



The Urban Assembly

FORDHAM

Graduate School
of Social Service

Social-Emotional Learning Research Brief



Abstract

The increasing emphasis on Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in schools has been amplified by disruptions caused by school closures, significantly impacting student well-being.

This study investigates how a sample of 110 urban public schools organized and implemented activities aimed at promoting Social-Emotional competencies of students during the academic year 2021-2022. Using data from The Urban Assembly Resilient Scholars Program Portal, 1806 activities were documented and analyzed in various SEL competencies and tiers of focus (Universal, Targeted, and Tertiary). Most activities were implemented at the Universal tier, with a particular emphasis on Self-Awareness and Self-Management competencies. High schools and elementary schools were responsible for more than half of the documented SEL inputs. In particular, elementary schools showed higher selection percentages for the Self-Awareness and Self-Management indicators, while middle schools focused more on Social-Awareness. On the contrary, Social-Management indicators were consistently less prioritized in all types of schools. These findings underscore the diverse approaches urban schools take to integrate SEL into their educational frameworks and highlight the different emphasis on specific competencies at different educational levels. The study provides critical insights for educators and policymakers aiming to enhance SEL practices in urban school settings.

FINDINGS

Most activities were at the Universal tier, focusing on Self-Awareness and Self-Management.

Among the 110 schools, High and elementary schools contributed over 50% of the SEL inputs, with variations in the focus of SEL competencies across different school types.

Elementary schools had high selection percentages for Self-Awareness, while middle schools had moderate selection. EMS and K-12 schools showed varied selection percentages.

Self-Management indicators followed a similar pattern, with elementary schools showing high selection percentages and high schools showing lower percentages.

Social-Awareness indicators were most frequently selected by middle schools, followed by EMS schools.

Social-Management indicators were consistently less focused across all school types.

Introduction

The commitment of schools to investing financial and human resources to develop and implement activities targeting different Social-Emotional competencies both in and outside the classroom is clear (Tyton Partners, 2021). The impact of the disruption that school closures have had on the well-being of students has increased schools' efforts to implement Social-Emotional programming (Zieher, et. al., 2021; Education Week, 2021). While much of the literature addresses the implementation and evaluation of specific programs, little is known about how schools organize various programs, interventions, and activities designed to promote students' Social-Emotional development. The study examined the number and type of activities a sample of urban public schools are implementing to promote and activate student's social and emotional competencies. The study addressed several questions:

- 1 What is the percentage of SEL inputs across tiers of support?
- 2 What is the percentage of Promotion versus Reinforcement (activation) SEL input?
- 3 What percentage of SEL inputs are devoted to each SEL competency?

METHOD

Data from 110 public schools that used The Urban Assembly Resilient Scholars Program Portal's during the 2021-2022 school year to inventory activities targeting the promotion of specific Social-Emotional competencies provided data for this research brief. The online portal allows school's document their implementation of activities designed to promote and reinforce (activate) SEL competencies. The program has three modules: Matrix, Implementation Rubric and Sustainability Rubric. Data from the Matrix module was used for this study. Schools use the Matrix module to document activities targeting SEL competencies. Along with a description of the activity the following information gathered:

- Target SEL competencies
- The tier of support
- The extent to which the activity involves direct instruction (Promotes) or activates (reinforces) the target competency.

During that period 1,806 activities were documented. Descriptive analyses were carried out to provide information about:

- 1 The tier of focus for the SEL activities.
- 2 The SEL competencies focused on.
- 3 Potential variation among school types.

Results

TABLE 1. SCHOOL TYPE BY ACTIVITIES CODED

SCHOOL TYPE	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS (%)	SEL INPUTS CODED (%)
Elementary	27 (24.5)	481 (26.6)
Middle	12 (10.9)	203 (11.2)
EMS	15 (13.6)	304 (16.8)
High School	33 (30.0)	490 (27.1)
MSHS	7 (6.4)	123 (6.8)
K-12	16 (1.5)	205 (11.4)
Total	110 (100)	1806 (100)

SEL INPUTS

Only those schools with five or more documented SEL inputs were included in the analyses. There were 110 schools with 1,806 activities analyzed. Table 1 shows the number of SEL inputs by school type. **High Schools (Schools =33, SEL inputs = 490) and Elementary schools (Schools = 27, SEL inputs = 481) were responsible for greater than 50% of the SEL inputs.**



TABLE 2. PERCENTAGE OF SEL INPUT BY TIER

TIER	ELEMENTARY	MIDDLE	EMS	HIGH SCHOOL	MSHS	K-12
	(+N=27) (*n=481)	(+N=12) (*n=230)	(+N=15) (*n= 304)	(+N=33) (*n= 490)	(+N=7) (*n= 123)	(+N=16) (*n= 205)
Universal						
+95%CI	74.6 _a (71.2-78.6)	68.0 _{ab} (61.3-74.3)	63.5 _{bc} (58.1-68.9)	72.7 _{ab} (68.9-76.7)	77.2 _{ab} (69.0-83.7)	70.0 _{bc} (63.5-76.8)
Targeted						
95%CI	17.9 _a (14.6-21.1)	22.7 _a (17.1-28.4)	22.3 _a (18.5-27.8)	21.0 _a (17.4-24.6)	19.5 _a (13.1-27.2)	19.4 _a (15.1-26.1)
Tertiary						
95%CI	7.5 _a (5.2-10.1)	9.4 _a (5.4-13.9)	13.2 _a (9.2-16.9)	6.3 _a (4.3-8.6)	3.3 _a (0.8-6.9)	9.3 _a (5.6-13.5)

Universal – support is designed for all students to have access.

Target – For students who are selected or otherwise demonstrate a risk factor to gain access to additional support.

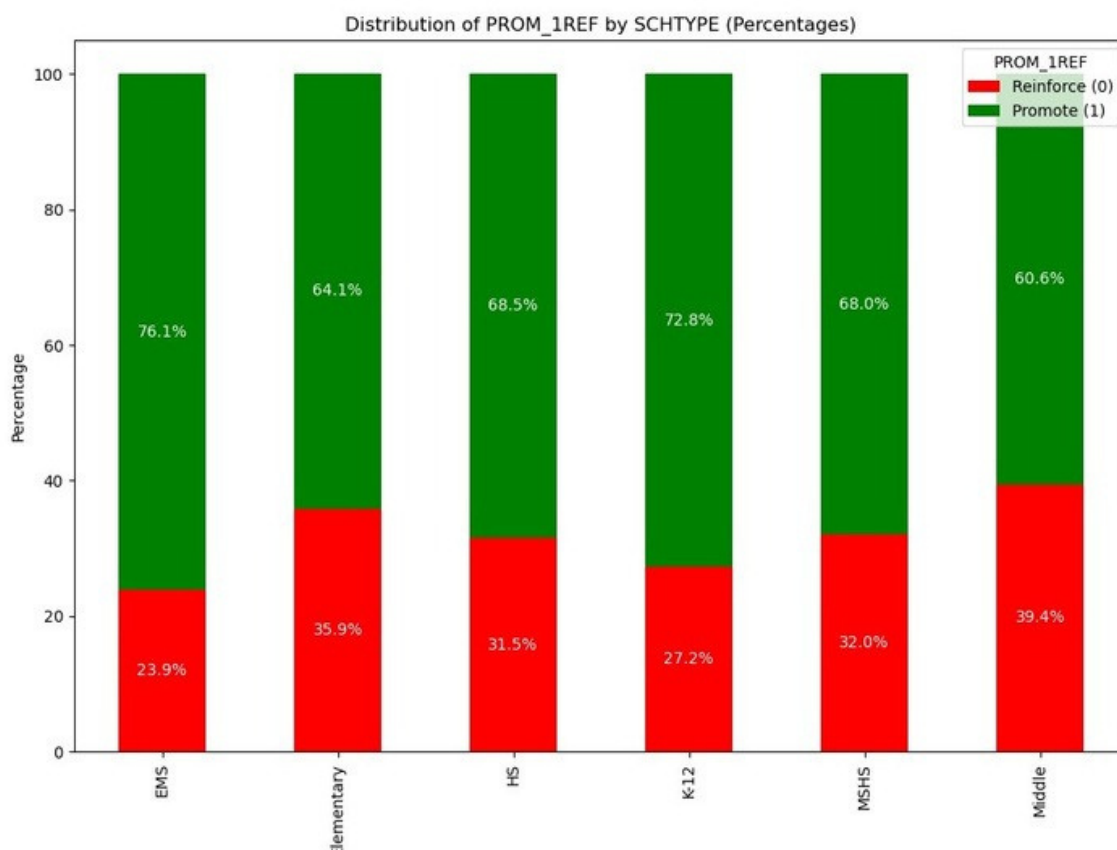
Tertiary – High-risk students have access to individual support.

+Bootstrap 95%Confidence Interval, 1000 bootstrap samples. Percentages with different subscripts differ at the p= .05 level.

SEL INPUT BY TIER Table 2 describes the percentage of SEL input at the various tiers. The percentage of activities at the universal tier ranged from 63.5% (EMS) to 74.6% (Elementary). The only differences were found between EMS schools and the other schools. The percentage of activities at the targeted tier ranged from 17.9% (Elementary) to 22.7% (Middle). There were no statistically significant differences among the schools. The percentage of activities at the targeted tier ranged from 3.3% (MSHS) to 13.2% (EMS). There were no statistically significant differences.



FIGURE 2. SEL INPUTS PERCENTAGE OF PROMOTION (INSTRUCTION) VS. REINFORCEMENT (ACTIVATION) FOCUS



SEL INPUT PROMOTION VS. REINFORCEMENT FOCUS

Across the school types, the majority of SEL inputs focused on the promotion of competency. The percentage ranged from 60% for Middle schools to 76% for EMS schools.

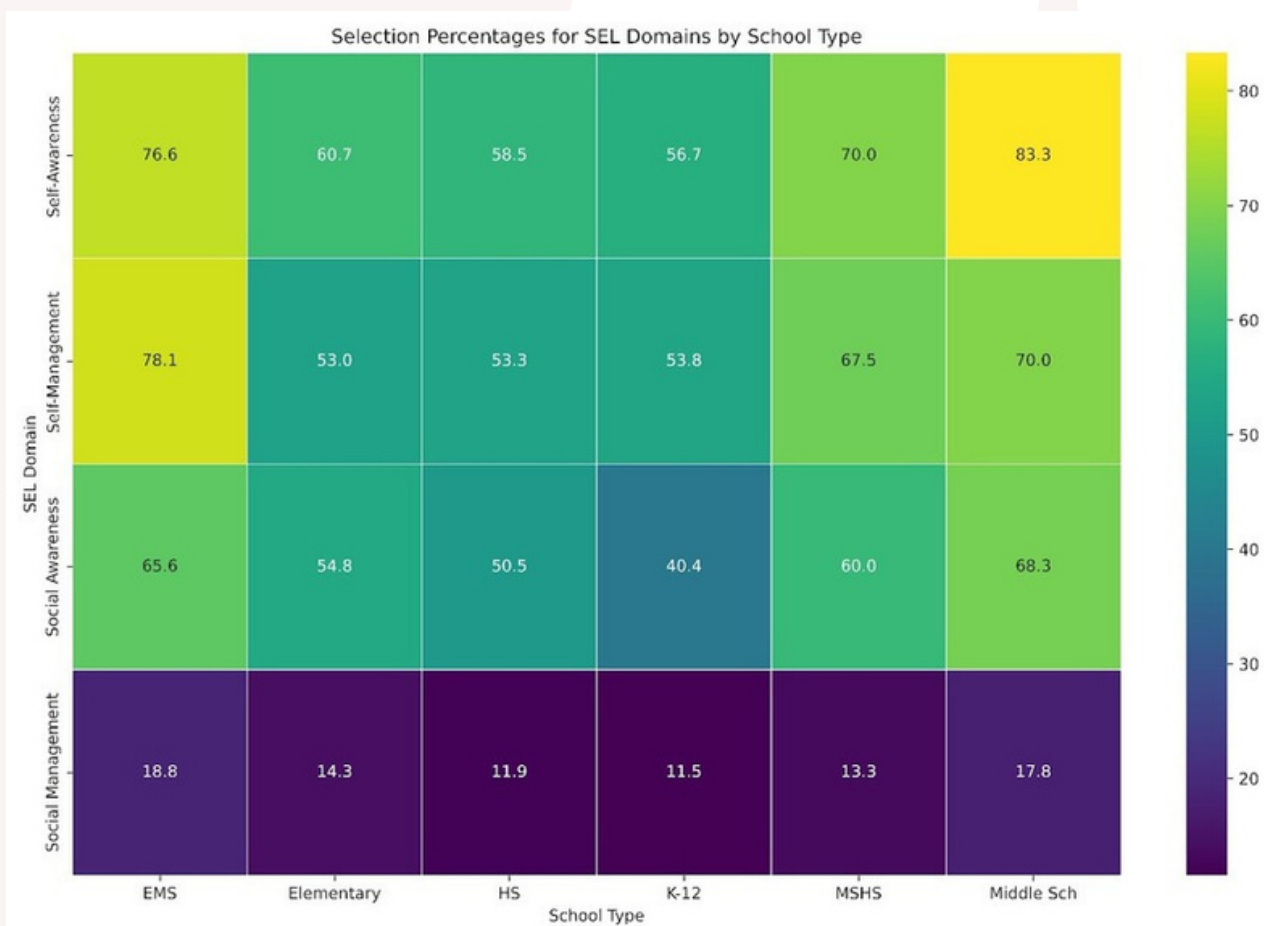
FIGURE 3. SEL DOMAINS FOCUSED ACROSS SCHOOL TYPE**SEL DOMAINS FOCUSED ACROSS SCHOOL TYPE**

Figure 3 is a heatmap diagram of the selection percentages for Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social-Awareness, and Social-Management indicators by school type. The percentages represent the extent to which a particular SEL domain was the focus of the school activities.



Self-Awareness Indicators

SA2: Students demonstrate awareness of their needs and emotions.

I am aware of what I need and feel.

SA6: Students demonstrate awareness of their external supports.

I am aware of the supports I have around me.

SA4: Students demonstrate awareness of their personal traits.

I am aware of my traits, know what I do well, and know what areas I can work on.

SA8: Students have a sense of personal responsibility.

I am aware of my responsibilities.



Elementary schools have high selection percentages for all Self-Awareness indicators. Middle schools show moderate selection percentages. EMS1 and K-12 schools have varied selection percentages, with some indicators being selected more frequently than others.

¹EMS the groups school contains school providing specialized instructional support for student with significant learning and emotional challenges, school serving children in Pre-K to 8 and K-5 grades.

Self-Management Indicators

SM10: Students demonstrate the ability to manage their needs and emotions.

I can responsibly manage my needs and emotions.

SM12: Students are genuine and demonstrate honesty/integrity.

I can act in a genuine and honest manner.

SM14: Students use effective choice-making and decision-making skills.

I can make good choices and decisions.

SM16: Students demonstrate increasing levels of independence and the ability to set and achieve goals.

I can demonstrate increasing levels of independence and set and achieve goals that will help me to be successful.



Elementary schools again show high selection percentages for Self-Management indicators. Middle schools and EMS have moderate selection percentages. High schools and MSHS show lower selection percentages for Self-Management indicators. K-12 schools have varied selection percentages, similar to Self-Awareness indicators.

Social-Awareness Indicators

SOC18: Students demonstrate awareness of other people's roles, their emotions and perspectives.

I demonstrate knowledge of other people's roles and I care about the feelings and viewpoints of others.

SOC20: Students demonstrate consideration for others and a desire to positively contribute to their community.

I care about others and do my part to make my community better.

SOC22: Students demonstrate an awareness of cultural issues and a respect for human dignity and differences.

I care about and respect the individual differences of others.

SOC24: Students can respond to and read social or pertinent environmental cues.

I care about how I perceive others and am being perceived by them.



Middle schools have high selection percentages for all Social-Awareness indicators followed by EMS schools. Middle schools show moderate selection percentages. Apart from K-12 schools, more than half of the activities focused on Social-Awareness.

Social-Management Indicators

SOCM1: Students use positive communication and social skills to interact effectively with others

I will interact well with others.

SOCM3: Students develop constructive relationships.

I will work on having constructive relationships.

SOCM5: Students demonstrate the ability to prevent, manage, and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways.

I will deal with interpersonal conflicts constructively.

Social-Management was infrequently the focus of activities across all school types.



Discussion

The findings of this study have several important implications for educators and policymakers committed to enhancing Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in schools.

DIFFERENTIATED APPROACH TO SEL IMPLEMENTATION

The variation in SEL focus across different school types and educational levels suggests that a one-size-fits-all is not how schools are responding to the need to address student's development of social and emotional competencies. Policymakers should encourage and support schools in tailoring SEL programs to the specific needs of their student populations. For example, elementary schools may benefit from continued emphasis on Self-Awareness and Self-Management, while middle schools might focus more on Social-Awareness.

NEED FOR INCREASED FOCUS ON SOCIAL-MANAGEMENT SKILLS

The consistently lower emphasis on Social-Management indicators suggests a potential gap in SEL programming. Educators should be encouraged to integrate more activities that promote positive communication, relationship-building, and conflict resolution skills. Policymakers could develop guidelines or provide resources to support the inclusion of Social-Management skills in SEL curricula.

UNIVERSAL TIER AS A FOUNDATION

The predominance of activities at the Universal tier indicates that foundational SEL competencies, such as Self-Awareness and Self-Management, are critical across all school types. Educators should ensure that these competencies are integrated into the core curriculum and that all students have access to SEL programming. Policymakers should consider incentivizing Universal tier activities to ensure broad-based SEL education.

DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING

The use of data from The Urban Assembly Resilient Scholars Program Portal underscores the importance of data-driven decision-making in SEL implementation. Policymakers should encourage schools to systematically document and analyze SEL activities to identify gaps, monitor progress, and make informed decisions. This approach can help ensure that SEL programs are meeting the intended outcomes and addressing the needs of all students.