Respected

Perspectives of Youth on High School & Social and Emotional Learning

A Report for CASEL

By Civic *with* Hart Research Associates
Jennifer L. DePaoli, Matthew N. Atwell,
John M. Bridgeland & Timothy P. Shriver

Sponsored by
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CIVIC

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Letter from the Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development's Youth Commission

We, the members of the [Aspen Institute National Youth Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development](#), are encouraged and motivated by the voices of our peers captured in Respected: Perspectives of Youth on High School & Social and Emotional Learning.

We are not surprised by what our fellow students shared about their high school experiences. Far too often, schools fail to help all of us reach our potential and see us as whole learners. Respected reveals that our generation's embrace of social, emotional, and academic learning in schools is undeniable and unambiguous: learning does not happen in a vacuum. Instead, learning happens best when the full, often complicated nature of our lived experiences are recognized, celebrated, and serve as the basis upon which we experience school.

While life outside of school can pose obstacles to learning, reconstructing what happens inside of school can offset learning barriers and instead enhance, accelerate, and broaden our success. The adults who teach and guide us—teachers, administrators, coaches, and counselors—should be organized to foster a warm, nurturing, and physically and emotionally safe environment that acknowledges and helps offset these obstacles. That means that adults in the building need to know and understand us. They need to help cultivate a strong sense of community that empowers each of us to achieve a sense of purpose and belonging. It also means that schools must transition to a leadership model that sees collaboration as a two-way street.

As students, we understand why we go to school: to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for future success. Social and emotional learning works in service of greater academic achievement and mastery, while also helping raise a generation of empathetic, compassionate, and self-aware people. This understanding, which was affirmed during our time with the Youth Commission, drives our desire to help build a student experience that leaves us better prepared to claim our future. By listening to young people, our education system can provide equitable access and opportunity for all and create a generation of leaders prepared to combat the challenges of this century.

To those reading this report, know that behind every data point is the story of a student who was brave enough to give voice to their own experiences and struggles. We want to thank them in joining our call in asking for more support from our schools as we go forth to accomplish our dreams.

The Youth Commission is a diverse group of high school and post-secondary young people with a wide range of educational experiences. We've attended traditional public, charter, and private preK-12 schools as well as public and private universities and military academies. Over the past two years, we've reflected on the successes and challenges of our educational journeys and listened to various voices within the National Commission community and beyond. We learned how to advocate for students like us who want their schools to engage their passions and prepare them to succeed in school, career, and life. Our findings culminated in a [Call to Action](#) for adults and schools to treat us as whole learners.

Open Letter to the American People
By Karen Niemi, John M. Bridgeland, & Timothy P. Shriver

There is power in listening.

Over the last year, we have been listening to the perspectives of young people — students in high school and recent graduates who are in college, employed or still finding their path. We wanted to understand more about how they viewed their school experience, what their greatest challenges were, how well they felt prepared for life after high school, and how schools could improve to unleash more of their potential.

We were particularly interested in whether their schools helped them develop social and emotional skills – such as the ability to get along well with others, understand other points of view, solve problems collaboratively, persist through challenges and stress, and have confidence in themselves. These are many of the skills employers are looking for in workers and many of the competencies our communities and nation are looking for in leaders.

What we heard from these extraordinary young people is presented in this report and it should serve as a wake-up call to improve our schools in ways that inspire our young people, cultivate the skills and abilities to develop them as whole human beings, and prepare them to be productive workers and citizens contributing to our democracy.

Most students give their schools — and the teachers, administrators and staff within them — good marks, showing how much they value those who are working to educate and engage them. The majority of students and young adults, however, want much more from their schools and report that their schools are not exceling at develop-ing their social and emotional skills. Students who are in schools where the integration of social, emotional and academic development is strong report doing much better academically, getting along better with others, feeling safer, being much better prepared for life, and having higher rates of volunteering than those students who do not attend such schools.

Their experiences are borne out by research demonstrating that high-quality social and emotional learning boosts many of the outcomes we already measure – such as attendance, academic achievement, behavior, graduation, college attainment, employment, and participation in community. And those on the front lines of schools – our teachers and administrators – also believe in the power of social and emotional learning and want schools to create learning environments that make those skills central.

America certainly needs the talents of our young people more than ever, with the changing nature of work and an economy demanding more education and training from workers, and with the fraying of American communities and a significant decline in civic participation. By hearing from young people, and taking their ideas for reform seriously, we can help strengthen an educational system that remains the best hope for providing equal access to the American Dream and a generation of leaders prepared for the challenges of this century.
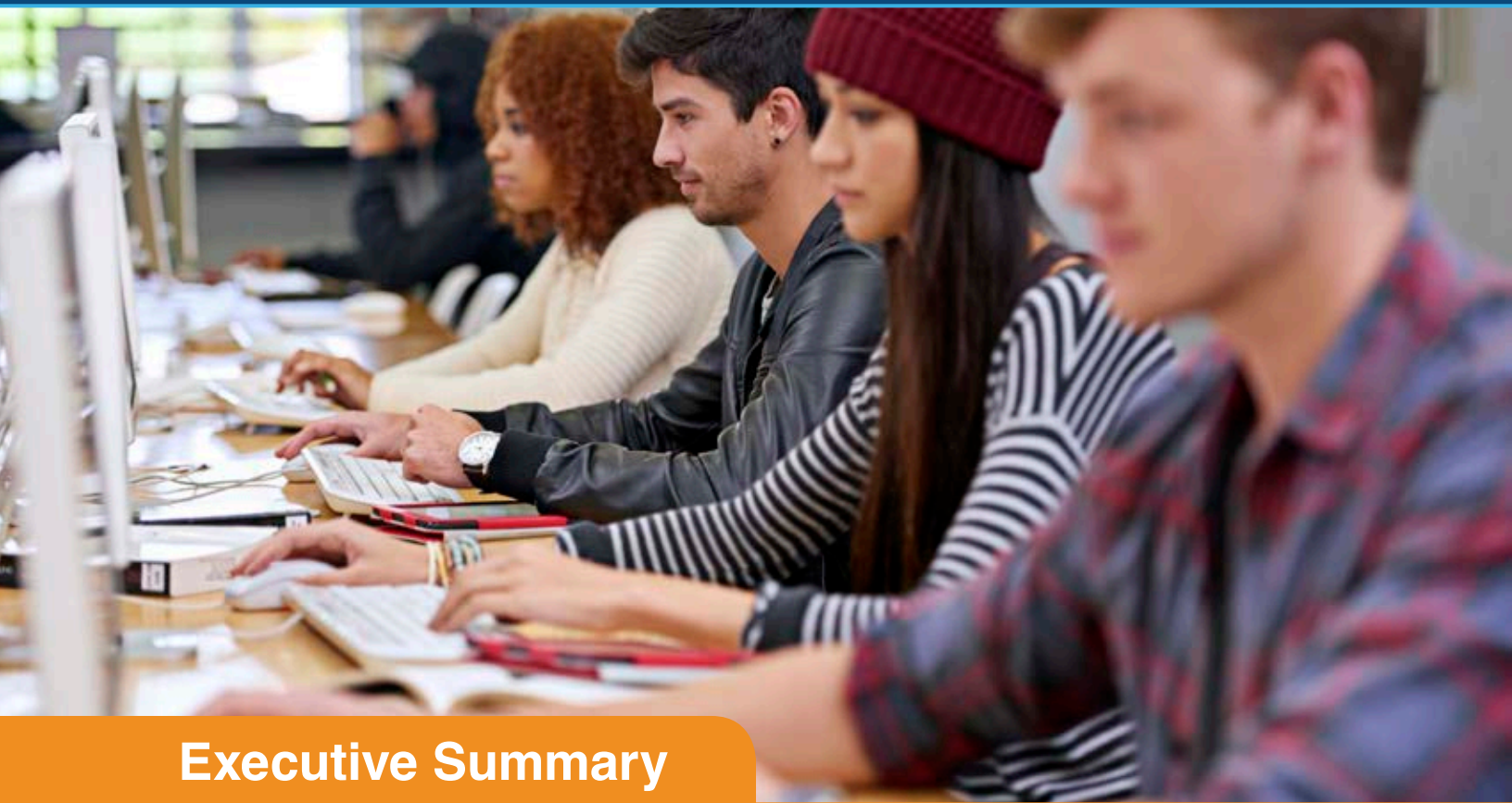
Executive Summary

The central message of this report is while current and recent high school students today generally respect their teachers and give their high schools favorable marks, most see a big missing piece in their education – a lack of social and emotional skills development – and most recent students feel unprepared for life after high school.

Students, like teachers and administrators, see the benefits of attending schools that emphasize social and emotional learning (SEL), especially in terms of improving relationships, reducing bullying, and preparing them for postsecondary education, work, and life. Such schools are broadly appealing to students across backgrounds and from different types of schools. Encouragingly, students in schools with a strong commitment to social and emotional development report having better learning environments, feeling respected more, feeling safer, doing better academically, getting along well with others better, being better prepared for life, and being more likely to serve and give back to their communities than those students not in such schools.

These and other findings are the result of a nationally representative survey of current (age 14-19) and recent (age 16-22) high school students, including in-depth interviews with students in schools with and without a strong focus on social and emotional learning. Listening to the perspectives of students completes a compelling picture that has included nationally representative surveys of pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade teachers and principals to assess the role and value of social and emotional learning in America's schools.

Survey Findings

The survey findings have three major themes:

1. Students and young adults from strong SEL schools report a more positive social climate and learning environment, doing better academically, and being better prepared for life than those in weak SEL schools;

2. Schools that emphasize social and emotional skill development are broadly appealing to students across background, race, ethnicity, income, geography, and type of school attended and students see the benefits of such schools, but fewer than half believe their high schools are doing a good job of helping them develop SEL skills; and

3. Students – particularly some of the most vulnerable – cite social and emotional problems as significant barriers to learning, doing their best, and fulfilling their potential.

Throughout the report, we share the perspectives of current and recent high school students, including in their own words, that give us a clearer picture of how they view their high schools, what their challenges are, and how their schools could be improved to unleash more of their potential. We also present findings related to the perspectives of students from different backgrounds in an effort to promote an equitable approach to understanding students' experiences in high school. Finally, we highlight what research tells us about the integration of social, emotional, and academic development and make recommendations on how to advance the strategic and systemic use of youth voice and SEL in schools to promote student success in school, work and civic life.

We asked young people to rate how well their high school helps students develop the following seven SEL skills:

- Knowing how to get along/work with people different from you;
- Feeling confident in yourself;
- Understanding other people's feelings/views;
- Knowing how to solve disagreements in a positive way;
- Understanding your own emotions and why you feel different emotions;

- Dealing with difficult situations in your life; and
- Knowing how to deal with stress.

Based on the evaluation of students and young adults, the SEL capability of their high schools was determined in the following manner:

- **Strong SEL Capability:** Great/pretty good job on 6 or 7 of these skills
- **Medium SEL Capability:** Great/pretty good job on 2 to 5 of these skills
- **Weak SEL Capability:** Great/pretty good job on 0 or 1 of these skills

Theme 1
Students in strong SEL schools report a more positive social climate and learning environment, doing better academically, and feeling better prepared for life than those in weak SEL schools.

Nearly all students in strong SEL schools give their high schools high marks, report positive relationships, feel safer, and believe they have agency in their school.

- Ninety-two percent of current high school students and 90 percent of recent students from strong SEL schools would give their school an A or a B as a place for academic learning and to do their best. This is compared to 55 percent of current students and 42 percent of recent students in weak SEL schools who would give their school an A or a B as a place for students to learn and do their best.

- More than 9 in 10 current and recent high school students from strong SEL schools say principals and teachers are supportive and respectful compared to less than half of young people from weak SEL schools.

- Eighty-nine percent of current high school students and 84 percent of recent students from strong SEL schools say students at their schools get along with each other well, compared to 46 percent of current students and 33 percent of recent students from weak SEL schools.

- Nine in ten current high school students attending strong SEL schools say they feel safe in their high school, compared to 60 percent in weak SEL

schools. A similar margin exists between recent high school students who attended strong SEL schools (86 percent) and those from weak SEL schools (56 percent).

- About 8 in 10 current and recent high school students from strong SEL schools say their school values the opinions of students, compared to roughly 1 in 4 current and recent students from weak SEL schools.

> *"I wouldn't have talked to kids who are different from me at my old school. Now I will. If I don't understand anything I can ask a teacher. I went from D's to A's. I was ready to stop going at my old school."*
>
> **High school student, SEL school**

Current and recent high school students in strong SEL schools say their schools do a better job of helping them learn academically, engaging and motivating them, and preparing them for success after high school.

- Nearly all current high school students (95 percent) and recent high school students (93 percent) from strong SEL schools feel their school did a pretty good or great job of helping them learn academic material. About half of current students (49 percent) and only a little more than one-third of recent high school students (37 percent) from weak SEL students agree.

- Eighty-eight percent of current students and 78 percent of recent high school students from strong SEL schools felt motivated to work hard and do their best in school, compared to 39 percent of current and 24 percent of recent students in low SEL schools. Eighty-one percent of current students and 65 percent of recent students from strong SEL schools expressed being engaged in the learning material, compared to 16 percent of current and 9 percent of recent students from weak SEL schools.

- A large majority of recent high school students from strong SEL schools say their school did a great or a pretty good job of preparing them for success after high school (83 percent) and preparing them for a job or career (82 percent), and current high school students from strong SEL schools feel similarly. Small fractions of recent high school students from weak SEL schools feel as though their school prepared them for success after high school (only 13 percent) or prepared them for a job or career (only 8 percent). High school students currently in low SEL schools also do not believe their school is preparing them well for future success (30 percent) or a job or career pathway (23 percent).

- Fifty-seven percent of students and young adults from strong SEL schools say they regularly volunteer in their community, compared to only 28 percent of students and 26 percent of young adults from weak SEL schools.

- Seventy-seven percent of current high school students and 75 percent of recent students from strong SEL schools say they would participate in full-time military, national, or public service for their community or country, compared to 62 percent of current students and 58 percent of recent students from weak SEL high schools.

> *"It's going to help us in the long run, learning how to communicate with people and be open to others' opinions. It helps me get along better with other kids my age. We all have the same skill set… If you believe that you can do something, you will most likely succeed, like getting good grades in all your classes."*
>
> **High school student, SEL school**

Theme 2
Schools that emphasize social and emotional skill development are broadly appealing to students across background, race, ethnicity, income, geography, and type of school attended, but fewer than half believe their schools are doing a good job of helping them develop SEL skills.

Current and recent high school students like the idea of attending a school that helps students develop SEL skills, and most believe they would personally benefit from such schools.

- Roughly three-quarters of current high school students say attending a strong SEL school appeals to them (76 percent) and would help them personally (74 percent). A similar number of recent high school students agree that a strong SEL school would have appealed to them (75 percent) and personally benefitted them (74 percent).

- A majority of both current and recent high school students say that going to a school that focuses on developing SEL skills would: help improve student/teacher and peer relationships, reduce bullying, help them learn academic material and real-world skills, prepare them for college and jobs/careers, and prepare them to give back to their communities.

Most recent high school students do not feel their school is doing a great job of helping students develop SEL skills, and only about a third of high schools are seen as being strong on SEL.

- Fewer than half of recent high school students believe their school did at least a pretty good job of helping students develop each of the seven different benchmark SEL skills, and even fewer say their school did a great job of helping them develop SEL skills.

- Though many current high school students feel their high school does at least a pretty good job of helping young people develop some SEL skills, very few give their school the highest marks on helping them develop the seven benchmark SEL skills.

- According to current students, only 36 percent of high schools could be considered strong SEL schools, while recent students put even fewer schools (23 percent) in the top category.

- Just four percent of current students and five percent of recent students rate their high school as doing a great job helping them develop all seven of the SEL skills presented in this survey.

Most current and recent high school students say that working on group projects, organized sports, talking to a school counselor, and participating in band, choir, or orchestra have been the most helpful ways to learn about themselves and how to get along with others. Only about 20 percent of students reported having a formal SEL class that helped them learn things beyond academics and just over one-third cited classroom instruction.

Theme 3
Many current and recent high school students cite social climate issues and emotional problems as barriers to learning, doing their best, and fulfilling their potential.

Although majorities of youth view teachers and administrators as supportive of students and give their schools a passing grade, most believe improvements need to be made in the school system.

- 80 percent of current high school students and 70 percent of recent high school students would give their school an A or B as a place to learn and do their best.

- Most current (78 percent) and recent (69 percent) high school students say teachers at their school are supportive and respectful of students, but fewer say they feel like their teachers care about them all or most of the time (61 percent current students, 55 percent recent students).

- Seventy-seven percent of current students and 66 percent of recent high school students feel that their principal respects and supports students.

- However, more than half of current students (52 percent) and recent students (62 percent) say that at least some changes need to be made to their school when it comes to being a good place for students to learn and do their best.

While current and recent students give their high school decent marks, many students, especially some of the most vulnerable, cite social and emotional obstacles that are holding them back.

- Between 70 and 80 percent of current and recent students feel physically safe in their school all or most of the time, but Hispanic students, students with lower grades, and lower-income students report feeling less safe in their high schools.

- Only 52 percent of current high school students and 39 percent of recent high school students report feeling comfortable participating in school and taking risks even if it means making mistakes. Young people with lower grades, from lower-income families, and those now enrolled in community/vocational for postsecondary education are more likely to report holding back in high school for fear of making a mistake.

- Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of current high school students say they feel stressed out at least some of the time, including one in three of those students (31 percent overall) who say they feel stressed out all or most of the time. Looking back, 85 percent of recent students say they felt stressed at least some of the time, and a majority within those students (51 percent overall) say they felt stressed all or most of the time.

- Roughly 7 in 10 current high school students say they feel bored at least some of the time in school, and upon reflection, more than 8 in 10 recent high school students say they felt bored at school at least some of the time.

- About two in five (42 percent) current high school students and three in five (62 percent) post-high school young adults report feeling lonely in their high school at least some of the time.

A majority of current and recent high school students also report that disruptive students, drugs in school, and bullying in school and on social media are at least somewhat of a problem in their school. African American students report these social and relational issues within their schools at higher rates than White and Hispanic students.

Equity gaps between student subgroups exist – and some challenge preconceived notions.

The feelings young people expressed about their schools depend, in part, on their backgrounds.

These subgroup variances are highlighted within the report, but some of the gaps that exist between different student subgroups include:

- Current and recent Hispanic students are less likely to report feeling physically safe in their high schools than their White and African American peers. There is no significant difference in feelings of school safety between students in urban, suburban, and rural schools.

- Though African American students report social and relational issues within their schools at higher rates, they are more likely to report feeling motivated to do their best, being excited about what they are learning in school, and more comfortable participating and taking risks than their White and Hispanic peers.

- Hispanic students are more likely than White and African American students to report feeling stressed out at least some of the time.

- Students from below average income backgrounds are more likely to feel negatively about their high school experience, including feeling a lesser sense of physical safety, lower levels of comfort participating, less engaged and motivated, and feeling bored, lonely, and bullied in school.

- Students reporting lower grades are less likely to feel safe and comfortable being themselves, are less excited about what they are learning and less comfortable about participating and taking risks, are more likely to feel stressed out, bored, and lonely, and are more likely to have experienced bullying than their peers reporting higher grades.

Exploring the differences in how different subgroups feel about their schools can help educators and education leaders better understand and support students from various backgrounds and challenge harmful stereotypes that hold young people back.

Many high school students say that experiencing social and emotional problems makes it difficult for them to learn and do their best. Looking back with experience after high school, recent students are even more likely to see the harmful effects of personal problems and a negative social environment on their education.

- More than half of current high school students say that feeling stressed (61 percent) and dealing with disruptive students in class (54 percent)

make it harder for them to learn and do their best in school. Roughly half of current students say things outside of school (52 percent) and a lack of confidence (48 percent) also negatively affect their ability to learn and do their best in school.

- Nearly three-quarters (72 percent) of recent students felt the impact of being stressed made it harder to learn and do their best in school. Roughly 6 in 10 recent high school students say that things outside of school (62 percent) and disruptive students (59 percent) negatively affected their ability to learn. Significant numbers of recent students also said that a lack of confidence (56 percent), feeling lonely (49 percent), and bullying (42 percent) made learning more challenging.

Paths Forward

Surveys of teachers, principals, and students all illustrate a strong appetite for greater integration of SEL into their schools and classrooms. They see the many benefits of SEL, and the teachers and administrators believe it can be taught and assessed and is a powerful lever in promoting student achievement and motivation. District, state and federal policies must work to support the enabling conditions for social and emotional learning to be well integrated in schools throughout the country, and all stakeholders – especially young people – must be included in the conversation to create the best outcomes for all.

Integrate social, emotional, and academic learning and development.

Evidence shows the benefits of SEL are greater when it is implemented effectively and integrated directly into learning environments, but too often even in schools where high-quality SEL programming is present, it is not being embedded into and across classrooms effectively (Oberle, Domitrovich, Meyers, Weissberg, 2016). Schools must intentionally and actively integrate social, emotional and academic learning with instruction on specific skills and competencies. This includes integrating relevant examples of academic subjects intersecting with social and emotional competencies in lessons and designing opportunities for students to engage their SEL skills. Instruction should affirm diversity and seek to address stereotypes or inequities that may arise in instruction or communities.

Create and articulate a clear vision for student success and SEL.

In order to craft effective policy and practice, states, districts, and schools must articulate a clear vision of student success and what social and emotional learning looks like and how it is measured. This vision should be informed by what students should know and be able to do at each age level and be aligned with the best evidence on SEL, improving academic achievement, creating a more positive school climate and culture, and better preparing students with the skills they need for postsecondary education, employment, and civic engagement. The vision for social and emotional learning at the state level must be adaptive to differences across schools and districts to ensure school leaders are given the flexibility to address the needs of their school community, while still providing a strong framework for advancing SEL and guiding implementation and assessment.

Ensure young people are part of the decision-making process, particularly around SEL programming and assessment.

As this survey shows, young people are an asset in understanding what works and what doesn't in a school, and neglecting to include them in the decision-making process fails to consider their invaluable perspective on the social dynamics and challenges students must navigate. School and district leaders should empower young people by providing space for students to share their experiences and weigh in on decisions that will affect them. This is particularly true for decisions on the adoption and implementation of social and emotional programming and the collection and use of SEL data. Bringing students together with teachers, administrators, and staff to discuss how to integrate social and emotional learning and development in a school can ensure the most appropriate decisions are made to meet the needs of all. Including student voice is also integral to the collection of SEL data, especially in the case of developing climate survey instruments and other tools that need to be correctly calibrated for young people to produce accurate responses.

Diversify youth leadership and leadership opportunities.

Often, the young people included in the decision-making process or given the opportunity to voice their opinions in school are high-profile academic, athletic, or leadership group students – not those that tend to be the most vulnerable. To fully understand the issues facing all students in a school, efforts must be made to be more inclusive of students who are not typically chosen or do not volunteer for leadership opportunities. As this survey shows, students at the lower end of the academic scale have very different perspectives on many of the challenges young people face in school than students at the higher end of the spectrum, and by excluding them from the conversation, teachers and administrators are missing a significant piece of the picture of what is happening within their school. School leaders must do more to diversify student involvement in school leadership opportunities and tap into the voice of the students who are the most vulnerable to falling behind and whose voices often go unheard.

Strengthen SEL training for teachers and administrators.

To ensure students are getting the best possible SEL instruction, it is equally important that the SEL skills and competencies of educators and administrators are being continually developed as well. Surveys of teachers and principals have illustrated that school leaders are clamoring for increased investments in social and emotional learning, but also realize that greater training in teaching and assessing SEL is needed to ensure successful implementation. Schools and districts should emphasize adult social and emotional competencies in job requirements and descriptions, as well as offer additional professional development and continuing learning opportunities. Universities and colleges must also do a better job of including SEL training in pre-service teacher programs. SEL training should also be embedded in continuing education requirements for faculty and educators. States should also integrate SEL competencies into teacher preparation requirements to better prepare all teachers to understand their own social and emotional competencies and help students to develop their own.

Support State SEL competency benchmarks backed by funding and resources for full implementation.

State SEL benchmarks should be used as a high-impact lever to implement many of the above policy recommendations. Specifically, benchmarks can articulate a clear vision of the importance of SEL to districts and schools, inform best practices and continuous learning on integrating SEL into academic curriculum, provide vital context to universities on how to integrate SEL training into pre-service teacher training programs, guide professional development for teachers and administrators, and provide a framework for developing appropriate SEL assessment tools. Unlike academic standards, however, it is important that SEL competency benchmarks are used exclusively to improve teaching and learning. It is also critical that state SEL competency benchmarks be backed up by funding and a strong state-level infrastructure for supporting schools and districts as they navigate SEL implementation, pre-service and professional development, and the creation of valid and reliable SEL assessments.

Advance a robust SEL research agenda – and make sure young people are included.

New research continues to affirm the power of SEL to improve a host of youth success indicators. Yet, continued research is needed to improve SEL assessments and inform implementation and practice of SEL programming. These efforts are critical to providing school and district leaders with the knowledge and resources they need to implement high-quality programming, integrate SEL into classrooms, and evaluate its impacts. Research should also guide teacher training and professional development to ensure educators are being adequately prepared to develop students' social and emotional competencies. The voice of young people should also continue to be included in the research agenda, and students should be considered an integral part of creating valid assessment tools to ensure continued improvement of SEL data collection and reporting.

Introduction

Young people today face significant challenges – increasing rates of anxiety and depression, an odd combination of stress and boredom, fear of failure and making mistakes, the drug crisis and violence in their schools and communities, bullying and biases, the pressures of social media and their peers, and the changing nature of work that demands more education and training – all amid a backdrop of national discord.

Listening to young people about their experiences in schools, the challenges they face, and how well prepared they are for their futures can help improve their learning environments, enable them to overcome challenges, and strengthen American education.

More than a decade ago, we undertook to listen to the perspectives of students who had dropped out of high school and their insights helped unleash a national movement to increase graduation rates, which have climbed from 71 percent to 84 percent. But far too often, the voices of young people go unheard because they are not asked to be participants in creating better schools. It is in this spirit that we set out to learn more from current and recent high school students on how well their high schools are engaging and preparing them academically, socially, and emotionally and what they think should be done to improve the high school experience, as they prepare for the rigors of post-secondary education, employment and engaged citizenship.

The findings presented here were collected from a national online survey with 1,300 youth and young adults across all types of school and districts, including 800 current high school students (age 14 to 19) and 500 recent high school students (age 16 to 22) during the spring of 2018 (throughout the report, recent high school students are also referred to as "post-high school young adults"). Quotes and case studies within the report were collected from two phases of in-depth interviews. In the first phase, interviews were conducted with middle school, high school, and post-high school young adults from non-SEL schools, and in the second phase, interviews were conducted with high school students currently enrolled in schools that focus on social and emotional learning. SEL schools were identified as schools actively implementing social and emotional learning programming within one of the school districts participating in CASEL's Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI). (For more information on the CDI, see Appendix II.)

The survey was informed by other surveys of youth conducted in recent years (see "Findings from Other Youth Surveys"), as well as prior nationally representative surveys of teachers (*The Missing Piece*, 2013) and administrators (*Ready to Lead*, 2017) that examined the state of social and emotional learning in American schools. The comprehensive survey and interviews were aimed at answering the following research questions:

1. How do youth and young adults view the learning environments of their high schools?

2. How does the social and emotional environment of high school affect students and student outcomes?

3. How do young people view the potential effects of focusing on social and emotional skill development?

4. To what extent are high schools helping young people develop social and emotional skills?

What young people have to say about their high schools presents a clear map for creating a learning environment to propel students positively into their futures. While most current and recent high school students rate their high schools well on providing them with a positive atmosphere for learning, many see room for changes. Looking back, young adults out of high school are even more likely to see the need for improvements, particularly in how well their school prepared them for life after high school, engagement in learning, and helping them deal with personal and social stressors. To tackle many of the issues they see as holding them back in high school, most young people agree that schools should focus more on helping them develop social and emotional skills, and they believe improving the social environment and preparing them to handle their emotional challenges would be hugely beneficial.

Despite the positive reaction from young people to emphasizing social and emotional learning in schools, far too many say that their high school is not doing enough to help them develop these skills. The young people attending high schools where social and emotional learning is a priority, however, are already reaping its benefits, including greater engagement and motivation, feeling more

physically safe in school, better teacher-student and peer relationships, increased academic learning, better preparation for success after high school, and improved understanding of how to deal with stress and difficult situations.

The correlations young people report here between an increased focus on developing social and emotional skills and improved student and school outcomes align with the growing research base on SEL. High-quality SEL instruction has been linked to increased achievement scores, decreased mental health issues, a lesser chance of dropping out of high school, and an increased probability of college attendance and degree attainment (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017). Other studies show that students who receive high-quality SEL in the classroom perform better academically; display improved attitudes and behaviors; have a greater motivation to learn; connect more deeply to their school; have better relationships with their peers; have fewer delinquent acts and conduct referrals; and have reduced emotional distress, including less stress, anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal (Sklad, Diekstra, Ritter, Ben. & Gravesteijn, 2012; Wigelsworth, Qualter, & Humphrey, 2017). In addition to the positive impacts for young people, researchers have also found that for every dollar a school spends on quality social-emotional programming, it sees an 11 dollar return on its investment (Belfield, Bowen, Klapp, Levin, Shand, & Zander, 2015). Employer surveys repeatedly show that they are looking for the very skills that social and emotional learning promote, but are too often not finding them in their workers (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2018; Sigmar, Hynes, & Hill, 2012).

Following the release of *The Missing Piece*, a nationally-representative survey of teachers, in 2013 and *Ready to Lead*, a nationally-representative survey of principals, in 2017, this report adds the critical perspective of young people on the state of American high schools and the need for greater emphasis on integrating the social, emotional, and academic dimensions of learning and development (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013; DePaoli, Atwell, & Bridgeland, 2017). Young people powerfully reinforce what teachers, principals, and superintendents have already reported: though schools are

getting better at recognizing the importance of SEL, there is still much work to be done to make them places that can address the social and emotional needs of their students and help them develop the skills that can take them successfully into their adult lives.

This report presents the perspectives of young people in two parts. First, we present how current and recent high school students view their high school experiences, including how they would grade their high school, how they view their teachers, administrators, and their academic learning, and how they feel about the culture and climate of their school and the challenges they face in their learning environment. Second, we present their views on social and emotional learning, how well they feel their schools are doing in helping them develop SEL skills, and the benefits many young people are already seeing from a focus on SEL. We also provide policy and practice recommendations based on what teenagers and young adults told us about their schools and what could make them better, as well as the evidence-base for SEL.

Part I

Young People's Views on the High School Experience

Survey Findings 1
Grading American High Schools

Most current and recent high school students give their high schools decent marks on creating a positive learning environment, but a majority of both groups still see significant room for improvement. But while most current and recent high school students believe their high school does a good job of helping students learn academic material, young adults out of high school see significant deficits in how well their school prepared them for life after high school.

As a place to learn, most American current and recent high school students give their high school a passing grade, but there is still room for significant improvement.

In all, 80 percent of current high school students would give their high school an A (31 percent) or B (49 percent) grade as a place for students to learn and do their best, and just 3 percent would give their school a failing grade.

- White high school students (34 percent) are *more likely* to give their high school an A than either Hispanic (24 percent) or African American (24 percent) students.
- Current high school students from higher-income homes (38 percent vs 30 percent average income and 24 percent below average income) are also *more likely* to give their school an A.

Recent high school students also gave their high schools high marks, but at a slightly lower rate than current high school students. Seventy percent of young adults out of high school would give their high school an A or B as a place for students to learn, and only eight percent would give their school a D or F.

- Like current high school students, recent students from higher-income homes (37 percent) are *more likely* to give their high school an A than their average income (25 percent) and low-income (21 percent) peers.

Current and recent high school students are more likely than their parents or other adults to give their school high marks. In the most recent Phi Delta Kappan (2017) *Annual PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools*, 61 percent of public school parents and 45 percent of non-parents gave the public schools in their community an A or B. Similar socioeconomic differences are also apparent

in adults' responses, with higher-income Americans ($100,000+ household incomes) significantly more likely to give schools in their community an A or B (60 percent compared to 46 percent of lower-income Americans).

Despite giving their schools high marks, half of current high school students feel their school needs to make changes for students to get the most out of their education, and even more recent high school students see a need for improvements.

Fifty-two percent of current high school students believe at least some changes need to be made to make their school a better place for students to learn and do their best, though just nine percent believe a lot of changes need to be made. Examining this by demographics shows:

■ Hispanic (62 percent) and African American (59 percent) high school students are *more likely* than White students (48 percent) to say their school needs to make at least some changes.

■ Lower-income students (58 percent) are *more likely* than their higher-income peers (48 percent above average income, 52 percent average income) to see the need for improvements.

■ Young people in city schools (49 percent) are *less likely* than students in small towns/rural areas (58 percent) to say their school needed at least some changes.

■ Current high school students who have at least one parent who graduated college (49 percent) are also *less likely* to see the need for improvements (compared to 58 percent of current high school students with neither parent graduating from college).

Young adults out of high school see an even greater need for changes to improve the learning environment of their former high schools, with 45 percent saying some changes need to be made and 17 percent saying a lot of changes should be made (62 percent total). Though some variance exists, a majority of young adults, regardless of demographics, reported the need for at least some changes need to be made:

■ Whether enrolled in a four-year college (64 percent), a vocational/community college (63 percent), or not enrolled in postsecondary education (60 percent), young people looking back felt roughly the same about the need for improvements to their high school learning environment.

■ African American (66 percent) and White (62 percent) young adults are *a little more likely* than Hispanic (57 percent) young adults to see the need for at least some changes to their former high schools.

■ **Half of high school students feel their school needs to make changes in order for students to get the most out of their education.**

At being a good place for students to learn and do their best, my high school:

Is pretty good as is — 48%
Needs to make some changes — 43%
Needs to make a lot of changes — 9%

Top changes needed

Better teachers	10%
More/better security	7%
Prevent bullying	6%
Better classes, diverse	6%

Needs to make a lot/some changes	
All current HS students	**52%**
Regular public school	53%
Other school	48%
Whites	48%
African Americans	59%
Hispanics	62%
City	49%
Suburb	53%
Small town/rural area	58%
Below average income	58%
Average income	52%
Above average income	48%
One/both parents college grads	49%
Neither parent college grad	58%

■ Looking back, young adults out of high school see even greater need for improvements in their school's learning environment.

At being a good place for students to learn and their best, my high school:

Is pretty good as is 38%
Needs to make some changes 45%
Needs to make a lot of changes 17%
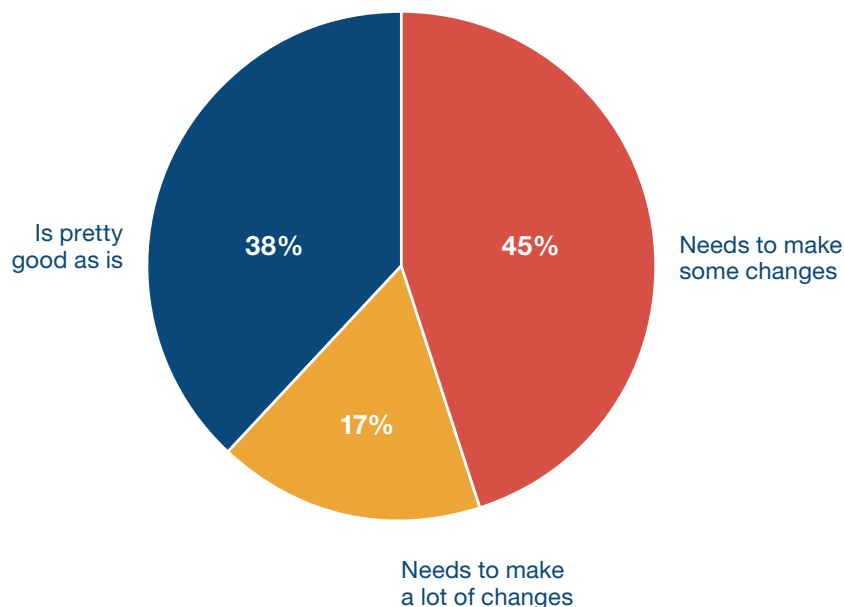
Top changes needed

Better teachers	8%
More caring teachers	8%
Prevent bullying	7%
Better classes, diverse	6%

Needs to make a lot/some changes	
All post-HS young adults	**62%**
In four-year college	64%
In voc/community college	63%
Not enrolled	60%
Regular public school	63%
Other school	58%
Whites	62%
African Americans	66%
Hispanics	57%
City	57%
Suburb	65%
Small town/rural area	69%
Below average income	66%
Average income	59%
Above average income	64%
One/both parents college grads	59%
Neither parent college grad	68%

■ Young adults who attended a high school in a small town or rural area (69 percent) or a suburb (65 percent) are *more likely* to see the need for changes than those who attended a city school (57 percent).

■ Young adults from families in which neither parent graduated from college (68 percent) are *more likely* to see the need for improvements to their former high schools than those young people who have at least one parent with a college degree (59 percent).

When it comes to the adults in school, majorities of current high school students view teachers and administrators as being supportive and respectful of students. Looking back, young adults outside of high school are less sure of this.

The relationships young people have with the adults in their schools, and with their teachers in particular, are critical to their success and to building a positive school climate. High-quality teacher-student relationships are associated with youth feeling more safe and secure in their learning environment, fewer behavioral issues, and increased academic achievement (Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008; McCormick, O'Connor, Cappella, & McClowry, 2013; Murray & Malmgren, 2005; O'Connor, Dearing, & Collins, 2011).

When asked about their teachers:

- 78 percent of current high school students say their teachers are supportive and respectful of students (31 percent very supportive/respectful, 47 percent fairly supportive/respectful).

- 69 percent of young adults out of high school say their former teachers were supportive and respectful of students (28 percent very supportive/respectful, 41 percent fairly supportive/respectful).

When asked about their principal:

- 77 percent of current high school students say their principal is supportive and respectful of students (37 percent very supportive/respectful, 40 percent fairly supportive/respectful).

- 66 percent of young adults out of high school report having a principal who was supportive and respectful of students (33 percent very supportive/respectful, 33 percent fairly supportive/respectful).

When asked about their vice principal:

- 70 percent of current high school students say their vice principal(s) is supportive and respectful of students (30 percent very supportive/respectful, 40 percent fairly supportive/respectful).

- 58 percent of young adults out of high school say their vice principal(s) was supportive and respectful of students (27 percent very supportive/respectful, 31 percent fairly supportive/respectful).

When asked specifically if they feel their teachers care about them, a majority of current high school students responded positively. In hindsight, only about half of post-high school young adults say they felt the same.
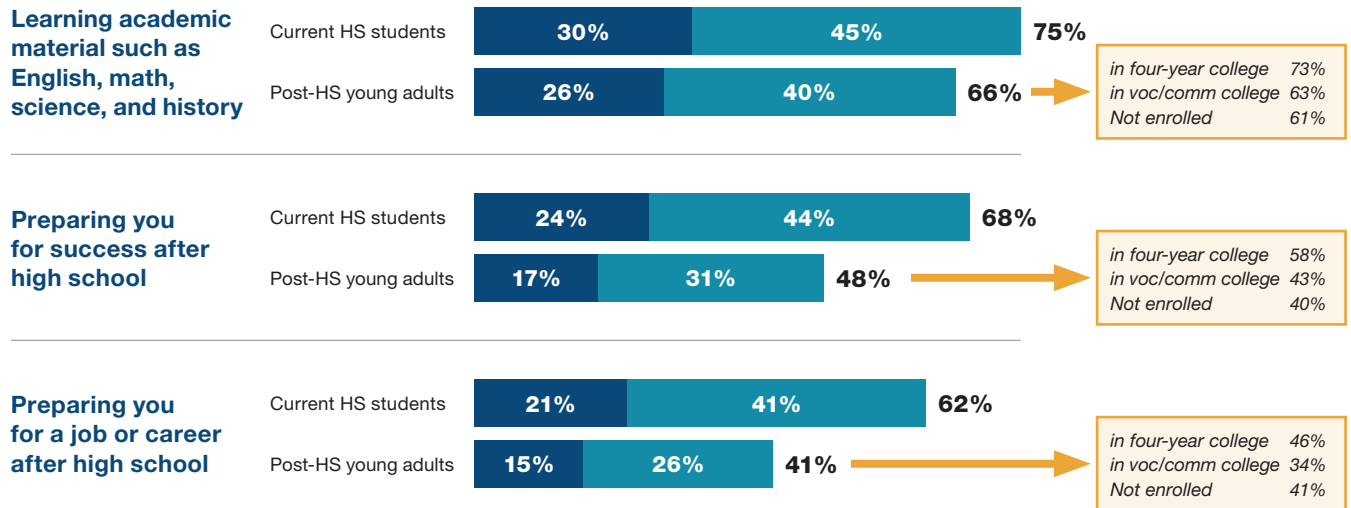
Sixty-one percent of current high school students say they feel like their teachers care about them almost all or most of the time, compared to 51 percent of recent high school students. About 3 in 10 of both current and recent high school students feel or felt this way about their teachers some of the time. Students with high grades, those who give their high school a good grade, and high-income students are most likely to say their teachers care about them:

- Current high school students with mostly A's on their last report card (71 percent) are *more likely* than students with mostly C's or worse (50 percent) to feel as though their teachers care about them all or most of the time. Recent high school students follow a similar pattern, with 62 percent of young people who earned mostly A's on their last high school report card feeling as though their teachers cared about them almost all or most of the time compared to 25 percent of recent students who received B's or worse.

- Current high school students who would give their high school an A grade (84 percent) are *far more likely* than students who would give their high school a C, D, or F (19 percent), as are post-high school young adults (82 percent of young adults who would give their high school an A compared to 23 percent of young adults giving their high school a C, D, or F).

- White high school students (64 percent) are *more likely* than African American (55 percent) and Hispanic (55 percent) students to feel as though their teachers care about them all or most of the time.

- High-income current students (70 percent) are *much more likely* to feel that their teachers care about them than their low-income peers (51 percent), as are high-income young adults (66 percent above average income versus 43 percent below average income).

◼ While current students and young adults give their high schools decent marks on teaching them academic material, young adults see significant deficits in preparing them for life after high school

How good a job does/did your high school do helping you in this area?

◼ Great Job ◼ Pretty Good Job

Learning academic material such as English, math, science, and history

	Great Job	Pretty Good Job	Total
Current HS students	30%	45%	75%
Post-HS young adults	26%	40%	66%

→ in four-year college 73%
in voc/comm college 63%
Not enrolled 61%

Preparing you for success after high school

	Great Job	Pretty Good Job	Total
Current HS students	24%	44%	68%
Post-HS young adults	17%	31%	48%

→ in four-year college 58%
in voc/comm college 43%
Not enrolled 40%

Preparing you for a job or career after high school

	Great Job	Pretty Good Job	Total
Current HS students	21%	41%	62%
Post-HS young adults	15%	26%	41%

→ in four-year college 46%
in voc/comm college 34%
Not enrolled 41%

While current students and young adults give their high school decent marks on teaching them academic material, young adults see significant deficits in how well their school prepared them for life after high school.

In terms of how well their high school does at helping students learn academic material (i.e., English, math, science, and history):

◼ 75 percent of current high school students say their school does at least a pretty good job at helping students learn academic material (30 percent great job, 45 percent pretty good job).

◼ 66 percent of young people out of high school say their high school did at least a pretty good job (26 percent great job, 40 percent pretty good job). Young people enrolled in a four-year college (73 percent) are *more likely* than those enrolled in a vocational/community college (63 percent) or not enrolled in any postsecondary (61 percent) to say their high school did at least a pretty good job of helping them learn academic material.

In terms of how well their high school prepares students for success after high school:

◼ 68 percent of current high school students believe their school is doing a good job of preparing them for success after high school (24 percent great job, 44 percent pretty good job).

◼ Less than half of former high school students (48 percent) agree, and even fewer young people enrolled in vocational/community college (43 percent) or not enrolled in any postsecondary institution (40 percent) think their high school did a good job preparing them for later success. Comparatively, more than half of young people enrolled in a four-year college (58 percent) said their high school did well at preparing them for success after graduation.

In terms of how well their high school does at preparing students for a job or career:

◼ More than half (62 percent) of current high school students think their high school is doing a good job preparing them for a job or career (21 percent great job, 41 percent pretty good job).

◼ Once again, most young adults out of high school disagree. Just 41 percent of recent high school students think their high school did a good job of preparing them for a job or career. Young people enrolled in a vocational/community college are the most likely to disagree (34 percent), though most of those enrolled in a four-year college (46 percent) and those not enrolled in postsecondary (41 percent) do not feel their high school prepared them for a job or career either.

Survey Findings 2
How Young People Feel about Their High School Experience

Though youth and young adults have overall positive feelings about their high school, many say they deal with social and emotional issues that stand in the way of them getting the most out of their education. Both current and recent high school students report high levels of stress, and many admit they sometimes hold themselves back for fear of making mistakes and that stress and a lack of confidence make it harder for them to learn. Both groups of students also say that a negative social environment impacts their ability to learn. Disruptive students in classes – a fairly common problem – and bullying make some school environments antithetical to learning, and for some students, makes their high school a dreaded place to be.

Once out of high school, young adults tend to look back on their experiences with a more critical eye. Compared with current high school students, young adults reflecting back on their high school years see greater deficits in the quality of their education and feel they had a more negative overall experience, including higher levels of stress, lower levels of engagement, and higher rates of bullying and social isolation.

Throughout this section we report overall findings from current and recent high school students. We also point out specific subgroups of both current and recent students that stand out within the data to highlight where significant gaps are found between certain student groups, as well as the other interesting subgroups findings.

On Feeling Physically Safe in School:

When students do not feel safe in school, it has both short- and long-term consequences. In the short term, threats of physical violence or non-physical harassment can lead to less time spent on learning, decreased attendance, disengagement, and lower levels of academic achievement. In the long run, feeling unsafe in school has been linked to negative life outcomes including psychological and health issues that can ultimately impact a young person's workforce participation, career status, and earnings (Bowen & Bowen, 1999; Chen, 2007; Lacoe, 2013; Macmillan, Ross, & Hagan, 2004; Schreck & Miller, 2003).

In this survey, feeling physically safe in school is one bright spot both current and recent high school students agree on.[1] Nearly 8 in 10 current high school students (78 percent) say they feel physically safe in school all or most of the time, while roughly 7 in 10 post-high school young adults felt the same during their high school years. Breaking it down demographically, however, shows that some students tend to feel safer in school than others:

- Current high school students who gave their high school an A grade (90 percent) are *much more likely* than students who gave their high school a C, D, or F grade (52 percent) to say they feel physically safe in school almost all or most of the time. This gap is also apparent in post-high school young adults (85 percent of young adults giving their high school an A compared to 51 percent of young adults giving their high school a C, D, or F grade).

- Current high school students who say they mostly got A's on their last report card (89 percent) are *much more likely* to report feeling safe in their high school than students who reported getting C's or lower (63 percent).

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1   This survey was conducted in late May 2018, in the wake of the school shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida and Santa Fe High School in Santa Fe, Texas that sparked a youth movement and increased conversations about gun control and school safety. In April 2018, a Pew Research Center survey of US teens age 13 to 17 showed that more than half of teens (57 percent) said they are worried about the possibility of a shooting happening at their school, with Black (60 percent) and Hispanic (73 percent) students feeling greater levels of concern (Graf, 2018). About 1 out of every 100,000 students was enrolled in a public school in the 2015-16 school year that experienced a school-related shooting or school-related homicide (US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2018).

- Hispanic students (67 percent) are *less likely* to say they feel physically safe in their high school than African American (76 percent) and White (83 percent) students. This is also true of post-high school young adults (63 percent Hispanic compared to 72 percent African American and 75 percent White).

- Students reporting their family income as above average (84 percent) or average (81 percent) are *more likely* to say they feel a sense of physical safety in their high school than those who reported their family income as below average (68 percent). For young adults out of high school, the physical safety income gap is even wider. Eighty-three percent of young adults reporting an above average family income say they felt physically safe in their high school compared to just 63 percent of young people reporting their family income as below average.

- For current high school students, there is no significant difference between students attending high school in different geographic settings (78 percent in city schools, 79 percent in suburban schools, 78 percent in small town/rural area schools). Slightly fewer recent high school students who attended a city school (69 percent) say they felt safe in their school than recent students who attended a suburban (74 percent) or small town/rural (75 percent) high school.

On Feeling Comfortable Being Themselves:

Nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of current high school students say they feel comfortable being themselves in school all or most of the time, but looking back, only about half (52 percent) of post-high school young adults felt that way during their high school years. Significant gaps exist between the following student subgroups:

- Current high school students reporting mostly A's (80 percent) and mostly A's and B's (78 percent) on their last report card and those reporting C's or worse (59 percent).

- Current high school students who would give their school an A (87 percent) and students who would give their high school a C, D, or F grade (53 percent). This gap also exists among post-high school young adults (67 percent of young adults who would give their high school an A compared to 41 percent of young adults giving their school a C, D, or F grade).

- Current high school students with an above average family income (80 percent) and those from below average income families (67 percent).

- Post-high school males (57 percent) and post-high school females (47 percent).

- Post-high school African Americans (62 percent) versus White (50 percent) and Hispanic (50 percent) young adults.

Engagement in learning varies markedly across current high school students. With few exceptions, many young adults reflecting back on their high school years report relatively low levels of engagement in their learning.

On Feeling Motivated to Work Hard:

About 7 out of 10 current high school students (68 percent) say they feel motivated to work hard and do their best in school all or most of the time. In hindsight, only half (51 percent) of post-high school young adults say the same. Not surprisingly, both current (81 percent) and former (71 percent) high school students who say they got mostly A's on their last report card are the most likely to report a high level of motivation, while those with the lowest grades report feeling motivated to work hard (37 percent of current high school students getting mostly C's or worse and 30 percent of recent high school students getting mostly B's or worse). Other gaps exist between the following subgroups:

- African American students currently in high school (80 percent) are *more likely* than current White (68 percent) and Hispanic (58 percent) high school students to say they feel motivated to work hard and do their best all or most of the time. This stays true for post-high school students, though the percentages drop significantly for all three groups (57 percent of African American young adults compared to 50 percent of White and 48 percent of Hispanic young adults).

- Current students from above average income homes (78 percent) are *more likely* than students from average income homes (66 percent) and *much more likely* than students from below average income homes (58 percent) to report high levels of motivation in school. Post-high school young adults from above average income homes (60 percent) are also *more likely* to say they felt motivated to work hard all or most of the time than their average income (50 percent) and below average income (45 percent) peers.

- Post-high school young adults enrolled in a post-secondary institution (56 percent in a four-year college, 53 percent in a vocational/community college) are *more likely* to say they felt motivated all or most of the time during their high school years (compared to 45 percent of young adults not enrolled in a postsecondary institution).

On Being Excited about Learning:

Only about half (53 percent) of current high school students say they feel excited about what they are learning in school all or most of the time. Looking back at their high school experience, just a third (34 percent) of young adults say they felt excited about what they were learning at least most of the time. Across subgroups of both current and recent students, these percentages remain low, with only a few groups of current high school students express-ing higher levels of excitement:

- Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of current high school students getting mostly A's on their last re-port card feel excited about what they are learning all or most of the time compared to just 39 percent of students getting mostly C's and 27 percent of students getting C's or worse. In hindsight, fewer post-high school young adults with high grades (41 percent of young adults with mostly A's and 40 percent of young adults with A's and B's) report feeling excited about what they were learning in school, and just 21 percent of young adults with grades of mostly B's or worse say they felt excited about learning at least most of the time.

- Both current (63 percent) and recent (45 percent) African American students are *more likely* to report higher levels of excitement than their White (50 percent current, 30 percent recent) and Hispanic (51 percent current, 38 percent recent) peers.

- Current high school students from above average income homes (62 percent) are among the *most likely* student groups to report feeling excited all or most of the time about what they are learning (compared to 48 percent of students from both average income and below income homes). Only 40 percent of post-high school young adults from above average income homes say they felt the same, and even fewer average income (36 per-cent) and below average income (28 percent) young adults felt a high level of excitement about what they learned in high school.

Many students say they hold themselves back from getting the most out of their education because they are afraid of making mistakes.

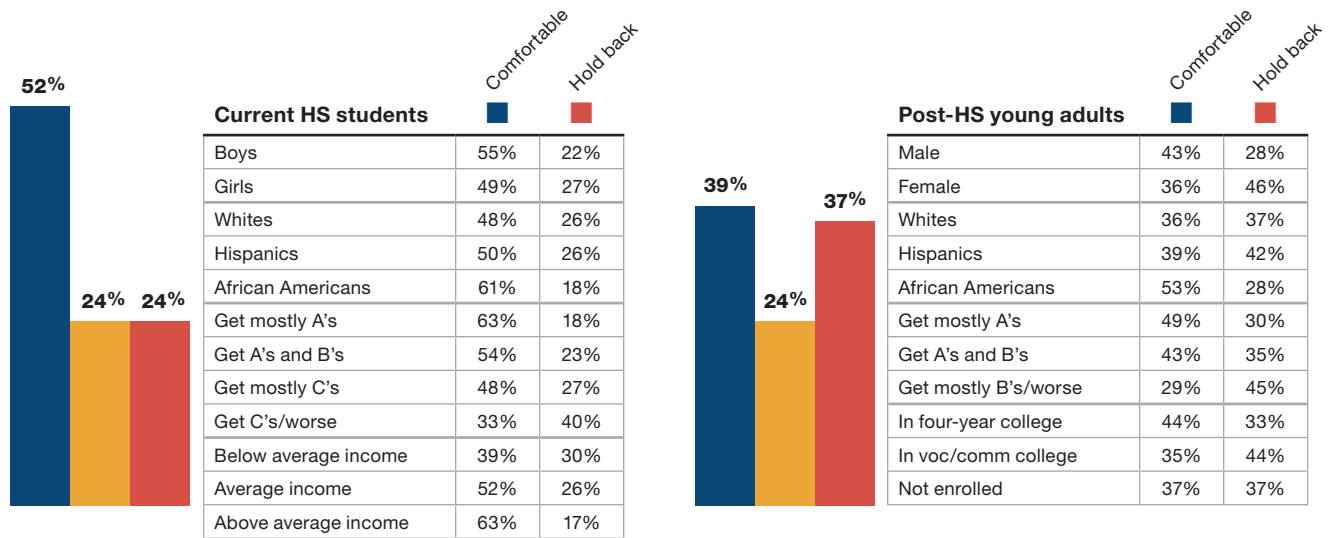## On Feeling Comfortable Participating in School and Taking Risks:

Only about half (52 percent) of current high school students say they feel comfortable participating in school and taking risks even if it means making mistakes. Reflecting back, about 4 in 10 (39 percent) of young adults say they felt comfortable participat-ing and taking risks in high school, while an almost equal percentage (37 percent) say they often held back because they were worried about making mistakes or getting something wrong. Male students, both current and recent, are *slightly more likely* to say they feel comfortable participating and taking risks in school (55 percent vs 49 percent of current female students, 43 percent vs 36 percent of recent female students). In hindsight, however, females out of high school are *much more likely* to say they held back in high school for fear of making mistakes (46 percent vs 28 percent of male young adults). Other notable gaps include:

- Both current (61 percent) and recent (53 percent) African American students report higher levels of comfort in participating and taking risks in high school. White students (48 percent current, 36 percent recent) report the lowest levels of comfort in participating and taking risks. Hispanic young adults out of high school (42 percent) are among those *most likely* to say they held back in high school.

- Current and recent high school students with the highest grades also report high levels of comfort in taking risks, while those with the lowest grades are much more likely to report holding back in school for fear of making mistakes or getting something wrong. Current high school students reporting all A's (63 percent) are *nearly twice as likely* to say they feel comfortable participating in school than their peers getting C's or worse (33 percent). Post-high school young adults getting mostly A's (49 percent) are also *much more likely* to say they felt comfortable participating and taking risks in school than their peers who earned lower grades (29 percent of young adults with B's or worse), though at a lesser rate than students still in high school. Conversely, 40 percent of current students getting C's or worse and 45 percent of young adults earn-ing B's or worse in high school report holding back to avoid making mistakes.

■ Many students are holding themselves back from getting the most out of their education because they are afraid of making mistakes

When it comes to participating in school:

■ I am/was comfortable participating and taking risks even if it means/meant making mistakes   ■ Some of both   ■ I often hold/held back because I am/was worried about making mistakes or getting something wrong

Current HS students	Comfortable ■	Hold back ■
Boys	55%	22%
Girls	49%	27%
Whites	48%	26%
Hispanics	50%	26%
African Americans	61%	18%
Get mostly A's	63%	18%
Get A's and B's	54%	23%
Get mostly C's	48%	27%
Get C's/worse	33%	40%
Below average income	39%	30%
Average income	52%	26%
Above average income	63%	17%

52%   24%   24%

Post-HS young adults	Comfortable ■	Hold back ■
Male	43%	28%
Female	36%	46%
Whites	36%	37%
Hispanics	39%	42%
African Americans	53%	28%
Get mostly A's	49%	30%
Get A's and B's	43%	35%
Get mostly B's/worse	29%	45%
In four-year college	44%	33%
In voc/comm college	35%	44%
Not enrolled	37%	37%

39%   24%   37%

■ Above average income high school students (63 percent) are *much more likely* than below average income students (39 percent) to report feeling comfortable participating and taking risks in school. Nearly a third (30 percent) of below average income high school students say they hold back for fear of getting something wrong.

■ Recent high school students enrolled in a four-year college (44 percent) report higher levels of comfort in participating and taking risks in high school than those enrolled in a community/vocational school (35 percent) or not enrolled in any postsecondary institution (37 percent). Almost half (44 percent) of recent high school students in a community/vocational school say they held back in high school to avoid making mistakes.

Stress and boredom are fairly common among high school students.

On Feeling Stressed:

Stress is fairly common among high school students. Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of current students say they feel stressed out at least some of the time, and a little less than half of those students (31 percent) say they feel stressed out almost all or most of the tim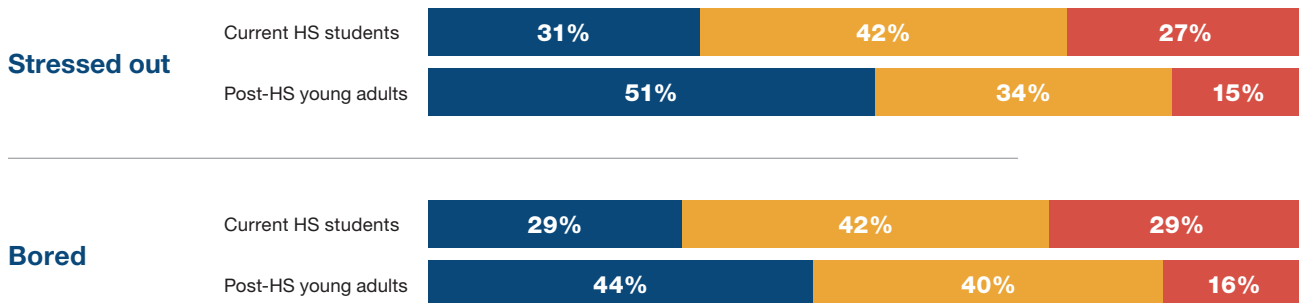e. Looking back, recent high school students report even higher levels of stress. Half of all recent high school students say they felt stressed all or most of the time in school, and all together, 85 percent of recent high school students say they felt stressed at least some of the time. Stress is especially high for students in their senior year, those with poor grades, and those from lower-income homes:

■ Four out of ten high school seniors (40 percent) feel stressed all or most of the time. About another 3 out of 10 seniors say they feel stressed out some of the time.

■ Roughly half (48 percent) of current high school students with mostly C's or worse on their last report card say they are stressed out all or most the time. In all, 85 percent of students with the lowest grades feel high levels of stress consistently.

■ Nearly 8 in 10 Hispanic students currently in high school (79 percent) say they feel stressed out at least some of the time, and over four in ten of those students (42 percent) say they are stressed out all or most of the time.

■ Eighty percent of students from below average income homes feel stressed out at least some of the time, and nearly four in ten of those students (39 percent) say they are stressed all or most of the time.

■ Stress and boredom are fairly common among high school students

How often do/did you feel this way at your high school?

■ All/most of the time   ■ Some of the time   ■ Barely ever/never

Stressed out

Current HS students	31%	42%	27%
Post-HS young adults	51%	34%	15%

Bored

Current HS students	29%	42%	29%
Post-HS young adults	44%	40%	16%

On Feeling Bored in School:

Boredom in school is also common among high school students. Nearly 3 in 10 current high school students (29 percent) say they feel bored all or most of the time in their school, and another 4 in 10 current students (42 percent) say they feel bored at least some of the time. Post-high school young adults express even higher levels of boredom, with 84 percent saying they felt bored at least some of the time (44 percent all/most of the time, 40 percent some of the time). Students with lower grades and from lower-income homes, as well as young adults not enrolled in a postsecondary institution, tend to report greater levels of boredom in school:

■ Nearly half (46 percent) of current high school students with C's or worse on their last report card say they feel bored almost all or most of the time in school (compared to 23 percent of students with mostly A's and 23 percent of students with A's and B's).

■ Thirty-nine percent of current students from below average income families report feeling bored in school all or most of the time, while just 23 percent of students from above average income homes and 26 percent of students from average income homes feel the same. More than half (55 percent) of post-high school young adults say they felt bored in high school all or most of the time, while 42 percent of young people from below average income homes and 34 percent of above average income homes say they felt the same.

■ Boys in high school are more likely than girls to report feeling bored in school, and more specifically,

boys in the 11th or 12th grade are much more likely than all others to say they feel bored in their high school (compared to 26 percent of 9th/10th grade boys, 24 percent 9th/10th grade girls, and 24 percent of 11th/12th grade girls).

■ Hispanic students in high school (38 percent) report higher rates of boredom than their African American (33 percent) and White (24 percent) peers.

■ Roughly half of post-high school young adults who are not enrolled in any postsecondary institution (52 percent) say they felt bored all or most of the time in their high school. That percentage drops for both young adults enrolled in a vocational/community college (38 percent) or a four-year institution (41 percent), but significant numbers of these young people also experienced boredom consistently in high school.

At a general level, students mostly get along with each other in high schools, but for a significant minority of students, high school can be a lonely or painful place.

Nearly three-quarters (72 percent) of current high school students say the students in their school get along very or pretty well. Boys (75 percent vs 68 percent of girls), White students (76 percent compared to 67 percent of African Americans and 63 percent of Hispanics), and those from higher-income homes (81 percent vs 73 percent from average income homes and 59 percent from below average income homes) are all more likely to believe this is true. Far fewer post-high school young adults (58 percent) feel as though students in their high school

got along very or pretty well. There is little variation between various groups of recent high school students with the exception of those from above average income homes (68 percent), who were more likely than their peers to feel as though students mostly got along in their high school. Underneath the broad perspectives of students, however, many young people see significant issues in the social environment of their high school and feel the impact on their ability to learn.

On Feeling Lonely:

About four out of every ten current high school students (42 percent) feel lonely at least some of the time at their school (15 percent all/most of the time, 27 percent some of the time). Reflecting on their time in high school, roughly 6 out of every 10 young adults (62 percent) say they felt lonely in high school (33 percent all/most of the time, 29 percent some of the time). Loneliness is most common among students with lower grades and from lower-income backgrounds:

- Of current high school students, 53 percent of those with C's or worse on their report card say they feel lonely at least some of the time in school, compared to 37 percent of students with A's and B's and 38 percent of students with mostly A's. Post-high school young adults with lower grades (mostly B's or worse) also report higher levels of loneliness (68 percent compared to 60 percent of young adults with A's and B's and 57 percent with mostly A's on last high school report card).

- About half (49 percent) of high school students from below average income homes say they feel lonely in school at least some of the time, while looking back, almost three-quarters of post-high school young adults from below average income homes say the same.

On Their Personal Experiences with Bullying:

Bullying, like other types of violence, can lead to lowered attendance rates, disengagement from school, social isolation, suicidal ideation, and other social, emotional, and academic issues. Roughly 3 in 10 current high school students (29 percent) say they feel bullied at least some of the time at school (12 percent all/most of the time, 17 percent some of the time). For post-high school young adults, that number jumps to about 4 in 10 (39 percent). Like students who say they experienced loneliness in high school, young people who say they have felt

bullied or picked on tend to have lower grades and come from lower-income backgrounds:

- Current students who get mostly C's (40 percent) or C's or worse (36 percent) are more likely to say they have experienced bullying than those with higher grades (23 percent of students with mostly A's and 28 percent of students with A's and B's).

- High school students from below average income homes (40 percent) experience bullying or being picked on at least some of the time at their school (compared to 24 percent of above average income and 25 percent of average income students). A similar percentage of post-high school young adults from lower-income homes (43 percent) and average income homes (42 percent) also said they experienced bullying in high school (compared to 26 percent of young adults from above average income homes).

> *"I had a lot of friends but I also had a lot of people that didn't like me. I don't know why, so I was bullied sometimes. I feel like teachers should pay attention more to the bullying part because it really destroys a person. I didn't want to go to school, but my mom made me."*
>
> **High school graduate**

Disruptive students, drugs in school, and bullying are at least somewhat of a problem in a majority of schools. Poor relationships between teachers and students, physical fights between students, and students dropping out of school are also a problem to some degree in many schools.

On Students Being Disruptive in Class:

A majority (59 percent) of current high school students say that students being disruptive in class is at least somewhat of a problem in their school (27 percent very/fairly big problem, 32 percent somewhat of a problem). An even greater share of post-high school young adults (73 percent) say this was a problem in their school (40 percent very/fairly big problem, 33 percent somewhat of a problem).

On Drugs in School:

A little more than half (54 percent) of current high school students say drugs are at least somewhat of a problem in their school (24 percent very/fairly big problem, 30 percent somewhat of a problem). Sixty-one percent of young adults out of high school feel that drugs in their high school were a problem (30 percent very/fairly big problem, 31 percent somewhat of a problem).

On Bullying on Social Media:

About half (53 percent) of current high school students say that bullying on social media is a problem at their school (28 percent very/fairly big problem, 25 percent somewhat of a problem). A similar percentage (55 percent) of recent high school students also saw this as a problem in their school (31 percent very/fairly big problem, 24 percent somewhat of a problem). Bullying on social media is a problem to some degree at many schools, but current students from lower-income homes most commonly report it (62 percent say it is at least somewhat of a problem).

On Bullying at School:

Though a minority of students say they have experienced bullying themselves in their high school, more than half of current high school students (52 percent) and post-high school young adults (56 percent) feel this is a problem in their school. Roughly a quarter of current students (24 percent) and post-high school students (28 percent) report this as a very or fairly big problem in their high school. Students experience bullying to some extent in all schools, but students from lower-income backgrounds (62 percent) tend to report it as a problem at greater levels.

Though this survey did not ask students specifics about bullying in their school, the Civil Rights Data Collection conducted by the US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights reports on allegations of harassment and bullying on the basis of sex, race, sexual orientation, and religion. During the 2015-16 school year, 41 percent of allegations involved harassment or bullying based on sex, 23 percent were based on race, 16 percent on sexual orientation, 11 percent on disability, and 8 percent on religion.

On Relationships between Teachers and Students:

Though many students say their teachers are supportive and caring, a little less than half (48 percent) say that poor teacher-student relationships are at least somewhat of a problem at their school (19 percent very/fairly big problem, 29 percent somewhat of a problem). Slightly more (55 percent) of post-high school young adults say this was a problem in their school (26 percent very/fairly big problem, 29 percent somewhat of a problem).

Fewer students cite teachers being rude or disrespectful to students as a problem. Forty percent of current students (19 percent very/fairly big problem, 21 percent somewhat of a problem) and 46 percent of recent students (22 percent very/fairly big problem, 24 percent somewhat of a problem) report this as a problem in their high school.

On Physical Fights in School:

Slightly less than half (47 percent) of current students say students getting into physical fights is a problem in their high school (21 percent very/fairly big problem, 26 percent somewhat of a problem). More than half (57 percent) of post-high school young adults say this was a problem in their school (27 percent very/fairly big problem, 30 percent somewhat of a problem).[2]

On Students Dropping Out of School:

About 4 in 10 current students (43 percent) say students dropping out of school is a problem in their high school (18 percent very/fairly big problem, 25 percent somewhat of a problem). About half of post-high school young adults (52 percent) say students dropping out was a problem in their school (25 percent very/fairly big problem, 27 percent somewhat of a problem).

African American students report social and emotional issues within their schools at higher rates than their Hispanic and White peers.

Almost across the board, African American high school students are more likely than Hispanic and White students to say that these social and relational issues are a very or fairly big problem at their school. African American students saying these

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2   The Office for Civil Rights (2018) reported nearly 1.1 million incidents of serious offenses in public schools in 2015-16, with physical attacks or fights without a weapon and threats of physical attack without a weapon the two most common reported serious offenses.

problems exist in their school in at least a fairly big way are in the minority, but it nonetheless indicates that many of these students must navigate a challenging social environment that can make it much harder to get the best out of their education.

Given that research shows African American students disproportionately grow up in poverty and attend high-poverty schools, are more likely to face harsh disciplinary measures, are taught by less experienced teachers, and are more likely to attend a school employing a law enforcement officer than one that has a school counselor, it is all the more critical that they are given access to resources and opportunities that can help them handle the social and relational issues they face.

Many high school students say that experiencing social and emotional problems makes it difficult for them to learn and do their best. Looking back, young adults out of high school are even more likely to see the harmful effects of personal problems and a negative social environment on their education.

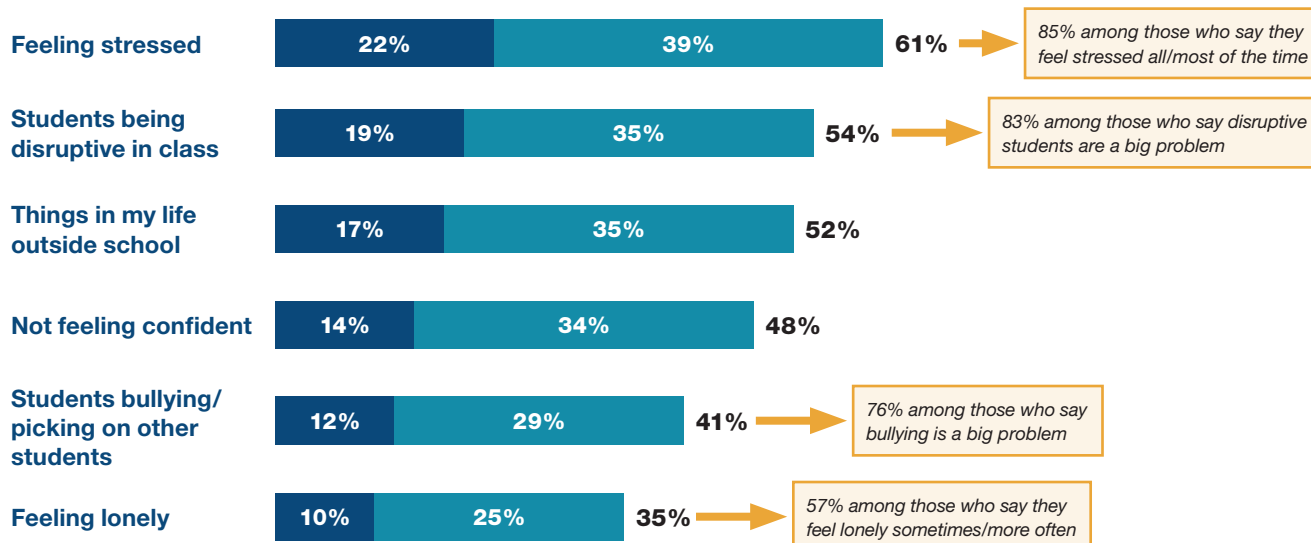For many young people, coping with social and emotional issues in and out of school negatively impacts their ability to learn. More than half of current high school students say that feeling stressed (61 percent) and dealing with disruptive students in class (54 percent) makes it harder for them to learn and do their best in school. For students who report feeling stressed all or most of the time, most (85 percent) say feeling this way makes it harder to learn. Similarly, for those who say that disruptive students are a big problem in their school, a large majority (83 percent) say this makes learning more difficult. A little more than half (52 percent) of current high school students say that their ability to learn is affected by things outside of school, while slightly less than half (48 percent) say a lack of confidence makes it harder to learn. Forty-one percent of high school students say that bullying negatively affects their learning, and for students who say bullying is a big problem in their school, that number nearly doubles (76 percent). Roughly a third of students (35 percent) say that feeling lonely makes it harder for them to learn, and for students who report feeling lonely at least some of the time, that number jumps to 57 percent.

Nearly three-quarters (72 percent) of former high school students felt the impact of being stressed on their learning, and among those who said they felt stressed all or most of the time, 87 percent said

■ High school students say that social and emotional problems make it difficult for them to learn and do their best in school

Proportions of current high school students saying each makes it HARDER for them to learn in high school:

■ Makes it a lot harder for me to learn   ■ Makes it somewhat harder for me to learn

	Makes it a lot harder	Makes it somewhat harder	Total	
Feeling stressed	22%	39%	61%	→ 85% among those who say they feel stressed all/most of the time
Students being disruptive in class	19%	35%	54%	→ 83% among those who say disruptive students are a big problem
Things in my life outside school	17%	35%	52%	
Not feeling confident	14%	34%	48%	
Students bullying/picking on other students	12%	29%	41%	→ 76% among those who say bullying is a big problem
Feeling lonely	10%	25%	35%	→ 57% among those who say they feel lonely sometimes/more often

stress made it harder for them to learn. About 6 in 10 young adults say that things outside of school negatively affected their ability to learn (62 percent), while roughly the same number (59 percent) of post-high school young people said disruptive students made it harder for them to learn. For young adults who said that disruptive students were a big problem in their school, 77 percent said it made learning more challenging. Significant numbers of post-high school young adults also say that a lack of confidence (56 percent), feeling lonely (49 percent), and bullying (42 percent) also made it harder for them to learn and do their best in school. For students who saw bullying as a big problem at their school (77 percent), its negative impact was even larger.

Findings from Other Youth Surveys

The annual **Gallup Student Poll** is intended to provide schools with non-cognitive measures via student feedback to build a more positive school culture and climate, inform school improvement plans, and help educators create programs to help students develop their strengths and prepare for college and career. The survey is administered each fall to students in grades 5 through 12, and approximately five million total surveys have been completed to date. The Gallup Student Poll features four core questions measuring four dimensions: engagement (the involvement in and enthusiasm for school); hope (the ideas and energy students have for the future); entrepreneurial aspiration (the talent and energy building businesses that survive, thrive and employ others); and career/financial literacy (the information, attitudes, and behaviors that students need to practice for healthy participation in the economy).

Participation in the 2017 survey included 915,214 students from all 50 states in both public and private schools (2,940 public schools, 34 private schools). Among the relevant survey findings:

- As grade level increases, the percentage of students who are engaged decreases, the percentage of students who are actively disengaged increases, and the percentage of students who are hopeful marginally decreases.
- Engagement and hope are highest among Asian and white students.
- Students who plan to attend a four-year college, plan to start their own business, or plan to volunteer or serve on a mission are most engaged and hopeful.

- Students who plan to take time off after high school are least engaged and hopeful.

The **Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence** released the results of a survey of 22,000 high school-age youth in October 2015. The survey looked at how young people currently feel and how they want to feel in school, and the possible reasons for those emotions. Among the significant findings from the survey:

- Most students described negative emotions in response to "How do you feel at school?" and of the top 10 emotions named, 8 were negative.
- Students feel bored 70 percent of the time and stressed 80 percent of the time.
- Students who said that other people have been mean or cruel to them in school tend to feel more lonely, fearful, and hopeless.
- Students who said that teachers deliver engaging and interesting lessons in their school tend to feel less bored, more respected, and happier.

YouthTruth, founded in 2008 by the Center for Effective Philanthropy, offers a survey tool to schools, districts, and education funders to enhance learning for all students. While the surveys are primarily for localized use, YouthTruth began producing *Learning from Student Voice*, a series of data briefs intended to provide insight on the youth experience in school. Relevant findings from these briefs include:

Findings from Other Youth Surveys *(continued)*

In their 2017 brief, "Learning from Student Voice: Are Students Engaged?", YouthTruth reported:

- Elementary school students (78 percent) are more likely to feel engaged than middle (59 percent) and high school (60 percent) students.
- 72 percent of middle school students and 68 percent of high school students take pride in their schoolwork.
- Female students (74 percent) are slightly more likely to take pride in their work than male students (66 percent). Students who identify as something other than male or female are least likely to take pride in their schoolwork (44 percent).
- Just 52 percent of secondary school students agree or strongly agree that they enjoy coming to school most of the time.

In their 2017 brief, "Learning from Student Voice: What Do Students Have to Say about School Culture?", YouthTruth reported:

- Only 30 percent of high school students rate their school culture positively.
- 57 percent of students agree that most adults treat students with respect, but only 34 percent agree that students treat adults with respect.
- Only 37 percent of students feel that discipline at their school is fair.

In their 2017 brief, "Learning from Student Voice: How Prepared Do Students Feel for College and Career?", YouthTruth reported:

- 84 percent of students report that they want to go to college; however, when asked about their plans after high school, just 68 percent expect to attend either a two- or four-year college.
- Only one in two students feel academically prepared for college.
- Feelings of readiness vary widely (from 11 percent to 78 percent positive rating) across schools.

In 2006, Civic Enterprises and Hart Research Associates released *The Silent Epidemic*, a survey of young people who left high school without graduating. Relevant findings from this report include:

- Nearly half (47 percent) said a major reason for dropping out was that classrooms were not interesting. These young people reported being bored and disengaged from high school and not seeing a connection between what they were learning in school and what they wanted to be in life.
- 69 percent of respondents said they were not motivated or inspired to work hard.
- 81 percent of young people said that there should be more opportunities for real world learning.
- Seven in ten (71 percent) said their schools did not do enough to make school interesting.
- Though 65 percent said there was a staff member or teacher who cared about their success, only 56 percent said they could speak to an adult about school problems and 41 percent said they had someone in school to discuss personal problems.

Part II

The SEL Effect in American High Schools

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is defined as the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2012). SEL enhances students' capacity to integrate these skills and behaviors to deal effectively and ethically with daily tasks and challenges (CASEL, 2018). CASEL's framework for SEL is centered on five core competencies:

- **Self-awareness:** The ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior. The ability to accurately assess one's strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a "growth mindset."

- **Self-management:** The ability to successfully regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations – effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. The ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals.

- **Social awareness:** The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

- **Relationship skills:** The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. The ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.

- **Responsible decision-making:** The ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. The realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the well-being of oneself and others.

To understand the extent to which high schools are helping students develop social and emotional skills, we cultivated a list of seven attributes based on CASEL's core SEL competencies:

- Knowing how to get along/work with people different from you
- Feeling confident in yourself
- Understanding other people's feelings and points of view
- Knowing how to solve disagreements in a positive way
- Understanding your own emotions and why you feel different emotions
- Dealing with difficult situations in your life
- Knowing how to deal with stress

In the following section, we use these skills to provide a baseline for the presence of SEL in American high schools. We also present the perspectives of young people on how well integrated the development of these skills are in their schools and show the strong correlational effects of helping students develop SEL competencies.

Survey Findings 3
Youth Perspectives on the State of SEL in High Schools

Most young people like the idea of attending a school that would help them develop social and emotional skills, and they believe attending a strong SEL school would personally benefit them and create a more positive social and learning environment. However, many young people do not feel that their high school excels in developing students' social and emotional competencies. Few current high school students believe their school does a great job helping students develop different social and emotional skills, and young adults out of high school have an even less favorable view. Most notably, students see their schools as falling short in helping them with emotional challenges, including under-

standing their emotions, dealing with difficult situations in their lives, and managing stress.

In the schools where students and young adults report high levels of SEL, however, the outcomes are overwhelmingly positive. Both current and recent high school students from schools where students reported a strong focus on developing students' SEL competencies are much more likely to report a better school climate, greater engagement and motivation, an increased sense of physical safety, and knowing how to deal with stress and difficult situations and getting along with and understanding others. Students and young adults from strong SEL schools also report increased academic learning and preparation for success after high school, including being prepared for a job or career.

Current and recent high school graduates like the idea of attending a school that helps students develop SEL skills, and most believe they would personally benefit from it.

Roughly three-quarters of current high school students say attending an SEL school appeals to them a lot or a fair amount (76 percent) and would help them personally a lot or a fair amount (74 percent). A similar number of post-high school young adults also say a school that helps students develop SEL skills would have appealed to them (75 percent) and would have been personally beneficial (74 percent). Going to a high school that emphasizes the development of SEL skills is broadly appealing to both current students and young adults from various demographic and academic backgrounds.

Students and young adults believe schools that integrate SEL would create a more positive social and learning environment.
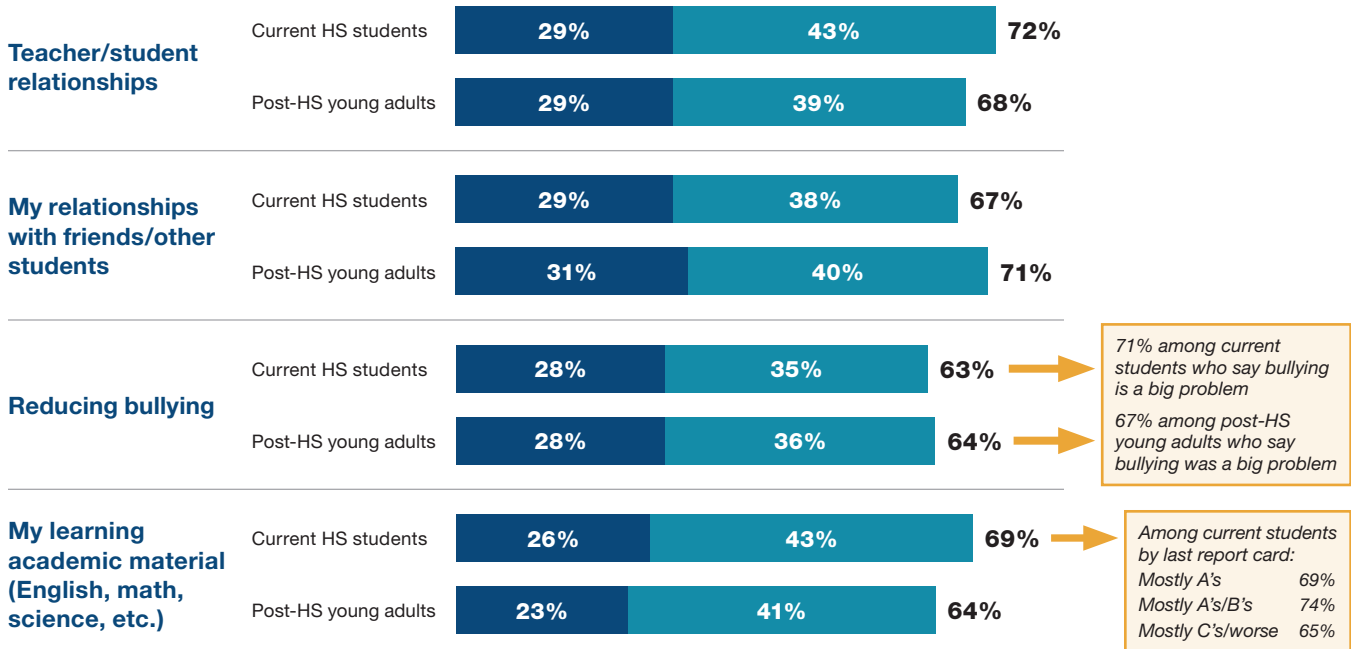
A majority of both current and recent high school students say that going to an SEL high school would help each of the following a lot or a fair amount:

- Improve teacher/student relationships (72 percent current students, 68 percent recent students).

■ Students and young adults believe SEL schools would create a more positive social and learning environment

How much would going to an SEL high school help/have helped in this area?

■ Would help/have helped a lot   ■ Would help/have helped a fair amount

Teacher/student relationships

	Would help a lot	Would help a fair amount	Total
Current HS students	29%	43%	72%
Post-HS young adults	29%	39%	68%

My relationships with friends/other students

Current HS students	29%	38%	67%
Post-HS young adults	31%	40%	71%

Reducing bullying

Current HS students	28%	35%	63%
Post-HS young adults	28%	36%	64%

→ 71% among current students who say bullying is a big problem

→ 67% among post-HS young adults who say bullying was a big problem

My learning academic material (English, math, science, etc.)

Current HS students	26%	43%	69%
Post-HS young adults	23%	41%	64%

→ Among current students by last report card:
Mostly A's — 69%
Mostly A's/B's — 74%
Mostly C's/worse — 65%

- Improve relationships with friends/other students (67 percent current students, 71 percent recent students).
- Reduce bullying (63 percent current students, 64 percent recent students)
- Learning academic material (69 percent current students, 64 percent recent students).
- Preparation for college (76 percent current students, 69 percent recent students).
- Learning real-world skills for after high school (74 percent current students, 70 percent recent students).

- Preparation for jobs/careers (73 percent current students, 67 percent recent students).
- Preparation for giving back to the community (66 percent current students, 64 percent recent students).[3]
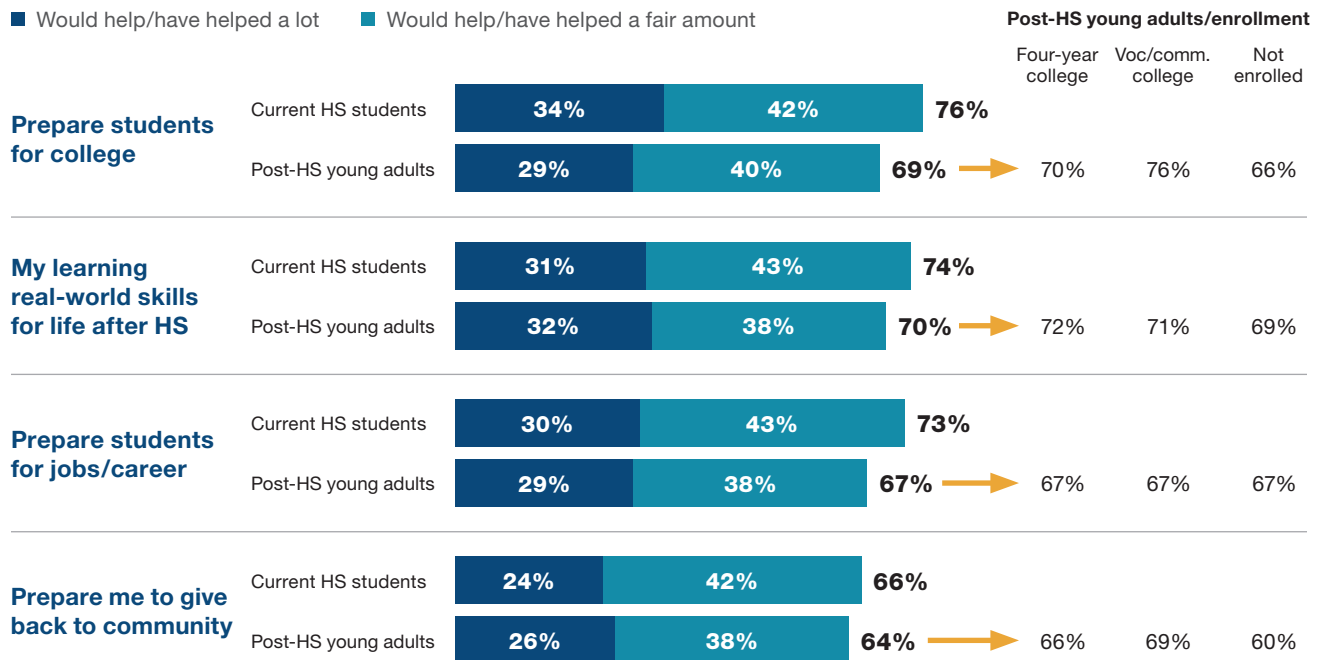
> *"[The SEL school] sounds pretty great. More preparation for life rather than just academic subjects."*
>
> **Middle school student, non-SEL school**

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3   Teachers (in 2013) and principals (in 2017) also shared their beliefs on the positive impact of increased attention to developing students' SEL skills, and much of what they said aligns with what young people reported: 98 percent of principals and 94 percent of teachers say focusing on SEL will improve relationships between teachers and students; 96 percent of principals and 93 percent of teachers believe increased SEL will help decrease bullying; 97 percent of principals and 77 percent of teachers believe a larger focus on SEL will improve students' academic achievement; 97 percent of principals and 78 percent of teachers say a larger focus on SEL will benefit students' preparation for college; and 98 percent of principals and 87 percent of teachers say a greater focus on SEL will help prepare students for the workforce.

◼ And they believe students who attend SEL schools would continue to experience benefits after high school in life, college, and career

How much would going to an SEL high school help/have helped in this area?

◼ Would help/have helped a lot   ◼ Would help/have helped a fair amount

		Would help/have helped a lot	Would help/have helped a fair amount	Total	Post-HS young adults/enrollment		
					Four-year college	Voc/comm. college	Not enrolled
Prepare students for college	Current HS students	34%	42%	76%			
	Post-HS young adults	29%	40%	69% →	70%	76%	66%
My learning real-world skills for life after HS	Current HS students	31%	43%	74%			
	Post-HS young adults	32%	38%	70% →	72%	71%	69%
Prepare students for jobs/career	Current HS students	30%	43%	73%			
	Post-HS young adults	29%	38%	67% →	67%	67%	67%
Prepare me to give back to community	Current HS students	24%	42%	66%			
	Post-HS young adults	26%	38%	64% →	66%	69%	60%

"It would have helped with communicating with teachers and especially communicating with the administration. This school sounds incredible – what I learned in high school I didn't use at all. Communication would have been way better to learn, more personal skills and also from a business aspect. This school [sounds] amazing. You can learn to speak in public forums, to business owners, and gain the confidence to speak to anyone."

High school graduate, non-SEL school, commenting on SEL school.

However, fewer than half of young adults believe their school did a good job helping students develop SEL skills; current students have a more generous view, but few say their school did a good job.
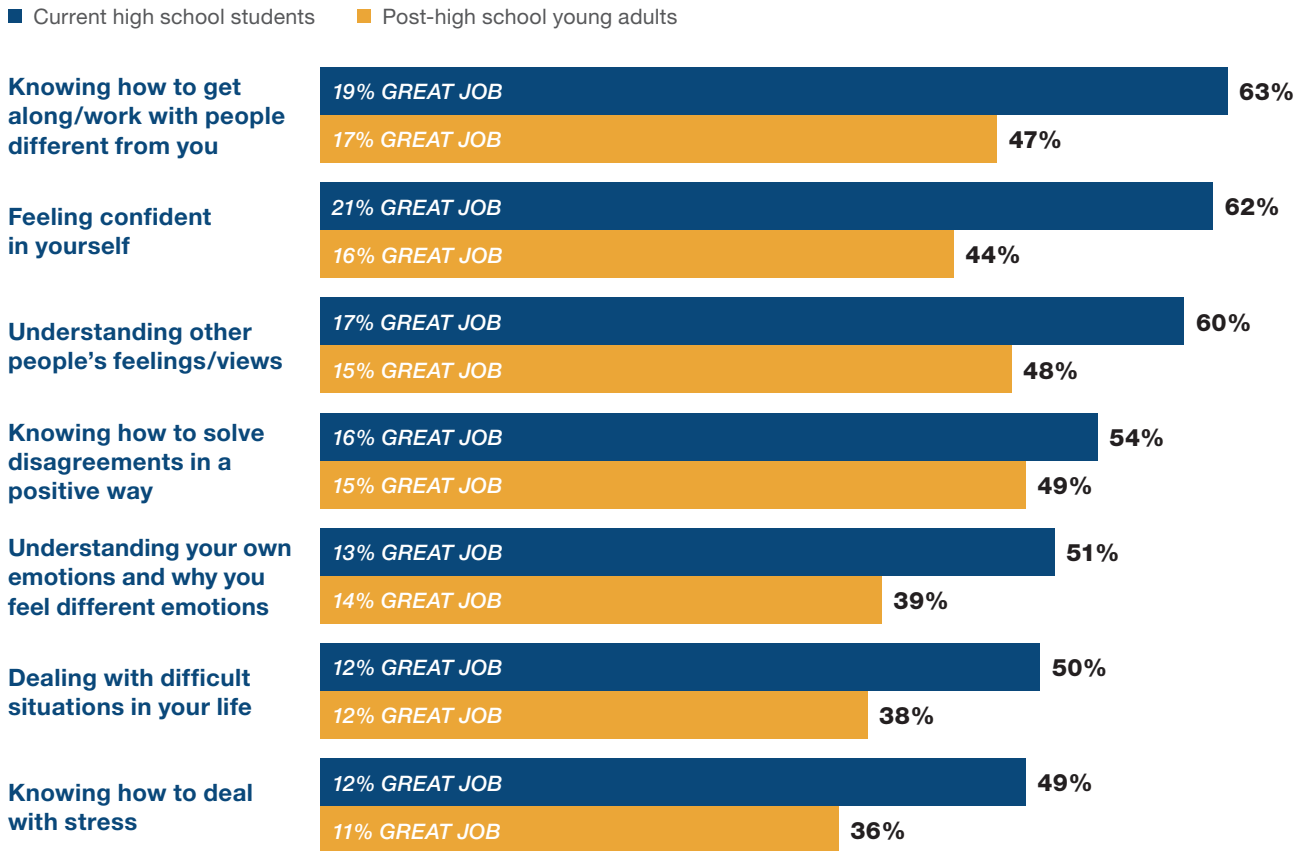
When asked how well their high school does at helping students develop seven different SEL skills, current high school students are generally more positive, while post-high school young adults see a lot of room for growth:

Knowing How to Get Along/Work with People Different from You:

A majority of current high school students (63 percent) say their school does at least a pretty good job of helping them know how to get along with and work with people that are different than them, though less than one in five students (19 percent) say their high school does a great job of this. Less than half of post-high school young adults (47 percent) say their high school did a good job of helping them develop this skill, and just 17 percent say their school did a great job with this.

■ **Fewer than half of young adults believe their school did a good job helping students develop seven different SEL skills; current students have a more generous view, but few say their school did a great job**

Proportions who say their high school does/did a GREAT/PRETTY GOOD JOB helping them in each area:

■ Current high school students   ■ Post-high school young adults

Knowing how to get along/work with people different from you
- 19% GREAT JOB — 63%
- 17% GREAT JOB — 47%

Feeling confident in yourself
- 21% GREAT JOB — 62%
- 16% GREAT JOB — 44%

Understanding other people's feelings/views
- 17% GREAT JOB — 60%
- 15% GREAT JOB — 48%

Knowing how to solve disagreements in a positive way
- 16% GREAT JOB — 54%
- 15% GREAT JOB — 49%

Understanding your own emotions and why you feel different emotions
- 13% GREAT JOB — 51%
- 14% GREAT JOB — 39%

Dealing with difficult situations in your life
- 12% GREAT JOB — 50%
- 12% GREAT JOB — 38%

Knowing how to deal with stress
- 12% GREAT JOB — 49%
- 11% GREAT JOB — 36%

Feeling Confident in Yourself:

Sixty-two percent of high school students say their school does a good job of helping them feel confident in themselves, but just 21 percent say their school does a great job of helping them build this skill. Forty-four percent of post-high school young adults say their high school did a good job of helping them feel confident, but just 16 percent say their school did a great job of this.

Understanding Other People's Feelings/Views:

Six out of ten current high school students (60 percent) say their school does at least a pretty good job of helping them to understand other people's feelings and views, but less than two out of ten students say their school does a great job of this. About half (48 percent) of recent high school students say their school did at least a pretty good job of helping them build this skill, but only 15 percent say their school did a great job.

Knowing How to Solve Disagreements in a Positive Way:

A little more than half (54 percent) of current high school students feel their school does at least a pretty good job of helping them resolve disagreements in a positive way, but just 16 percent say their school does a great job of this. About half of post-high school young adults (49 percent) feel their school did a good job of helping them to know how to solve disagreements positively, but just 15 percent would give their school the highest marks for helping them develop this skill.

Understanding Your Own Emotions and Why You Feel Different Emotions:

About half of current high school students (51 percent) feel their school does a good job of helping them understand their emotions, but just a fraction of those students (13 percent) feel their school does a great job of helping them develop this skill. Only 39 percent of post-high school young adults say their high school helped them understand their emotions, and just 14 percent of those young people say their school did a great job of this.

Dealing with Difficult Situations in Your Life:

Half of current high school students (50 percent) feel their high school does a pretty good job or better of helping them deal with difficult situations in their lives, but only about a quarter of those students (12 percent) say their school does a great job of this. Thirty-eight percent of recent high school students feel their high school did a pretty good job of helping them deal with difficult situations in life, and just 12 percent of these students say their school did a great job of helping them develop this skill.

Knowing How to Deal with Stress:

About half of current high school students (49 percent) say their school does at least a pretty good job of helping them learn how to deal with stress, and just 12 percent say their school does a great job of this. A little more than a third of post-high school young adults (36 percent) feel their high school did a good job of helping them understand how to deal with stress, and only about a third of those students (11 percent) say their high school did a great job of helping them develop this skill.

Based on the perceptions of current and recent high school students, few schools score high on SEL capability.

To understand how many high schools have a high capability for developing SEL skills, we segmented current and recent high school students into groups based on their perceptions of how well their schools help students with developing each of the seven representative SEL skills. Based on the evaluation of students and young adults, the SEL capability of their high schools was then broken down in the following manner:

- **Strong SEL Capability:** Great/pretty good job on 6 or 7 SEL skills
- **Medium SEL Capability:** Great/pretty good job on 2 to 5 SEL skills
- **Weak SEL Capability:** Great/pretty good job on 0 or 1 SEL skills

According to the evaluation of current high school students, 36 percent of high schools have a strong SEL capability, 40 percent have a medium SEL capability, and 24 percent have a weak SEL capability. *Only four percent of high school students rate their school as being great at developing all seven SEL skills.*

The evaluation of post-high school young adults of their schools puts even fewer high schools at the top end of SEL capability. Based on their perceptions, 23 percent of high schools have strong SEL capability, 41 percent have medium SEL capability, and 36 percent have weak SEL capability. *Just five percent of post-high school young adults would rate their high school as doing a great job on all seven SEL skills.*

Students in strong SEL schools report a more positive learning environment on a number of important school climate dimensions. The correlation is even stronger among post-high school young adults.

Current and recent high school students in strong SEL schools are *more likely* to:

Give their high school an A or B as a place for students to learn and do their best.
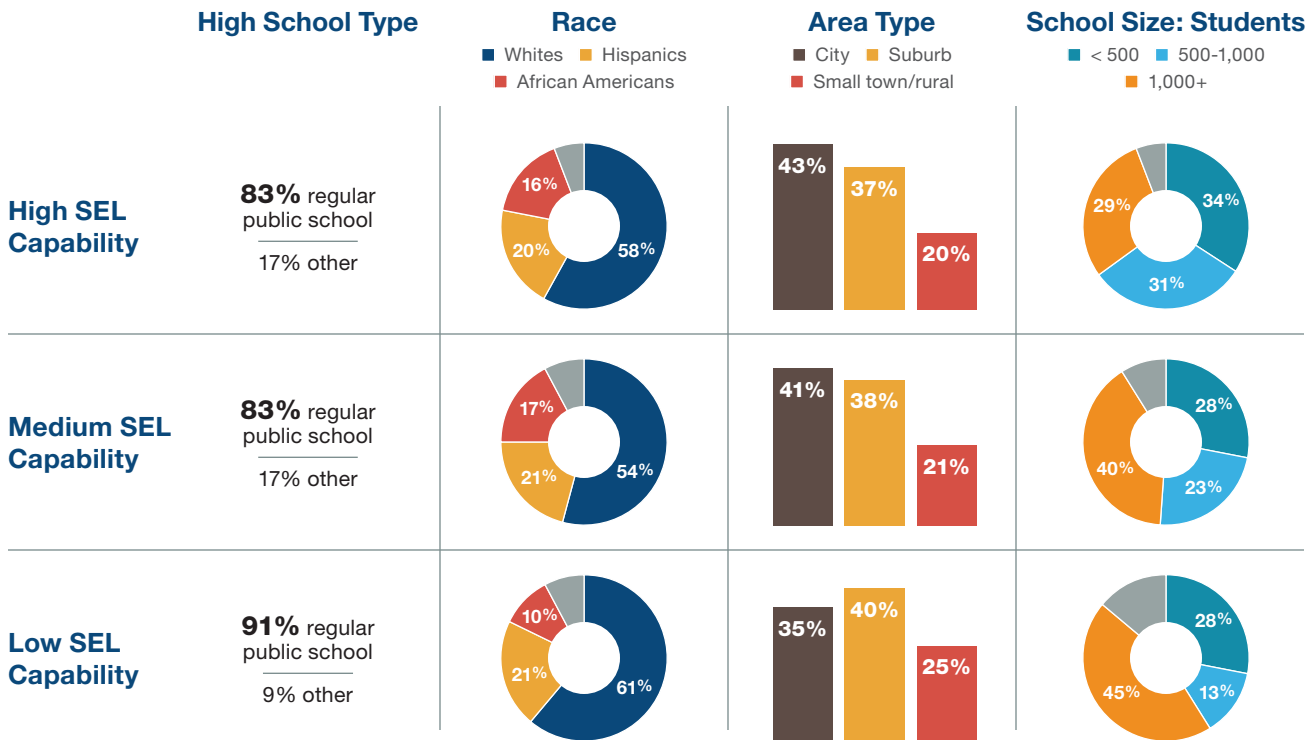- 92 percent of current high school students in strong SEL schools versus 55 percent in weak SEL schools (37 percentage point gap)
- 91 percent of post-high school young adults from high SEL schools versus 41 percent in low SEL schools (50 percentage point gap)

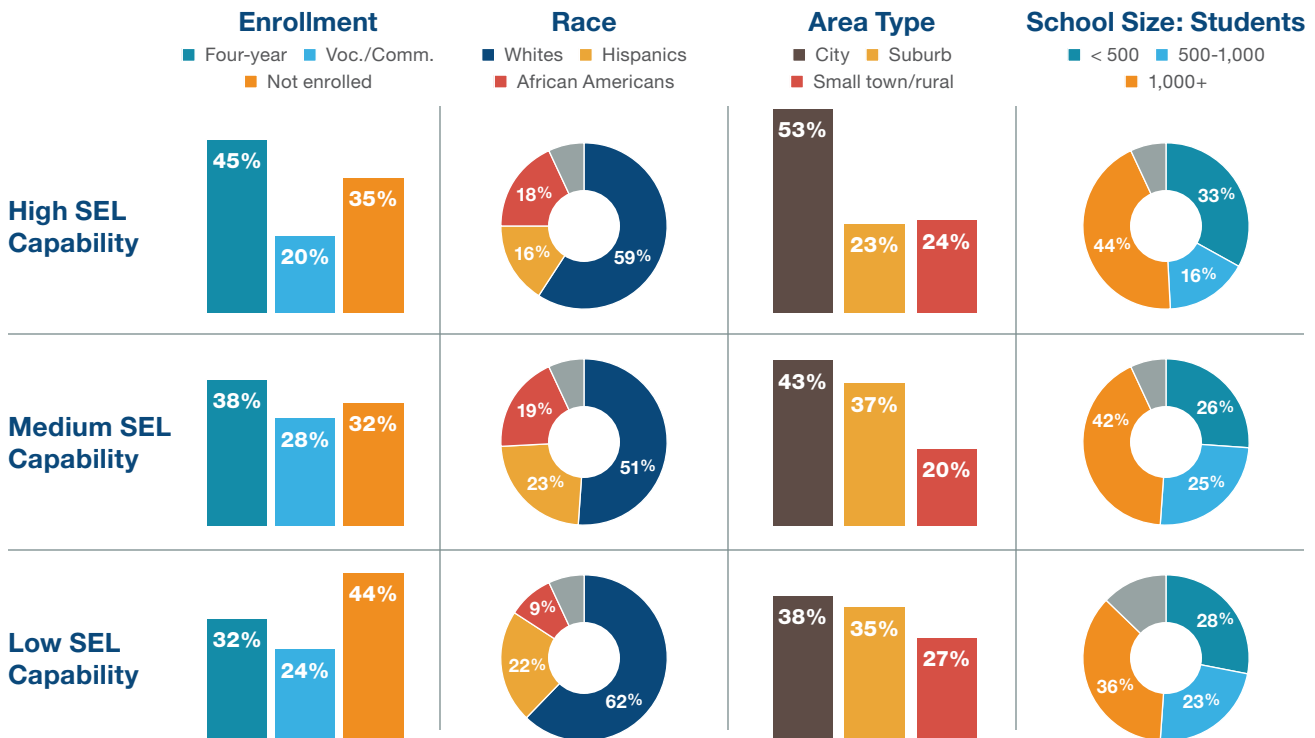## Say that teachers at their school are supportive and respectful of students.
- 95 percent of current students in strong SEL schools compared to 49 percent in weak SEL schools (46 percentage point gap)
- 96 percent of former high school students in strong SEL schools compared to 46 percent in weak SEL schools (50 percentage point gap)

■ Profile of SEL Capability: Current High School Students

	High School Type	Race	Area Type	School Size: Students
		Whites ■ **Hispanics** ■ African Americans	**City** ■ **Suburb** ■ Small town/rural	■ < 500 ■ 500-1,000 ■ 1,000+
High SEL Capability	**83%** regular public school — 17% other	Whites 58%, Hispanics 20%, African Americans 16%	City 43%, Suburb 37%, Small town/rural 20%	< 500 34%, 500-1,000 31%, 1,000+ 29%
Medium SEL Capability	**83%** regular public school — 17% other	Whites 54%, Hispanics 21%, African Americans 17%	City 41%, Suburb 38%, Small town/rural 21%	< 500 28%, 500-1,000 23%, 1,000+ 40%
Low SEL Capability	**91%** regular public school — 9% other	Whites 61%, Hispanics 21%, African Americans 10%	City 35%, Suburb 40%, Small town/rural 25%	< 500 28%, 500-1,000 13%, 1,000+ 45%

■ Profile of SEL Capability: Post-High School Young Adults

	Enrollment	Race	Area Type	School Size: Students
	Four-year ■ **Voc./Comm.** ■ Not enrolled	**Whites** ■ **Hispanics** ■ African Americans	**City** ■ **Suburb** ■ Small town/rural	■ < 500 ■ 500-1,000 ■ 1,000+
High SEL Capability	Four-year 45%, Voc./Comm. 20%, Not enrolled 35%	Whites 59%, Hispanics 16%, African Americans 18%	City 53%, Suburb 23%, Small town/rural 24%	< 500 33%, 500-1,000 16%, 1,000+ 44%
Medium SEL Capability	Four-year 38%, Voc./Comm. 28%, Not enrolled 32%	Whites 51%, Hispanics 23%, African Americans 19%	City 43%, Suburb 37%, Small town/rural 20%	< 500 26%, 500-1,000 25%, 1,000+ 42%
Low SEL Capability	Four-year 32%, Voc./Comm. 24%, Not enrolled 44%	Whites 62%, Hispanics 22%, African Americans 9%	City 38%, Suburb 35%, Small town/rural 27%	< 500 28%, 500-1,000 23%, 1,000+ 36%

Say their principal is supportive and respectful of students.

- 93 percent of current students in strong SEL schools versus 49 percent of students in weak SEL schools (44 percentage point gap)
- 93 percent of post-high school young adults from strong SEL schools versus 37 percent of young adults from weak SEL schools (56 percentage point gap)

Say students at their school get along with each other very or pretty well.

- 89 percent of current high school students in strong SEL schools compared to 46 percent of students at weak SEL schools (43 percentage point gap)
- 84 percent of former high school students from strong SEL schools compared to 33 percent of former high school students from weak SEL schools (51 percentage point gap)

"I feel like it makes the teachers actually care about us. It's going to help us in the long run, learning how to communicate with people and be open to others' opinions. It helps me get along better with other kids my age. We all have the same skill set and that's about it. If you believe you can do something, you will most likely succeed, like getting good grades in your classes."

High school student, SEL school

Arianna[4], Senior at an SEL high school

Arianna describes her SEL school as a second home where the principal and her teachers are like family. She transferred to her SEL school because she wasn't getting along with the teachers at her old school and frequently ditched class. In contrast to her old school, where she felt unmotivated, Arianna says she is now excited to go to school each day. One of the biggest differences she has noticed at her SEL school is the level of communication and rapport between teachers and students. The teachers and staff do their best to provide a community environment where people support and trust each other and this makes a difference for Arianna's emotional well-being. For example, when she comes to school angry or upset, Arianna will often talk to the woman at the front desk—who she finds especially approachable and supportive—to gather herself for the day.

Arianna points to several ways in which her school has helped her to develop social and emotional skills. In advisory period, students sometimes meditate for 10 minutes, which she says relaxes her and helps her to manage stress. Although Arianna says the students generally do get along with each other very well, when there are disagreements, the school has students participate in a restorative circle where they sit down together, talk about the problem, and find a solution that satisfies them both. Her school also challenges students to do things out of their comfort zone. Arianna says that she struggles with public speaking, but giving presentations each trimester has helped to her improve her skills and confidence.

"It's easy for me to succeed. My teachers and everyone, we all connect and it's so much easier to learn."

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4   Name has been changed to protect student's confidentiality.

■ Youth and young adults in strong SEL schools report feeling safer at higher rates than their peers in other schools

I feel/felt physically safe in high school
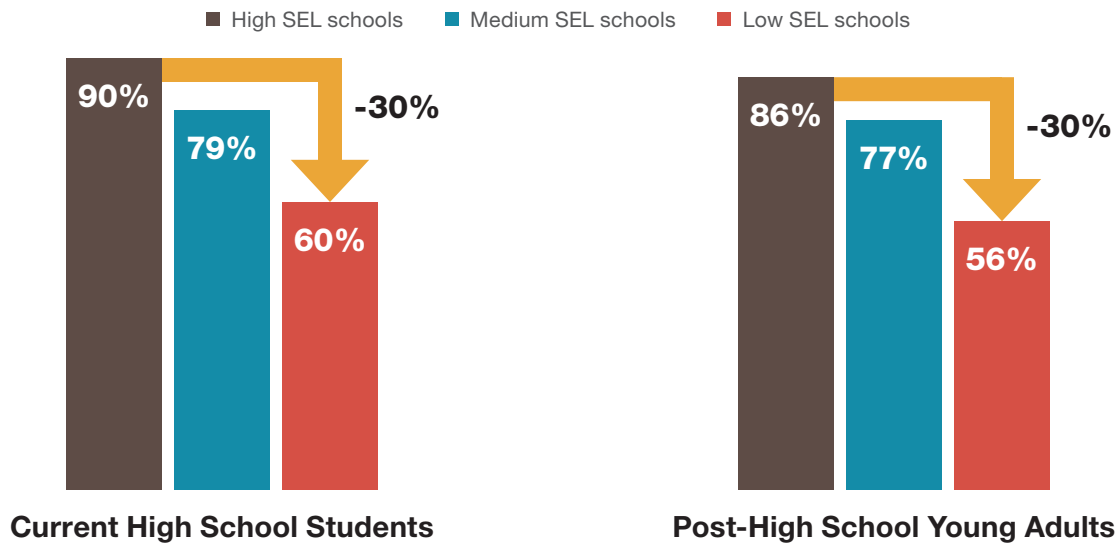
■ High SEL schools ■ Medium SEL schools ■ Low SEL schools

Current High School Students
90% 79% 60% -30%

Post-High School Young Adults
86% 77% 56% -30%

Youth and young adults in strong SEL schools report feeling safer at higher rates than their peers in other schools.

Nearly all current high school students attending strong SEL schools (90 percent) say they feel physically safe in their high school, while 60 percent of current students in weak SEL schools feel the same. A similar margin exists between post-high school young adults from strong SEL schools (86 percent) and those from weak SEL schools (56 percent).

> *"I like it [my school] because the other school that I went to, they are more violent. That's stereotypical, but I feel like it's true. My school doesn't really have that violence because, I think, of communication. Learning how to deal with it so that conflict doesn't occur even if there are arguments. Learning how to deal with that is a good skill."*

High school student, SEL school

Students and young adults from strong SEL schools are more likely to feel that their voice matters.

More than half (57 percent) of all current high school students feel their opinions matter to the adults at their school (17 percent students' opinions matter a lot, 40 percent students' opinions matter a fair amount). For students in strong SEL schools, that number rises to 81 percent of students, and the number of students who say their opinions matter a lot nearly doubles (31 percent students' opinions matter a lot). Just 18 percent of students in weak SEL schools say they feel that students' opinions matter in their school (2 percent students' opinions matter a lot, 16 percent students' opinions matter a fair amount).

A little less than half (48 percent) of post-high school young adults say they felt as though students' opinions mattered to the adults in their high school (14 percent students' opinions mattered a lot, 34 percent students' opinions mattered a fair amount). Post-high school young adults from strong SEL schools (79 percent) are far more likely to feel that students' opinions mattered in their school than young adults from weak SEL schools (24 percent).

> *"There's not one adult [in that school] that I cannot go talk to about anything. They make the atmosphere so family-like. They make themselves available, they make themselves open, and they don't turn anything down. They're not just mentors they say whatever you want to talk about, let's talk about it."*
>
> **High school student, SEL school**

Students and young adults from strong SEL schools also feel their school did a better job helping them learn academic material.

Nearly all young people from strong SEL schools say their high school does a pretty good or great job helping students learn academic material. Ninety-five percent of current high school students from strong SEL schools feel their high school did a good or great job helping them learn academic material, compared to about half (49 percent) of students from weak SEL schools (a 46-point gap).

Similarly, 93 percent of post-high school young adults who attended strong SEL schools say their school did a good or great job preparing them academically, compared to just 37 percent of young adults from weak SEL schools.

Students' engagement in their learning is higher in strong SEL schools.

An overwhelming majority (88 percent) of current high school students in strong SEL schools say they are motivated to work hard and do their best in school almost all or most of the time, compared to 39 percent of current students in weak SEL high schools. Looking back, 78 percent of post-high school young adults from strong SEL schools say they felt motivated to work hard in school, compared to 24 percent of young adults from weak SEL high schools.

About 8 in 10 current high school students in strong SEL schools (81 percent) say they are excited about what they are learning in school, while fewer than

Maya[5], Junior at an SEL high school

Maya participates in a unique high school program in her district that takes a very individualized approach to learning with a strong SEL component. There are only 20 other students in her program and all are encouraged to take control of their learning and move at their own pace. Maya transferred to her school because she felt that she was being held back by her old school and the teachers weren't willing to work with her individually. At her SEL school, her teachers make an effort to connect with their students beyond just the academics and try to get to know every student on a personal level. When she's feeling down, Maya says her teachers will notice and try to help cheer her up. The entire school environment is very welcoming and supportive; Maya says she feels comfortable talking to any of the adults in the building and that collaborating with other students on group projects helps her to get the most out of her education.
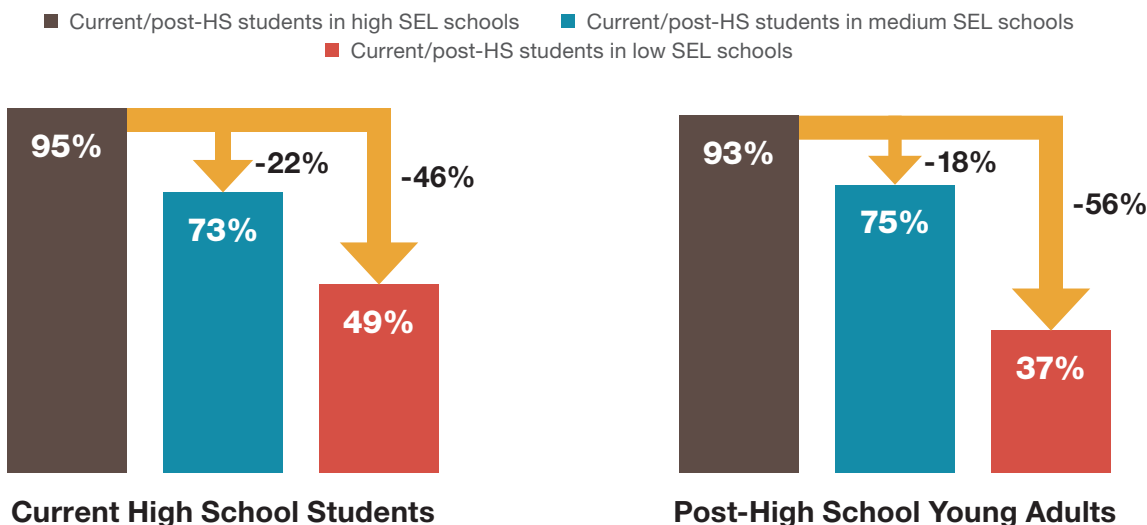
The teacher-student relationship is a major pillar of SEL at Maya's school. For Maya, these positive relationships allow her to feel comfortable discussing her strengths and weaknesses in a 1-on-1 setting with her teachers. Moreover, she feels the teachers really listen to the students and are always willing to talk, which can give the students a chance to develop and understand their emotions in a safe environment. The school also helps the students deal with stress by working with them to develop short- and long-term plans for the future. The school offers a Social and Emotional counselor who serves as a supportive listener and helps students to organize their thoughts and emotions. Maya really values the care her school puts into developing students' social and emotional skills and believes it is especially important for her generation due to the current news and social media environment.

"We feel like we're heard, we feel like they're hearing us, not just 'oh, it doesn't matter.' They hear each and every one of us."

5   Name has been changed to protect student's confidentiality.

■ Students and young adults from strong SEL schools also feel that their school did a better job helping them learn academic material

My HS does/did a great/pretty good job helping students learn academic material:

■ Current/post-HS students in high SEL schools ■ Current/post-HS students in medium SEL schools
■ Current/post-HS students in low SEL schools

	Current High School Students		
95%	73% (-22%)	49% (-46%)	

	Post-High School Young Adults		
93%	75% (-18%)	37% (-56%)	

2 in 10 current students (16 percent) from weak SEL schools say the same. Sixty-five percent of recent high school students from strong SEL schools say they were excited about what they were learning in school, compared to just 9 percent of former students from weak SEL schools.

Young people in strong SEL schools are more likely to volunteer in their communities.

A recent study (Dietz & Grimm, 2018) found that the number of teenagers volunteering – a key indicator of civic engagement – declined between 2005 and 2015, but more than half of current high school students (57 percent) and post-high school young adults (59 percent) from strong SEL schools surveyed say they regularly volunteer in their community. That percentage is cut in half for current students (28 percent) and recent students (26 percent) in weak SEL schools.

Seventy-seven percent of current high school students and 75 percent of recent students from strong SEL schools also say they would participate in full-time military, national, or public service for their community or country, compared to 62 percent of current students and 58 percent of recent students from weak SEL high schools.

Young adults from strong SEL schools see the benefits of feeling more prepared for their post-high school life; current students in high SEL schools also see the potential for benefits.

A large majority (83 percent) of recent high school students from strong SEL schools say their high school did a pretty good or great job preparing them for success after high school, compared to just 13 percent of recent students from weak SEL schools – an enormous 70 percentage point gap. A similarly large percentage (82 percent) of post-high school young adults from a strong SEL school say their high school did a pretty good or great job of preparing them for a job or career, compared to just eight percent of young adults from a weak SEL school (a 74-point gap).

Nearly all current high school students in strong SEL schools (93 percent) feel as though their school is doing a good job of preparing them for success after high school, and nearly the same number (91 percent) say their school is doing a good job of preparing them for a job or career. Far fewer students from weak SEL schools say their school is doing a good job of preparing them for success after high school (30 percent) or for a job or career (23 percent).
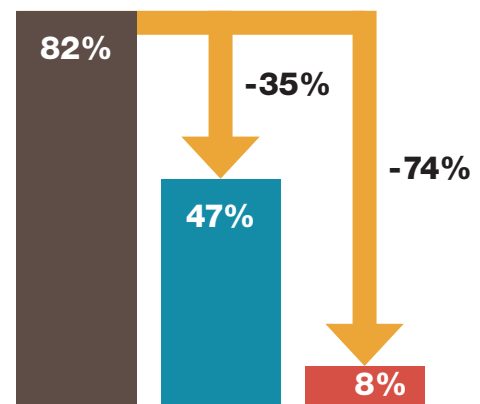
■ Young adults from strong SEL schools feel more prepared for life after high school

83%   **-26%**   **57%**   **-70%**   **13%**
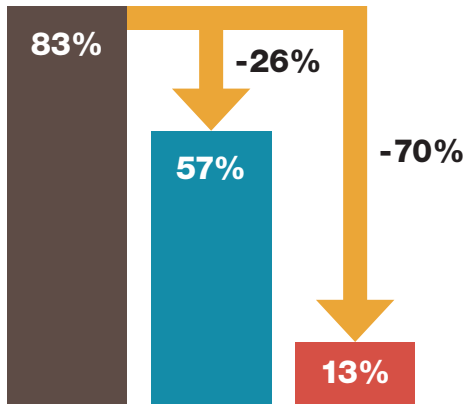
My HS did a great/pretty good job preparing me for success after high school:

82%   **-35%**   **47%**   **-74%**   **8%**

My HS did a great/pretty good job preparing me for a job or career after high school:

Jamal[6], Senior at an SEL high school

Jamal describes his school as a small, energetic place that has a family-like feel, where all the students know everyone, from the teachers to the security guards. Jamal says he feels comfortable having a one-on-one conversation with anyone on campus whether they are a teacher or a student. The teachers create a strong and welcoming learning environment, despite a lack of resources due to the school's small size. Jamal's favorite teacher is his gym/health teacher, Ms. Cooke, who he describes as passionate about teaching and creating a positive atmosphere in the classroom. She constantly reminds the students that they are "kings and queens and shouldn't feel down." For Jamal, these encouraging words can help flip a day from bad to good.

As the health teacher, Ms. Cooke's class is where many students are introduced to the idea of SEL. Jamal explains that in health class, students learn to understand and cope with their emotions and how to communicate with one another in an honest manner. She also helps students learn how to be confident by telling stories of times when her perspective was challenged and she had to stand up for herself. Teachers in other subjects also bring SEL into the classroom. In Jamal's math class, many of the students struggled with the material but the teacher encouraged all of the students to keep trying and overcome the difficulty. While Jamal is overwhelmingly positive about his school, he does note that his school could do a better job helping students to learn about and deal with stress. Stress, he feels, is such a big part of life that schools could spend more time helping students learn to deal with it.

"This school is trying to help students succeed."

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6   Name has been changed to protect student's confidentiality.

Paths Forward

Surveys of teachers, principals, and students all illustrate a strong appetite for greater integration of SEL into their schools and classrooms, as well as a belief in its ability to be taught and assessed and be a powerful lever in promoting student achievement and motivation. District, state, and federal policies must work to enable the conditions for SEL to be systemically implemented in schools throughout the country.

For policies to be most successful, it is essential that they prioritize equity and be informed by local context. In this way, SEL can be a powerful tool in combatting cultural or racial inequalities in schools, as well as equipping students with the skills and competencies to tackle local challenges.

Most of all, policies must begin and end with the voices of young people. This fact is supported by current events and movements across our nation that have been driven by teens and young adults and is reinforced by this report. Young people offer an essential perspective when crafting policies and practices for our education system and for advancing SEL in our schools, and to ensure the most positive outcomes for all students, their voices must be included in the conversation.

Integrate social, emotional, and academic learning and development.

Evidence shows the benefits of SEL are greater when it is implemented effectively and integrated directly into learning environments, but too often even in schools where high-quality SEL programming is present, it is not being embedded into and across classrooms effectively (Oberle, Domitrovich, Meyers, Weissberg, 2016). Schools must intentionally and actively integrate social, emotional, and academic learning with instruction on specific skills and competencies. SEL programming must be backed up in classrooms through robust practice. This includes inserting relevant examples of academic subjects intersecting with social and emotional competencies in lessons and designing opportunities for students to engage their SEL skills. Instruction should affirm diversity and seek to address stereotypes or inequities that may arise in instruction or communities.

Create and articulate a clear vision of student success and for SEL.

In order to craft effective policy and practice, states, districts, and schools must articulate a clear vision of what student success and social and emotional learning looks like and how it is measured. This vision should be informed by what students should know and be able to do at each age level and be aligned with the best evidence on SEL, improving academic achievement, creating a more positive school climate and culture, and better preparing students with the skills they need for postsecondary education, careers and civic engagement. The vision for social and emotional learning at the state level must be adaptive to differences across schools and districts to ensure school leaders are given the flexibility to address the needs of their school community, while still providing a strong framework for advancing SEL and guiding implementation and assessment.

Ensure young people are part of the decision-making process, particularly around SEL programming and assessment.

As this survey shows, young people are an asset in understanding what works and what doesn't in a school, and neglecting to include them in the decision-making process fails to consider their invaluable perspective on the social dynamics and challenges students must navigate. School and district leaders should empower young people by providing space for students to share their experiences and weigh in on decisions that will affect them.

This is particularly true for decisions on the adoption and implementation of social and emotional programming and the collection and use of SEL data. Bringing students together with teachers, administrators, and staff to discuss how to integrate social and emotional learning and development in a school can ensure the most appropriate decisions are made to meet the needs of all. Including student voice is also integral to the collection of SEL data, especially in the case of developing climate survey instruments and other tools that need to be correctly calibrated for young people to produce accurate responses. Students should also be involved in reviewing and understanding the data collected from SEL assessments, especially in the growing use of school climate surveys, and be given the opportunity to voice questions and concerns about what the data show.

Diversify youth leadership and leadership opportunities.

Often, the young people included in the decision-making process or given the opportunity to voice their opinions in school are high-profile academic, athletic, or leadership group students – not those that tend to be the most vulnerable. To fully understand the issues facing all students in a school, efforts must be made to be more inclusive of students who are not typically chosen or do not volunteer for leadership opportunities. As this survey shows, students at the lower end of the academic scale have very different perspectives on many of the challenges young people face in school than students at the higher end of the spectrum, and by excluding them from the conversation, teachers and administrators are missing a significant piece of the picture of what is happening within their school. School leaders must do more to diversify student involvement in school leaderships opportunities and tap into the voice of the students who are the most vulnerable to falling behind and whose voices often go unheard.

Strengthen SEL training among teachers and administrators.

To ensure students are getting the best possible SEL instruction, it is equally important that the SEL competencies of educators and administrators' are being continually developed as well. Surveys of teachers and principals have illustrated that school leaders are clamoring for increased investments in social and emotional learning, but also realize that greater training in teaching and assessing SEL is needed to ensure successful implementation. Eighty percent of high-implementing principals report their teachers are prepared to successfully teach SEL compared to just 15 percent of low-implementers (DePaoli, Atwell, & Bridgeland, 2017).

Schools and districts have an important role to play in developing and prioritizing adult capacity to actively use social and emotional skills in their day-to-day activities, as well as teach them. Six in ten principals said the need for more teacher training to support SEL implementation is a major challenge.

Furthermore, in *The Missing Piece*, only 55 percent said they had received SEL training of any kind (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2012). Schools and districts should emphasize adult social and emotional competencies in job requirements and descriptions, as well as offer additional professional development and continuing learning opportunities.

It is no surprise that teachers need more training in SEL. A recent scan of SEL content in state teacher certification requirements by the University of British Columbia found that while many state requirements incorporate several of CASEL's SEL competencies, a disconnect persists between requirements and coursework being provided to pre-service teachers (Schonert-Reichl, Kitil, & Hanson-Peterson, 2017). Universities and colleges must also do a better job of including SEL training in pre-service teacher programs. SEL training should also be embedded in continuing education requirements for faculty and educators. States should also integrate SEL competencies into teacher preparation requirements to better prepare all teachers to understand their own social and emotional competencies and help students to develop their own.

As the knowledge base on effective SEL programming grows, schools and districts should also work to make research-based teaching strategies more available to teachers.

Support State SEL competency benchmarks backed by funding and resources for full implementation.

More than three in five teachers (62 percent) and nearly three-quarters of principals (73 percent) say they believe the development of SEL skills should be explicitly stated in state education standards. Now is the time for state leaders to heed these calls to create state social and emotional competency benchmarks.

State SEL benchmarks should be used as a high-impact lever to implement many of the above policy recommendations. Specifically, benchmarks can articulate a clear vision of the importance of SEL to districts and schools, inform best practices and

continuous learning on integrating SEL into academic curriculum, provide vital context to universities on how to integrate SEL training into pre-service teacher training programs, guide professional development for teachers and administrators, and provide a framework for developing appropriate SEL assessment tools. Unlike academic standards, however, it is important that SEL competency benchmarks are used exclusively to improve teaching and learning. It is also critical that state SEL competency benchmarks be backed up by funding and a strong state-level infrastructure for supporting schools and districts as they navigate SEL implementation, pre-service and professional development, and the creation of valid and reliable SEL assessments.[7]

Advance a robust SEL research agenda – and make sure young people are included.

New research continues to affirm the power of SEL to improve a host of youth success indicators. Yet, continued research is needed to improve SEL assessments and inform implementation and practice of SEL programming. These efforts are critical to providing school and district leaders with the knowledge and resources they need to implement high-quality programming, integrate SEL into classrooms, and evaluate its impacts. Research should also guide teacher training and professional development to ensure educators are being adequately prepared to develop students' social and emotional competencies. The voices of young people should also continue to be included in the research agenda, and students should be considered an integral part of creating valid assessment tools to ensure continued improvement of SEL data collection and reporting.

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7   At the time of this report release, all 50 states currently have preschool competencies for SEL, seven states have PreK-early elementary SEL competencies, and by the end of 2017, eight states have articulated SEL competencies through the 12th grade.

Conclusion

Throughout our history, young people have used their voice and energy to create movements and change the course of our nation, but we still often make critical decisions for them without including them in the conversation. Given all that teenagers and young adults must contend with today – the overwhelming nature of social media, increased mental health problems, bullying and harassment, academic pressure, high rates of poverty, racial and ethnic prejudice, and in many places, exposure to violence in their schools and communities – it is all the more important to listen to them and recognize the challenges they face.

This survey, along with others, puts the voice of young people front and center, so that we can better understand their lived experiences and what they need to be fully engaged in high school. Much like previous surveys of young people, what this report shows are that American high schools still have room to grow in order to better serve students' academic and developmental needs, and like surveys of educators and administrators on SEL, it confirms that teenagers and young adults also see the tremendous value of emphasizing social and emotional development in their schools. Despite the positive reactions to SEL, few schools are meeting their students' needs and fostering the SEL competencies that can help them build better relationships, deal with stress, handle difficult situations, learn how to empathize with others, and become more engaged and motivated learners. In the schools that are already delivering strong SEL, however, students are reporting better outcomes on academic, social, and emotional factors across the board, which means their chances for success after high school are also improved. Given the need for more talent to meet the social, economic and civic challenges of this century, we don't have a moment to lose in integrating the social, emotional and academic development of children and youth in our nation's schools.

Acknowledgements

CASEL, together with Civic and Hart Research Associates, would like to give special thanks to everyone who contributed to this report. Specifically, we would like to thank each of the following: the CASEL Board, Staff, and collaborators, especially Karen Niemi, President & CEO; Roger Weissberg, Chief Knowledge Officer and Tim Shriver, Board Chair.

We would also like to give a very warm thank you to The Allstate Foundation for generously supporting the development of the youth survey and the report.

We are also grateful for the hard work and dedication of the team at Hart Research Associates: Geoff Garin, President; Corrie Hunt, Senior Vice President; and Sandra Markowitz, Assistant Analyst.

CASEL, together with Civic and Hart Associates, would also like to thank the more than 1,300 young people who participated in the national survey and individual interviews. They shared their thoughts and reflections with honesty and integrity.

Appendix I Methodology

From February to June 2018, youth and young adults were asked to participate in a mixed-methods research study to understand their experience in high school and perceptions and experience with social and emotional learning in school. From February 20 to March 1, 2018, in-depth interviews were conducted with youth and young adults in non-SEL schools including: 11 middle school students, 10 current high school students, and 10 recent high school graduates. From March 26 to April 20, 2018, additional in-depth interviews were conducted with 17 high school students currently enrolled in schools that focus on social and emotional learning. These students were asked the same set of questions as the first groups of students, but given their experience with social and emotional learning, these interviews were also used to guide the development of the survey instrument to help ensure appropriate SEL language was used. From May 23 to June 1, 2018, the online quantitative survey was conducted with 800 current high school students (age 14 to 19) and 500 post-high school young adults (age 16 to 22).
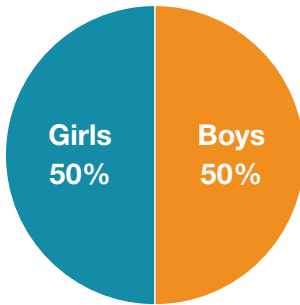
◾ Overview of the research

PHASE 1

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH
among youth and young adults

In-depth interviews with youth and young adults in non-SEL schools including:

• 11 middle school students

• 10 current high school students

• 10 recent high school graduates

Conducted February 20 to March 1, 2018

PHASE 2

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH
among youth in SEL high schools

In-depth interviews with high school students currently enrolled in schools that focus on social and emotional learning:

• 17 high school students in SEL schools

Conducted March 26 to April 20, 2018

PHASE 3

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH
among youth and young adults

Online quantitative survey with 1,300 youth and young adults nationwide, including:

• 800 current high school students, age 14 to 19

• 500 young adults post-high school, age 16 to 22

Conducted May 23 to June 1, 2018

◾ Qualitative: Profile of IDI Participants *(48 interviews total)*

Gender

Female 25

Male 23

Grade

High school graduates 10

Middle school students 11

High school students 27

Parents Education

No college grads 24

One/both college grads 24

Race

White 19

African American 13

Hispanic 11

Other 5
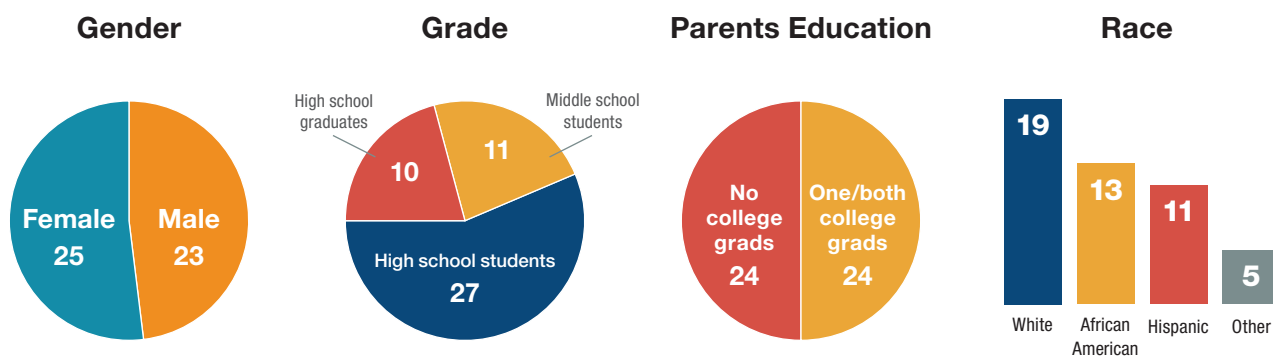
■ Quantitative: Profile of High School Students Sample *(800 interviews)*

Gender

Girls 50%
Boys 50%
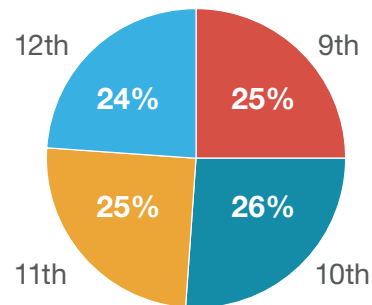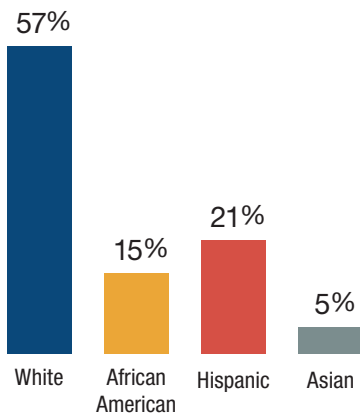
Grade

12th 24%
9th 25%
11th 25%
10th 26%

Race

57% White
15% African American
21% Hispanic
5% Asian

Family Income

Below Average **28%** | Average **39%** | Above Average **32%**

Parents' College Education

One/both college grads **65%** | No grads **32%**

Area Type

City **40%** | Suburb **38%** | **22%** Small Town/Rural

High School Type

Other 15%
Regular public school 85%

High School Size

<500 students 30%
1,000+ students 37%
500-1,000 students 24%

Absent

Never 18%
12% Once a week/ more often
12% A few times a month
A few times a year 58%

Last Report Card

Mostly A's — 29%
A's and B's — 41%
Mostly B's — 13%
C's/worse — 16%
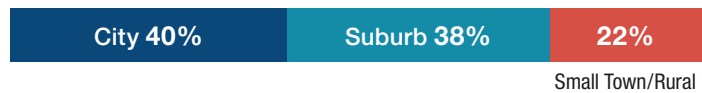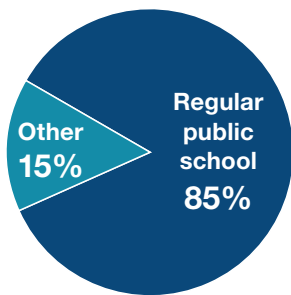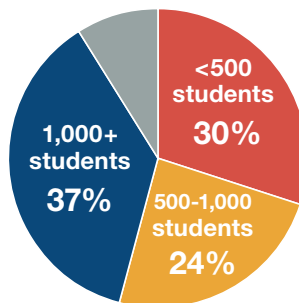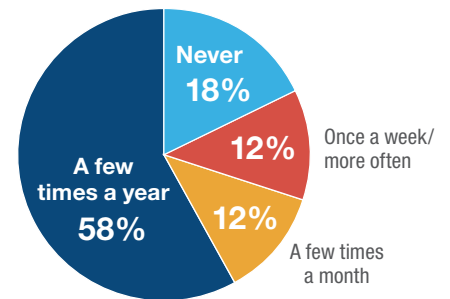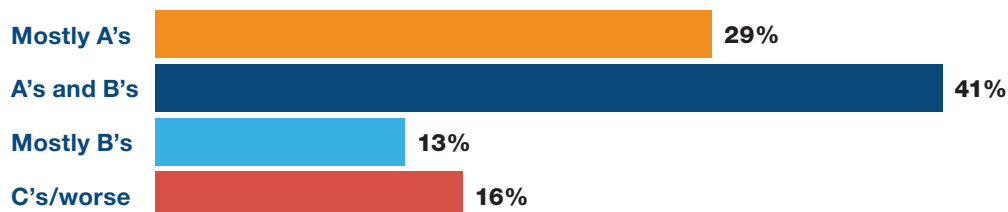
Quantitative: Profile of Post-High School Young Adults Sample *(500 interviews)*

Gender
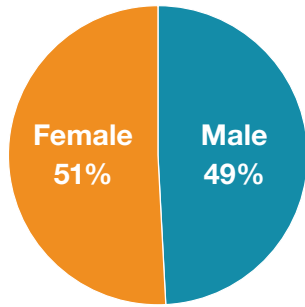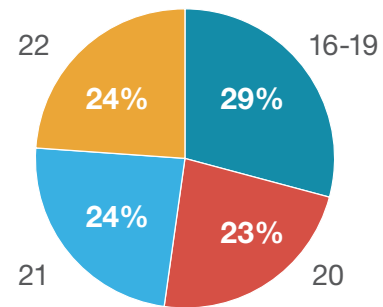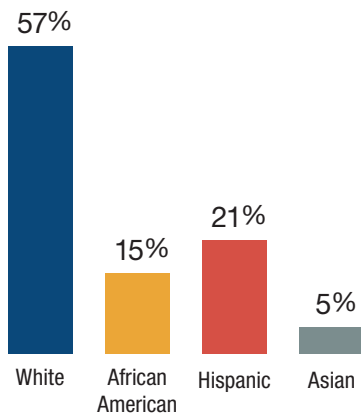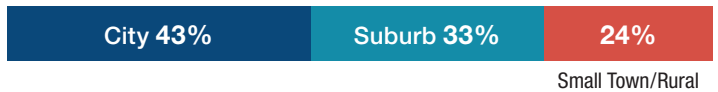
- Female 51%
- Male 49%

Age

- 16-19 29%
- 20 23%
- 21 24%
- 22 24%

Race

- White 57%
- African American 15%
- Hispanic 21%
- Asian 5%

Family Income

| Below Average 34% | Average 41% | Above Average 25% |

Parents' College Education

| One/both college grads 60% | No grads 35% |

Area Type

| City 43% | Suburb 33% | 24% Small Town/Rural |

High School Type

- Regular public school 85%
- Other 15%

High School Size

- <500 students 28%
- 500-1,000 students 22%
- 1,000+ students 41%

Job During High School

- Had job 42%
- Had coop/internship 17%
- Had Neither 46%

Current Enrollment

Graduated from high school 94%

Post-HS Edu.
- Not enrolled 37%
- Training/vocational/community college 25%
- Four-year college/graduate school 38%
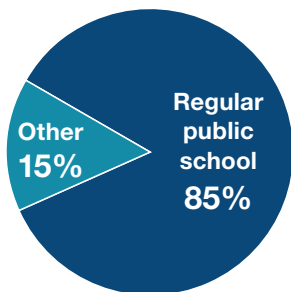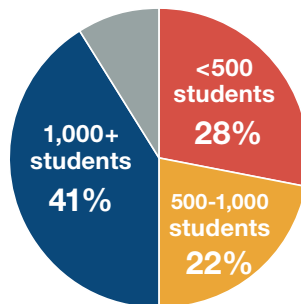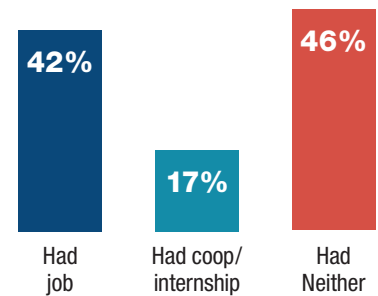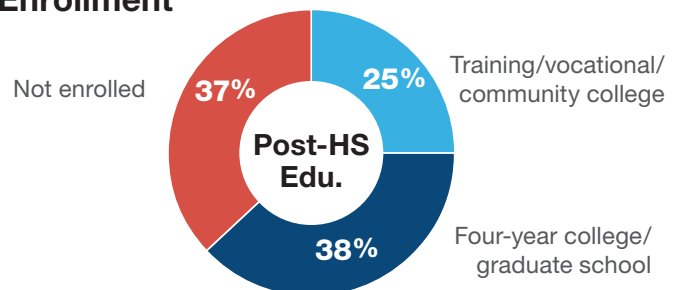
Appendix II
CASEL's Collaborating Districts Initiative

In 2011, CASEL embarked on an effort to put research into action and launched the first-of-its kind Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI) — a partnership between CASEL, the American Institute for Research (AIR), and initially eight large school districts across the country: Anchorage, AK; Austin, TX; Chicago, IL; Cleveland, OH; Nashville, TN; Oakland, CA; Sacramento, CA; and Washoe County, NV. Today, with several districts subsequently joining the collaborative, the CDI now includes 21 school districts representing more than 1.7 million students in some of the nation's most geographically, economically, and ethnically diverse communities.

The CDI was built on the belief that positive student outcomes rely on improving classrooms and schools, which in turn depend on improving district-wide capacities to bring SEL to all students. The CDI attempts to expand the focus of SEL implementation from individual schools to also include entire districts to align SEL with district priorities, integrate it with academic instruction, make it an essential piece of a child's education, and achieve two complimentary goals:

1. To develop districts' capacities to plan, implement, and monitor systemic changes that will impact schools and classrooms in ways that enhance students' social-emotional development and academic performance; and

2. To document lessons learned that can inform future efforts to support systemic SEL implementation in districts across the country.

To aid districts' attempting to implement system-wide SEL, CASEL created the following comprehensive district Theory of Action:

Build foundational support and plan.
- Develop a shared vision and plan for SEL.
- Promote collaboration among school and district leaders around SEL, academics, and equity.
- Communicate SEL as a district priority.
- Align resources for SEL.

Strengthen adult SEL competencies and capacity.
- Develop central office expertise.
- Design and implement a professional learning program for SEL.
- Strengthen adult social-emotional competence.
- Promote equitable learning environments.

Promote SEL for students.
- Adopt and implement PreK-12 SEL standards or guidelines.
- Adopt and implement evidence-based programs and practices.
- Develop and strengthen family and community partnerships.
- Integrate SEL with academics, district priorities, and policies.

Use data for continuous improvement.
- Planning for improvement (Plan).
- Documenting and assessing (Do).
- Data reporting and reflecting (Study).
- Action planning and sharing (Act).

This report highlights student stories from three different CDI districts. For more on the Collaborating Districts Initiative, please visit www.casel.org/cdi-results

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