ABOUT THE SEAL INITIATIVE

The development of noncognitive skills through Social, Emotional and Academic Learning (SEAL) plays a vital role in the lifelong success of youth. Yet, few education systems are equipped to help students develop these skills.

Denver is addressing this by building the capacity of schools and youth-serving programs to integrate SEAL into their organizational structures, staff practices and goals for youth. In 2017, the Wallace Foundation selected Denver as one of six communities to implement the Partnerships for Social Emotional Learning Initiative (PSELI) with the goal of better understanding how day-school and out-of-school time (OST) can be aligned to enhance adult social emotional practices and youth experiences.

Through this partnership, locally known as the SEAL Initiative, staff from the Denver Afterschool Alliance (DAA) and Denver Public Schools (DPS) formed a systems-level leadership team to guide the initiative’s vision and strategic operations. During its first phase, the initiative is being implemented at six DPS elementary schools that have an established partnership with a comprehensive afterschool provider. Providers include: Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Denver, DPS Department of Extended Learning and Community Schools (Discovery Link), the YMCA of Metro Denver, and Denver Parks and Recreation.

Data. The Wallace Foundation selected the RAND Corporation and xSEL Labs as technical assistance partners to support the measurement and tracking of the PSELI Initiative’s development.

RAND administers an annual staff survey to all day-school and OST staff members to gauge their perceptions of the SEAL work happening in their community. RAND also uses a validated observational tool to assess the quality of day-school and OST climates, as well as the quality of their SEL instruction. Finally, xSEL Labs administers the SELweb to K through fifth-grade grade students, which measures their self-reported competencies as well as their demonstration of SEAL skills. All data presented in this report comes from these tools.
SEAL COMMUNITIES

The six elementary schools and OST partners selected to participate in Phase I serve youth in communities with relatively limited opportunities so that consistent delivery of high-quality SEAL practices can help address those opportunity gaps.

2019 Child Well-Being Index

SEAL INITIATIVE: SUMMARY OF YEAR 2 RESULTS

This report reflects on results from the SEAL Initiative’s second year of implementation (2018-2019), and it suggests areas of opportunity as the program moves forward. The four findings:

1. **A Vision Is Coming Together:** Participating schools integrated the SEAL vision into their culture, and they established collaborative systems for sharing practices between day-school and OST programs.

2. **Professional Learning Leads to Impact:** Professional learning helped staff deliver high-quality SEAL practices, although there were opportunities to enhance how professional learning addressed staff needs.

3. **Staff Confidence & Instruction Is Improving:** Staff shifted how they perceived SEAL and felt empowered to help students develop these skills. As a result, staff more consistently delivered the high-quality practices that help youth thrive.

4. **Students Are Learning SEAL Skills:** Since fall 2017, staff reported an increase in students expressing and demonstrating SEAL competencies, suggesting that youth are internalizing these skills.
A VISION IS COMING TOGETHER

At the end of Year 2, Phase 1 sites have integrated the SEAL vision into their culture. Collaborative systems between day-school and OST programs were established, setting a strong foundation for sharing SEAL practices, and both day-school and OST staff report that their leadership teams support the SEAL vision.

INCREASED COMMITMENT TO SEAL

In Year 2, Phase I sites had a collective commitment to ensuring that SEAL was a part of their site’s culture.

89% of staff said most staff “feel responsible that all students learn”

84% of staff in Year 2 reported having “informal dialogue with colleagues about social and emotional learning”

INCREASED RESPECT AMONGST STAFF

As they worked more closely together, day-school and OST staff developed an increased understanding of and respect for each other’s role and the value they provide.

79% of day-school staff reported that “afterschool staff treat school staff with respect,” up from 70% in 2018

92% of OST staff reported that “day-school staff treat OST staff with respect,” up from 81% in 2018

STRONG IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SEAL VISION

From Year 1 to Year 2, staff reported significant increases in how their school/program built an environment that supports youth’s SEAL skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff reporting their school/program had...</th>
<th>DAY SCHOOL</th>
<th>OST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A vision for academic, social and emotional learning</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>+30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional practices or roadmap for achieving specific student social and emotional learning outcomes</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>+34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A culture that supports the development of children’s social and emotional learning skills</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>+20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LEADERSHIP SUPPORTS THE INITIATIVE

Building a SEAL-rich environment starts with having a supportive leadership team. Nearly all day-school and OST staff reported having collaborative relationships with their leadership teams.

How much do you agree with the following statements about your OST program this school year? (% agree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OST: The OST management and staff collaboratively develop norms and routines that support social and emotional learning</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day-school: School administration and staff collaboratively develop norms and routines that support social and emotional learning</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LOOKING FORWARD: AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY

💡 Sites should continue collecting and using data for the benefit of staff culture and youth experiences. The good news is 95% of OST staff and 69% of day-school staff report using “student input to inform program improvement.”

💡 Leaders should consider how to continually put into action the SEAL vision and roadmap to ensure that children experience its benefits.

💡 All adults should be invested in SEAL and use the approach when interacting with students and each other.

“Teachers see us more often, teachers have an awareness of what we’re doing, so then it creates that pathway, to interact with them.”

– OST Manager
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING LEADS TO IMPACT

The development of “SEAL U,” a professional learning series focused exclusively on SEAL practices, improved how professional learning opportunities were delivered and received by staff. Staff reported it helped them implement high-quality SEAL practices, and they also indicated which topics they need further guidance around in Year 3.

NEARLY ALL STAFF PARTICIPATED IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

SEAL professional learning opportunities reached nearly all day-school and OST staff, increasing the visibility and importance of SEAL.

Staff participating in professional learning about SEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Participation Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2017</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2018</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2019</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“As a new person to the program, what was valuable about professional learning was seeing how emotional learning is integrated throughout the day for students.”

– OST Staff

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IMPACTS HOW STAFF ENGAGE YOUTH

Learning opportunities made a difference in how staff interact with youth and address SEL learning.

92% of staff reported that the professional learning “changed the way I interact with students”

86% of staff reported that the professional learning had “adequately prepared me to address students’ social emotional learning”
LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES ARE IMPROVING

There was a notable increase in the perceived quality of SEAL professional learning opportunities from Year 1 to Year 2, with approximately 9 out of 10 staff reporting a positive experience.

**Overall, my professional development experiences this year have... (% agree)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Been aligned with what I do in my programming</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Included enough time to try new ideas</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been sustained, rather than short-term</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LOOKING FORWARD: AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY

When staff were asked what future professional learning sessions should focus on, the largest needs were around strategies to adapt SEL practices to students from different cultures or linguistic backgrounds (86%) and to students with different learning needs (87%).

Explicit instruction is increasingly important in Year 3, so professional learning should provide staff with opportunities to learn how SEAL skills can be integrated into instructional activities.

For adults to model and practice SEAL skills, Year 3 professional learning opportunities could focus on strategies for staff to build their own SEL skills, which could help address staff burnout and reduce turnover rates.
Staff have shifted how they perceive SEAL and are empowered to help their students develop these skills. As a result, they more consistently delivered the high-quality practices that help youth thrive.

59% "Factors beyond my control have a greater influence on my students’ social and emotional competencies than I do," down from 79% in 2018

13% "There is little I can do to ensure that all my students make significant progress in social and emotional competencies this year," down from 21% in 2018

Fewer staff reported experiencing barriers to working with youth on their SEAL skills.
STAFF CONFIDENCE IS INCREASING
When there are fewer barriers to success, confidence grows. Staff reported feeling more confident that they can help students develop their SEAL skills.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your work with students this year?

(% agree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>2018 (%)</th>
<th>2019 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am good at helping all the students in my classes/programming make significant improvement in social and emotional competencies</td>
<td></td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I try really hard, I can get through to even the most difficult student</td>
<td></td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel confident I can help students develop their social and emotional competencies</td>
<td></td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018 2019</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

QUALITY OF SEL INSTRUCTION IS IMPROVING
As staff confidence grows, the delivery of SEAL-rich practices are strengthened. In Year 2, external researchers from the RAND Corporation observed the quality of SEAL instruction at Phase I sites, and they found that staff are delivering high-quality SEAL instruction. They identified having staff model these skills to students as an area of opportunity for Year 3.

LOOKING FORWARD: AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY

Based on staff feedback, Phase 1 sites teams and coaches can offer deeper supports around how to implement SEL lessons throughout the day.

Student self-awareness was the skill that was most frequently observed in the day-school and OST settings, suggesting that there are opportunities for more intentional explicit instruction of all SEAL skills.

The continuous quality improvement (CQI) process that Phase I teams engage in should monitor observation data to see how SEAL instruction and delivery is improving.
STUDENTS ARE LEARNING SEAL SKILLS

The SEAL Initiative enriches environments where students learn and grow by enhancing systems, structures and adult practices that support SEAL. Ultimately, though, the goal is that these changes make a difference for the youth themselves. Over the past year, day-school and OST staff reported more students demonstrating SEAL skills.

STUDENTS CONTRIBUTING TO POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT

Students at Phase I sites experienced a SEAL-rich climate, and, as a result, they contributed to a positive environment in their day-school and OST programs.

3 in 4

staff said that “Students treat students with respect.”

9 in 10

staff said that “Students in this school care about each other.”

“Students feel more comfortable and they feel like they can talk to me and come to me more. They can share more stuff with me, like what’s going on with them that day. If they had a bad day in class, they can come and tell me.”

– OST staff

MORE STUDENTS ARE DEMONSTRATING SEAL COMPETENCIES

Since the initiative began, staff have reported a notable increase in students demonstrating SEAL skills.

In the past few months, what portion of students display the following competencies most of the time? (Scale is 0-4, where 0 is none and 4 is nearly all.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The ability to regulate emotions and behaviors</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ability to make responsible decisions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have what it takes to be a positive role model</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
STUDENT PERCEPTIONS REVEAL VALUABLE INSIGHTS

While staff reported their perceptions of youth behaviors, it is important to see how youth rate their own SEAL skills. According to the SELweb, which is used to measure student perceptions, kindergarten through third-grade students reported stronger competencies than the PSELI average, while fourth- and fifth-grade students reported slightly lower competencies than the PSELI average.

SELweb also directly assesses youths’ social emotional skills by asking them to solve challenging social problems. On average, kindergarten through third-grade students grew these skills from 2018 to 2019, while fourth- and fifth-grade students performed at an average level, but did not experience growth.

LOOKING FORWARD: AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY

The discrepancy between the self-reported and demonstrated skills of youth in grades K-3 and 4-5 could be the result of when SEAL was implemented at their schools. The SEAL team should explore the reasons behind these differences.

Staff should consider why fourth- and fifth-grade students rated their skills lower in 2019, despite the fact that their performance was about average.

DPS possesses data that is complementary to the SEAL Initiative, including the Whole Child Survey, the Teacher Satisfaction Survey, as well as Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS) data. The SEAL team should consider how these data points have improved at Phase I Sites as a result of the SEAL Initiative.
ABOUT THE YEAR 2 STATUS REPORT

In its first two years, the SEAL Initiative has established a strong foundation. Staff in the six Phase I communities are invested in a shared vision for their programs and feel empowered to support the development of youth.

Moving forward into Year 3, the SEAL team has an opportunity to continue encouraging all staff, including principals and afterschool leaders, to infuse SEAL into their academic instruction and youth interactions. This will create even richer SEAL environments, where youth learn the skills that will benefit them now and in the future.

Read this report to learn how Denver is integrating Social, Emotional and Academic Learning into its day-school and OST programs.