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Student Data Dig 2018: Bowie High School

About this report

This report summarizes Bowie High School students' experiences with the first social and emotional learning (SEL) student data dig.

What was the student data dig at Bowie?

Beginning in the 2017–2018 school year, Bowie's principal, Mark Robinson, who was new to the position in 2017–2018, and Ruth Ann Widner, the school improvement coordinator and SEL facilitator, began meeting with approximately 40 students during flexible instructional time (FIT), a 22-minute time period that was added to high school students' schedules, allowing them to attend specialized classes at other high schools, study, or engage in other school-sponsored activities. The purpose of the principal's panel was to provide an opportunity to empower students' voices by gaining insight into their experiences at school, discuss students' needs, and brainstorm ways to improve students' experiences at Bowie. Importantly, participating students were selected to reflect the student population at Bowie; that is, students in grades 9 to 12 who were high performing, low performing, engaged, or not engaged, and who represented different racial groups and various extracurricular activities, participated in the principal's panel.

During the school year, students discussed a variety of topics, such as how to more effectively use the Austin Independent School District's (AISD) new student learning platform (BLEND), how they used technology in the classroom, opinions about student engagement, and how they responded to the 2018 Austin bomber incident. During the final two principal panel sessions, which took place on May 15 and 17, 2018, students engaged in a pilot activity that is expected to become the annual SEL data dig. During these meetings, students were asked to (a) reflect on results from the 2017–2018 Student Climate Survey, (b) think about whether the results accurately reflected students' experiences at Bowie, and (c) brainstorm ways to improve students' experiences at school. To help organize this process, students were split into groups based on survey subscale (i.e., student

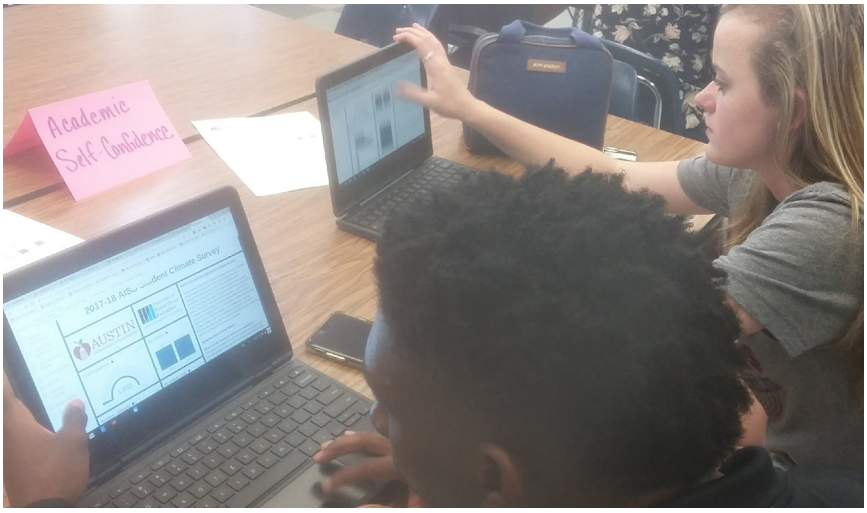
engagement, behavioral environment, adult fairness and respect, academic self-confidence, teacher expectations, SEL skills, and culture and language). Students used a data analysis protocol (see sidebar) adapted from the School Reform Initiative's (SRI) protocols for youth engagement.

What happened during the student data dig?

During the first session on May 15, using the student engagement subscale of the Student Climate Survey as an example, the principal and the school improvement coordinator modeled the data analysis protocol, with the entire panel working together. The student engagement subscale was selected because, in 2017–2018, Bowie staff identified student engagement as an area in need of campus improvement, and they focused school-wide efforts on improving the degree to which students were engaged. Students on the principal panel were asked to use a data analysis protocol to see if their peers' perceptions of student engagement improved from 2016–2017 to 2017–2018. Students shared things they noticed in the data; for example, they compared Bowie's responses to responses from other high schools, examined responses by different student groups (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, economic disadvantage), and examined whether responses changed over time.

During the exercise, students shared that girls at Bowie reported that they liked to come to school more than did boys. When asked why they thought this was the case, students theorized that "girls like coming to school more because they are better at [school than boys]" and "girls are smarter than boys and like doing things they are better at." There was some disagreement on the latter statement, but the conversation continued, with students theorizing that girls liked to come to school more than boys because "boys are more fidgety and don't like to sit" and "boys like extracurricular activities, whereas girls like doing well in school" and "school is more naturally designed for girls [as opposed to boys]." When asked what to do with what they learned from the data, students felt that their thoughts should be shared with teachers so they could improve student engagement for male students at Bowie.

After this discussion, students described the data related to the subscale assigned to their group. Students seemed excited about looking at the data and making changes to improve students' experiences. Students talked about the positive results they observed in the data and how student groups were actually more similar to each other than were different from each other. However, some students were surprised by the data they saw. Specifically,



Data Analysis Protocol

1) Describe the data

In this step, students shared with their group observations from the data they found interesting. They were asked to simply share what they observed and refrain from interpreting their observations.

2) Interpret the data

In this step, students began theorizing what factors may have contributed to the characteristics of the data they observed.

3) Explore the data

In this final step, students discussed the different observations and interpretations made by peers in their group and explored the implications of their discoveries. Students were also asked to brainstorm ideas for actions that could be taken to address concerns revealed during the data dig.

This protocol was adapted from the School Reform Initiative's (SRI) protocols for student engagement: http://www.schoolreforminitiative.org/download/atlas-looking-at-data-an-inquiry-approach-for-youth-engagement/

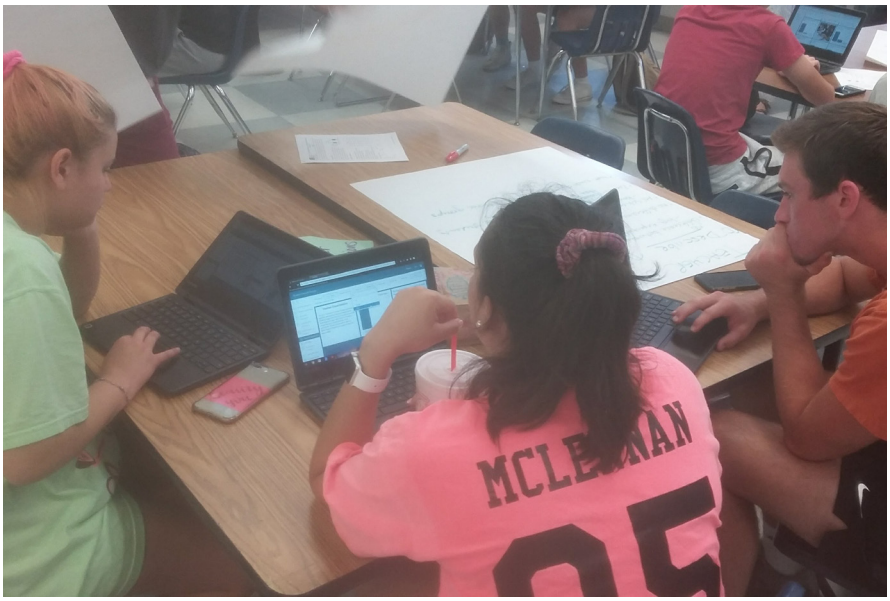
some students felt that girls did not respond honestly to the survey but responded in a way they thought was socially desirable.

During the second session, on May 17, students spent time describing potential solutions to issues they observed in the data assigned to their group. For example, several students felt that agreement on survey items was too high, suggesting that students did not take the survey seriously, were responding in a socially desirable way, or were afraid of responding honestly for fear of retribution from teachers. Many students said their teachers did not emphasize the importance of the survey or how students' responses would be used, therefore decreasing students' likelihood of taking the survey seriously. To address these concerns, students suggested shortening the survey, offering more response options, explaining in the student newspaper why the survey is important and should be taken seriously, and asking representatives from AISD to talk to their school about the importance of the survey.

In addition to these concerns related to students' perceptions of the Student Climate Survey, students discussed issues related to bullying. For example, students felt that although not very many students reported bullying behavior at Bowie, any students who reported or experienced bullying should not be ignored. Students also felt that students' perceptions of safety decreased as students got older, possibly because students were less naïve as they got older (i.e., were in the upper grades) and were more aware of unfair behavior.

Students examining data from the culture and language subscale observed that at Bowie, students' perceptions of school climate did not differ based on student racial group. Additionally, students believed that sensitivity or diversity training should be offered to students to address issues related to culture and language at Bowie and should be led by students.

What were the key takeaways from the student data dig?

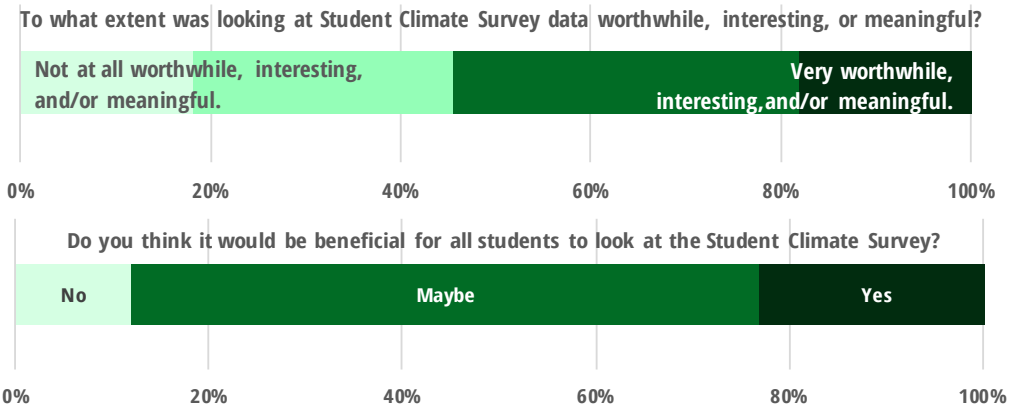


Students' conversations were rich and went beyond the school bell. Students seemed truly engaged in the work and were not waiting for the bell to ring or packing up their belongings prior to the bell ringing. Students stated that they were excited to look at the data in this way because they had never had the opportunity to do so before. Once they were exploring the data, they seemed to really enjoy looking at the data and seeing how different students responded to the survey. The school improvement coordinator noted that "seeing the data helps [students] frame their own personal views." The major takeaway from students, as noted during the discussions and in a follow-up survey, was that students did not seem to take the Student Climate Survey seriously and responded too favorably to survey items. Students wanted to work with school or district staff to improve students' perceptions of the survey to garner more honest feedback. Additionally, several students said they would like to be notified when the survey results are available next year so they can continue to look at the data in years to come.

In what ways can the student data dig be improved?

The biggest issue with the student data dig was lack of time. Each FIT class is 22 minutes, and on both days, the bell rang right when students were ready to share with the rest of the class what they had learned. The school improvement coordinator stated, "[Although I] really liked the lesson, two 45-minute sessions would have been ideal… Each group didn't get to share out [what] was the greatest deficit [of the student data dig]." When asked in a follow-up survey what suggestions they had for the student data dig, nearly all the students who responded said to provide more time or more opportunities to meet. Another suggestion was to provide students with information or questions to help them prepare for the session before hand. Most students felt that the student data dig was worthwhile (Figure 1). Despite the drawback of time, most students as well as the principal and the school improvement coordinator expressed interest in continuing this work in the future. Suggestions included expanding the data dig to include a fall and a spring meeting, including a wider range of students, and inviting parents and staff to the sessions. When asked what is necessary to expand these data summits to additional schools, the school improvement coordinator stated, "Unless there is a relationship with a key decision maker (such as the principal or other campus leader), then the students will probably see the activity as a futile exercise. Students need to be assured that their reflections will be valued by the decision-makers." The school improvement coordinator believed the student data dig, along with the principal panel, were successful at Bowie because the principal "has established this rapport with our principal panel, and thus our students are willing to engage in the activity." Moving forward with this project at additional schools will require a similar rapport between administrators and students. Fortunately, several SEL specialists serving secondary schools have identified schools with similar relationships.

Figure 1. Slightly more than half of students who responded to the follow-up survey found the activity meaningful, but most were unsure if their peers would benefit from a similar activity.



Source. Follow-up data dig survey, *N* = 17.

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