Insights from the Field: Facilitating Dialogue and Learning within a Research-Practice Partnership on Social-Emotional Learning

A Working Paper By
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Boston Charter Research Collaborative (BCRC) is a multiyear research-practice partnership (RPP) among six high-performing charter management organizations (CMOs); researchers at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE) and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT); and Transforming Education (TransformEd). These organizations combine their expertise to conduct research and improve practice to support the development of students' social-emotional competencies (SEC) and the cognitive skills that are not directly captured by academic assessments.

Research suggests that the surveys used to assess students' SEC in the BCRC provide valid reports of student mindsets, skills, and habits. Further, student scores from those SEC surveys are predictive of both academic and behavioral outcomes, suggesting that SEC are important contributors to students' academic success. Considering the promising findings that have emerged thus far from this RPP, this white paper seeks to address challenges common among RPPs, including: 1) finding effective ways to bridge the research-practice gap by building a common language around using new types of data to address urgent problems of practices; and 2) facilitating practitioner-centered dialogue about the data and its implications. We explain how we have sought to address these challenges in the context of an RPP focused on social-emotional learning (SEL), but we expect that the lessons apply more broadly to efforts to support schools and researchers in maintaining mutualism in such a partnership and generate information in ways that are familiar to educators and school systems.

The primary takeaways discussed in this paper suggest that effective RPPs should:

- Provide opportunities for researchers and practitioners to work together to explore patterns, discuss findings, develop hypotheses, and gain insights from the data on student SEC.
- Ensure that these data review meetings: 1) revisit the history and goals of the partnership; 2) include key school team members, such as administrators and instructional staff; 3) present data in a way that is clear and easily accessible to educators and the broader school community; 4) minimize jargon; and 5) focus the conversation on implications for practitioners.

- Create a time and space to have a conversation focused on SEL, allowing practitioners to generate hypotheses based upon their SEL data and then, share these hypotheses across sites to learn from each other.
- Plan for the success of this knowledge sharing convening by providing ample support for school representatives to identify and speak about their data and by facilitating an enriching dialogue around shared lessons learned and addressing questions and challenges as a group.

We describe these emerging themes from our recent experience and elaborate on our lessons learned throughout the paper. We have found that engaging in conversations that are grounded in data while deeply leveraging practitioners' expertise can help educators share actionable insights with each other and can help researchers identify additional questions—particularly around investigating promising practices—that warrant further exploration.

Insights from the Field: Facilitating Dialogue and Learning within a Research-Practice Partnership on Social-Emotional Learning

Introduction

The Boston Charter Research Collaborative (BCRC, the Collaborative) is a multiyear research-practice partnership (RPP) among six high-performing charter management organizations (CMOs)[1]; researchers at the Center for Education Policy Research (CEPR) at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT); and Transforming Education (TransformEd). These organizations combine their expertise to conduct research and improve practice to support the development of students' cognitive and social-emotional competencies (SEC).

Through this RPP, the BCRC is investigating issues related to the development and measurement of students' SEC, including self-management, self-efficacy, growth mindset, and social awareness, that are of particular interest to school practitioners. (For more information about these competencies, please see *Patterns in Student Self-Report and Teacher Report Measures of Social-Emotional Mindsets, Skills, and Habits: Initial findings from the Boston Charter Research Collaborative*). As with similar partnerships, this type of collaboration is intended to deepen educators' understanding of social-emotional learning (SEL) research and its implications in the classroom. The initial findings emerging from the BCRC offer an important step forward in understanding how student and teacher surveys can be used to assess student's SEC. Research suggests that the student SEC surveys used provide reliable reports of student mindsets, skills, and habits. Further, student scores from SEC surveys are predictive of both academic and behavioral outcomes, suggesting that SEC is an important contributor to students' academic success.[2] Considering the promising findings that have emerged thus far from this RPP, this white paper seeks to address challenges common among RPPs.

Collaborating across the different worlds of researchers and practitioners can be challenging in RPPs.[3] While researchers strive to produce high-quality findings that are useful to schools and school systems, school leaders feel a strong sense of urgency around identifying approaches that can be implemented quickly to address students' immediate needs. In other words, researchers and practitioners share a common goal of students' educational outcomes but have different approaches to achieving this goal.[4] Finding ways to negotiate the needs of both partners can strike the necessary balance of developing reliable and generalizable knowledge about SEL, while benefiting the students who are partaking in the research.

A key aspect of navigating such a balance in an RPP in education is by intentionally maintaining mutualism[5]—or ensuring that school leaders and researchers have equal voice in the partnership after data has been gathered. There's a pressing need to facilitate this bidirectional process, particularly around receiving and reviewing the data generated from students and engaging in dialogue about the implications for how to improve SEL-related goals in school.

In a pioneering RPP such as this, where clarity on the most effective measurement and use of SEL data is still emerging, it is also helpful to also embrace a conceptual way of using research. With this approach, new data and findings can be used to influence how SEL problems of practice are defined and to provide an orientation towards practical applications in the classroom.[6] Engaging with the research in this way can shed new light on persistent challenges (e.g., with student engagement, attendance, and behavior), while

empowering school leaders and teachers to consider alternative and innovative approaches to supporting the academic and future life successes of students. Leveraging the unique expertise of school leaders' understanding of their own school communities through practitioner-centered dialogue thus results in a "win-win-win:" learning from one another, contributing to the greater body of knowledge, and identifying promising ways and ideas to investigate in the future with the continued goal of supporting students' cognitive and social-emotional development.

To that end, TransformEd and CEPR researchers scheduled "data deep dive" meetings with each CMO to review findings from their schools. During these meetings, partners of the Collaborative explored student SEC data from their schools, as well as trends across the entire cohort. For the CMO leaders, reviewing SEC data of students at other CMOs sparked curiosities about what other schools might be doing to support their students' SEC development. While the schools in the Collaborative have had a history of sharing best practices with respect to academic data, they have lacked the data to do the same with respect to non-tested skills, namely SEC. Therefore, this led to the development of a convening focused on fostering this type of dialogue. We convened school leaders at a BCRC-wide "knowledge sharing meeting (convening)," where we invited participants to reflect on their data and discuss data-informed hypotheses about best practices in supporting students. School leaders used this opportunity to exchange ideas, learn about and discuss practices of interest, and engage their colleagues in conversation about supporting students' social-emotional development.

This paper describes how the data deep dives and the knowledge sharing convening helped Collaborative partners explore their students' SEC data and exchange ideas with other practitioners. Our goal is to share our learnings around facilitating dialogue that is informed by data and actionable for educators. To that end, we review lessons learned and provide recommendations for others who may want to facilitate similar conversations among researchers and practitioners in the future.

Data Deep Dive Meetings: Drawing Lessons from Data

Using a data-informed approach is foundational to the BCRC partnership. The data we collect enables us to explore, understand, and inform practices related to students' SEC development. To this end, the twenty-four participating schools have been surveying their 5th – 12th grade students each spring using common self-reported measures of students' SEC. In addition to collecting these self-reported measures, participating schools also ask teachers to rate the SEC of individual students in grades 3-12.[7]

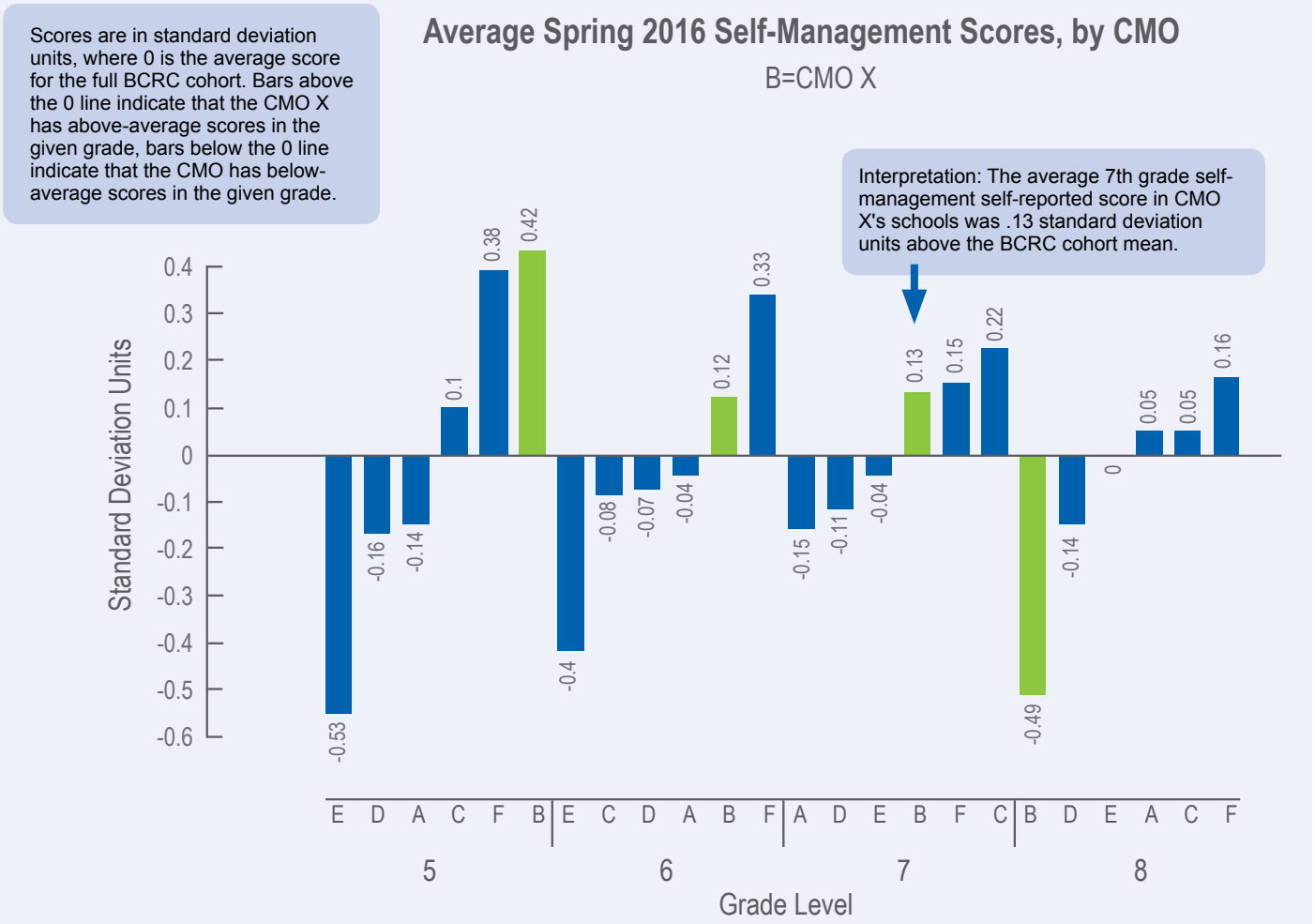
When researchers and practitioners collaborate, a common challenge is that information tends to flow only in one direction: from practitioners (who gather the data) to researchers (who sometimes fail to share back findings in a timely way). TransformEd and CEPR have sought to address this challenge by holding data deep dives.[8] These meetings provide opportunities for researchers and practitioners to work together to explore patterns, discuss findings, develop hypotheses, and gain insights from the data on student social-emotional development.

During each data deep dive, the research team presents school leaders with BCRC-wide trends and school-specific data on student SEC, including patterns in change over time by grade level and subgroup (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity). Figuring out the right way to present data to practitioners is critical. In this case, we needed to account for the fact that there are systematic differences in student SEC by grade-level. We accounted for this by standardizing the scores across the Collaborative by grade and competency, in order to produce a metric that is comparable across grades and competencies (see Figure 1). The goal was to enable practitioners to see how the self-reported SE data of students at each school compared to the grade-level average across the whole Collaborative and to help them identify performance above or below the mean within in each competency.

These comparisons were important because national benchmark data are not yet available for these measures. However, this method is particularly complex, because each data point must be interpreted

Figure 1. Individual CMO's self-management scores across grade levels are presented in comparison to other CMOs' students.

CMO X has above-average self-management scores at each grade level, except for Grade 8.



relative to the grade-level performance of the full cohort of participating schools. For example, when a CMO observed an apparent decrease in their students' **growth mindset** scores, it was difficult to decipher whether this was due to a true decline in their students' mindset over the past year or to a cohort-wide improvement on **growth mindset** (which would, in turn, reduce how much the individual CMO's score stood out over the other CMOs' scores). This added layer of complexity made it difficult for both researchers and practitioners to unpack the implications of that data, which has led us to reconsider presenting raw (i.e., non-standardized) data in future years.

After researchers presented the data, school leaders were asked to reflect on the information in a variety of ways. Based on their knowledge of the school, we asked them to think about which data resonated with them and which were surprising. Additionally, we asked which practices or approaches they thought might be driving any outliers or trends in the data. We found that these questions produced more fruitful conversations when we posed them throughout the presentation, instead of waiting until the end (i.e., in the form of a question and answer session following the full presentation of the data).

Data Deep Dive Meetings: What We Learned

Through the data deep dives we held with school leaders in the Collaborative, several themes emerged:

SEC data were often consistent with practitioners' observations or intuitions about cohorts that were thriving and those that were struggling.

For example, at CMO A, the 5th grade cohort was known to be a tight-knit group that had developed a close, empathetic rapport with one another. The data suggested that these students had above average SEC scores across the board, particularly in **social awareness**, compared to their counterparts from other schools. The same school had a cohort of 8th graders who had been struggling academically. These 8th grade students also reported lower overall SEC scores compared to their counterparts from other schools.

Social-emotional and academic outcomes converged in some cases, but not in others.

At CMO B, school leaders noticed that campuses with stronger math test scores also had students reporting higher scores in math **self-efficacy**. On the other hand, at CMO C, the school leader was surprised that students at an academically underperforming campus (as measured by state test scores) reported higher SEC scores than those at another campus with stronger academic results. This encouraged the school leader to reflect on whether the campus that had been struggling academically might have non-academic strengths that contributed to positive SE development (e.g., strong relationships between students and teachers).

School leaders sought to identify ways to use SEC data to inform their understanding of educators' strengths.

At CMO D, for example, one leader asked how these data could be used to identify teachers who were using effective SEL practices in order to ensure that each grade-level teaching team included at least one teacher with a strong track record for supporting students' social-emotional development. Practitioners at CMO C also wondered how they might elevate teachers who are strong supporters of student social-emotional development, just as they elevate teachers who are strong supporters of academic growth, into teacher leadership roles.

Findings from SEC data shed light on the potential impact of existing interventions and initiatives.

Students at CMO E reported higher **self-management** scores than all of their BCRC peers. In discussing this finding, school leaders hypothesized that a mid-year "culture reset" might explain this positive SEC outcome. At this school, the culture reset involved redefining their school identity, empowering students to take ownership over their learning, and building clarity around roles and expectations of students and staff within the school community. At CMO F, data from the common SEC surveys corroborated findings from their internal data collection efforts, which suggested that an initiative in place to foster students' **growth mindset** was successful. Learn more about this initiative in Appendix A: Implementing a Growth Mindset Intervention.

In addition to providing an opportunity to reflect on trends in their students' social-emotional development, this method of reviewing data enabled school leaders to think about their students' competency and growth compared to their that of their peers. School leaders were able to reflect on areas for growth and identify other CMOs that appeared to be stronger in those same areas, which prompted questions about the practices and strategies being enacted at other schools. Thus, emerged the desire to have a discussion with other CMO leaders to exchange ideas about ways to support students' development.

Deep Data Dive Meetings: What We Recommend

1. **Begin meetings by briefly revisiting the history of the partnership and goals of the project.** There is often excitement and momentum at the start of an RPP, when all parties have clarity over the goals and purpose of the joint project. It is helpful to re-engage participants at data deep dives by revisiting these goals in order to frame the conversation that follows. In addition, there are often new people joining the team, so taking the time to re-introduce the project's purpose before reviewing the data can help ensure that everyone in the room is on the same page.

2. **Invite key team members to join the meeting, including school administrators and instructional staff.** Maximize the opportunity to discuss and make sense of the data by inviting administrators, data analysts, and instructional staff. Administrators and data analysts (if available) can help provide a high-level perspective on the data and discuss how it might relate to other internal data, while instructional staff can help shed light on what practices and interventions might be driving the outcomes. Having all of these parties participate in the meeting can generate a deeper conversation about implications of the data and next steps.

3. **Researchers should make every effort to present the data in a way that is clear, easily interpreted by a variety of stakeholders, and free of jargon.** Presenting the data in practitioner-friendly, non-technical visuals can help participants quickly review the data and identify points of interest or concern. This includes reviewing the definition of each SEC and minimizing the use of research jargon to help drive the conversation forward (e.g., avoiding the use of terms such as "standard deviation," and instead providing a more intuitive understanding of what this means in terms of their student data). For greater context, have a copy of the survey available to reference the items to which students responded. These steps will help to focus the majority of the meeting on unpacking the findings from the perspective of school leaders. Furthermore, this facilitates the ability for school leaders to share findings with the broader school community (e.g., other faculty, parents).

4. **Focus on the "so what."** More often than not, school leaders are most interested in what they can do in response to the data presented. Addressing this demand may require researchers to go beyond what can be established definitively based on evidence from within the partnership. Researchers may need to seek out lessons from the broader literature or even emerging ideas about best practices that have not been subjected to rigorous evaluation, while being clear about the strength and limitations of the evidence to support a recommended course of action. To this end, it is helpful to have a set of questions prepared to guide the discussion and explore the question of "so what" in collaboration with school leaders. It may also be helpful to have a curated list of known best practices in advance to support those conversations. Moreover, the focus should be on sharing only the most salient data points and allowing plenty of time for discussing these takeaways. See Appendix B for a list of recommended discussion questions.

Knowledge Sharing Convenings: Facilitating an Opportunity for Practitioners to Gather, Reflect, and Discuss

Through this Collaborative, school leaders saw an opportunity to learn from other BCRC schools about their efforts to support SEL, which aligned well with TransformEd and CEPR's desire to learn from practitioners about what they saw as the key takeaways from their data. All parties also recognized the value in fostering dialogue among this group of high performing CMOs to help support their work in SEL. From these aspirations emerged the development of a half-day knowledge sharing convening, bringing together representatives from each CMO and giving them a chance to highlight a best practice or lesson learned that was supported by their SEC data.

The goal of the knowledge sharing convening was to offer school leaders an opportunity to learn from and support each other's work by:

- Sharing best practices and/or lessons learned about their own work in supporting students' social-emotional development;
- Gathering specific ideas from other educators that may help advance their own work; and
- Generating questions about social-emotional development that can help guide future research and practice.

In anticipation of the convening, CMO leaders used a common set of guiding questions and put together a brief presentation for their peers that included the following key components: 1) identification of a data point or trend of interest; 2) description of the practice they thought might help explain the data point; 3) lessons learned; and 4) questions for others.

The structure and content of the convening led to a rich dialogue among all participants that not only generated actionable ideas for practitioners, but also helped build community around common challenges and questions related to supporting students' social-emotional development.

Knowledge Sharing Convenings: What We Learned

The knowledge sharing convening provided school leaders with an opportunity to reconnect with each other, exchange thoughts and ideas, and discuss emerging questions about social-emotional practices, successes, and challenges. The topics brought forth by school leaders centered around two domains: promising SEL practices and broader lessons in doing this work well.

The primary goal of this convening was to generate and share hypotheses about best practices that are informed by data but not yet rigorously tested. True to the spirit of *conceptual* research, what emerged was the ability to use a common vocabulary among the CMOs to consider SEL problems of practice, while considering different intervention programs and practice or strategy ideas. While many productive ideas were indeed generated and shared, it is important to note that additional work needs to be done in order to test the ideas that emerged. As such, the knowledge sharing convening should be viewed as an intermediary step in the process of informing best practices in the field of SEL.

Promising SEL Practices

Upon reflecting on their data, many CMO leaders developed theories about which SEL practices might be helping to drive students'outcomes. School leaders consulted with their colleagues and uncovered how grade-level and school-wide initiatives showed promise in supporting student social-emotional development. Their commitment to digging deeper to understand the data surfaced a number of key pieces of information about their practices:

Learning across individual differences helped students build community

The 5th grade cohort at CMO A reported the highest scores in **social awareness** across the BCRC. School leaders believed this to be a result of an ongoing commitment to building community across their diverse student body (50% white; 50% students of color). To this end, before CMO A joined the Collaborative, it initiated a school-wide focus on race and equity. In particular, their 5th grade leadership team focused on fostering conversations that empowered the different voices in their community and promoted empathy among students. Additionally, there was a special program with a purposeful focus on inclusion opportunities for students with moderate to severe disabilities in general education classrooms. These opportunities sought to give students of all abilities the experience of learning from and seeking to understand each other. Targeted lessons aimed to help teachers and students talk about various topics that support **social awareness**: acknowledging differences related to race and ethnicity, improving empathy, and ways to safely confront bullying. Teachers were also provided with ongoing support to reflect on their own teaching and be responsive to these issues.

Increasing student ownership and sense of purpose can make a difference

CMO E's school leaders attributed above average scores in **self-management** and **grit** to a major shift in school culture. Students at one of CMO E's middle school campuses experienced a mid-year culture reset spearheaded by a school leader who aimed to dramatically change students' experience of school. Conversations about school culture and academic growth were centered around the idea that learning is an "act of resistance," encouraging students to build a deeper connection between their schoolwork and the broader theme of social justice. Students were empowered to close their own gaps in understanding through multiple daily re-teaching opportunities. Furthermore, school leaders also provided opportunities for students to grow and develop by providing them with feedback and opportunities to bounce back from behavioral challenges. Similarly, CMO C also thought that a shift to resolving behavioral and discipline issues in committees of staff, students, and family members helped their students develop **self-management**.

On a separate campus, CMO E's 12th graders reported the highest scores in **grit** across the BCRC cohort. During the college application process, students are counseled to apply to "reach," "match," and "likely" schools. School leaders hypothesized that this process generates plentiful experiences with rejection and success. Additionally, as part of their four-year advisory model at CMO E, students work closely with an adult and with peers to name and address personal areas for growth and improvement over the long term. School leaders believe this has improved students' self-perceptions of **grit**.

Prioritizing little things can add up to a big impact

School leaders at CMO B were pleasantly surprised with their middle schoolers' above average **self-management** scores. With no specific initiative in place, they concluded that it was likely a combination of many things that are supporting their students' development of self-management. For example, grade-level teams meet regularly to review student data and proactively address any emerging individual issues, while schoolwide Community Meetings lend an opportunity to lift up student voices and celebrate hard work. School leaders believed that the combination of individual and group support added up to a culture that helped students develop strong **self-management** skills.

Connecting with the local community can have a role in supporting students SEL

Within CMO E's network, the campus with above average **self-management** and **social awareness** scores has deeper ties to the community, both physically and relationally: the campus shares its gym with the local community center, and many members of the faculty and staff have children or family members who are students at the school. Neither of these things is true for the school's sister campus, which had below-average **self-management** and **social awareness** scores. While the association between the two factors is not clear, the school leaders wonder whether the strong relationships with the local community may be fostering students' social-emotional development.

Broader Lessons in Doing This Work Well

CMO leaders also used this opportunity to brainstorm ways in which to move their SEL work forward. This involves taking a closer look at how systems and structures may be working to support or create a barrier to their SEL goals. Two key themes emerged:

Supporting teachers' efforts is key

A common thread in our conversations with CMO leaders focused on the importance of providing teachers with the resources and support they need to foster students' social-emotional development. Whereas there are institutional structures that support teachers around academic instruction (e.g., dedicated time for math department meetings and student test preparation), there are few structures in place for helping teachers support students' social-emotional development.

Furthermore, with an understanding of the many competing priorities that teachers face, CMO leaders agreed on the need to achieve teacher buy-in and build capacity around supporting students' social-emotional development to prepare students for success in college, career, and life. Leaders named the importance of providing ongoing support to teachers on SEL in order to achieve reflective, responsive teaching. They also emphasized the need for collaboration across various administrative levels at schools. Still, specific ideas on how to achieve this were less forthcoming due to the complexities of balancing priorities and uncertainty about the most effective approaches to supporting teachers in this work.

Be willing to rethink systems and structures

Looking at bright spots in the data also surfaced questions about areas for growth. At CMO D, for example, the focus was on low student **self-management** scores. While the schools had been implementing a commonly-used behavioral management system, there were questions about its effectiveness in light of students' reported **self-management** skills. This encouraged school leaders to question their assumptions about students' capacity to choose appropriate behaviors in response to the current reward and consequence behavioral system. However, in considering the SEC data

and other internal measures, it became apparent that there was a need to shift towards a trauma-sensitive approach. Thus, the CMO leaders shared their intentions to partner with and implement Think:Kids, a program that seeks to engage students in collaborative problem solving, with an assumption that students will do better when they have developed strong relationships with adults and the necessary skills to resolve problems together.

Discrepancies in SEC scores across campuses in the same network surfaced other questions. For CMO B, the difference in scores between two campuses generated a question about the quality of implementation of the same practice. While community meetings are held at both schools, there is no common curriculum or agenda. Reflecting on the impact of the meetings' success at one campus has encouraged school leaders to consider a more uniform approach across both campuses. For CMO E and others, the discrepancies in SEC scores made school leaders wonder whether SEC should be a part of formal teacher evaluations or should be one of the factors considered in assembling instructional teams with diverse strengths and skills.

Grappling with Open Questions

A convening such as this also creates space to grapple with open questions about SEL. Each school leader asked questions of their colleagues in order to learn from each other's experience and push his/her own thinking. This was also a helpful exchange for researchers to participate in, as it helped shed light on what was most top-of-mind for the educators participating in the Collaborative.

Some practitioners raised big questions, such as how to bring down discipline rates without sacrificing behavioral standards. Others asked more specific questions about how to develop a particular competency, or even more granular questions about how often students should have opportunities to complete independent projects. Several leaders were curious to learn about the process of implementing SEL-related initiatives at other CMOs. Questions discussed included: Who should spearhead such initiatives? How do we create capacity for teachers to balance a focus on SEL with a focus on the academic content they are teaching? Should we integrate SEL into formal educator evaluations? If so, what is the process for providing feedback on SEL-related instruction? How can we adopt promising practices from other contexts while also honoring our school's unique culture?

Moreover, there were questions about incorporating other sources of data to better understand the whole picture of students' social-emotional development. For example, some school leaders were interested in learning about what metrics their colleagues were using to assess school climate or student behavior. One leader raised an important question about how to authentically measure **growth mindset**, ensuring that students are not merely repeating back the messages that teachers promote every day without having truly internalized them.

While many of these questions were left unanswered, the opportunity to call attention to these issues helped to promote a shared dialogue around the importance and complexity of students' social-emotional development. By creating space to generate questions and develop hypotheses, network participants strengthened their relationships with each other and increased the likelihood that further research on SEL will address educators' most pressing concerns.

Knowledge Sharing Convenings: What We Recommend

1. **Work directly with one point of contact at the school or CMO to provide support in identifying a data point or trend, SEL practice, or lesson learned that they are interested in sharing.** While it may be helpful for the researchers to highlight interesting patterns in the data, it is crucial that the practitioners make the final decision about the topic they plan to discuss. This enables the convening to remain practitioner-led, allowing for researchers and other facilitators to take on the role of observer and learner.

2. **Provide a common framework, but empower school leaders to ultimately make the decisions about how to present their information.** Providing a template for the presentations helps to reduce preparation time for school leaders and helps to frame the conversation to follow. While we provided a list of questions to consider, we encouraged participants to use those questions only as general guidelines. Ultimately, it is most important for school leaders to tell their stories in a way that feels authentic. See Appendix C for the prompts and questions we shared with school leaders.

3. **Host the convening at a school.** Being in a school building (as opposed to a researcher's office) helps to set the tone for a practitioner-centric convening. Additionally, this provides an opportunity for the host school to show some of their promising practices in action and for others to garner concrete ideas for how to implement those practices.

4. **Establish norms at the beginning of the convening to create a space for open dialogue.** It is important for participants to have an equal stake in learning—not only from each other's strengths, but also their challenges. Consider establishing norms around transparency, candor, and confidentiality to promote a richer dialogue.

5. **Use the information prepared by school leaders to guide a discussion following all the presentations.** Plan to review the prepared materials before the convening to identify relevant, common themes (as appropriate) and make space for a group discussion about them.

Conclusion

The knowledge sharing convening was well-received by all participants. In a brief survey completed by all the school leaders in attendance, 100% of respondents indicated an interest in taking part in a similar convening again on a bi-annual basis, and all indicated that they were leaving with at least one practice they wanted to implement at their own schools. In addition, several school leaders planned to follow up with their peers in the Collaborative to learn more about the practices and initiatives they presented at the convening.

More than anything, we have found that it is valuable to engage in practitioner-focused conversations that are grounded in data while deeply leveraging practitioners' expertise. Doing so can help researcher and educators collaborate to share actionable insights with one another and identify additional questions that require further exploration. Additionally, conversations like these help to support mutually-beneficial RPP models. Creating a space for the open exchange of ideas and challenges in this work can help all members and stakeholders in the field of SEL chart a clearer path towards supporting student success in school and in life.

APPENDIX A: Implementing a Growth Mindset Intervention

After several years of tracking their former 8th graders through high school and college, Excel Academy Charter Schools (Excel) sought to identify the barriers their alumni were facing in reaching their academic and life goals. From conversations with their alumni, school leaders learned that academic preparedness was not what students perceived as standing in their way of college success; rather, the greatest challenges were related to SEC. To help students develop these skills, Excel built the following plan:

1. Develop a comprehensive list of skills/mindsets pulled from various sources (e.g., attending classes, talking with others in the field, reading research papers) and eliminate duplicates;
2. Distill down the list of skills/mindsets that we think are most relevant to our students;
3. Brainstorm sub-constructs for each skill/mindset on the shortlist;
4. Vet the resulting list with different teachers and leaders in the school community.

Among other things, a theme around the importance of developing a growth mindset emerged. During the following two years, the math department at Excel implemented a series of practices to support growth mindset across its three campuses.

Components of the Intervention

The Director of College Access, in collaboration with the head of the math department, developed a growth mindset intervention that was implemented across all middle school math classes. Components included:

Providing instructional resources, including:

- Informational videos and activities to promote a growth mindset;
- Curated teacher strategies from The National Mentoring Partnership[9] Mentor Network and other sources explaining how to implement the use of growth mindset language in the classroom;
- Guides to facilitate conversations with students about how the brain grows;
- An internal survey conducted 3 times per year to assess growth mindset.

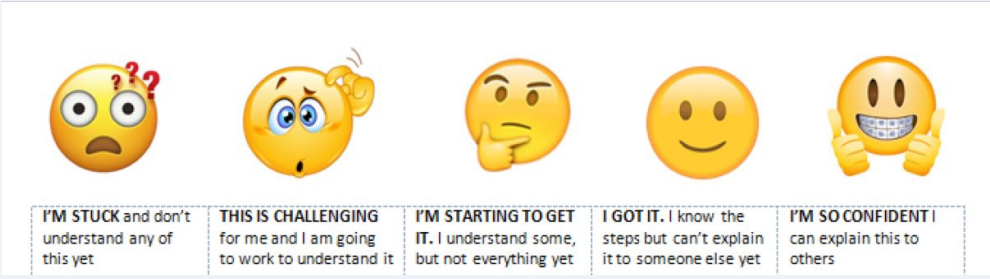
Shifting teacher language to include growth mindset framing. For example:

- "It's okay if you don't know yet…you can use your resources to help you."
- "This is going to be a challenging (spicy) problem coming up, get ready."
- "Taking on a challenge feels good."
- "This is a good mental stretch."
- "We are taking a risk if we are not sure."
- "This is going to be a challenge because…"
- "I will not accept 'I don't know'; you have notes."
- "Just because I'm good at something doesn't mean it's easy."
- "Who feels like they are better at problem solving now?"

Building student capacity for real-time self-monitoring and assessment, including:

- Using a real-time self-assessment tool where students could report responses ranging from "I do not understand any of this yet" to "I am so confident that I can explain this to others!"

Image A. Students use emojis and text to self-assess their level of understanding.



- Monitoring student understanding in real-time by using the Plicker app, in which each student was assigned a quick response code (QR code) on a card that was unique to them. Students could then turn the card in different directions, to indicate how comfortable they were with the lesson. When students held up their cards, teachers used their phones to scan the classroom. They could then obtain information on the percentage of students who were struggling in the moment and give students the feedback, in that same moment, to let them know they were not the only ones confused. This helped to normalize struggle as a part of the learning process for students and provided teachers with an indication as to when material needed to be re-taught.

Image B. Teacher quickly reads students' QR codes to get a sense of their level of understanding.

- Inviting students to signal their comfort with the existing material with red, yellow, or green indicator cards (e.g., paint chips in the respective colors) on their desks to signal: red = "I'm stuck and can't move on yet", yellow = "I think I need some support," and green = "I am feeling confident about this."

Results from the data

The cohort that participated in this intervention showed improvements in their self-reported growth mindset from 2015 to 2016 according to both the BCRC-wide survey and Excel's supplemental survey.

What made the intervention successful?

Excel attributed the intervention's success to several factors. In particular, they thought it was particularly helpful to provide teachers with toolkits—or sets of curated growth mindset resources—that made it easy to implement the interventions. Furthermore, since the intervention occurred in the math department and

the department head was heavily invested in this work, the full team checked in about their experiences with the intervention during their monthly department meetings. These regular meetings provided an opportunity to for the Director of College Access to share key data with teachers from student surveys and research in the field. In addition, she provided feedback to teachers, school leaders, and the department head on how growth mindset was being integrated into classroom practices. Finally, individual teachers could also request support with growth mindset in their classrooms by reviewing student reflections on their mindset and identifying ways to encourage a growth mindset. For example, the Director of College Access worked with 6th grade teachers to develop a pre- and post- intervention surveys to assess how students were thinking about their growth in math.

Other Lessons Learned

Competing priorities can make the work challenging.

While teachers and school leaders often agree that initiatives such as these are important, it can be a challenge to secure resources (e.g., time, professional development opportunities) to support SEL efforts. A good first step is for organizational leaders to name SEL as a top priority.

The work needs to be organic.

The work should be driven primarily by the teachers, themselves—which can only happen with teachers' authentic buy-in and commitment. Management coming tangentially from outside the teaching team was less effective. Teachers and teacher teams really drove this work forward. Another important factor was how much the teachers felt that growth mindset was naturally aligned to the content in math. This experience has generated conversations about whether to focus interventions in content areas or in non-instructional time (e.g., advisory).

Strong SEL requires the collaboration of teachers and school leaders to:

1) create a framework that is developmentally appropriate; 2) create any materials that teachers need to use for the intervention; and, 3) implement the intervention effectively and with fidelity.

Backward planning is best.

Start by deciding what the end goal looks like for students and clearly lay out a plan on how to get there. For Excel, this has meant gaining clarity and naming what they want their high school graduates to know, believe, and be able to do before going to college based on their experiences with their alumni. Using that information, they have identified ideas on what they need to do in each grade to help support their future graduates.

Collecting additional data to complement student self-reports is critical.

Real-time data, such as student QR code responses, allow for teachers to get quick feedback about learning in the classroom. Including additional sources of data can help teachers determine what is working and think through what adjustments are needed to the supports they are offering students.

Appendix B. Guiding Questions for Data Deep Dive Meeting

- Which findings resonated with you? Which didn't?
- Does this make sense based on what you've observed in your school?
- What practices are you using in these areas that you think might be driving the results we're seeing in the data?
- Which practices, if any, does this make you think twice about?
- What other questions or reflections do these findings bring up for you?

Appendix C. Guiding Questions for Knowledge Sharing Convening Presentations

1. Present Your Data

What data point or pattern from your BCRC survey results stood out to you that you'd like to discuss in greater detail today? Please include a description or a screen shot of that data point here.

2. Description of the Practice

Use this slide to describe what type of practice, program, or intervention at your school might help explain that data point or pattern. (Please note that what you discuss does not have to refer to a pre-planned or formalized program or practice. You can use this slide to simply describe what your school is already doing with respect to social-emotional development.)

Consider the following questions:

- What was the goal of the practice?
- What was your theory about how the practice would achieve this goal?
- What did it look like in action? What was it like for the students and teachers who participated? Please share artifacts from your practice.
- Who observed the need for change (e.g., teacher, principal, chief academic officer)?
- Who (internally and externally) was involved in the planning and implementation of the practice?
- What resources (e.g., materials, staff, training, tools, technology) were necessary to carry out the practice?
- Was there prior work (e.g., prior initiatives at the school or research) that informed your planning?
- What were the target grade levels/age groups for the implementation?

3. Lessons Learned

What lessons did you learn from this practice or about developing this particular competency in your students?

Consider the following questions:

- What challenges were you able to anticipate when planning (e.g., individuals involved, data collection)?
- What pieces did you not anticipate during planning/implementation? How did you adapt?
- How do you know if you were successful in achieving the goal of the practice?
- What worked well? What will you keep doing in future years?
- What would you do differently next time?
- What recommendations do you have for other schools interested in planning or implementing a similar practice?

4. Questions for Others

- What are some questions you have for your colleagues (both practitioners and researchers) about this practice or about developing this competency?
- Are there lingering questions about outcomes that you did not expect or challenges you still would like to address?
- Are there research questions we may be able to tackle together?

Sources

1. The BCRC comprises six CMOs in the greater Boston area: Boston Collegiate Charter School, Edward Brooke Charter Schools, Excel Academy, KIPP: MA, Match Education, and Uncommon Schools: Roxbury Prep. Among these six networks there are five elementary schools, 14 middle schools, and five high schools. As of Fall 2017 these schools served a total of 8,104 students, with the majority of the student population spanning grades 5-8.

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7. See Patterns in Student Self-Report and Teacher Report Measures of Social-Emotional Mindsets, Skills, and Habits: Initial findings from the Boston Charter Research Collaborative for more information.

8. Sadowski, K., Worden, J. & Krachman S.B. (2015). Launching a Multi-Year Research-Practice Collaborative: Lessons Learned from Year One [White paper]. Retrieved from Transforming Education website: https://www.transformingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/151223_LaunchingaResearchPracticeCollaborative_Release2-1.pdf

9. The National Mentoring Partnership. (n.d.) Handout – Seven Common Growth Mindset Scenarios and Responses.

About Transforming Education

Transforming Education (TransformEd) advances research, policy, and practice to support students in developing the social-emotional competencies they need to succeed in college, career, and life. TransformEd has coined the term "MESH" (Mindsets, Essential Skills, and Habits) to encompass the subset of social-emotional skills that research has linked most clearly to student success and that are, therefore, of the most immediate importance to educators and education policymakers.

TransformEd's work is grounded in compelling, longitudinal research on the importance of MESH competencies and informed by our on-the-ground experience as:

- The lead strategic advisor to the CORE Districts: Six school districts (serving over one million students) that have chosen to integrate MESH competencies alongside academic outcomes in their federally approved accountability and continuous improvement system;
- The facilitator of the Boston Charter Research Collaborative: A collaboration between six high-performing charter management organizations and researchers at Harvard and MIT to develop and pilot innovative ways to assess and develop students' cognitive and MESH skill; and
- Partner to NewSchools Venture Fund: A multi-year collaboration to support a growing portfolio of new district and charter schools in expanding their definition of student success. Together, we prioritize and design metrics for a shared set of competencies, address pressing questions about how to track student progress, make meaning from this data, and use it to improve student outcomes.

Through our relationships with researchers, policymakers, and education system leaders, TransformEd is uniquely positioned to translate lessons learned from our on-the-ground research and practice work into changes in education policy and systemic practices that will help ensure that all students have opportunities to build the MESH skills they need to succeed in school and beyond.

Follow our latest work through the TransformEd website, newsletter, twitter feed, and blog.

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Akira S. Gutierrez is the Manager of Research-Practice Integration at TransformEd, where she leads the work on identifying practical applications of developmental and interdisciplinary theory and research on social-emotional learning in the classroom. She also leverages practitioner expertise to help generate a wider understanding of how to support the development of student MESH. Prior to joining TransformEd, Akira was a part of various research projects at Tufts University related to children, families, and innovative curriculums. Akira has also taught young children in inclusive classrooms and adolescent students as a Teaching Fellow of Breakthrough Collaborative. She holds a B.A. and M.A. in Child Development from Tufts University with concentrations in early childhood education and applied developmental research.

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