Bridgeport Public Schools Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Partnership
May 2018 Community Update
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The Bridgeport Public Schools Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Partnership with Yale University and Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (BCAC) was launched in 2013 to build the social and emotional skills of Bridgeport Public Schools administrators, teachers, staff, students, and their families. Specifically, the partnership aims to: a) promote learning, healthy interpersonal relationships and sound decision-making; b) foster safe, supportive, and respectful classrooms and schools; c) utilize measures relevant to these goals that can be used to measure progress, gauge impact and guide improvements; and d) create a model for school improvement that actively engages all stakeholders.

Project Partners

Bridgeport Public Schools (BPS) is a large urban district that serves approximately 22,000 students in 38 schools (30 elementary/middle schools and 8 high schools). The district serves an ethnically diverse student population (48% Hispanic/Latino, 35% Black/African American, 13% White, 5% other)[1].

Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence (YCEI) is the developer of the RULER Approach to social and emotional learning. YCEI is responsible for the implementation of RULER and capacity-building in BPS.

The Consultation Center (TCC) is a collaborative endeavor of the Yale School of Medicine, Connecticut Mental Health Center, and The Consultation Center, Inc., that focuses on community-based research, evaluation and scholarship. Staff from TCC are responsible for evaluation of RULER and capacity-building in BPS.

Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (BCAC) at LifeBridge Community Services works to improve the well-being of Bridgeport's children and families through research, education, advocacy, and mobilization. BCAC supports the implementation of RULER and Restorative Practices in BPS and the engagement of families and community partners.

Funders include the Tauck Family Foundation, Tudor Foundation, New Profit, Inc., Seedlings Foundation, Safe Schools Healthy Students, Lone Pine Foundation, The Goodnow Fund, Bigelow Tea, NoVo Foundation and an anonymous donor.

Other Partners include Cooperative Education Services (C.E.S.), United Way of Coastal Fairfield County/Bridgeport Prospers, All Our Kin, Regional Youth Adult Social Action Partnership (RYASAP), and Education First.

Background on Bridgeport Public Schools

Bridgeport's median household income of $43,137 places it among the poorest cities in Connecticut[2] and the school district is one of the lowest performing academically[3]. In 2013-2014, the BPS rates of chronic absenteeism and suspensions were more than double the statewide rates[4]. In 2014, after over two years of turbulence and transition in the district, the Bridgeport Board of Education hired Interim Superintendent Fran Rabinowitz to lead a district-wide improvement effort in the Bridgeport Public Schools. A veteran Connecticut educator and administrator with experience at the state and local level, Superintendent Rabinowitz led BPS

stakeholders in developing a three-year District Improvement Plan that emphasized academic excellence, excellent leadership, and the emotional well-being of the school community.

Figure 1: Five core competencies defined in the CASEL Framework for Systemic Social and Emotional Learning.

The 2014-2017 District Improvement Plan was consistent with research showing that emotions drive attention, memory, and learning; decision making and judgment; relationship quality; physical and mental health; and everyday effectiveness[5]. It also acknowledged that educational transformation relies on collaboration among a diverse group of partners and funders, as well as the engagement of school leaders, teachers, students, families and community groups to drive improvement. Finally, the plan emphasized the importance of using data to improve instructional practice and student outcomes.

In late 2016, the district hired Dr. Aresta Johnson as Bridgeport's next superintendent. Under Dr. Johnson's leadership, the district initiated a strategic planning process that led to the creation of the district's Strategic Plan for 2017-2020, which includes the following:

Vision: Bridgeport Public Schools envisions a culturally responsive, high-performing learning environment where students thrive academically, socially, emotionally and civically.

Mission: We model excellence in equity in education for every child at every level by focusing on quality instruction and providing efficient systems and structures in schools to sustain a culture committed to success.

Foundational Pillars: Student Achievement; Curriculum and Instruction; Recruitment and Retention; and Parent, Family and Community Engagement.

Like the 2014-2017 district improvement plan, the 2017-2020 strategic plan includes an emphasis on social and emotional learning, as well as an explicit focus on equity and culturally responsive learning environments.

What is Social and Emotional Learning?

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is 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.[6] A wide variety of SEL programs for schools seek to build these skills in students, alongside traditional academic skills.

Background on the RULER Approach to Social & Emotional Learning

The BPS SEL initiative began with the introduction of RULER, an evidence-based approach designed to enhance emotional intelligence in educators and students. RULER stands for five key skills related to emotional intelligence: Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing, and Regulating emotions. The RULER approach relies on first teaching principals, teachers, and school staff to appreciate the significance of their own and their students' emotions; to value the skills of recognizing, understanding, and managing emotions; to learn and model these skills; and to support, teach, and encourage students to develop these skills. RULER is designed to be part of the everyday routine of teaching and learning; it is infused into the curriculum, not taught as a separate lesson or set of activities. Rigorous evaluations of RULER have shown that with RULER training, classroom climates improved, teachers taught more effectively, and students were more engaged in learning and performed better.[7]

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Background on Restorative Practices

Restorative Practices (RP) became a part of the BPS SEL initiative after RULER was introduced from pre-kindergarten through grade 12. RP is an approach that aims to build healthy communities and reinforce positive school climate through building relationships and emphasizing the value of all individuals within the community. When a mistake, wrongdoing, or conflict occurs, RP utilizes individualized responses that aim to repair harm and rebuild relationships. RP includes a variety of relationship-building techniques along a continuum, ranging from focusing on individuals to school-wide culture. The use of RP aims to improve interpersonal interactions by helping stakeholders develop effective ways of recognizing the impact that an individual's actions has on others and utilizing all community members as resources.[8]
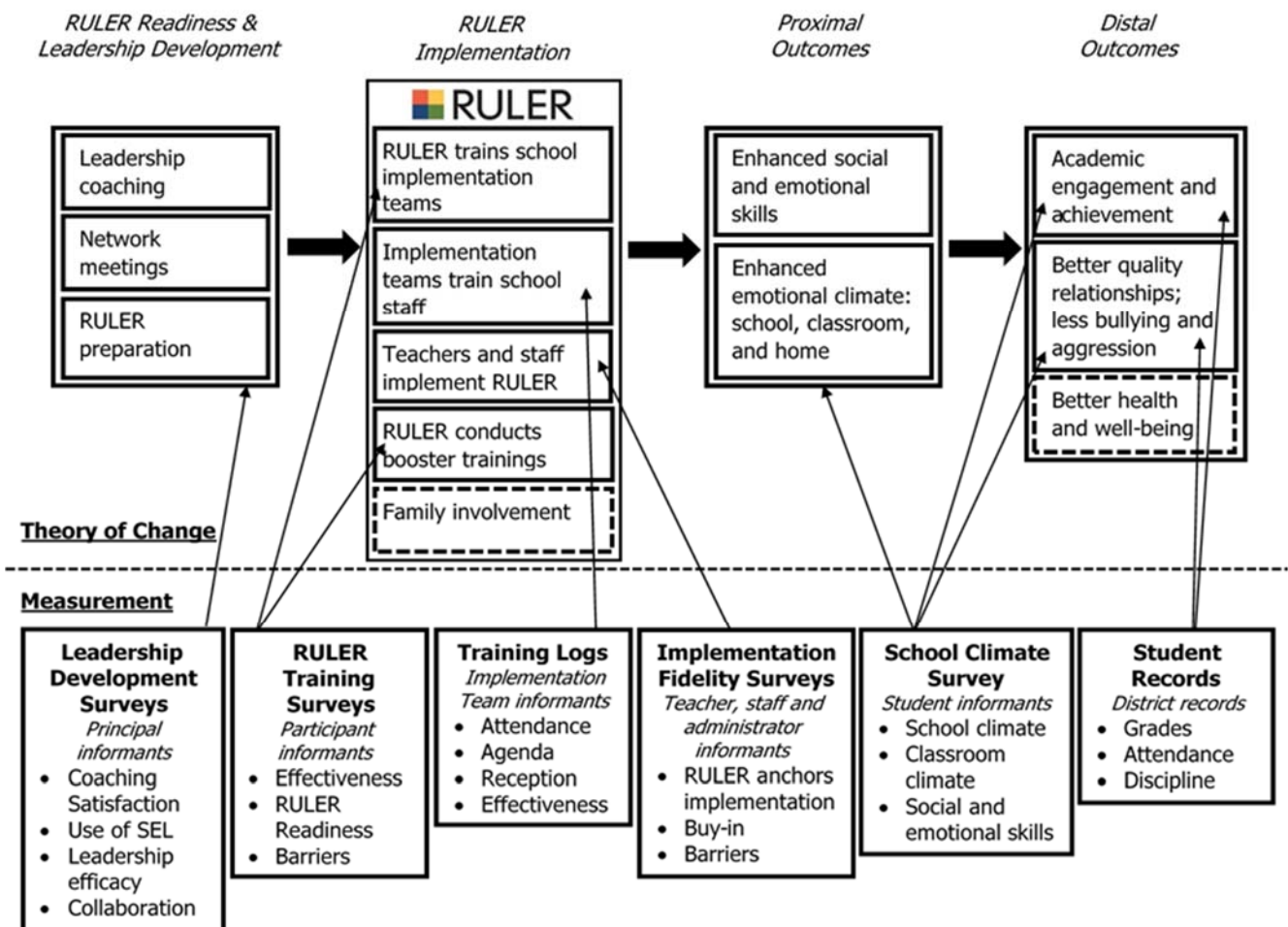
SEL Initiative Timeline

Year 1 (2013-2014): Strategic Planning & Capacity Building
- RULER pilot at Wilbur Cross school
- Strategic planning with Superintendent's office regarding capacity-building and evaluation of SEL initiative
- Establishment of SEL Task Force and selection of SEL Facilitators
- First Leadership Institute for BPS leaders (approximately 90 district and school administrators)

Year 2 (2014-2015): Launch SEL District-wide at Leadership Level
- Convocation ceremony with address from director of Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence (over 4000 district and school employees)
- SEL co-facilitators received RULER training
- Launched SEL initiative district-wide including integration of SEL into district and school improvement plans

Figure 2: Theory of Change and Measured Indicators for Yale-BPS Social and Emotional Learning Partnership.

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- Established quarterly SEL Task Force meetings that include district, Yale and community representatives
- All 41 BPS principals participated in Leadership coaching and network meetings
- Established school SEL teams at 34 schools (29 K-8 schools and 5 high schools)
- Provided initial *RULER Anchors of Emotional Intelligence* training for 29 K-8 SEL teams
- Evaluated leadership development program and collected baseline data on school climate
- Second Leadership Institute for BPS leaders

Year 3 (2015-2016): Integrate SEL into all Schools
- Convocation ceremony with address from director of Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence
- Provided *RULER for Families* training for BPS personnel and community partners (approx. 20 individuals)
- Began family and community engagement and training
- SEL co-facilitators continued to provide training and support for 29 K-8 SEL teams
- K-8 SEL teams led RULER Anchors training at all 29 K-8 schools in district
- K-8 schools began school-wide adoption of RULER Anchors (approx. 16,000 students)
- Provided *High School RULER* training for 5 high school SEL teams; High School RULER pilot begins
- Continued data collection and analysis for evaluation and continuous improvement, including on school climate
- Third Leadership Institute for BPS leaders

Year 4 (2016-2017): Continue Implementation & Evaluation
- Convocation ceremony with focus on social and emotional learning
- Provided additional RULER for Families training for BPS personnel and community partners
- Trained all K-8 school SEL teams in RULER Feeling Words Curriculum
- K-8 school SEL teams led RULER Feeling Words Curriculum training at all 29 K-8 schools
- K-8 schools began implementation of *Feeling Words Curriculum*
- Expanded implementation of High School RULER
- Continued to engage families and community partners in RULER
- Established an Out-of-School Suspension Reduction Task Force and chose four BPS schools to pilot Restorative Practices in conjunction with RULER
- Continued data collection and analysis for evaluation and continuous improvement, including on school climate
- Fourth Leadership Institute for BPS leaders

Year 5 (2017-2018): Sustain Implementation & Evaluation
- Convocation with focus on social and emotional learning
- Provided *Early Childhood RULER* training for BPS preschool teachers
- Hired full-time SEL Coordinator
- Remaining schools invited to participate in Restorative Practices training and to implement Restorative Practices at their schools
- Continued to engage families and community partners in SEL via community forums
- Adopted RULER Feeling Words Curriculum school-wide at K-8 schools
- Expanded implementation of High School RULER
- Revised BPS Code of Conduct to shift from a punitive approach to a restorative approach
- Continued data collection and analysis for evaluation and continuous improvement, including on school climate
- Identified additional RULER implementation training and sustainability plan beyond 2018

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Implementation Successes to Date

- All forty-one (41) principals in Bridgeport Public Schools participated in leadership development coaching during 2014-2015. Of these individuals, thirty-three (33; 80%) were still BPS school leaders in 2017-2018.
- Principals generally reported high levels of satisfaction with the Leadership Development program, particularly the individual coaching sessions. Many principals reported that the program supported them as leaders and provided tools that they could use in their role.
- SEL Teams from all 29 K-8 schools received RULER Anchors training in 2015 and launched RULER Anchors training for their colleagues in 2015-2016.
- SEL teams from all K-8 schools received RULER Feeling Words Curriculum training in the fall of 2016 and introduced their colleagues to the Feeling Words Curriculum in 2016-2017.
- During their 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 visits to the 29 K-8 schools, the SEL coordinators noted increasing enthusiasm about RULER among teachers and students, and an increasing level of implementation.
- High School SEL teams at all 5 high schools received training in 2016-2017 and began to pilot RULER.
- All schools hosted one or more RULER or SEL event for families in 2017-2018.
- By the end of 2017-2018, over 300 educators and community members will have participated in Restorative Practices training.

Evaluation Findings: RULER Implementation and Student Outcomes

Overall Evaluation Goals

The SEL evaluation, led by The Consultation Center at Yale University, consists of the following four goals.

1. Establish efficient data collection and reporting procedures that have low cost, low burden, and high utility.
2. Provide useful, real-time data for informing SEL implementation and improvement of SEL practices in BPS.
3. Examine the association of school climate and students' SEL skills with student outcomes.
4. **Examine the association of RULER implementation with improvements in school climate, students' SEL skills, and student outcomes.**

The October 2016 community report focuses on Goals 1, 2, and 3, whereas this report focuses on Goal 4.

Outcome Areas

- Social and emotional skills
- School and classroom climate
- Academic performance
- Student attendance and suspensions

Data Sources

- SEL Logs: completed monthly by SEL teams
- SEL Implementation Survey: completed 2-3 times per year by administrators, teachers, and other staff members
- School Climate Survey: completed annually by students in grades 3-8
  - Student perceptions of school climate
  - Self-reported SEL skills
- District Administrative Data
  - De-identified student data (demographics, attendance, year-end grades, and suspensions)

Figure 3: Data Sources and Outcome Areas for the SEL Evaluation
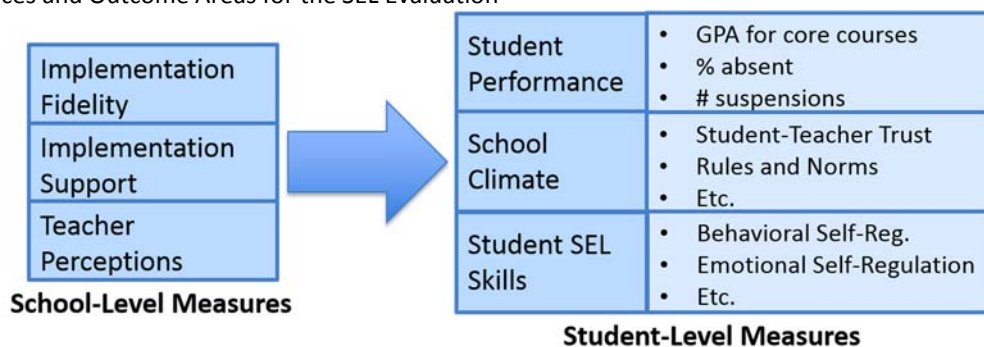
Data Analytic Approach

Step 1: In consultation with YCEI, we selected items from the May 2017 RULER/SEL Implementation Survey that capture the most important aspects of RULER implementation: *Implementation Fidelity, Implementation Support,* and *Teacher Perceptions*.

Step: 2: We used a statistical modeling technique called confirmatory factor analysis to assess how well the survey data fit the statistical models consisting of domains of Implementation Fidelity, Implementation Support, and Teacher Perceptions.

Step 3: We created school-level values for each of the three implementation aspects/domains based on the analyses in Step 2.

Step 4: We assigned values for each implementation domain to individual students, based on their school assignment at the end of the 2016-2017 school year.

Step 5: Using implementation values from the May 2017 RULER/SEL survey as predictors, we analyzed how these indicators were associated with three outcome areas: *Student Performance* (measured with administrative data), *Student SEL Skills* (self-reported by students), and *School Climate* (reported by students).

Implementation Items

Implementation Fidelity
1. Number of anchor tools introduced to students in classroom
2. How comfortable are you teaching RULER lessons to your students?
3. How effectively do you think you can teach the RULER lessons to your students?
4. In the past week, how often have students used the Mood Meter in your classroom?
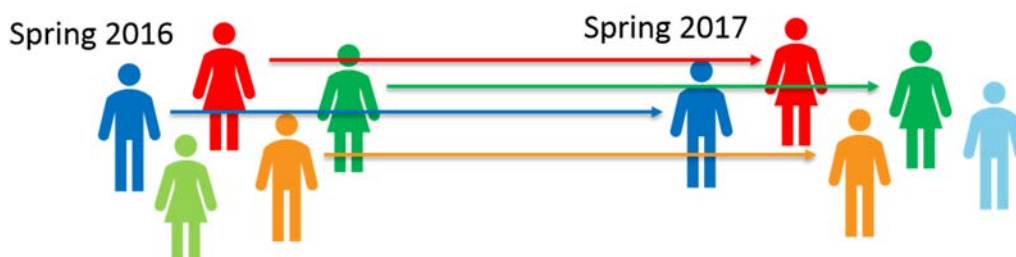
Implementation Support
1. There is someone at our school who actively encourages teachers to use RULER.
2. One or more members of my school's RULER team provides me with useful feedback or support.
3. How effective is the training led by the school's RULER team in terms of preparing you to implement RULER in your classroom?

Teacher Perceptions
1. How well does RULER integrate with the general curriculum?
2. How well does RULER meet the needs of most or all of your students?
3. To date, how helpful do you think RULER has been in terms of teaching practical social and emotional skills

Analytical Considerations

- We used a data analytic technique that accounted for the grouping of students in schools (multi-level modeling).
- We excluded students who were not at the same school at the two timepoints.
- We adjusted student outcomes for values at the end of the previous year.
- We have not yet examined how results varied by demographic characteristics, specifically gender, race/ethnicity, English learner status, or special education status.

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Preliminary Results

A summary of results is presented in Tables 1 through 3 below, with rows containing implementation domains and columns containing student outcomes. In the boxes, "+" indicates a positive correlation, meaning that as implementation increases so does the corresponding student outcome. Conversely, "−" indicates a negative correlation, meaning that students' outcomes decrease with an increase in implementation. Green boxes indicate that correlations occur in the expected/favorable direction and yellow boxes indicate counterintuitive effects.

Given the challenge of measuring links between SEL implementation and student outcomes, it is meaningful that our analyses detected some associations. Of the implementation measures we examined, *implementation fidelity* was most consistently associated with positive student outcomes. Specifically, implementation fidelity is associated with one out of three SEL domains (emotional regulation—see table 2) and five out of seven school climate domains (student-teacher trust, rules and norms, emotional climate, personal safety, and classroom behavior—see table 3.) There were no statistically significant correlations between implementation fidelity and academic outcomes, although there was a correlation between *implementation support* and absences, with lower rates of absenteeism for students at schools with stronger implementation support (see table 1).

Our analyses also produced some counterintuitive results involving implementation support and *teacher perceptions*. For example, the analyses indicate higher rates of absenteeism for students at schools with more favorable teacher perceptions about RULER. These results may indicate interaction effects with implementation fidelity. In other words, the effects of teachers' perceptions of RULER on student outcomes may depend on how well teachers are implementing RULER.

Table 1: Implementation (Fidelity, Support, and Teacher Perceptions) Predicting Grades, Absences, and Suspensions

	GPA		% Absent		Any OSS/ISS	
Grade level	3-5	6-8	3-5	6-8	3-5	6-8
Fidelity						
Support			−	−		
Percep.			+	+		
n	1926	2072	1951	2093	1951	2093

Table 2: Implementation (Fidelity, Support, and Teacher Perceptions) Predicting SEL Skills

	Behavioral Self-Regulation		Emotion Regulation		Social Competence
Grade level	3-5	6-8	3-5	6-8	6-8
Fidelity			+		
Support					
Percep.					
n	1939	2067	1930	2076	1259

Table 3: Implementation (Fidelity, Support, and Teacher Perceptions) Predicting School Climate

	Student-Teacher Trust		Rules and Norms		Emotional Climate		Personal Safety	School Safety	PEER Support		Academic Engagement	
Grade level	3-5	6-8	3-5	6-8	3-5	6-8	6-8	6-8	3-5	6-8	3-5	6-8
Fidelity		+		+	+		+		+			
Support					−							
Percep.										−		
n	1941	2081	1946	2085	1938	2067	2083	1260	1941	2080	1939	2058

Caveats

- The small school-level sample size only allows us to statistically detect relatively large effects. We may be missing some smaller effects.
- We don't know how sensitive the outcome measures are to interventions like RULER. It's possible that more sensitive measures would detect effects not captured in here.

- The SEL measures used in this evaluation are self-reported by students, not direct measures of students' skills.
- Results are **correlational, not causal**. Even when a correlation between RULER implementation and a specific outcome is present, the absence of a comparison/control group makes it impossible to say whether RULER implementation caused the outcome.

Next Steps

- As described above, these analyses did not examine how results varied by demographic characteristics. Future analyses will control for gender, race/ethnicity, English language learner status, or special education status to examine group differences in the correlation between RULER implementation and student outcomes.
- These analyses examine data from the 2016-2017 school year, correcting for each individual student's outcomes at the close of the 2015-2016 school year. We plan to repeat these analyses with data from the 2017-2018 school year, when it becomes available.

Looking Forward

Over the past five years, the BPS SEL Partnership with Yale University and Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition has helped the district to build a strong foundation in the area of social and emotional learning. The district adopted RULER and Restorative Practices in an effort to provide students, teachers, administrators and parents with tools to help them strengthen their interpersonal skills and better cope with stressors. Evaluation data and anecdotal evidence indicate that the strength of RULER implementation varies among schools, and many schools are still in the early stages of implementing Restorative Practices. Ongoing professional development and capacity-building will be essential to the full implementation and long-term sustainability of these approaches, especially in a district that sees a high rate of teacher turnover.

With regard to discipline, the district is working to shift from a punitive approach to a restorative mindset. As part of its strategic efforts to reduce suspension rates, BPS is reexamining its disciplinary policies and revising its code of conduct ahead of the 2018-2019 school year. Although the focus on academic skills remains a top priority for BPS, an increasing number of stakeholders are calling for schools to focus on SEL skills as a way of supporting academic outcomes and other critical life skills. Over the coming years, the partnership plans to engage more community partners in its efforts to provide tools and resources that support social and emotional learning for the students, teachers, staff, administrators, and families of Bridgeport.

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Where to Find More Information about this Evaluation

This report was designed to provide a summary of some of the key findings from this evaluation. Additional information about the SEL/RULER evaluation can be found on Open Science Framework by visiting https://osf.io/nwzrs/.

Acknowledgements

The BPS Social and Emotional Learning Partnership has been made possible by the generous financial support of:

as well as Bigelow Tea, Lone Pine Foundation, and an anonymous donor.

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[1] Based on 2017-2018 student counts by race/ethnicity for Bridgeport School District, according to Edsight.ct.gov.

[2] Based on 2012-2016 median household income values, Bridgeport is the seventh poorest city in Connecticut. Data from the American Community Survey via data.ctdata.org.

[3] In 2016-2017, 23.9% of grade 3 students and 23.8% of grade 8 students met or exceeded the standard on the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium year-end tests in English Language Arts, compared to 51.8% and 53.7%, respectively, at the state level. Data from the Connecticut State Department of Education via data.ctdata.org.

[4] In 2013-2014, 20.3% percent of BPS students were chronically absent (missed 10% or more of the days that they were enrolled in the district), compared to 10.7% of Connecticut students. In the same period, 8.0% of BPS elementary school students (grades K-5), 21.8% of middle school students (grades 6-8) and 29.6% of high school students had been suspended at least once, compared to statewide averages of 3.0%, 10.1% and 12.3%, respectively. Data from the Connecticut State Department of Education via data.ctdata.org.

[5] Durlak, J. A., Domitrovich, C., Weissberg, R. P., & Gullotta, T. (2015). Handbook of social and emotional learning: Research and practice. Guilford Publications.

[6] CASEL: Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, http://www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning

[7] For evaluation studies of RULER please visit: http://ei.yale.edu/evidence/

[8] Wachtel, T. Defining Restorative. International Institute of Restorative Practices. https://www.iirp.edu/what-we-do/defining-restorative/