Collaboration to Achieve Whole-School SEL Across a Large, Urban District

Michelle Porche
Jenny Grossman
Wellesley Centers for Women

Nova Biro
Nancy MacKay
Open Circle, Wellesley College

Sojourner Rivers
Public Health Commission

Evaluation support provided by NoVo Foundation
• SEL programs shown to improve social skills, behavior, and academic achievement

• Yet most studies conducted at the classroom level, few examining whole-school and district-level reform through SEL
Aims

• Process outcomes and program impact for 2-year, grade K-5 SEL rollout across a large urban district:
  - 23 schools (one-third of elementary-level district schools)
  - 400 classrooms (universal – every K-5 classroom)
  - Over 7,000 students (universal – every K-5 student)

• What are critical factors for successful district implementation?

• How is implementation related to school climate, teacher practice, student behavior?
District Setting

• Setting
  - 8.5% suspension rate
  - 7.4% retention in grade
  - 8.9% dropout

• Student population
  - 78% low-income
  - 30% limited English proficiency
  - 20% special education status
  - 36% Black/African American; 40% Hispanic; 13% White; 9% Asian; 2% other/multi-racial
Open Circle Goals

Skill Development

Help students develop skills for recognizing and managing emotions, empathy, relationships and problem solving

Learning Environment

Help students feel safe, cared for, and engaged in learning at school
Whole-School Approach

- Students
- Teachers
- Administrators
- Specialists & Support Staff
- Family & Community
Theory of Change

Target Population: All students in Kindergarten to Grade 5 (universal)

Intervention:
- Classroom component: student curriculum, teacher training, teacher coaching
- Schoolwide component: administrator, specialist, and paraprofessional training
- Family component: Home Link letters, family workshops

Underlying Process:
- Teachers implement curriculum
- School community models and integrates SEL

Intermediate Outcomes:
- Enhanced school climate
- Enhanced SEL skills

Student Education Outcomes:
- Academic performance
- Health & well-being
- Success in work & life
• **Grade-level teachers** receive 4 days of training (2 in summer, 1 in winter, 1 in spring), 2+ coaching visits (1 in fall, 1 in spring)

• **Administrators, counselors, specialist subject teachers, support staff, and family and community outreach coordinators** receive 1 day of training

• 1+ peer coaches and SEL leadership team of 8 cross-departmental staff members receive additional PD
Curricula

- Teachers implement grade-differentiated SEL curricula during twice-weekly, 15-minute classroom meetings.
- The entire school community models and infuses SEL vocabulary, concepts and strategies throughout the school day and beyond.
Implementation Challenges

• Staffing transitions:
  → New mayor
  → New interim superintendent
  → New principals at 9 of 23 participating schools

• Structural changes:
  → New network model
  → Changes to teacher hiring and evaluation
  → Introduction of Common Core

• Limited district financial support for future SEL sustainability

• District slow to deliver data
23 Participating Schools

- 34 schools expressed interest
- District selected schools, prioritizing schools serving lowest-income populations
- 19 schools joined in Year 1 (3 of which dropped) and 7 schools joined in Year 2

793 Staff Members Trained

- 413 teachers
- 332 counselors, special subject teachers, support staff
- 48 administrators
Evaluation Procedures

- Implementation observations
  - 344 teachers

- Pre-Post online surveys
  - 250 teachers, 177 specialist/para, 27 admin, 4 family coordinators

- Pre-Post classroom observations
  - 12 Grade 3; 13 Grade 5

- Pre-Post student surveys
  - 247 Grade 3; 239 Grade 5

- Qualitative interviews with 17 staff
Evaluation Measures

- Staff surveys
  - School/Classroom Climate; Students’ Prosocial and Negative Behaviors
  - Implementation of *Open Circle Curriculum*
  - Learning from training/coaching
  - Program satisfaction

- Observation tools
  - Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; La Paro, Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004)
  - Open Circle Fidelity Checklist

- Student survey
  - Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS; Gresham & Elliott, 2008)
Training Participation

Percent of 23 Participating Schools

- **Teachers**: 100% All/Nearly All Trained
- **Specialists & Paraprofessionals**: 80% Over 50% Trained, 20% Less than Half Trained
- **One or More Administrators**: 100% All/Nearly All Trained
- **Behavioral Health Staff**: 100% All/Nearly All Trained

Legend:
- Dark Red: All/Nearly All Trained
- Yellow: Over 50% Trained
- Pink: Less than Half Trained
Teacher Training and Coaching Attendance

Percent of Teachers (n=413) Completing Training/Coaching

- Completed All
- Half or More
- Few or None

4 Teacher Training Sessions
2 Coaching Sessions for Teachers
Teacher Implementation (n=123)

- 92% reported facilitating Open Circle Meetings for 15+ minutes
- 81% reported facilitating Open Circle Meetings one or more times per week
- 83% reported completing at least three-quarters of all curriculum lessons
Coaches’ Fidelity Checklist for Teachers in Year 2 of Implementation (n=171)

- Skilled: 64%
- Somewhat Skilled: 26%
- Not Skilled: 10%
Teacher SEL Infusion (n=121)

- I integrated SEL throughout the day
- I modeled SEL skills throughout the day
- I posted SEL visuals in my classroom
- I used SEL community-building activities
- I read or assigned SEL-themed books
- I sent SEL content to families

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

- Very Frequently
- Frequently
- Occasionally
Whole-School Implementation

Special Subject Teachers and Support Staff Infusion (n=76)

- I used SEL vocabulary in my interactions with students
- I encouraged my students to practice SEL skills
- I used SEL community-building activities
- I infused SEL in school-wide activities (e.g., assemblies)
- I posted SEL visuals in my work area
- I read SEL-themed books with students
- I collaborated with grade-level teachers on an SEL-related project

Very Frequently  Frequently  Occasionally
## Program Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I would recommend Open Circle to a colleague.</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers (n=124)</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialists/Paraprofessionals (n=76)</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators (n=24)</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How satisfied are you with Open Circle in your school?</th>
<th>Very Satisfied</th>
<th>Extremely Satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers (n=124)</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialists/Paraprofessionals (n=76)</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators (n=24)</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Open Circle Impacts Across Staff
*(Teachers/Specialists/Administrators: n=228)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Circle…</th>
<th>Percent Agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provided a common vocabulary</td>
<td>89.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased my students’ demonstration of prosocial behaviors</td>
<td>93.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced my students’ demonstration of negative behaviors</td>
<td>89.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped to create a safer environment in my school</td>
<td>92.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped to create a more caring environment in my classroom/school</td>
<td>93.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped to create a more highly engaged environment in my classroom/school</td>
<td>88.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enabled me to spend less time managing disruptive behaviors and more time on academics</td>
<td>86.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enabled me to make fewer office referrals for student behavior problems</td>
<td>51.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Student Behaviors & Climate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PreSurvey Mean</th>
<th>PostSurvey Mean</th>
<th>Paired t-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ProSocial Behaviors(^1)</strong></td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>(t = -6.00, p &lt; .0001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Behaviors(^1)</strong></td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>(t = -2.24, p &lt; .0267)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classroom Climate(^2)</strong></td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>(t = 1.56, p &lt; .1211)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) Teachers, Specialists, Paraprofessionals (n=138)  
\(^2\) All staff (n=190)
Positive Training/Coaching Impact Correlated to Improved Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Coaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post School/Classroom</td>
<td>.34***</td>
<td>.30***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate</td>
<td>(n=204)</td>
<td>(n=127)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Prosocial Behaviors</td>
<td>.33***</td>
<td>.20*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=204)</td>
<td>(n=127)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Negative Behaviors</td>
<td>-.14*</td>
<td>-.19*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=204)</td>
<td>(n=127)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .05$  *** $p < .001$
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Paired t-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>3.20 (0.53)</td>
<td>3.19 (0.53)</td>
<td>$t=-0.24$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>3.18 (0.61)</td>
<td>3.12 (0.60)</td>
<td>$t=-1.39$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Control</td>
<td>2.68 (0.69)</td>
<td>2.68 (0.70)</td>
<td>$t=0.03$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>1.36 (0.51)</td>
<td>1.28 (0.44)</td>
<td>$t=-2.36^*$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interview Findings

• Students learning to “calm and quiet” helped “gain about 15 minutes” of academic learning time each period

• “Calm breathing techniques” helped students “manage emotions better”

• Focus on expression helped students develop “oral language skills”
Success Factors

• Cultivate many SEL champions at district-level and throughout schools
  – Mitigate impact of high staff turnover

• Leverage relationships and funding from external community groups
  – External champions can help with district politics

• Follow up and follow through
  – Overloaded schools often need extra support and reminders to prioritize PD and implementation

• Expect a range of needs
  – Schools vary widely and can change quickly in their levels of commitment, responsiveness and capacity for SEL work
Limitations & Next Steps

- Self-selected schools
- Small sample of observed classrooms
- Less than 50% compliance on surveys
- Academic data unavailable
- Will use district data to do propensity score matching in order to compare to matched controls on SEL report card measures
Conclusions

• Achieved extensive, whole-school SEL professional development and implementation across a significant share of schools in large urban district in two years

• Will focus on sustainability in Year 3
Thank You!

www.open-circle.org

info@open-circle.org

(781) 283-3277