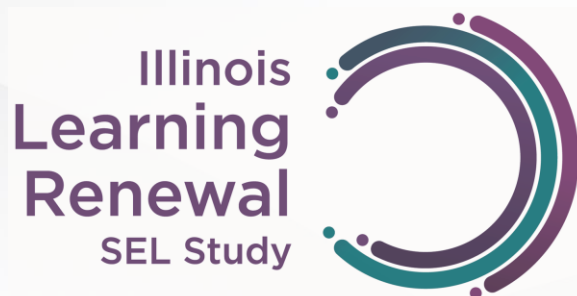


Evaluation of the Learning Renewal— Social Emotional Learning Programs for Supporting Pandemic Recovery with the Illinois State Board of Education

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Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic caused widespread disruptions in Illinois, deeply impacting students' mental health, academic progress, and overall well-being. In response, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) launched the Learning Renewal Initiative in 2021, prioritizing social-emotional learning (SEL) as a foundation for recovery. Backed by \$136.5 million in federal relief funds, the initiative focused on three main strategies: establishing SEL Hubs to provide professional development and resources statewide, expanding the trauma-responsive REACH initiative, and offering flexible Community Partnership Grants to support collaborations between schools and community organizations. These efforts aimed to address urgent needs in student and staff well-being, promote trauma-responsive practices, and build sustainable supports for recovery.

The American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) conducted an independent study of Illinois's Learning Renewal–Social Emotional Learning (SEL) initiative starting in September 2022 through December 2025. This report summarizes findings on the implementation and outcomes of the SEL Hubs, REACH, and Community Partnership Grants, highlighting how these programs were carried out and their effects on students and staff.

Key findings include:

- Illinois's regional infrastructure (SEL Hubs, ROEs, ISCs) was crucial for promoting SEL, enabling collaboration, resource sharing, and improved access to SEL training. Trust between ROEs/ISCs and districts encouraged participation, allowing SEL supports to be tailored to local contexts and needs.
- Nearly three-quarters of Illinois public schools participated in SEL Hub activities in 2022–23 and 2023–24; about one-quarter were highly engaged. In general, schools that most frequently participated in SEL Hub activities tended to have fewer resources and greater needs—even before the pandemic.
- Schools with higher levels of engagement in SEL Hub activities had lower chronic absenteeism rates (about 1% lower) compared to schools that did not engage.
- Engagement with SEL Hubs was linked to modest but statistically significant improvements in mathematics achievement test scores, with gains equaling about 1-3

months of extra learning in math¹ and slightly higher teacher retention rates (about 1% higher). Relationships between SEL Hub engagement and other student outcomes or school climate were mixed; some negative associations likely reflect pre-pandemic differences and challenge.

- Leadership buy-in and community engagement were critical for successful SEL implementation, but barriers included staffing shortages, substitute coverage, and politicization of SEL terminology.
- Implementation costs varied widely due to local flexibility in participation and resource allocation, reflecting local priorities rather than a uniform mandate.

Overall, the study found that Illinois’s Learning Renewal–Social Emotional Learning (SEL) initiative, particularly through the SEL Hubs, reached most schools statewide and prioritized support for those with the greatest needs and fewest resources. Participation with SEL Hubs was associated with lower chronic absenteeism, higher math achievement, and slightly higher teacher retention, though schools with greater participation often faced more challenges at baseline. The report emphasizes that flexible, locally tailored implementation and sustained investment are essential for overcoming persistent capacity barriers and ensuring the long-term success of SEL efforts to support student and educator well-being across Illinois.

¹ Relationships between SEL Hub engagement and math achievement ranged from .03 to .06 standard deviations across school years and levels of engagement. Grade-level equivalency is based on empirical benchmarks from Hill, C. J., Bloom, H. S., Black, A. R., & Lipsey, M. W. (2008). Empirical benchmarks for interpreting effect sizes in research. *Child Development Perspectives*, 2(3), 172–177. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1750-8606.2008.00061.x>

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic created a cascade of disruptions that reached far beyond lost learning, affecting children’s mental health, psychosocial well-being, physical health, and even nutrition. Nationally, the decline in young people’s mental health has been described as one of the most pressing health, social, and economic challenges of our time (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2024; U.S. Surgeon General, 2021). Mental health challenges have emerged as one of the most significant barriers to learning, with national surveys showing that 37% of high school students reported poor mental health most or all of the time during the pandemic and 44% felt persistently sad or hopeless (CDC, 2022; Learning Policy Institute, 2025; NCES, 2024).

The pandemic’s impact on youth mental health was compounded by widespread school closures. In 2020–21, schooling continued largely online or in hybrid formats—approaches for which educators had little training or experience. Not only were the health effects of the pandemic devastating—more than 3 million cases and nearly 37,000 deaths in Illinois alone—but the educational and social effects were severe. After 6 months of disruption, Illinois students scored lower than expected on formative mathematics assessments (Streich et al., 2021). By the end of 2020–21, enrollment had dropped by 4.9%, ninth graders were less likely to be on track for graduation, and achievement fell in English language arts and mathematics statewide (ISBE, 2021b). Teachers and school staff were also deeply affected: burnout rates climbed, and statewide surveys revealed severe shortages of teachers, substitutes, and administrators (Goshen Education Consulting, 2022; Kendziora, 2021).

To address the profound academic and social-emotional disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) launched the Learning Renewal Initiative in 2021.² Backed by federal relief funds, Learning Renewal represents a comprehensive strategy to accelerate learning recovery, strengthen school systems, and support educator well-being. While the initiative includes multiple components—such as high-impact tutoring, interim assessments, and digital equity—ISBE prioritized social-emotional learning (SEL) as the cornerstone of recovery. This emphasis reflects a critical insight: students cannot fully engage in academic learning until their mental health and well-being are stabilized.

To operationalize this vision, the Illinois State Board of Education invested \$136.5 million in Learning Renewal–SEL, making it the largest focus of the initiative. The Learning Renewal–SEL effort comprised three complementary strands: (1) SEL Hubs, which provided professional development, coaching, and technical assistance to districts and schools; (2) Resilience

² For more details about ISBE’s Learning Renewal Initiative, visit <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Learning-Renewal.aspx>.

Education to Advance Community Healing (REACH), which delivered virtual training for educators on trauma-responsive practices and equity; and (3) the Community Partnership Grants, which offered a flexible funding opportunity for collaborations between schools, mental health providers, and community organizations to promote the well-being of students, staff, and families.

Illinois Social-Emotional Learning Hubs

ISBE established the SEL Hubs in 2021 as a cornerstone of the Learning Renewal–SEL Initiative, aiming to help schools implement SEL approaches that support both school staff and students. Building on Illinois’ long-standing network of Regional Offices of Education (ROEs)—organized into six geographic areas plus Chicago Public Schools—ISBE designated one ROE in each area to serve as an SEL Hub. These seven SEL Hubs provide professional development, training, and resources for SEL, mental health, and trauma-responsive educational practices tailored to local needs.

Exhibit 1. Learning Renewal–SEL Timeline

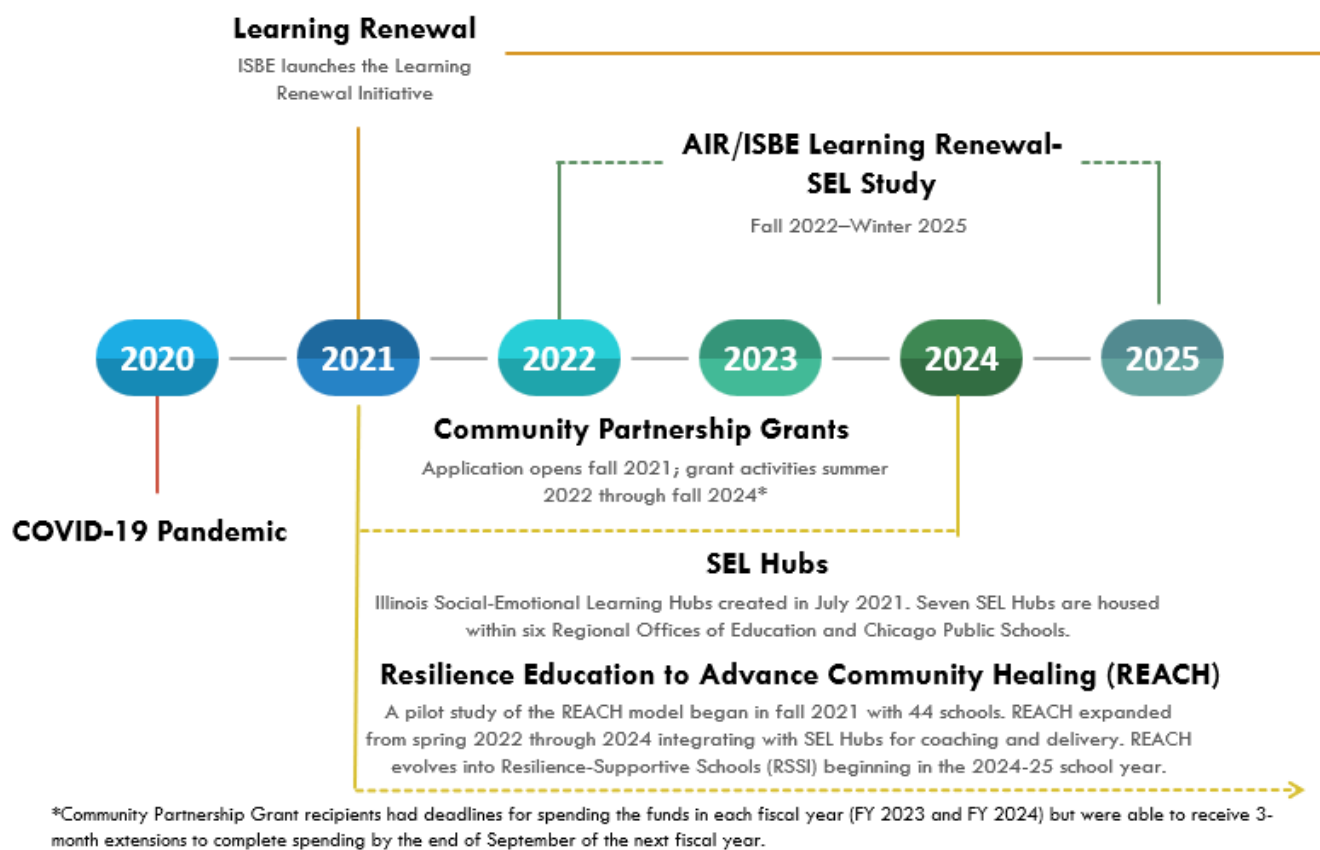
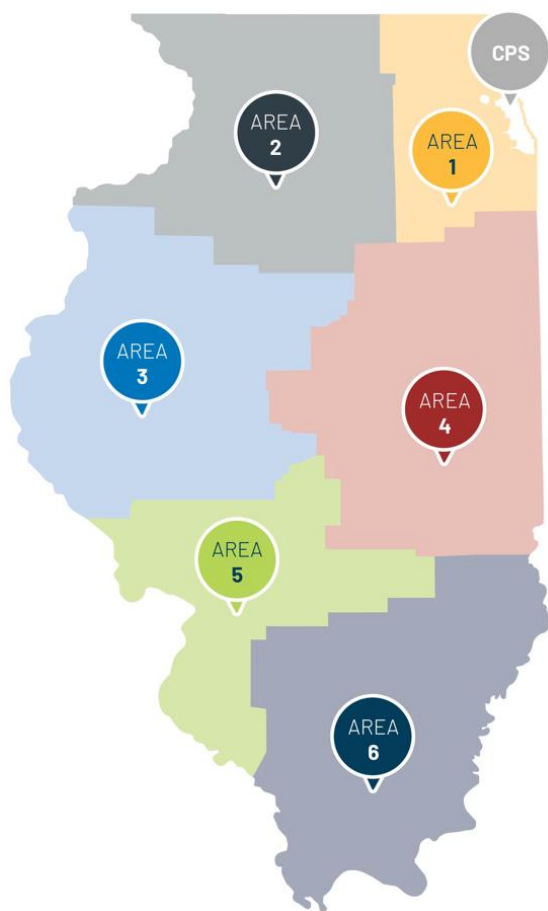


Exhibit 2. Illinois SEL Hubs



The SEL Hubs act as central infrastructure and connective tissue for the state’s SEL efforts. SEL Hub directors work closely with ROEs and Intermediate Service Centers (ISCs) to promote SEL, school mental health, trauma-responsive education, and equity. They foster relationships, communicate opportunities, and facilitate collaboration across regions. SEL coaches, often working across multiple ROEs/ISCs, encourage districts to prioritize SEL, participate in trainings, and implement SEL programming in schools.

Across the 2022–23 and 2023–24 school years, 2,061 (or 73% of) Illinois schools participated in at least one Hub activity. Hubs provided over 1,500 activities and over 30,000 participants, including teachers, counselors, administrators, and other staff.³

The most frequent SEL Hub activities included workshops, coaching, resource sharing, and action planning. About half of these events were held in

person. Content areas focused on educator well-being, family and community engagement, trauma-related professional development, safe and supportive school climates, and the fundamentals of SEL. The SEL Hubs also support the REACH initiative, which expanded into the Resilience-Supportive Schools Illinois (RSSI) initiative in the 2024–25 school year.

Resilience Education to Advance Community Healing (REACH) Initiative

REACH is a whole-school trauma-responsive approach developed by the Center for Childhood Resilience (CCR) at the Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago.⁴ REACH helps schools create and implement action plans to advance trauma-responsive and healing-centered practices. The model guides schools through forming a diverse REACH team, engaging in professional learning (PL; including asynchronous and live sessions), completing the Trauma Responsive Schools Implementation Assessment (TRS-IA), developing an action plan, and optionally joining a community of practice (CoP) to deepen learning and share strategies.

³ The number of activities excludes Chicago Public Schools due to data availability.

⁴ Visit <https://www.luriechildrens.org/en/specialties-conditions/center-for-childhood-resilience/> for more information about CCR.

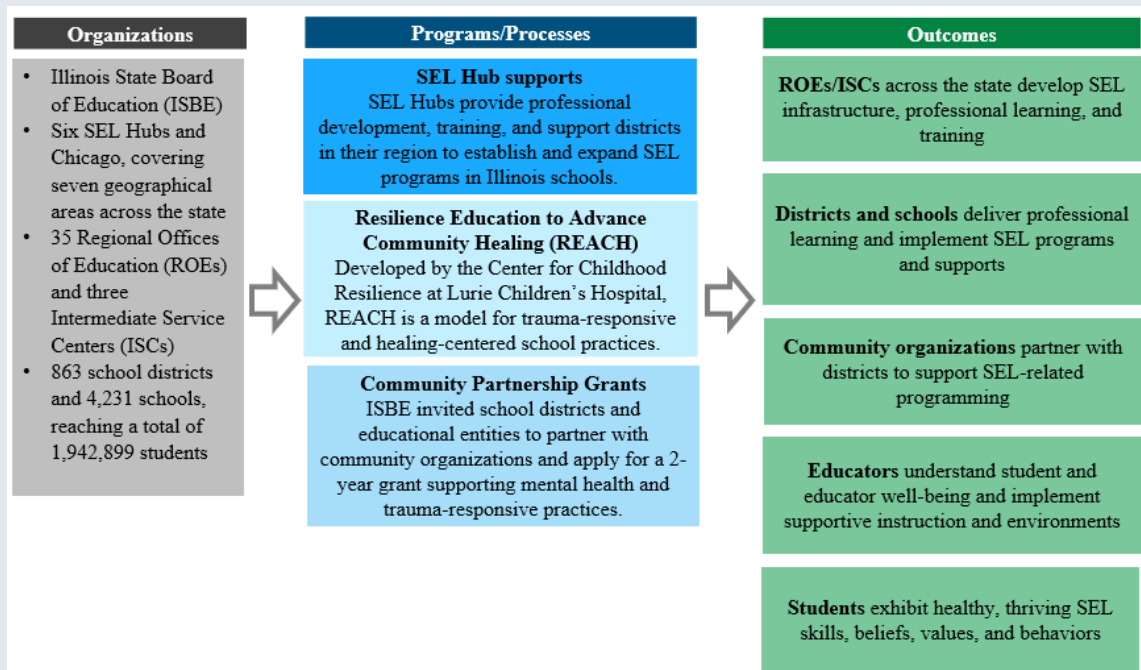
In July 2021, ISBE partnered with CCR and the Illinois Department of Public Health to expand REACH statewide, supported by federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds. The rollout was managed through the SEL Hubs, with directors and coaches trained by CCR to recruit schools, establish REACH teams, and provide ongoing PL and coaching. Schools joined REACH in cohorts, with initial participation driven by school interest and later cohorts focused on equity—recruiting schools disproportionately affected by the pandemic and trauma.

THE LEARNING RENEWAL—SEL IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

To implement the initiative, the SEL Hub directors built relationships with ROEs to promote SEL, school mental health, trauma-responsive educational approaches, and equity. In addition to communicating about SEL opportunities, the SEL Hubs provided a central infrastructure to implement SEL across Illinois regions. ROE superintendents and ISC executive directors—whose offices act as an intermediary between the state board of education and local school districts—were tasked with communicating, coordinating, and delivering SEL supports locally. SEL coaches, who often work across an area’s ROEs/ISCs, encouraged districts to prioritize SEL, engage in SEL trainings, and provide SEL programming for schools.

Exhibit 3 outlines the core inputs, processes, and outcomes of Learning Renewal–SEL implementation.

Exhibit 3. Learning Renewal—SEL Initiative Logic Model



Note. SEL = social-emotional learning. Illinois has 35 ROEs and three ISCs (all ISCs are in Cook County). See <https://iarss.org/> for more details about the ROEs including specific role function.

By the end of the 2023–24 school year, nearly 1,000 schools had enrolled in REACH. The initiative’s core activities included needs assessments, action planning, and participation in CoPs focused on topics such as youth voice, adult SEL, restorative practices, and educator self-care. All participating schools also had access to CCR’s Learning and Resource Hub, offering on-demand trainings and resources on trauma-responsive practices, racism and inequity, and mental health. The American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) conducted a separate, independent evaluation of REACH’s statewide expansion, assessing implementation and short-term outcomes to inform future scaling and sustainability.⁵

Community Partnership Grant

ISBE’s Community Partnership Grant was established in 2022 to help schools and communities address the mental health and well-being needs intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. The grants were intended to support partnerships between school districts and community-based organizations, including mental health providers, to deliver trauma-responsive practices, mental health services, and programming that promote the well-being of students, staff, and families.

A defining feature of the Community Partnership Grant is its flexible funding structure. ISBE intentionally designed the grant to “provide communities the flexibility to determine the best approach to respond to the local mental health needs” and to “allow funds to be used for a range of responses” (ISBE, 2021). This flexibility enabled grantees to tailor their strategies to local priorities—whether that meant expanding access to school-based mental health services, launching new trauma-informed initiatives, supporting family engagement, or building sustainable collaborations with community organizations.

A total of 136 applicants were awarded the grant and received a total of \$635,000 spread over 2 years (2022–23 and 2023–24 school years). Grantees reported implementing a wide range of strategies to support student and community well-being (see appendix F for more details about the grant). The most common primary strategy was providing students with direct access to certified mental health professionals, followed by expanding academic learning time, and offering SEL-related professional development for staff. Many grantees also engaged families and community members, funded after-school programs, and purchased mental wellness subscriptions. Implementation approaches varied: some districts partnered with external agencies for mental health services and training, others hired new staff and invested in infrastructure, and some provided after-school tutoring, health seminars, and life skills workshops.

⁵ Findings from this study can be found at <https://ccr.luriechildrens.org/en/projects/#reach>.

About the Study

The Evaluation of the Learning Renewal–Social Emotional Learning Programs for Supporting Pandemic Recovery with the Illinois State Board of Education was conducted as a research–practice partnership between ISBE and AIR. This study set out to examine the key components of Illinois’s Learning Renewal–SEL initiative, focusing on how these programs were implemented and the outcomes they produced for both students and staff. Specifically, it aimed to determine whether these investments in social-emotional learning effectively supported Illinois school staff and students during pandemic recovery. The primary goal was to assess the impact of the initiative on student well-being, school climate, and academic recovery, with a particular focus on the SEL Hubs as the central vehicle for SEL implementation across Illinois. The study aimed to provide useful feedback about effective strategies for implementing and scaling SEL programs, supports, and resources.

Organization of Findings in This Report

This report presents a comprehensive summary of all findings from the *Evaluation of the Learning Renewal – Social Emotional Learning Programs for Supporting Pandemic Recovery with the Illinois State Board of Education*, guiding readers through five main research questions that shaped the study’s design and analysis (see Exhibit 4). The report is organized to address each research question in turn, beginning with implementation of the Learning Renewal–SEL components and then turning to outcomes and costs. Each section includes discussion of policy considerations for scaling and sustaining SEL supports statewide.

Exhibit 4. Learning Renewal–SEL Study Questions and Coverage in This Report

Study question	Learning Renewal–SEL component
1. How were REACH and SEL Hub Activities Implemented across the state?	SEL Hubs, REACH
2. How were the Learning Renewal–SEL programs implemented in schools?	SEL Hubs, REACH, Community Partnership Grant
3. To what extent were student and teacher outcomes related to schools’ participation in SEL Hub activities?	SEL Hubs
4. What were the costs to schools of implementing Learning Renewal–SEL components?	SEL Hubs, REACH, Community Partnership Grant
5. What is the relationship between school climate and student and staff well-being?	ISBE Social-Emotional Well-Being student and staff survey results

The report’s appendices provide methodological and supplemental details: Appendix A covers implementation analyses, Appendix B details outcome study methods, Appendix C explains the cost study, Appendix D provides the SEL-W survey technical report, Appendix E lists survey constructs and items, and Appendix F summarizes the Community Partnership Grant.

1. How Were REACH and SEL Hub Activities Implemented Across the State?

ISBE’s Learning Renewal–SEL initiative aimed to support schools to recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic by improving SEL and well-being supports for both educators and students across the state. Importantly, the programs were designed to support districts and schools at varying stages of SEL exposure and implementation. In some regions, schools were eager to expand on SEL existing practices. In others, leaders were learning about SEL for the first time, including what SEL practices looked like in schools and classrooms. To meet this range of SEL exposure and diverse SEL needs across regions, a key feature of Learning Renewal–SEL was its “opt-in” approach to implementation. This allowed regional, district, and school leaders to select programs and activities that best fit their local context and needs. As a result, each region could select from a broad range of SEL programs and customize how and when they were implemented.

Research Questions

- How were SEL Hub Activities and REACH implemented across the state?
- What factors facilitated or hindered engagement?
- What were the barriers and facilitators to implementing SEL supports across regions?
- What is needed to sustain SEL programs, resources, and supports?

At the outset of our study in fall 2022, little was known about the full scope of SEL activities being leveraged across the state or the strategies and conditions facilitating their implementation. We aimed to fill this knowledge gap by conducting longitudinal interviews with key regional education and SEL leaders between winter 2022 and spring 2025. Through longitudinal interviews with these leaders, totaling 113 interviews across 3 years, we explored how implementation unfolded as regional stakeholders learned more about the Learning Renewal–SEL Initiative, engaged in SEL programming and practices, and expanded their networks and knowledge of SEL Hub resources.

This chapter focuses on two key Learning Renewal–SEL programs: the SEL Hubs and the REACH Initiative and how they were implemented across the state. We summarize insights from interviews with regional education and SEL leaders, highlighting the infrastructure and relationships that supported implementation, SEL Hub priorities, perceptions of promising practices, barriers and facilitators to SEL implementation, and sustainability considerations for SEL programming. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the key findings and the connection to our case study interviews with district and school staff.

IMPLEMENTATION STUDY METHODS AND DATA

To understand the landscape of Learning Renewal–SEL programming efforts across the state, the study team conducted regional interviews with ROE, ISC, and SEL Hub staff.. From January 2023 to March 2025, the implementation team conducted three annual rounds of interviews with 61 regional representatives as well as SEL leaders from all seven of the state’s SEL Hubs for a total of 113 interviews (see Exhibit 5). We recruited interviewees from all ROEs and ISCs but did not attain equal representation across regions. Each year, our interview protocols focused on SEL Hub, ROE, and ISC staff experiences implementing SEL Hub activities and REACH.

Exhibit 5 displays the number of interviews we conducted with these regional and SEL leaders between winter 2023 and spring 2025 categorized by participant role.

Exhibit 5. Interview Sample by Year and Participant Role

Interview participant role	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25	All years
SEL Hub Directors	6	7	5	18
ROE Superintendents/ISC Executive Directors ⁶	14	11	10	35
Other ROE/ISC Staff (e.g., coaches, professional development coordinators)	20	15	18	53
Total	40	40	33	113

Note. SEL = social and emotional learning; ROE = Regional Office of Education; ISC = Intermediate Service Center. Illinois has 35 ROEs and three ISCs (all ISCs are in Cook County). See <https://iarss.org/> for more details about the ROEs including specific role functions.

Leveraging Illinois’s existing regional infrastructure was key to promoting SEL and supporting widespread participation in SEL activities.

A central finding from our interviews is that Illinois’s established regional infrastructure—particularly the SEL Hubs, ROEs, and ISCs—played a pivotal role in advancing SEL across the state. The organization of resources and expertise within the SEL Hubs—six geographic areas across the state and CPS—made it easier for regional staff to locate SEL opportunities and find experts on specific SEL topics.

⁶ Illinois has 35 ROEs and three ISCs (all the ISCs are in Cook County).

Regional SEL Hubs enabled cross-regional collaboration, communication, and promotion of SEL activities.

One key function of the SEL Hubs was communicating the purpose of the Learning Renewal–SEL Initiative and its offerings through website content, newsletters, and sent emails, among other forms of communication. Perhaps most importantly, the SEL Hubs provided a structured way for ROEs and ISCs to communicate with one another by convening regular cross-regional meetings and carving out new formal and informal communication channels. These convenings allowed ROE staff to come together, share resources, and brainstorm SEL ideas. As put by one SEL Hub director, “This is the first time that I feel like the SEL Hubs have been able to develop a system throughout the state where we are able to get information up and down and back and forth through networking, since every area of the state is represented.”

As the initiative unfolded, SEL Hub directors observed stronger relationships being built between leaders within their areas, as well as stronger relationships between SEL Hub directors across areas due to the regular convenings and communication. As one participant explained, “There’s so much I never would have communicated or collaborated with other ROEs across the state like we have that has been brought forth by ISBE.” Another participant noted, “This is one of the first times in my career that I’ve seen interagency conversations happening that haven’t happened before.” This was particularly helpful in some areas of the state, such as downstate Illinois, that historically did not have access to the most “cutting edge” SEL training opportunities. One SEL Hub director shared:

A lot of times [the information] doesn’t come downstate to us. It stays up in the northern regions. So having access to that and having the time and the space and the money to employ people that teach people about SEL has been essential. We are learning things in downstate that we never would have had it not been for ESSER funding.

In our interviews, we learned about how the SEL Hubs created new opportunities within their areas for cross-regional learning and collaboration. Multiple SEL Hub directors shared that the SEL Hubs supported cross-regional learning related to SEL trainings, events, or activities that worked well or did not. Participants described how their SEL Hub coach helped them identify ROEs that had an area of expertise or experience with a particular SEL strategy that they could then adapt to their own region’s needs. Additionally, several participants shared that having one point person from their hub to ask questions was helpful for pooling resources and strategizing implementation. For example, some described how their SEL coach networked with other coaches across ROEs to secure support for PL opportunities. One participant stated that “Each ROE tends to have a niche that I would call them about,” and a coach emphasized that “If we don’t know it, we’re going to find the person that does and we’re going to help them out.”

Longstanding regional relationships engendered local trust in SEL programs and opportunities.

The regional infrastructure provided by the SEL Hubs supported widespread SEL collaboration and promotion; however, the school-level implementation of the initiative hinged on the longstanding relationships that ROEs and ISCs maintained with districts and schools. Several ROE leaders reflected on how the trust they had previously established with districts and schools helped them encourage SEL participation. One participant shared, “[Schools are] finding out what’s important from us, knowing you don’t want to waste your time on something you’re not really comfortable with. We have a good relationship where we tell them something, they take it into account, and they make that decision because they understand we wouldn’t try to lead them wrong.” Another participant pointed to the fact that the ROEs and ISCs have been around since the Civil War, stating:

One thing our ROEs will say all the time is, ‘We’ve always been here, and we always will be. We are not a flash in a pan. . . . We’re going to be here forever.’ The principals know their ROE. The relationship’s already there. I think, perhaps, that mitigated any political issues because it wasn’t like somebody showed up from ISBE that they’d never heard of that was telling them what to do. But the ROEs that they’ve known for a decade show up and say, ‘I have a free resource for you,’ to me, that delivery is much easier.

To implement the initiative, ROE/ISC staff were often tasked with communicating, coordinating, and delivering SEL Hub supports locally, acting as a conduit between the SEL Hubs and districts or schools. This strategically positioned them to use their local knowledge and relationships to adapt their communication about SEL supports to their local contexts. Often, this resulted in adjustments to the terminology used to communicate about SEL and trauma. In some cases, ROE/ISC staff chose not to use terminology related to politically charged topics or focused on SEL activities that they believed would be better received. For example, in some regions, participants shared that they de-prioritized REACH because community members associated REACH with a liberal agenda. Instead, they focused on activities they believed would be better received, like book clubs or one-time SEL supports.

The flexibility in choosing what to communicate and promote, as well as how to deliver SEL programming locally, may have reinforced district and school trust in ROEs and helped legitimize SEL. For example, ROEs/ISCs leveraged their relationships with districts to design and coordinate SEL PL delivery options that promoted participation in SEL trainings. To motivate participation, some ROEs/ISCs worked with school leaders to use school improvement days or institute days for PL events to ensure staff availability. Others used stipends and graduate credit to encourage SEL PL participation. In rural areas, some ROEs opted to provide PL virtually or asynchronously due to

school staffing challenges, long driving distances to training facilities, and the costs associated with travel. Adapting to the needs of their suburban areas, other ROEs chose in-person PL sessions due to historical low engagement during virtual sessions.

District and school leader buy-in was critical to implementing REACH and SEL activities within schools.

The trusting relationships that the ROEs and ISCs held with their districts and schools had another important implication for SEL implementation: it helped facilitate local buy-in among leaders, as their district and school needs were discussed in partnership with regional offices alongside needs assessments and action planning. This buy-in set the tone for how educators and school staff were expected to engage with SEL and incorporate SEL PL and practices into their routines.

Regional and SEL leaders emphasized that superintendent and administrator buy-in were critical for motivating participation and holding staff accountable for implementation. The buy-in of district and school leadership also influenced school staff participation by informing districtwide priorities and resource allocation. As one SEL coach described,

I know that the superintendent is critical to this process. If the superintendent's goal is, 'We are going to implement social and emotional learning districtwide,' they are going to see that you have the resources and the [PD] to do that.

Another participant described an incident where a commonly spread misunderstanding of SEL as critical race theory (CRT) caused parent backlash, which was only ameliorated through the superintendent's strong, direct advocacy of SEL programming and strategic communication.

Additionally, the spread of success stories through "word of mouth" also strengthened local buy-in. One participant noted that other schools became curious about SEL programming only after hearing success stories from others who implemented REACH or SEL supports. These stories also helped regional and SEL leaders promote SEL to districts, with another participant stating, "Once an office has seen the success [of another], they may be very willing next year to jump on board." In addition, ROE/ISC staff shared that community-level buy-in for SEL programming supported implementation. Broader conversations around shared community traumas (e.g., grappling with the death of a community member) or persistent problems (e.g., truancy) also spurred increased support for mental health and trauma-related services.

SEL Hubs tailored priorities to local needs but shared common promising practices—such as needs assessments, brain-based training, and restorative approaches—that supported educator and student well-being.

SEL Hubs set different priorities to align with local contexts—some focused on REACH recruitment and action planning, while others emphasized a broader range of SEL supports and tiered models. To understand these regional priorities, we gathered input from participants and reviewed planning documents for SY 2024–25.

Overall, SEL Hubs in Areas 1, 2, and 4 concentrated more on REACH recruitment, retention, and expansion, with Area 1 prioritizing REACH coaching and action planning, Area 2 focusing on re-engagement and support for REACH schools, and Area 4 making REACH the default SEL strategy unless other supports were requested. Leaders in these areas viewed REACH as scalable and, in some cases, used it to support low-performing schools. To encourage participation, nearly all SEL Hubs offered honoraria or stipends for REACH-related activities, such as workshops, trainings, or supplies.

SEL Hubs in Areas 3 and 6 prioritized offering a diverse range of SEL supports through coaches, rather than focusing primarily on REACH. In Area 6, SEL coaches (funded by the regional Hub but housed within ROEs) led PL sessions for cohorts of school leaders, who then brought these practices back to their schools; leaders received stipends for participation. Area 3 provided honoraria for SEL activities supporting action planning, alongside REACH. Area 5 used a tiered approach, offering options from workshops and book studies to a week-long summit for action plan implementation.

Across regions, PL delivery was adapted to local preferences—some districts favored ongoing PL series, while others preferred one-off sessions due to time constraints. In some areas, SEL Hubs encouraged PL series even when districts requested single events. For SY 2024–25, SEL Hubs in Areas 1–4 also recruited schools to participate in Resilience-Supportive Schools Illinois (RSSI), a data tool connecting educators with evidence-informed resources to support school mental health and well-being.

Across areas, participants shared that needs assessments, brain development trainings, and restorative practices showed the most promise for educators and students.

Before participating in SEL-related opportunities, most schools and districts engaged in a needs assessment to determine their areas of strength and improvement. The initial needs assessments—frequently utilizing instruments such as the TRS-IA, CASEL, or alternative informal evaluations—informed subsequent steps in SEL implementation, specifically, the development of a school action plan.

Regional and SEL leaders found the needs assessment useful for identifying areas where schools could enhance climate and better support student and educator well-being. Further, regional and SEL leaders claimed that it was an essential first step in supporting action planning and understanding what programs, supports, and roles might be necessary for integrating SEL into schools. One participant stated:

I think the most promising activities are helping a school go through some form of a needs assessment to be able to analyze where they are, what is going well, what is not going well, and then having external people help build a plan. Then the next piece is being able to individualize at a school, then district level, the exact supports that they need that come out of that needs assessment.

The needs assessment created a means through which district and school staff could communicate their needs to their ROE/ISC or SEL Hub, informing the types of supports and resources the regional office and SEL Hub would then provide to the district or school.

Further, participants often cited PL focused on trauma and neuroscience as effective supports for educators' understanding of themselves and their students. Participants highlighted the importance of supporting educators so that they, in turn, could support students. As summarized by one participant, "Focusing on teachers is really focusing on students." For example, participants appreciated learning how trauma can disrupt the development of different parts of a child's brain in the neurosequential modeling trainings by Dr. Bruce Perry. One participant noted that the training helped her "understand how our brain functions and how when we're under stress, we have to help students regulate to be able to reason."

Additionally, participants believed restorative practices supported both educator and student well-being. Restorative practices—such as creating community circles, repairing relationships, and teaching self-regulation skills—not only helped students with their own social-emotional competencies, but helped teachers better manage their classrooms. Further, participants shared that creating quiet rooms or corners where students could practice self-regulation helped create a calm, mindful environment. Others shared that this was a promising practice for educators as well, who used the quiet rooms for self-reflection.

Staffing constraints, SEL framing and terminology, and ambiguity posed barriers to SEL implementation.

According to participants, the main barrier to participating in REACH and SEL PL was a lack of substitutes to provide coverage for staff. Several participants argued that the staffing shortage extended far beyond finding substitutes: small, rural schools were already leveraging paraprofessionals to teach classes and teachers were fulfilling multiple building-level roles.

Moreover, participants shared that the substitute shortage was contributing to teacher fatigue, hindering their motivation to participate in SEL PL. ROE and ISC staff addressed participation barriers by offering virtual and hybrid attendance options for activities, often scheduling them during professional development days. These options were especially helpful in rural areas, where transportation challenges made in-person attendance difficult.

The language and framing of SEL sometimes led to politicization, misconceptions or resistance to participation.

Several participants reported that parents and community members in parts of the state placed SEL in the same politically charged category as critical race theory (CRT). Participants reflected that some community members in their regions perceived the acronym to have a hidden agenda. As put by one participant, “I try and send as much information to them as I can, but I’ll be honest, in our district, in our county, I think we have some very rural, conservative areas that are concerned about any initials, C-R-T, S-E-L ...” Some participants further noted that the word “trauma” was sometimes politically charged and trauma-related supports were difficult to promote in their regions. For example, some ROE staff shared that school leaders and community members did not believe in the concept of trauma or found it to be an exaggerated characterization of COVID-19 experiences. One participant said, “People are turned off by the word ‘trauma.’ So when it’s like, ‘trauma, trauma, trauma,’ they’re like, ‘get over it.’” In these cases, regional and SEL leaders would share SEL supports related to educator and student well-being that did not specifically address trauma.

Participants shared feedback that there was ambiguity about what constituted implementation of REACH and SEL Hub supports.

Since regions were given the agency to determine priorities locally, guidance on SEL prioritization, communication, and delivery varied. In some cases, this led to varying levels of understanding regarding implementation milestone goals and limited detailed guidance beyond action planning. ISBE set a grant participation target that 50% of the schools in each region would access SEL/trauma training from the SEL Hubs during SY 2022–23; however, SEL-related activities were managed with different tracking methods. Many ROEs used the REACH tracker for monitoring progress, some utilized the ISBE framework to analyze activities, and others implemented internal tracking systems. There was no consensus on who established the SEL participation targets: responses varied among ISBE, the Hubs, the ROE, or the absence of a target altogether. The interviews indicated inconsistencies in defining and measuring participation, which posed a barrier in tracking progress toward SEL programming participation and integration into schools.

Policy Considerations

From our interviews with regional and SEL leaders, we learned valuable insights about the regional infrastructure and relationships driving implementation, the regional variation of SEL priorities but consistent SEL promising practices, the barriers to implementation, and the different considerations for sustaining the work. Importantly, strategically leveraging the SEL Hubs and regional offices to connect districts and schools with SEL opportunities that they could then select was a strength of the initiative. The combination of regional infrastructure and relationships supported buy-in and widespread participation in the initiative. This flexibility to tailor SEL opportunities to local needs resulted in different priorities, as demonstrated through the varying prioritization of SEL supports by each SEL Hub. Despite this variability, the same promising practices surfaced in the interviews: conducting needs assessments to understand school SEL needs, understanding the developmental reasons underlying student behavior, and learning about restorative practices to engage in healthy relationships.

The core challenges facing the initiative were related to framing SEL in a way that aligned to local cultural contexts, ambiguity in implementation steps, and substitute shortages. Staffing constraints also tied into the long-term sustainability of the initiative. Notably, the interviews shed light on the importance of dedicated SEL coach roles to sustain the work, particularly for rural schools already struggling with limited capacity. Although some participants shared alternative strategies to sustain the SEL programming through capacity building, most participants emphasized the central role of securing funding to successfully continue the work.

While our findings in these areas served as a starting point for understanding the state implementation landscape, a full understanding of the Learning Renewal–SEL Initiative required a deeper dive into how implementation was unfolding at schools. In the chapter that follows, we explore the connection between these key findings and the perspectives of school- and district-level staff who worked to integrate SEL in their school routines and classrooms. We conclude both chapters with findings across all 3 years of interviews with state-, district-, and school-level staff that surfaced policy implications for future statewide educational disruptions.

2. How Was Learning Renewal–SEL Implemented in Schools?

The previous chapter focused on statewide implementation, drawing on interviews with regional and SEL leaders across Illinois to identify key considerations for launching and sustaining Learning Renewal–SEL initiatives. Building on those insights, this chapter shifts to the school level, using in-depth case studies to explore how decentralized implementation played out in practice and what mattered most to local stakeholders.

Through interviews with school and district staff from SY 2023–24 to SY 2024–25, we developed 12 qualitative case studies of REACH, SEL Hub activity, and Community Partnership Grant implementation. These case studies allowed us to compare facilitators and barriers across programs and regions, and to examine how perspectives at the school level aligned with or diverged from those at the regional level. Studying SEL policy implementation through longitudinal case studies deepened our understanding of the Learning Renewal–SEL initiative by creating a bounded context through which we could generate or challenge hypotheses about the state’s opt-in approach to implementation (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017; Stake, 2010). The case study interviews allowed us to interrogate the importance of flexibility in implementation, regional relationships and buy-in, and the degree to which the SEL Hub infrastructure supported implementation and sustainability. Additionally, the case studies were a means through which we could triangulate regional, SEL leader, and school staff perspectives on implementation.

The following sections present findings from our cross-case analysis of REACH, SEL Hub activity, and Community Partnership Grant implementation. Many themes mirror those from our statewide regional interviews (see Chapter 1): leadership buy-in and regional office support were key facilitators; time and PL logistics were major barriers; most schools planned to sustain SEL by embedding it into existing structures and budgets; and restorative practices and self-care activities were especially promising for educators and students. We include vignettes from case study sites to illustrate these themes in practice.⁷

Research Questions

- How were the Learning Renewal–SEL programs implemented in schools?
- What were barriers or facilitators to implementing SEL supports in schools?
- How do schools plan to sustain SEL?
- What promising SEL practices did school staff identify?

⁷ To ensure the confidentiality of interview participants, pseudonyms are used throughout the report.

CASE STUDY METHODS AND DATA

We conducted a total of 78 case study interviews across SY 2023–24 and SY 2024–25. For the purposes of our study, each “case” constituted either a district or school responsible for implementing one of the three Learning Renewal–SEL programs: REACH, SEL Hub activities, or the community partnership grants. At 10 of the 12 case sites, we conducted interviews with key stakeholders across both years. At two of the 12 sites, school leaders declined participation in SY 2024–25 due to time constraints. Participants at case sites included district and school administrators, school-based SEL coordinators and staff, educators, ROE/ISC staff and SEL coaches, and community partners (see Exhibit 6). To ensure the confidentiality of interview participants, pseudonyms are used throughout the report.

We purposively selected 12 case study sites across Illinois, ensuring diversity in region, urbanicity, school size, and socioeconomic status. Regional SEL coaches helped identify schools implementing one of the three Learning Renewal–SEL programs, and interviews focused on the primary program at each site. For each case, we interviewed at least three participants. Interview data were coded and analyzed using NVivo, with both protocol-driven and emergent themes, and interrater reliability checks ensured consistency. We then conducted cross-case analyses to identify patterns and highlight common facilitators, barriers, and promising practices across programs.

Exhibit 6. Case Study Participants by Role

Participant role	2023–24	2024–25	Total
District administrators (superintendents, PD coordinators)	11	7	16
School staff (teachers, counselors, social workers, SEL coordinators)	28	25	53
Community partners (local health agencies, nonprofits, other community organizations)	5	2	7
Total	44	34	78

Note. SEL = social and emotional learning.

Leadership buy-in and regional office support were key facilitators of implementation within schools.

Leadership buy-in emerged as a central theme not only in our regional interviews focused on statewide implementation (see Chapter 1), but also across all 12 case sites at the school level. Participants consistently described how strong leadership and clear communication motivated staff participation in SEL.

Across all REACH sites, participants noted that building leaders motivated their involvement by emphasizing REACH's importance and incorporating it into professional learning schedules. Leadership buy-in also influenced the frequency of communication and content of messaging about REACH; three of the four REACH schools shared that principal communication about REACH PD reinforced its importance, highlighted opportunities and incentives, and included actionable next steps. At one REACH school, participants described how their leader showed support by attending REACH trainings, publicly congratulating staff for completing REACH trainings, and soliciting student and teacher feedback on REACH in classes. One REACH participant summarized the buy-in as “set[ting] the stage for the school to be as successful as they have been.”

Further, participants from REACH and SEL Hub activity sites described ways in which their building leadership motivated staff participation through re-purposing PL days and school routines to focus on SEL. For example, some sites created new positions focused explicitly on SEL, changes to schools’ professional development schedules, or incentives for staff to participate (e.g., gift cards). At Ocean and Buena Vista⁸ (two nonrural REACH sites), they positioned the multi-tiered systems of support coordinator to lead REACH and added grade-level facilitators to support implementation.

Participants at all community partnership grant and SEL Hub sites agreed that buy-in was essential for success. At two community partnership grant sites, staff shared that this buy-in could help secure local funding after the grant period. At one community partnership grant site, staff described leaders’ transparent communication as instrumental in cultivating community buy-in and motivating cross-agency participation in the work. At Easton, a small, rural community partnership grant site, staff described parental engagement as an essential first step in securing buy-in. Involving parents in decision making about how to allocate the grant funds engendered trust and created an extra layer of implementation accountability. Finally, across the sites implementing both REACH and SEL Hub activities, word of mouth from successful implementation helped spread and encourage teacher and student SEL participation.

⁸ To ensure the confidentiality of interview participants, pseudonyms are used throughout the report.

Flexible scheduling and substitute coverage enabled SEL PL participation.

One of the key facilitators of participation in SEL PL was finding ways to incorporate REACH and SEL PL into schools' regular schedules. School leaders who were characterized as having strong buy-in were particularly mindful of the challenges barring staff from participating (e.g., fulfilling extracurricular duties, inability to travel, lack of substitute coverage) and found ways to remove these barriers. For example, at three of the REACH schools, leaders used in-service days (e.g., late-start days, early dismissal days, school improvement days) to ensure staff would attend REACH PL. At two of these schools, staff explained that leaders provided substitutes to cover teachers' classrooms, including multi-day REACH events. Lagoon and Bailey—two small, rural REACH schools—leaned on either an ROE staff member or SEL coach to coordinate virtual or on-site trainings. This additional support appeared to be unique to Lagoon's and Bailey's rural context.

Participants from SEL Hub activity sites similarly shared that their leaders helped them find the time and coverage to attend SEL PL. At three of the schools, leaders supported staff PL attendance by scheduling it when students were not in the building and finding substitutes to cover staff time. Participants at Blossom and Elmwood shared that the school administrators conducted PL on in-service days or school days when students did not come in. At Maple, participants described how the district superintendent found and paid for substitutes to cover staff so that they could attend trainings; in at least one case, the superintendent served as a substitute so that a teacher could attend SEL PL.

Regional offices helped connect REACH and SEL Hub activity sites to needed implementation resources.

ROEs and Intermediate Service Centers played a central role in connecting schools and districts to REACH and SEL Hub resources. Schools learned about Learning Renewal–SEL supports through regular communication with their ROE, such as requests for assistance with events, direct outreach from SEL coaches, and updates in newsletters. In several cases, principals or staff reached out to their ROE for support, which led to coordinated trainings and ongoing implementation guidance. Participants consistently described ROE support as instrumental in facilitating access to SEL resources and ensuring accountability for implementation.

Participants shared several examples of how the ROEs held regular meetings to support SEL PL and implementation. For example, SEL leaders at Maple, one of the rural SEL Hub activity sites, attended monthly meetings with their regional SEL coach, monthly meetings with cohort leaders, and a training every two months at the ROE. Participants at two other SEL Hub activity sites shared that their ROE collected feedback and data (e.g., Google forms, TRS-IA) from school

leaders to identify where SEL support was needed. For example, at the two rural schools—Maple and Blossom—the ROE administered a questionnaire where parents, teachers, and community members provided ratings on what kinds of supports staff and students need. ROE staff engaged with school leaders across all SEL Hub activity and REACH sites to complete the TRS-IA to identify needs and implement REACH alongside other SEL programming.

The support of the ROEs was particularly critical for the rural REACH and SEL Hub activity sites. Lagoon and Bailey—the two small, rural REACH schools—leaned on either an ROE staff member or their SEL coach to help coordinate school REACH trainings. For example, at one of the rural SEL Hub activity schools, Maple, the SEL Hub funded a school coordinator position to provide

HOLDING IT ALL TOGETHER: HOW ONE RURAL SCHOOL'S SEL COORDINATOR SYSTEMATIZED CALM

On a Tuesday morning at Maple Elementary, the school's SEL coordinator, Mia, is moving quickly between classrooms. In one room, a teacher is setting up a new “calm box” filled with sensory tools and mindfulness cards—resources Mia secured through the regional SEL Hub. Down the hall, a group of educators gathers for their monthly SEL meeting. Mia enters to lead the discussion, reviewing the school's SEL action plan and sharing a new article from the Hub on trauma-informed practices.

Just one year prior, Maple had no formal SEL programming. Today, thanks to Mia's coordination, every classroom has a calming corner, teachers practice restorative circles, and students have access to counseling services. Mia's role is pivotal: arranging professional development, ensuring coverage for staff to attend trainings, and connecting teachers with expert speakers on poverty, trauma, and classroom management.

Behind the scenes, the regional SEL Hub funds Mia's SEL coordinator position. The SEL Hub also provides Mia resources, monthly coaching calls, and a network of schools sharing best practices. The ROE amplifies these efforts. When Maple's leadership expressed interest in SEL, the ROE provided coaching on writing an action plan, organized poverty simulations, and facilitated restorative practice trainings. They even offered stipends that Maple used to purchase calm box materials.

Mia's leadership, combined with SEL Hub support, ROE support, and buy-in from school leadership, transformed SEL from an abstract concept into a systematic practice at Maple that staff can't imagine losing. As one educator put it: “We've poured our heart and soul into this for three years. We can't just drop it. We've seen too many rewards.”

additional infrastructure and logistical support. According to participants, Maple would not have been able to implement SEL systematically without this key role.

In addition to connecting schools with resources, participants across SEL Hub activity and REACH sites shared that their ROEs connected them to other districts to help them advance their SEL goals. For example, at Blossom, participants explained that their ROE invited 8–10 school districts to attend and collaborate at regional meetings. This proved to be helpful at rural sites, such as Maple. At Maple, staff emphasized how the ROE gave them additional “manpower” to identify SEL resources and implement them, stating, “Our ROE really provides us with quality, good stuff ... the stipends that you receive for the participation, we have used as one of our resources. They've definitely helped.” Other participants at REACH and SEL Hub activity sites similarly appreciated the additional capacity ROEs provided for action plans, coaching, and training coordination.

Time constraints and professional learning logistics posed barriers to participating in SEL PL and implementing SEL practices.

Across REACH and SEL Hub activity case sites, participants shared examples of how their own time constraints and the logistics involved in coordinating PL posed challenges. Specifically, participants described how inadequate coverage of their classrooms, logistical challenges with coordinating SEL PL, and a lack of common planning time were hurdles to fully participating in SEL PL and implementing SEL practices.

A lack of time and substitute coverage were barriers to staff participation in SEL PL.

At three of the four REACH sites, participants described logistical challenges with scheduling teacher coverage so they could attend REACH trainings. The two rural schools, Lagoon and Bailey, described challenges in finding substitutes to cover classrooms due to either a lack of funding or a lack of personnel. Staff from these two schools also shared that it was difficult for staff to attend any PL scheduled during out-of-school time because they were often fulfilling multiple responsibilities—as teachers, coaches, extracurricular coordinators, or parents. One SEL coordinator shared, “It would be nice to send our whole team [to REACH trainings] but that's not really possible staffing-wise. Coverage and finding the time has been a barrier. There are 1,000 things we need to do ... And some people are like, ‘I don't want to ask to be gone because there's nobody to cover.’”

Similarly, participants at all four SEL Hub activity sites described the interrelated barriers of time constraints and substitute shortages, both of which influenced their ability to attend or participate in PL. At three of the schools, limited time during the school day or contractual hours (e.g., institute days) created a barrier for staff to participate in PL. Participants at one school shared that there was little interest in participating in sessions outside of contractual hours. Additionally, participants at another school explained that it was difficult to cover classes

on a block schedule without students missing too much classroom instruction.

Insufficient common planning time and low staff buy-in posed barriers to SEL implementation.

The main barrier to implementing REACH in classrooms, noted by participants at two of the REACH schools, was a lack of common planning time to integrate REACH into their curricula and routines. At one rural REACH school, Lagoon, staff noted a need for more follow-up support to implement REACH after participating in PL due to limited staff capacity to absorb SEL responsibilities without SEL coach support. Similarly, participants at two SEL Hub activity sites, Elmwood and Maple, identified limited staff time and turnover as a barrier. At Elmwood, participants explained that staff turnover posed a barrier to implementation by undermining consistent training in key SEL topics such as restorative practices and understanding trauma.

FINDING TIME FOR SEL AT BAILEY MIDDLE SCHOOL

At Bailey Middle School, the REACH team meets in the library for a quick 30-minute session after dismissal—the only time they can find. The SEL leader scrolls through notes from the latest regional SEL Hub meeting, eager to share trauma-informed strategies, but the clock is against them. Teachers have just 20 minutes after the last bell before contractual dismissal and many juggle multiple roles: coaching sports, supervising clubs, or rushing to family obligations.

Professional development is squeezed into half-days or parent–teacher conference slots. When funds for substitutes run out, staff can’t be released for training. Although the principal would love to do more, there’s just not enough time within contract hours. Even promising activities like book studies falter because they require staying late—an impossible ask for educators already balancing extra duties.

Capacity challenges compound the problem. The social worker handles crisis calls while trying to integrate SEL into classrooms. Teachers want to adopt a formal SEL curriculum, but without time or resources, creating lessons from scratch feels overwhelming. “I can go online and figure it out,” one teacher explains, “but how long will that take when I have kids in crisis?”

Despite these barriers, the principal pushes forward—sending weekly mindfulness emails and carving out minutes for SEL wherever possible. The ROE SEL coach helps by coordinating PD schedules and sharing ready-to-use resources. Still, in a rural school where every minute counts, implementing SEL is less about lack of interest and more about finding time in a day that never seems long enough.

At one REACH and one SEL Hub activity site, participants mentioned minor barriers related to buy-in. A suburban REACH school, Ocean, noted a minor barrier related to the political framing of REACH. They shared that the broader community was not bought into SEL and the school had to be conscientious about how to name and describe the work. A couple of participants at Elmwood, an SEL Hub activity site, also described a lack of staff buy-in as a barrier to implementation. One Elmwood participant commented that some teachers, especially those who have been in the education profession for a long time, did not see the benefit of SEL due to different expectations of how students should behave.

Most schools planned to sustain SEL through school structures, budgets, and other grant funding.

Our third key finding describes the sustainability plans and considerations shared by schools across the three programs. Most commonly, participants at REACH and SEL Hub activity sites shared plans to integrate SEL into their regular school routines and budgets; however, some SEL Hub activity sites hoped to continue working with their ROE or SEL coach to implement SEL programming. Additionally, participants across REACH, SEL, and community partnership grant sites shared plans to seek other grant funding to continue their work. At some SEL Hub activity and community partnership grant sites, participants believed that the cross-sector partnerships they had formed with the community would sustain their work.

Participants from REACH and SEL Hub activity sites believed their school leaders would integrate SEL into their PL schedules, school routines, and budgets.

To encourage staff to participate in SEL PL, many school leaders carved out dedicated PL time, engaged in regular communication about SEL, and incorporated REACH and SEL processes into their school infrastructure. For example, participants from three of the REACH sites shared that their building leaders communicated intentions to embed SEL-related PL into their professional development schedules. At one school, they planned to continue their monthly REACH team meetings and in-service days; at another, leaders planned to formally incorporate REACH into their school improvement plans. Similarly, participants from two SEL Hub activity sites described plans to continue school structures—such as SEL Committees—to ensure the SEL work continued. At three of the four SEL Hub activity sites, schools planned to leverage existing funding in their budgets (e.g., Title I and II funds) to continue implementing SEL programming and practices.

Participants across REACH, SEL Hub activity, and community partnership grant sites planned to sustain the work through other grants.

According to participants across programs and sites, seeking grant funding was an essential next step to sustaining SEL and community partnership grant work. Two SEL Hub activity sites

had already identified new grant opportunities in partnership with their ROEs to cover SEL PL that would no longer be free of charge, while two community partnership grant sites were actively seeking grants to continue paying staff salaries for two new positions created from the grant. At one of the suburban community partnership grant districts, staff identified mental health-related grants that could help support the continuity of key initiatives. While participants from two REACH sites mentioned grants as a possibility, staff from one school raised the concern that grant dependence might limit the accessibility of some REACH PD opportunities and it may be difficult to reallocate grants to provide stipends for REACH team leads. At a rural REACH school, Lagoon, staff raised concerns about the dearth of resources to continue implementing because “schools never have enough money, enough resources, enough manpower, or space.”

Some sites hoped to continue leveraging SEL coach and ROE staff support for implementation.

A theme that emerged across the four SEL Hub activity sites and one REACH site was the desire to continue working with SEL coaches and ROE staff once the ESSER funding ended. Participants at one SEL Hub activity site, Blossom, appreciated how their SEL coach frequently shared resources, papers, and other materials that aligned with their school’s SEL needs. School staff at Blossom planned to continue communication with their coach so that they could access relevant resources. At two other SEL Hub activity sites, Elysian and Maple, staff were not aware that any ROE or SEL Hub personnel support might change once the ESSER funding ended. Participants at one REACH site, Bailey, also hoped to continue leaning on their SEL coach for coordinating REACH PL and supporting implementation.

At the four SEL Hub activity sites, participants raised concerns about the end of the cost-free SEL supports. For example, staff at Elysian, Elmwood, and Blossom believed the cost-free nature of the SEL resources and PL opportunities enabled a greater number of staff to participate. At another site, Maple, participants explained that the funding covered speaker costs and school resources, like “calm boxes” that helped students and adults regulate emotions, reduce stress, and practice self-soothing strategies.

A small number of sites planned to sustain the work through new cross-sector partnerships.

At SEL Hub activity and community partnership grant sites, participants noted that they planned to sustain the work through local fundraising and their new cross-sector partnerships. For example, one SEL Hub activity site, Maple, planned to work with their community—including churches and health agencies—to continue fundraising and SEL or mental health services. They believed that local fundraisers, like bake sales, could also support the continuation of some SEL

activities. Participants at a community partnership grant site and an SEL Hub activity site also shared plans to employ a “train-the-trainer” approach where school staff took their learnings from PL back to staff who may not have been able to attend.

Restorative practices and self-care activities were the most promising practices for educators and students.

Participants across the 12 sites shared different perceptions of the most promising educator and student SEL practices, primarily because they had the agency to select different activities and events that best met their schools’ needs. As such, the types of activities—both within programs like REACH and across all SEL opportunities—varied widely. Overall, when it came to student well-being, restorative practices and building self-awareness of mental health were the most cited promising practices. For educators, educator well-being and self-care activities were commonly cited as promising practices. Despite the wide variation in SEL-related activities implemented, participants from SEL Hub activity and REACH sites appreciated the use of the TRS-IA to identify their own SEL strengths and needs.

Activities focused on understanding trauma, teaching coping mechanisms, and restorative practices supported student well-being.

While each of the REACH schools implemented different components of the program, staff from three schools believed that REACH activities focused on understanding trauma and how it manifests in student behavior were the most helpful. Staff from these schools believed that the REACH modules on trauma-informed instruction and the community of practice were effective in building this knowledge. At Ocean, participants described how these activities equipped educators to build stronger, more trusting connections between staff and students. Similarly, participants at Bailey and Buena Vista asserted that teaching students coping mechanisms and ways to re-set their nervous systems—through “calming corners” in each classroom where students have sensory gadgets and other tools, “brain breaks” where students take a break from class to go on a walk, and “community circles” where students participate in teacher-led breathing exercises and share-outs—effectively supported student well-being. Similarly, participants from two REACH schools shared that trainings on tools to support educators in identifying student distress and supporting emotional regulation—such as Mental Health First Aid training or the calming, sensory activities—were helpful.

STARTING WITH TEACHERS TO REACH STUDENTS

At Elysian School, the day does not begin with lesson plans, but with intentional moments of connection. In the staff lounge, educators gather for a brief restorative circle—a practice introduced during summer training. They share reflections, set intentions, and check in on each other’s well-being. These circles, once unfamiliar, have become a cornerstone of the school’s culture, helping teachers feel supported and fostering trust among colleagues.

This focus on educator well-being is deliberate. As the director of teaching and learning explained, “If we start at the top and create an environment where teachers feel nurtured and have the resources they need, that will carry down to the student level.”

The impact is clear in classrooms. Teachers who participated in self-care PL sessions now model calm and empathy during challenging moments. Instead of escalating conflicts, they guide students through restorative circles—spaces where students learn to express themselves, resolve disagreements, and build interpersonal skills. The Second Step SEL curriculum reinforces these lessons, teaching students how to manage emotions and practice kindness.

By investing in educators—through self-care training, restorative practices, and collaborative PL—the school has created a ripple effect. Teachers feel valued and prepared, and students experience classrooms where emotional safety and respect are the norm. At Elysian, helping educators thrive isn’t just good for staff—it’s the foundation for helping students succeed.

At two of the SEL Hub activity sites, participants emphasized restorative practices as a promising practice for students and educators alike. Participants at Elysian explained that restorative circles fostered a positive environment where students felt safe to express themselves, resolve conflicts, and build interpersonal skills. Additionally, at Elysian, all district leaders, school leaders, and staff working with students received restorative practice training over the course of 2 years. The restorative circles had proven valuable for educators, as they encouraged open dialogue and fostered stronger relationships between staff members. This collaborative environment helped break down silos and build a more cohesive school culture. At two other schools, participants shared examples of emotional regulation tools they had learned from trainings, including morning check-ins and calming boxes. To ensure SEL practices were being implemented, two SEL Hub activity schools created infrastructure changes. One created an “SEL leader” position focused on supporting students and another implemented a routine mental health screener for student check-ins.

Self-care activities and well-being-focused PL supported educators' emotional bandwidth.

At three of the SEL Hub activity sites, participants also shared that educator well-being and self-care activities were helpful because they created more bandwidth for educators to support their students. Examples of self-care activities included mindfulness and yoga, as well as a “kindness cart” stocked with materials and activities that promote acts of kindness and emotional well-being for educators as well as students. In addition to these self-care activities, participants shared that PL sessions focused on work-life balance, mental health, and self-regulation helped them fight feelings of burnout. At Blossom, participants identified expert speaker trainings and the introduction of an SEL curriculum as helpful for supporting educator well-being and knowledge of SEL practices.

Policy Considerations

Our analysis of both state-level implementation and school case studies revealed key factors for successful statewide SEL initiatives after the pandemic. We found strong alignment between the perspectives of regional leaders and those of school and community stakeholders regarding facilitators, barriers, and sustainability. In the section below, we discuss the policy implications of our findings from both sets of interviews spanning SYs 2022–2025, including considerations for rural schools.

Regional infrastructure and leadership buy-in were essential to local implementation.

State and regional offices, particularly SEL Hubs and ROEs/ISCs, were instrumental in communicating goals, fostering cross-regional collaboration, and supporting program adoption. Their local knowledge enabled effective resource sharing, needs assessments, and planning. School staff valued regional support, noting that school leader commitment was critical for successful SEL integration into routines and schedules.

SEL coaches were essential for connecting schools—especially rural ones—to resources and opportunities.

SEL coaches were the on-the-ground supporters of the Learning Renewal–SEL work, helping schools find appropriate resources and identifying next steps to strengthen their SEL programming and practices. At rural schools, the SEL coaches helped school stakeholders find out about SEL opportunities, connected them with resources and other schools or districts, and even stepped in to coordinate SEL-related opportunities and events. The SEL coaches filled a gap in capacity at these schools.

Strengthening local capacity is critical to sustaining SEL efforts.

To ensure long-term success of SEL initiatives, it is essential to address persistent capacity constraints and barriers at the school level. Staffing shortages, lack of substitute coverage, and limited planning time frequently hindered participation in SEL professional learning, especially in rural and under-resourced schools. While creative scheduling, such as using in-service days or having administrators cover classes, provided temporary relief, these solutions are not sustainable. Strengthening local capacity—through funding positions to secure substitute coverage, offering travel stipends or incentives for substitutes, and providing structured guidance for school leaders to create time for SEL activities within contract hours—can support long-term sustainability of SEL efforts. Addressing these barriers is critical for schools to fully engage in SEL and maintain momentum over time.

Decentralized, flexible approaches supported local needs.

Flexibility in program selection and communication allowed regions to tailor SEL supports to local needs. This adaptability meant schools could choose programs that aligned with their priorities and cultural context, increasing relevance and buy-in. Regional leaders were able to adjust messaging to resonate with local communities, which helped reduce skepticism and foster trust. Illinois decentralized implementation approach helped overcome political resistance by enabling alternative naming and opt-in options. In areas where SEL terminology was perceived as politically charged, regions could reframe language or emphasize locally valued outcomes, such as student well-being or academic engagement. This approach minimized controversy and allowed schools to participate without fear of backlash. Local autonomy also encouraged broader participation and engagement in SEL efforts by allowing local leaders to embed SEL practices into existing structures.

Sustaining SEL initiatives requires ongoing state investment to bridge gaps in local capacity.

Interviews with regional and school stakeholders revealed that many schools are still in the early stages of SEL implementation, focusing on needs assessments and action planning rather than integrating SEL into budgets or routines. While some schools with strong leadership buy-in may eventually embed SEL into professional learning schedules, others face significant resource constraints and may discontinue SEL without continued state support. Rural schools are especially vulnerable, as the loss of SEL coaches and free resources limits their ability to coordinate professional learning and access tools.

3. To What Extent Were Student and Teacher Outcomes Related to Schools' Participation in SEL Hub Activities?

The COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented disruptions to schooling, leading to declines in academic achievement, increased absenteeism, and significant social-emotional challenges for students and staff both nationally and in Illinois. ISBE prioritized SEL supports as a key strategy for pandemic recovery, reasoning that addressing social-emotional needs was essential for reengaging students and restoring conditions for learning. Central to this effort were SEL Hubs, which served as the primary mechanism for implementing and delivering SEL supports statewide. These hubs provided professional development, coaching, and resources to districts and schools, ensuring that evidence-based practices reached educators and students efficiently.

Research Questions

To what extent did schools engage with SEL Hubs?

To what extent do school characteristics vary across levels of SEL Hub engagement?

What is the relationship between SEL Hub engagement and ...

- student attendance, academic achievement, and discipline?
- school climate?
- teacher attendance and retention?

Our outcome study was designed to provide rigorous evidence on the effectiveness of Illinois's emphasis on SEL as a key recovery strategy. Specifically, we examined whether the state's initiatives achieved their goal of supporting students and staff in recovering from the pandemic. By analyzing differences in outcomes—such as student attendance, discipline, academic performance, teacher retention, and school climate—among schools with varying levels of engagement in SEL Hubs, the study sought to determine whether greater participation in SEL Hubs is associated with more positive recovery trajectories. Because participation in SEL Hubs was widespread across the state, identifying a comparable group of non-participating schools proved challenging. As a result, our study focuses on differences in student and teacher outcomes between schools with different levels of engagement in SEL Hubs, while accounting for pre-pandemic differences across schools. Although these analyses offer valuable insights for policy, the results should not be interpreted as evidence of causality.

It should be noted that this chapter focuses on schools' participation in SEL Hub activities during the 2022–23 and 2023–24 school years, and student and teacher outcomes are measured in those same school years. Therefore, relationships between engagement in SEL Hub activities and student and teacher outcomes represent a maximum of 2 years of engagement. It is likely that larger changes to school culture that SEL Hubs sought to influence will take a longer period of time to manifest and directly influence key outcomes of interest,

and so results presented in this chapter should be considered as preliminary, early evidence of the relationships between engagement with SEL Hubs and outcomes.⁹

OUTCOME STUDY METHODS AND DATA

Data. The data for this study come from both publicly available ISBE school report card data¹⁰, student and staff administrative data provided by ISBE, and data on participation in SEL Hub activities provided through SEL coach logs. Hub participation data were necessary for this study to measure the frequency with which schools participated in Hub activities during the 2022–23 and 2023–24 school years.

Sample. Although the outcome study was designed to include all public and charter elementary, middle, and high schools across the state of Illinois, outcome analyses exclude CPS schools because CPS data did not include information that would allow us to measure the frequency of participation. Based on the number of unique days school staff participated in SEL Hub activities during the 2022–23 and 2023–24 school years, schools that engaged in SEL Hub activities were placed into one of the five engagement categories:

- **minimally engaged:** participated once in only 1 year
- **partially engaged:** participated more than once in only 1 year
- **engaged:** participated both years, total of 4 or fewer days total
- **very engaged:** participated both years, between 5 and 7 days total
- **highly engaged:** participated both years, 8 or more days total

Measures. The outcome study includes 17 outcome measures related to student outcomes, school climate, and teacher outcomes (see Exhibit 7). Each of these outcomes are measured at the school level either as an average across students and teachers in the school or a percentage of the students or teachers who experienced the outcome.

Analytic Methods. Analyses consisted of regression models that compared the average outcomes in schools at each of the five levels of engagement with the outcomes of the 775 schools in Illinois that did not participate in SEL activities, REACH, or Community Partnership Grants.¹¹ To fairly compare outcome measures, regression models accounted for differences in school size and type, school location, school composition, and pre-pandemic outcomes (2019).

⁹ The outcome study focused exclusively on the **SEL Hub component** of the Learning Renewal–SEL initiative. Outcomes related to the **REACH program** were examined in a separate research study. Findings from the REACH evaluation are available at <https://ccr.luriechildrens.org/en/research/>.

¹⁰ ISBE school report card data includes school-level *5Essentials* school culture and climate survey measures. Visit <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/IL-Report-Card.aspx> for more information.

¹¹ An additional 272 schools are excluded from the outcome analysis because they did not participate in SEL Hub activities, but they were identified as participating in REACH or receiving services through Community Partnership Grants, and so these schools did not fit in the comparison group.

Study Limitations. Due to the complexity and volume of SEL Hub program data, analyses related to engagement with SEL Hubs focus on the number of days in which schools engaged with SEL Hub activities and do not reflect the content or quality of activities. Outcome study results presented in this chapter should not be interpreted as causal effects of SEL Hubs. Because schools were not randomly selected to engage with SEL Hubs, and school-level characteristics and pre-pandemic outcomes systematically differed across levels of engagement, differences in outcome measures may be driven by other measurable and non-measurable differences across school contexts. However, by statistically controlling for available measures of school characteristics and student and teacher outcomes prior to the pandemic, the results presented in this chapter demonstrate relationships between schools' engagement with SEL Hubs and key student and teacher outcomes after taking into consideration these important contextual factors.

Exhibit 7. Outcome Measures Included in the Outcome Study

Student outcomes—elementary, middle, and high schools
Attendance rate. Percentage of enrolled days students attended school.
Chronic absenteeism. Percentage of students who were absent for 10% or more of school days in the most recent school year.
High incidence of disciplinary incidents. For middle schools and high schools: more than 20 incidents per 100 students. For elementary schools: more than five incidents per 100 students.
Expulsions. School reported at least one expulsion during the school year.
Student outcomes—elementary and middle schools only
English language arts (ELA) achievement test scores. Average test scores on state ELA exam administered to students in Grades 3–8; standardized by grade and school year.
Mathematics achievement test scores. Average test scores on state mathematics exam administered to students in Grades 3–8; standardized by grade and school year.
Student outcomes—high schools only
Dropout rate. Percentage of students who did not return for the school year or did not graduate as expected.
High school graduation rate. Percentage of students who graduated within 4 years of entering high school, adjusting for students who transfer into and out of the school after Grade 9 entry.
Grade 9 on track. Percentage of first-time ninth-grade students who have earned at least five course credits without failing more than 0.5 course credits in core subjects. For the purposes of this metric, core subjects include reading, math, science, and social science.
School climate from the student perspective—elementary, middle, and high schools
Student–teacher trust. The extent to which students feel safe and comfortable around their teachers, and that their teachers treat them with respect.

Safety. Perceptions of personal safety inside the school building and traveling to and from school.

School climate from the teacher perspective—elementary, middle, and high schools

Collective responsibility. Perceptions of the extent to which teachers in the school take responsibility both for student success and for supporting students who are struggling.

School commitment. Teachers' reports of how loyal they are to the school.

Teacher–principal trust. The extent to which teachers feel respected and well-regarded by their principal.

Teacher–teacher trust. The extent to which teachers feel respected by other teachers in the school and are comfortable expressing concerns or frustrations.

Teacher outcomes—elementary, middle, and high schools

Teacher attendance rate. The percentage of full-time equivalent teachers who reported fewer than 10 days absent for reasons other than professional development, leaves of absence (for example, medical leave or parental leave).

Teacher retention. The percentage of teachers who remain teaching in the school, averaged across the three most recent school years.

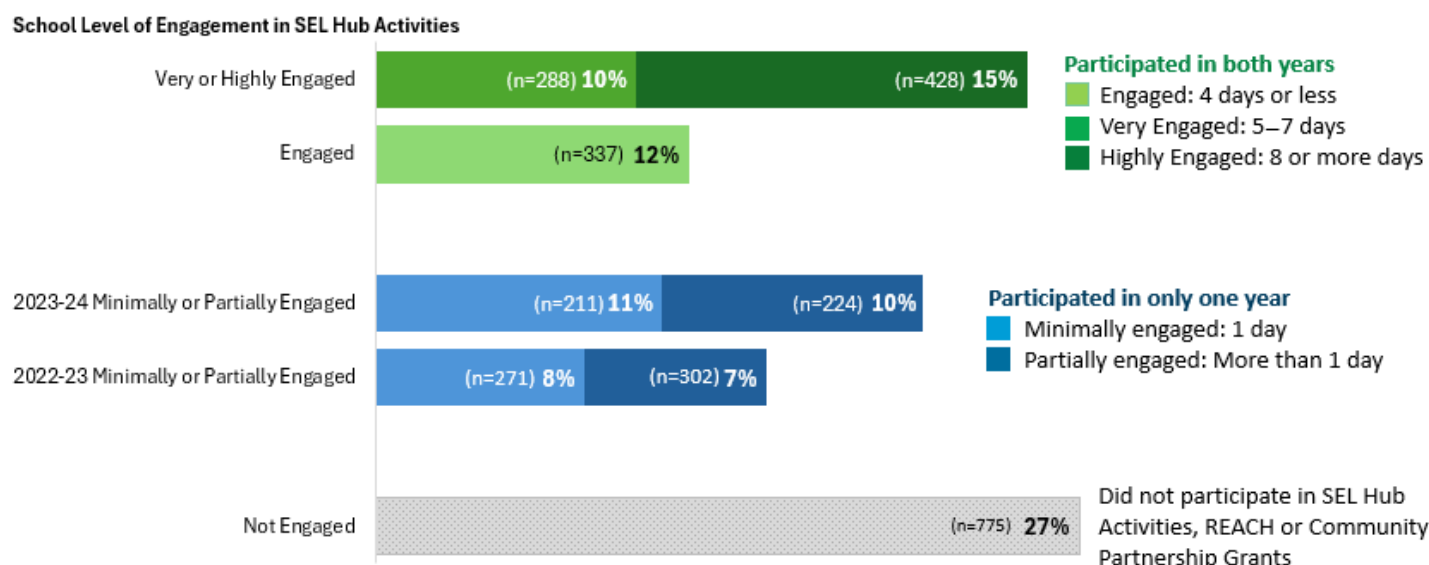
[For more details on the methods and sample, please see Appendix B.](#)

This chapter provides information about the extent to which schools across the state of Illinois participated in SEL Hub activities, the characteristics and pre-pandemic outcomes of schools with varying levels of engagement, and the ways in which key student and teacher outcomes varied across groups of schools based on their level of engagement during the 2022–23 and 2023–24 school years. Because the research questions guiding the outcome study focus on student outcomes during the years of SEL Hub engagement, it is important to first examine pre-pandemic differences among schools. These differences may reflect characteristics that influenced schools' likelihood of seeking out SEL supports and SEL Hub participation.

Nearly three-quarters of Illinois public schools participated in at least one SEL Hub activity during the 2022–23 and 2023–24 school years; one-quarter were very or highly engaged.

Among the public schools included in the outcome study, only 27% of schools did not engage with SEL Hubs during the 2022–23 or 2023–24 school years (see Exhibit 8). Schools that did engage with SEL Hubs varied in their level of engagement, with a total of 36% of schools engaging within a single school year and 37% engaging in both school years. A total of 428 schools (15% of the sample) were highly engaged with the SEL Hubs, indicating that they participated in SEL Hub activities for more than 8 days across the two school years.

Exhibit 8. Percentage of Schools Across Levels of Engagement in SEL Hubs



Note. SEL = social-emotional learning.

Source. SEL Hub activity data for the 2022-23 and 2023-24 school years.

In general, schools that most frequently participated in SEL Hub activities tended to have fewer resources and greater needs—even before the pandemic.

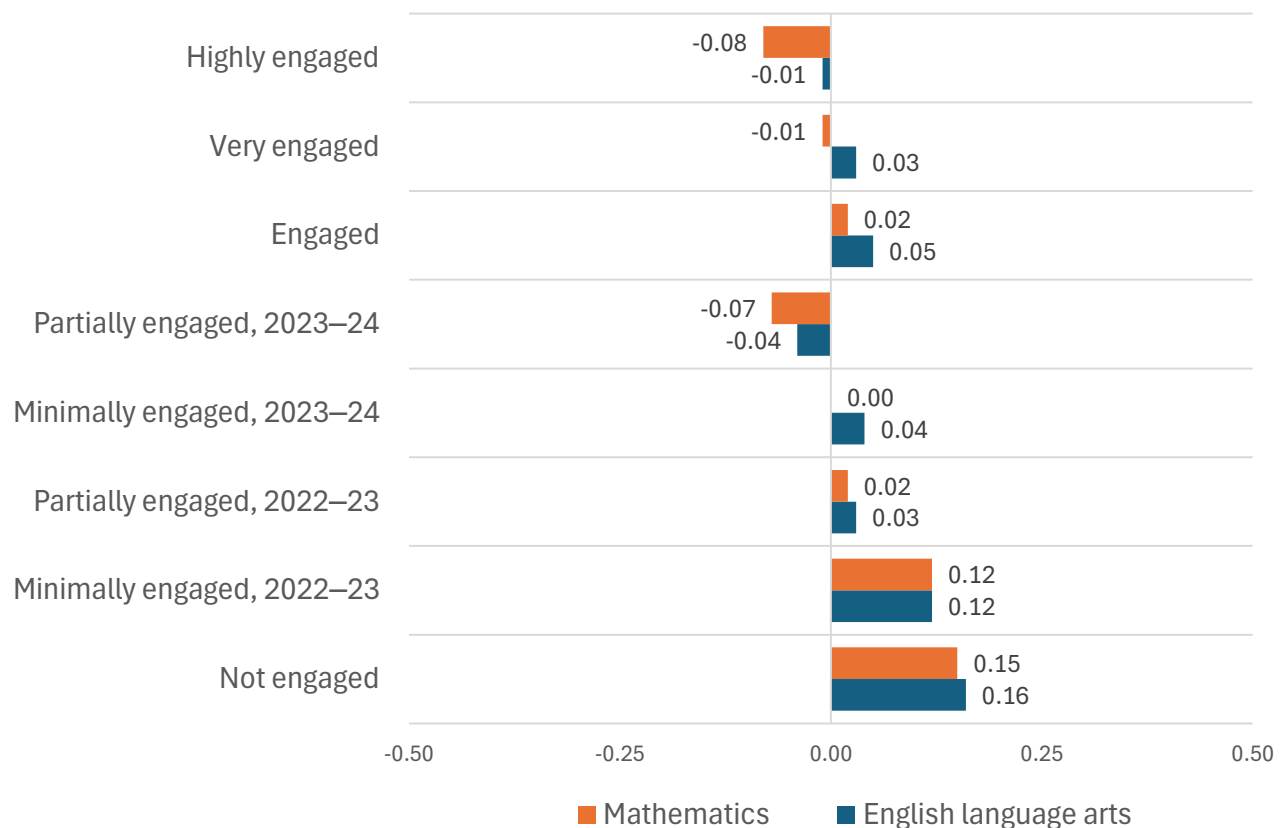
We observed that the characteristics of schools that did not engage with SEL Hubs systematically differed from the characteristics of schools that engaged with SEL Hubs, and that many of these differences were patterned such that schools with higher levels of engagement demonstrated greater need (see Appendix Exhibit B.1). Specifically, relative to schools with lower levels of engagement and schools that did not engage with SEL Hubs, we observed that schools with higher levels of engagement were more likely to:

- be located in rural areas and less likely to be located in suburban areas;
- be high schools and less likely to be elementary schools;
- exhibit lower average values on measures of school climate captured by the 5Essentials survey;
- have lower average achievement test scores in mathematics and ELA;
- have lower average operating expenses per pupil (OEPP); and
- exhibit higher rates of disciplinary incidents and expulsions.

For example, as we show in Exhibit 9, schools with higher levels of engagement with SEL Hubs had lower average achievement test scores in both mathematics and English language arts in

2019. Specifically, among schools that did not engage with SEL Hubs, the average achievement test scores were .16 standard deviations above average in ELA and .15 standard deviations above average in mathematics, and among schools that only participated in 1 day of SEL Hub activities in 2022–23, average achievement test scores were .12 standard deviations above average in both subject areas in 2019. In contrast, among highly engaged schools, average achievement test scores were below average in both subject areas (by .01 standard deviations in ELA and .08 standard deviations in mathematics). Schools that were partially engaged in 2023–24 also exhibited lower average test scores in 2019, with averages of .04 and .07 standard deviations below average in ELA and mathematics, respectively.

Exhibit 9. Average Achievement Test Scores Across Levels of Engagement in SEL Hubs

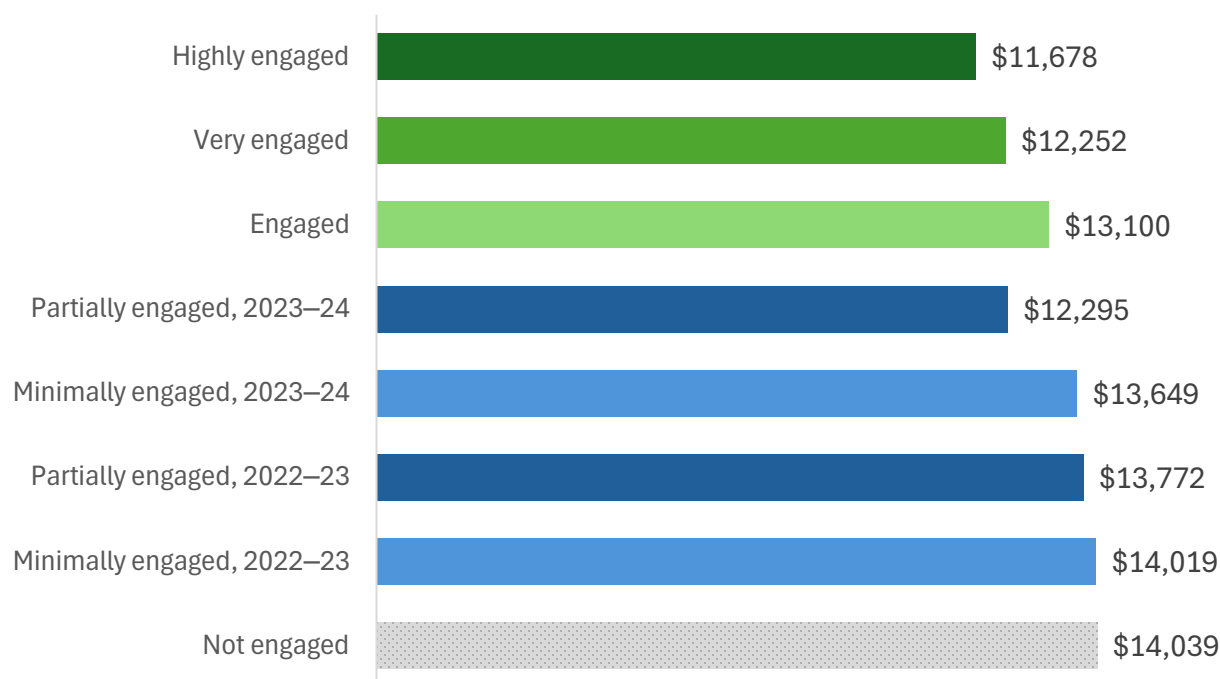


Note. State achievement test scores for the 2018–19 were standardized within grade level. Average achievement test scores were higher among schools that did not engage with SEL Hub activities (0.16 and 0.15 standard deviations in English language arts and mathematics, respectively) than among schools that were very engaged (0.03 and -0.01 standard deviations in English language arts and mathematics, respectively) or highly engaged (-0.01 and -0.08 standard deviations in English language arts and mathematics, respectively).

Source. SEL Hub program data for the 2022–23 and 2023–24 school years and student-level administrative data for the 2018–19 school year from the Illinois State Board of Education.

Following this pattern, when we explored differences in OEPP, schools that did not engage in SEL Hubs tended to be located in districts with higher average OEPP values than schools that engaged with higher frequency across the two years¹². Specifically, the average OEPP among schools that did not engage with SEL Hubs was \$14,039, while the average OEPP was \$12,252 and \$11,678 for schools that were very engaged and highly engaged, respectively. Therefore, on average, schools with more resources were less likely to engage in SEL Hubs.

Exhibit 10. Average Operating Expenses Per Pupil in 2019 Were Lower Among Schools With Lower Levels of SEL Hub Engagement



Note. Average OEPP is measured at the district level. For this analysis, the district-level average was assigned to each school in the district. In 2018–19, the OEPP was higher among schools that did not engage with the SEL Hubs (\$14,039) than schools that were very engaged (\$12,252) or highly engaged (\$11,678) with the SEL Hubs.

Source. SEL Hub program data for the 2022–23 and 2023–24 school years and publicly available data on operating expenses per pupil for the 2018–19 school year.

Taken together, these findings suggest that a combination of targeted recruitment efforts and schools’ self-selection into SEL Hub activities led to systematic differences in the characteristics of schools across levels of engagement such that schools at the higher levels of engagement were the schools that were struggling the most pre-pandemic and therefore had the most to gain. In the sections that follow, it is important to note that statistical models account for these

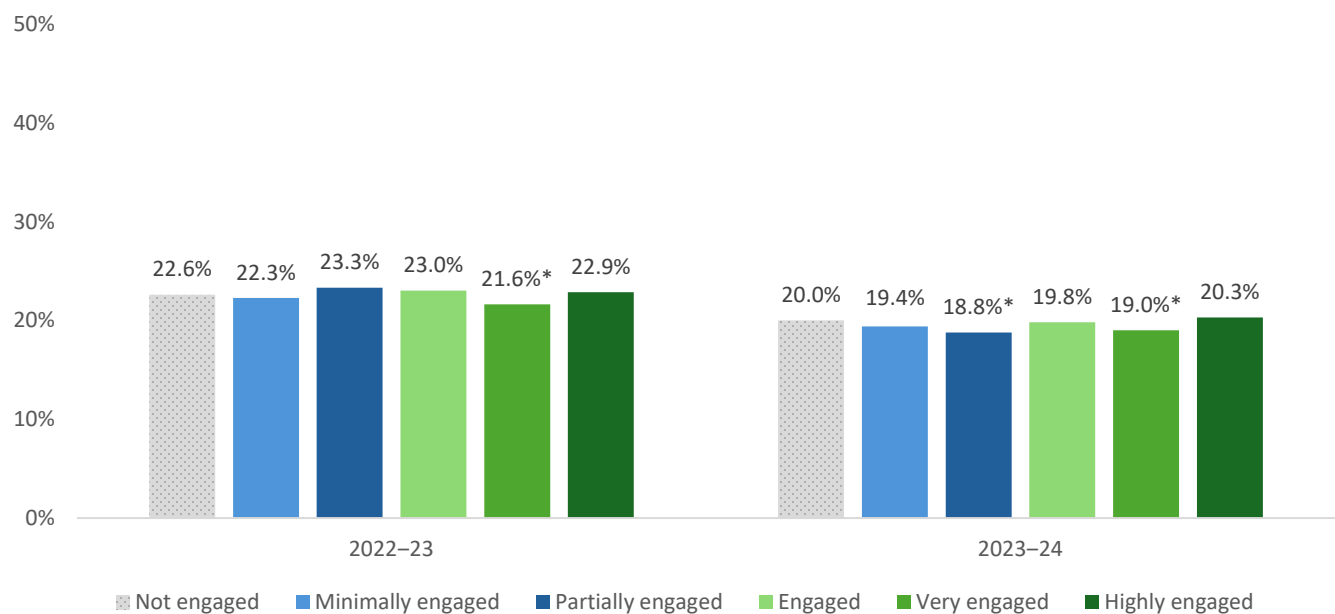
¹² OEPP is measured at the district level. These analyses used the district-level average OEPP for each school.

pre-existing differences in school characteristics to look at relationships between levels of engagement with SEL Hubs and outcomes during the 2022–23 and 2023–24 school years.

In general, schools that are more engaged in SEL Hubs had lower rates of chronic absenteeism and higher math test scores, but they were also significantly related to having a higher number of disciplinary incidents.

Although many measures of students’ academic and behavioral outcomes did not relate to participation in SEL Hubs, we observed significant relationships for three of the nine measures. First, schools that were very engaged with SEL Hub activities across 2022–23 and 2023–24 had significantly lower rates of chronic absenteeism by about 1 percentage point in both school years, after accounting for their rates of chronic absenteeism and other school characteristics in 2019. Similarly, schools that were partially engaged in 2023–24 had significantly lower rates of chronic absenteeism within that school year by about 1.2 percentage points (see Exhibit 11).

Exhibit 11. Engagement With SEL Hubs Was Related to Reduced Rates of Chronic Absenteeism



Note. Values are predicted values resulting from statistical models controlling for school demographics, location, urbanicity, and type. Statistical significance refers to differences between each level of engagement with the “not engaged” group of schools within the school year.

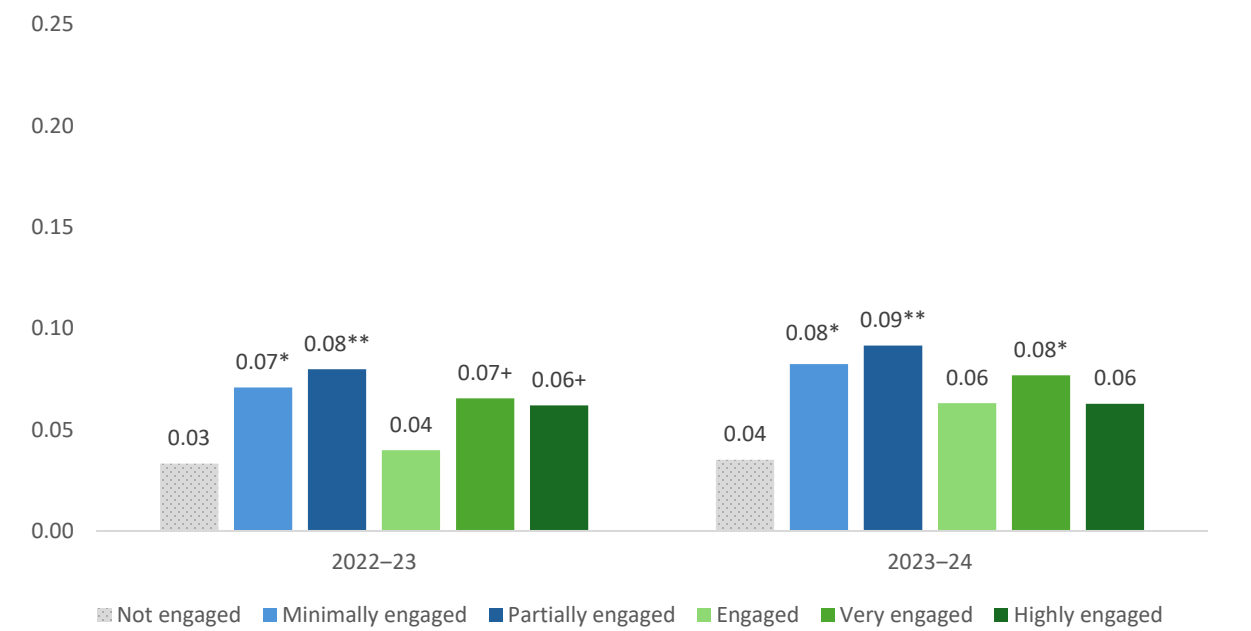
Source. SEL Hub program data and publicly available school report card data from the Illinois State Board of Education for the 2022–23 and 2023–24 school years.

+ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

We also observed that levels of engagement with SEL Hubs were associated with higher average achievement test scores in mathematics after statistically controlling for average

achievement test scores before the pandemic. In both 2022–23 and 2023–24, both minimally and partially engaged schools had higher average mathematics achievement test scores than schools that did not engage with SEL Hubs, and in 2023-24, the difference was also statistically significant among very engaged schools. Relationships were positive for all levels of engagement with SEL Hubs, even when relationships did not achieve statistical significance. However, relationships were relatively small in magnitude, generally ranging from .03 to .06 standard deviations across school years and levels of engagement.

Exhibit 12. Engagement With SEL Hubs Was Related to Higher Achievement Test Scores in Mathematics



Note. Values are predicted values resulting from statistical models controlling for school demographics, location, urbanicity, and type. Statistical significance refers to differences between each level of engagement with the “not engaged” group of schools within the school year.

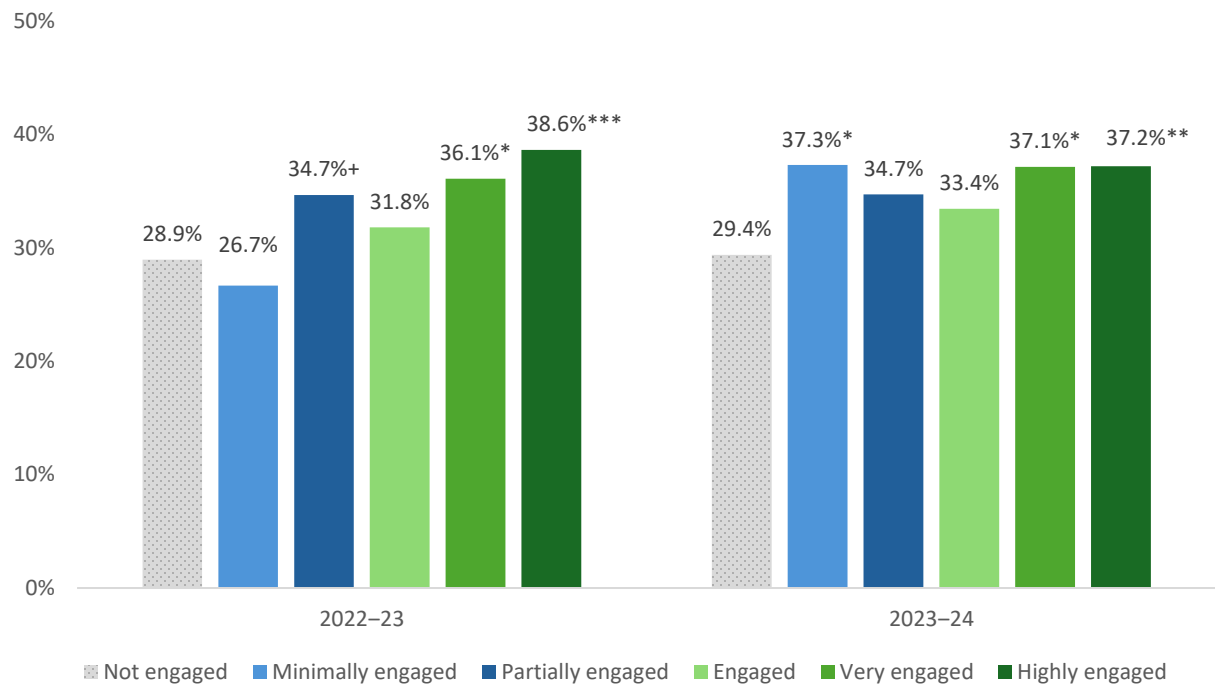
Source. SEL Hub program data and student-level administrative data from the Illinois State Board of Education for the 2022–23 and 2023–24 school years.

+ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Although engagement with SEL Hubs was positively related to mathematics achievement test scores and reduced chronic absenteeism, results also showed that schools that engaged with SEL Hubs were significantly more likely to have a high incidence of disciplinary incidents. In both 2022–23 and 2023–24, very engaged schools and highly engaged schools were both significantly more likely to have a high incidence of disciplinary incidents than schools that did

not engage with SEL Hubs (see Exhibit 13). This positive, significant relationship was also observed for schools that were minimally engaged with SEL Hubs in 2023–24.

Exhibit 13. Engagement with SEL Hubs Was Related to a Greater Likelihood of Experiencing a High Incidence of Disciplinary Incidents



Note. Values are predicted values resulting from statistical models controlling for school demographics, location, urbanicity, and type. Statistical significance refers to differences between each level of engagement with the “not engaged” group of schools within the school year.

Source. SEL Hub program data and publicly available school report card data from the Illinois State Board of Education for the 2022–23 and 2023–24 school years.

+ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

We did not observe relationships between schools’ engagement with SEL Hubs and the following student outcomes: ELA achievement test scores, attendance rates, incidence of expulsions, graduation rates, dropout rates, and rates of Grade 9 students being on track for high school graduation. For the three outcomes that are only measured among high schools (dropout, graduation, and being on track in Grade 9), it is possible that relationships were not significant because fewer than 500 high schools were included in these analyses, and the smaller sample for the analyses make it more difficult to detect significant relationships. We also note that expulsions were reported by only 5% of schools in 2022–23 and 2023–24, indicating a sharp decline in expulsions statewide during this period of time.

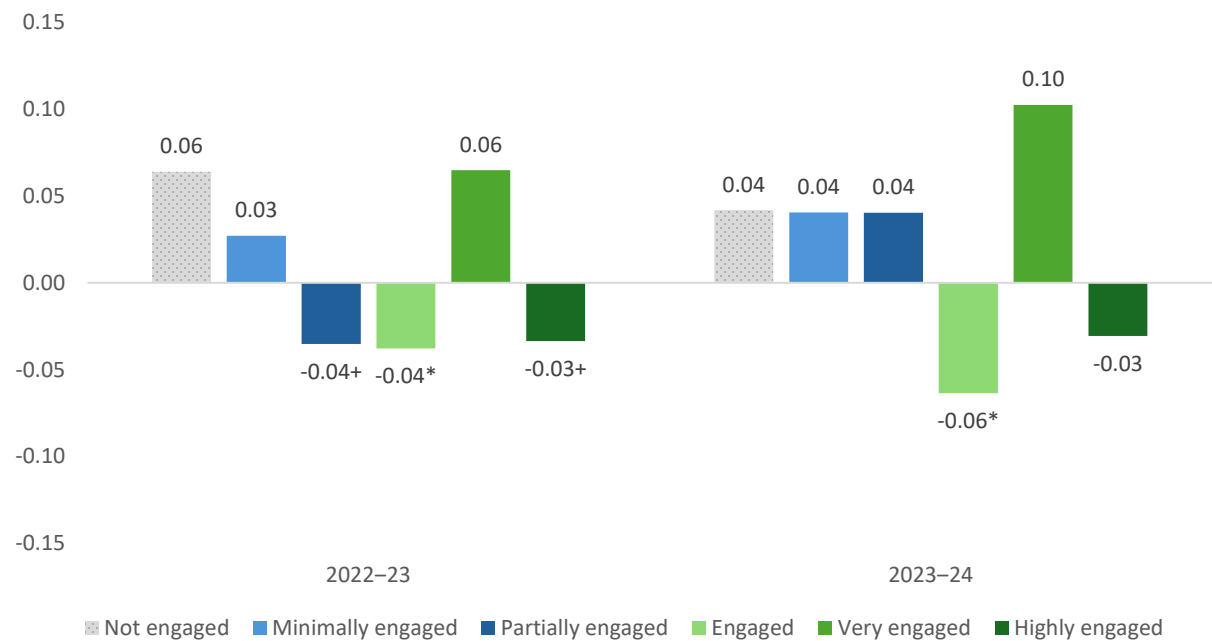
Relationships between participation intensity and measures of school climate were inconsistent, but where significant relationships were observed, they were negative.

For this study, we focused on seven measures of school climate from the 5Essentials survey. Two of these measures capture students' perceptions of the student climate (student–teacher trust and school safety) and four measure teachers' perceptions of the school climate (teacher–teacher trust, teacher–principal trust, school commitment, and collective responsibility). In general, we observed few significant relationships between engagement with SEL Hubs and school climate measures. In the few instances where we observed significant relationships, schools that engaged with SEL Hubs exhibited significantly lower values on school climate measures. In Exhibit 14, we illustrate relationships between engagement with SEL Hubs and student–teacher trust as an example. Relative to schools that did not engage with SEL Hubs:

- Engaged schools exhibited significantly lower levels of student–teacher trust and school commitment. Engaged schools also exhibited somewhat lower levels of school safety and collective responsibility, though differences for these measures did not meet thresholds for statistical significance.
- Highly engaged schools exhibited significantly lower levels of school safety (in 2022–23 only) and teacher–principal trust.

These findings suggest that measures of school climate did not significantly improve during the years in which schools engaged with SEL Hubs. Given the nature of school climate, it is possible that more time is needed to observe whether there is a lagged effect, such that engagement in SEL Hubs may influence school climate once teachers and school leaders have more time to practice the skills that they learn during SEL Hub activities.

Exhibit 14. Some Levels of Engagement With SEL Hubs Were Negatively Related to Student–Teacher Trust



Note. Values are predicted values resulting from statistical models controlling for school demographics, location, urbanicity, and type. Statistical significance refers to differences between each level of engagement with the “not engaged” group of schools within the school year.

Source. SEL Hub program data and publicly available school-level 5Essentials survey data from the Illinois State Board of Education for the 2022–23 and 2023–24 school years.

+ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

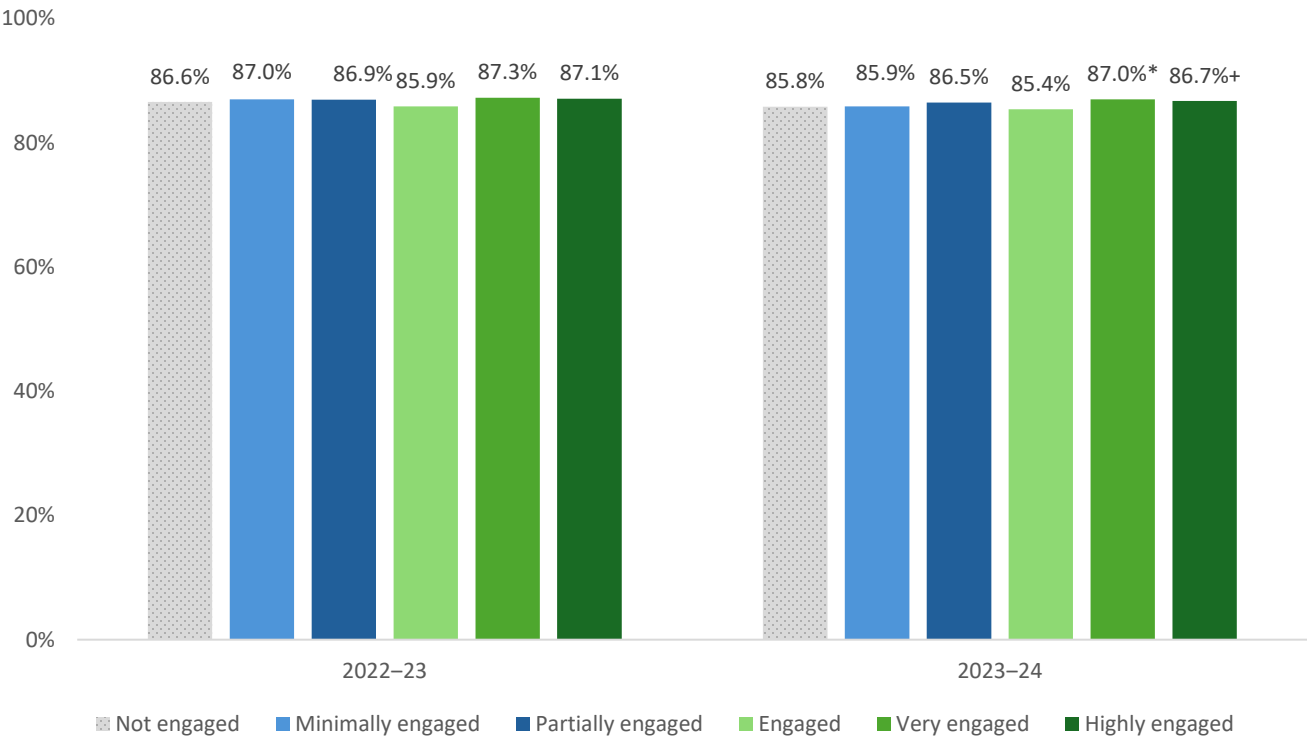
Higher levels of engagement with SEL Hubs were related to both lower teacher attendance and higher rates of teacher retention.

Study findings were mixed when it came to the two measures of teacher behavior: attendance and retention. In general, relationships between levels of SEL Hub engagement and teacher attendance rates were negative, indicating lower rates of teacher attendance among schools that engaged with SEL Hubs, though relationships were only statistically significant for the “engaged” group of schools that showed the lowest level of engagement across both years.¹³ The implication for this outcome measure is difficult to interpret because lower rates of teacher attendance may suggest teacher disengagement or burnout, though it also may indicate teachers’ comfort taking time off when they have physical, mental, or emotional concerns.

¹³ Please note that, because teacher attendance was not measured at the school level in 2022–23, analyses for the teacher attendance outcome only included the outcome measure for the 2023–24 school year.

We observed a positive, significant relationship between SEL Hub engagement and teacher retention rates in 2023–24, but this relationship was particularly observed for schools that were very engaged or highly engaged across both school years (see Exhibit 15). Teacher retention rates were about 1 percentage point higher among very engaged schools and highly engaged schools relative to schools that did not engage with SEL Hubs after accounting for differences in school characteristics and teacher retention rates in 2019. This finding suggests that frequent, sustained participation in SEL Hub activities may influence teachers’ decisions to remain in the school over time.

Exhibit 15. Schools with Higher Levels of Engagement in the SEL Hub Activities Across Years Had Higher Rates of Teacher Retention



Note. Values are predicted values resulting from statistical models controlling for school demographics, location, urbanicity, and type. Statistical significance refers to differences between each level of engagement with the “not engaged” group of schools within the school year.

Source. SEL Hub program data and publicly available school report card data from the Illinois State Board of Education for the 2022–23 and 2023–24 school years.

* $p < .05$

Policy Considerations

Consistent with the policy intent of generating statewide engagement in SEL strategies, almost three-quarters of public schools engaging with SEL Hubs at least once during 2 years of implementation. However, because schools varied in their level of engagement, and because SEL activities focused on long-term systems change such as adapting school culture to better meet students' SEL needs, more time is needed to fully capture the longer term influences of social-emotional well-being on student and teacher outcomes. However, results from this outcome study provide preliminary evidence of relationships between engagement with SEL Hubs and student and teacher outcomes during the first 2 years of implementation.

Targeted outreach for support may increase the likelihood that benefits are experienced in the schools that need it the most.

We observed that schools with higher levels of engagement across the first 2 years of SEL Hub implementation tended to have lower achievement test scores, higher incidence of disciplinary incidents, and lower per-pupil spending prior to the pandemic. In essence, either due to schools' self-selection into participation or SEL Hubs' recruitment of schools with the greatest need, schools with higher levels of engagement tended to be schools that had the most to gain from engaging with SEL Hubs. Future similar efforts for statewide reform may similarly consider a multi-tiered approach to recruitment and engagement of schools, maximizing benefits to students and schools with greatest SEL needs.

Supporting schools in the implementation of SEL strategies may influence student and teacher behaviors, leading to other benefits for students.

Higher levels of engagement with SEL Hubs were positively related to both teacher retention and reduced chronic absenteeism among students. In addition, preliminary findings show that engagement with SEL Hubs was positively related to achievement test scores in mathematics, once we took into account differences in pre-pandemic school characteristics. These early findings suggest that SEL strategies that aim to reduce chronic absenteeism may naturally improve student achievement, as chronically absent students may not be receiving the instruction needed to master the various mathematical concepts that are covered in statewide assessments.

Shifting school culture takes time, and schools may require frequent, sustained support to observe desired outcomes.

During the first 2 years of implementation, differences in student and teacher outcomes were relatively small in magnitude. For example, significant differences between engaged schools and schools that did not engage with SEL Hubs were approximately 1 percentage point for both chronic absenteeism and teacher retention. In addition, relationships tended to achieve

statistical significance when schools engaged frequently with SEL Hubs over an extended period of time. This suggests that long-term change may require sustained and frequent support over time, and that more time is needed to observe whether small differences in initial years of implementation can lead to lasting change over time.

4. What Are the Costs to Schools and Districts of Implementing Learning Renewal SEL?

Implementing SEL programs in Illinois schools requires more than just funding—it demands significant investments of staff time, materials, and infrastructure at the local level.

Understanding these costs means looking beyond obvious expenses like professional development providers and curricular materials to include the time and resources schools and districts dedicate to execution, such as staff hours

redirected to SEL initiatives. While the three Learning Renewal–SEL programs were offered at no cost to schools and districts, participation still required schools to dedicate significant resources to execution, including staff hours, materials, and facilities.

Our cost analysis focuses on the direct expenses incurred by SEL Hub and REACH case study sites, excluding the support provided by ROEs, such as coaching and facility use, which are offered at no cost and represent a significant statewide investment. Even with ROE support, schools and districts still contribute considerable resources to fully participate in SEL programs, including staff time, materials, contracted services, and facilities.

This chapter offers a closer look at the resources—both financial and human—that schools and districts shoulder when they adopt SEL programming. Drawing on case studies from nine schools and one district participating in the SEL Hubs, REACH, and Community Partnership Grant programs, we explore the real-world costs, challenges, and strategies involved in adopting and sustaining SEL efforts. Although these findings may not be universally applicable, they offer valuable insights into the common resource trade-offs and implementation decisions that shape SEL programming across diverse educational settings.

All schools and districts bore costs to participate in SEL Hubs, REACH, and the Community Partnership Grants.

Across all case study sites, schools and districts had to reallocate facility use, materials, and staff time to take advantage of the SEL programs. Exhibit 16 presents the range of costs our case study sites incurred to participate in Illinois’ SEL initiatives during SY 2023–24, showing overall implementation cost expenses from about \$50,000 to nearly \$400,000 and per-student costs from \$148 to \$721, depending on the site and initiative.

Research Questions

What is the overall and per-student cost of implementing the three Learning Renewal–SEL programs in schools and districts?

What are the key drivers of costs?

COST STUDY METHODS AND DATA

This cost study aimed to assess the resources required to implement Illinois' three Learning Renewal–SEL initiatives: SEL Hub, REACH, and the Community Partnership Grant program. We applied the “ingredients approach” (Levin et al., 2018), a comprehensive method that estimates the full value of all resources used and captures both direct expenditures and in-kind contributions such as staff time and facilities.

The analysis focused on actual school-level expenditures.

- For the **SEL Hub and REACH programs**, only costs incurred by schools were estimated, excluding contributions from ROEs, such as coaching or facility use, which were provided at no cost.
- For **Community Partnership Grant** sites, assessed costs include the local resources used to implement Community Partnership Grant programs, such as staff time supervising external partnerships.¹⁴

Costs were categorized by resource type (e.g., personnel, facilities, materials, contracts) and by program component (e.g., training, leadership activities). Where direct cost data were unavailable, reasonable assumptions—such as average rental rates—were used and documented.

Exhibit 16. Cost Study Sample

Cost study primary data collection	Description	Number of interviewees
Initial interviews	Initial interviews with district and school leaders, counselors, and teachers at each of the nine case study sites occurred from October 2023 to June 2024. These interviews addressed questions on implementation of the program as well as costs.	39
Follow-up cost surveys	All interviewees received surveys after their preliminary interviews to provide more detailed information on resources used in program implementation (e.g., hours spent in PL activities, location of professional development). Surveys were collected from October 2023 to June 2024.	31
Cost-specific interviews	Cost-specific interviews with school and district leaders to confirm our understanding of main program components at each case study site* and the related time and resources employed as a result of the school's or district's participation in the SEL program. Interviews occurred from July 2024 to September 2024. *We were only able to meet with representatives of nine of the 12 case study sites.	10

For more details on the methods and sample and for the detailed case studies, please see Appendix C.

¹⁴ Community Partnership Grant recipients received a total of \$635,000 over the duration of the grant. Our cost study focuses specifically on the 2023–24 school year, during which \$311,471 was disbursed to each grantee.

Exhibit 17. School-Level and- District-Level Costs to Implement SEL Programs Differ by Site and Initiative

Case study sites	Overall program implementation cost ^c	Per student implementation cost ^c	Total school per student expenditures ^d
SEL HUB Activities			
Elysian Elementary	\$50,684	\$148	\$19,700
Elmwood Elementary	\$63,844	\$394	\$18,400
Maple Elementary	\$88,761	\$379	\$12,700
REACH			
Bailey Elementary	\$73,656	\$155	\$14,300
Lagoon Elementary	\$155,236	\$512	\$13,100
Buena Vista Elementary	\$307,050	\$721	\$18,700
Ocean High School	\$393,028	\$302	\$21,800
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP GRANT^a			
Sequoia Middle School	\$88,545	\$237	\$18,400
Pine Valley Elementary	\$169,758	\$351	\$14,500

Note. SEL = social-emotional learning; REACH = Resilience Education to Advance Community Healing.

Costs are reported in 2024 dollars; total across categories for each site may not align due to rounding.

^a Community Partnership Grant funds are incorporated in overall program implementation costs and per student implementation costs.

^c Overall program implementation costs refer to the total value of all resources used to support the program, including both existing and new resources. This includes the reallocation of resources already available within the district, such as teacher time during regularly scheduled professional development or the use of existing facilities like the school cafeteria. Per student costs represent the average investment required to support each student participating in the program, calculated by dividing the total implementation costs by the number of students enrolled in each site.

^d Total School Per Student Expenditures refer to the average amount a school spends per enrolled student, calculated by dividing the school's total operating costs by its student enrollment. This includes all instructional, support, administrative, and facility-related expenses.

Source: Authors' analysis of interview data conducted in October 2023–June 2024 and July–September 2024, surveys administered in October 2023–June 2024, and publicly available sources including Illinois Report Card data, district and school websites, and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics databases. A full list of data sources and additional details about each data source can be found in Appendix C.

The cost of implementing SEL programs differed significantly depending on both the program and the site. Even within the same initiative, costs ranged widely—reflecting the unique contexts, priorities, and implementation strategies at each location. For example, among

schools participating in SEL Hub activities, total program costs ranged from just over \$50,000 at Elysian Elementary to nearly \$89,000 at Maple Elementary. Per-student costs also differed, from \$384 per student at Elmwood Elementary compared to \$148 at Elysian.

Among sites participating in the REACH initiative, the cost of implementation differed substantially. Bailey Elementary's costs were approximately \$73,656, while Buena Vista Elementary's costs exceeded \$307,00. Per-student costs also ranged widely, from \$155 at Bailey to \$721 at Buena Vista. Costs associated with the Community Partnership Grant at Sequoia Middle School and Pine Valley Elementary were \$88,545 and \$169,785, respectively. Per-student costs ranged from \$237 to \$351.

These differences reflect how schools and districts in our case study sites tailored their SEL efforts based on local needs, available resources, and strategic choices. Some schools and districts prioritized broader staff training or more intensive student supports, while others focused on targeted interventions or leveraged existing infrastructure to reduce costs.

Local decisions and flexible participation were the primary drivers of implementation costs.

The implementation of SEL Hub Activities, REACH, and Community Partnership Grants across case study sites showed that program costs varied based on school and district decisions. These choices were enabled by the initiatives' flexible, opt-in design, which allowed local leaders to tailor approaches to community needs, resources, and infrastructure. This structure—central to Learning Renewal–SEL programs—honored Illinois' tradition of local control and avoided resistance often associated with mandates. Schools and districts determined how to engage in SEL Hub activities and REACH, or use Community Partnership Grants, and these decisions directly influenced costs.

Three elementary schools—Maple, Elmwood, and Elysian—partnered with ROE SEL Hubs to strengthen SEL systems through professional development, trauma-informed practices, and schoolwide programming. Each formed an SEL Hub Team, but strategies reflected local priorities. Maple emphasized staff engagement through required and optional trainings, family outreach, and wellness resources. Elmwood focused on monthly restorative practice trainings and direct SEL programming for students. Elysian adopted a district-wide approach, combining REACH modules, trauma-responsive needs assessments, and daily SEL activities supported by a leadership community of practice.

Differences in implementation were shaped by the flexibility of SEL Hubs, which let schools decide staff participation levels, frequency of engagement, and whether to hire additional personnel. For example, Maple and Elysian sent more staff to events and incurred travel costs,

while Lagoon hired new staff for SEL activities, significantly increasing spending. Maple and Elmwood had similar overall and per-student costs, while Elysian’s per-student costs were lower, likely due to its districtwide team and larger student population. (See Exhibit 18 for more information about the SEL Hub activities, implementation, and their associated costs).

Exhibit 18. SEL Hub Activities Cost Breakdown by Case Study Site

Implementation activities	Maple Elementary	Elmwood Elementary	Elysian Elementary
SEL Hub Team - Professional Learning & Planning Time	\$158 (42%)	\$73 (19%)	\$5 (5%)
Mandatory SEL Trainings (all staff)	\$141 (37%)	\$76 (19%)	\$59 (40%)
Optional SEL Trainings (all staff)	\$61 (16%)	\$16 (4%)	\$0 (0%)
Supports for Teacher Wellness	\$12 (3%)	\$0 (%)	\$0 (%)
SEL Activities & Supports for Students	\$9 (2%)	\$228 (58%)	\$61 (41%)
REACH-Related Activities ^a	\$0 (0%)	\$0 (0%)	\$20 (14%)
Total per student cost^b	\$379	\$394	\$148

Note. SEL = social-emotional learning; REACH = Resilience Education to Advance Community Healing. Costs are reported in 2024 dollars; total across categories for each site may not align due to rounding.

^a Though Elysian was selected as an SEL hub school site for our study, many schools—including Elysian Elementary—opted into participating in both SEL Hub and REACH activities. These programs often overlapped, as schools frequently opted into multiple SEL supports based on their needs and goals. For example, alongside its engagement in SEL Hub Activities, Elysian also opted into the TRS-IA REACH assessment, a REACH tool for developing an action plan that SEL Hubs delivered.

Source. Authors’ analysis of interview data conducted in October 2023–June 2024 and July–September 2024, surveys administered in October 2023–June 2024, and publicly available sources including Illinois Report Card data, district and school websites, and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics databases. A full list of data sources and additional details about each data source can be found in Appendix C.

While REACH includes core activities, it offers schools flexibility to implement supports based on their unique needs and priorities. All four REACH case study schools implemented core REACH elements during 2023–24: forming a REACH team, training staff in SEL practices, and introducing student supports. However, each school adapted the model to its context. Lagoon Elementary invested heavily in staff development, hiring a full-time counselor and adopting a new SEL curriculum—the largest cost driver. Buena Vista took a schoolwide approach, adding a daily SEL block and training all staff, with costs concentrated in staff time for training and implementation. Bailey Middle School adopted a modest model, providing stipends for the REACH team, required SEL training, and a daily SEL block, resulting in the lowest costs. Ocean High School focused on capacity-building and family engagement, hosting a parent SEL session

and dedicating significant resources to staff time (51%) and training (37%). (See **Exhibit 19** for more information about REACH activities, implementation, and their associated costs).

These variations reflect strategic choices rather than mandates. Schools prioritized different goals—intensive staff development, expanded student services, or family engagement—within the flexible design of REACH and SEL Hubs, tailoring implementation to local needs.

Exhibit 19. REACH Activities Cost Breakdown by Case Study Site

REACH – case study site activities cost breakdown	Lagoon Elementary	Buena Vista	Bailey Middle School	Ocean High School
REACH Team - Professional Learning	\$12 (2%)	\$36 (5%)	\$20 (13%)	\$25 (8%)
Mandatory SEL Trainings (all staff)	\$179 (36%)	\$338 (47%)	\$87 (56%)	\$111 (37%)
Optional SEL Trainings (all staff)	\$23 (4%)	\$0 (0%)	\$0 (0%)	\$0 (0%)
Supports for Teacher Wellness	\$0 (0%)	\$0 (0%)	\$2 (1%)	\$0 (0%)
SEL Activities & Supports for Students	\$19 (4%)	\$347 (48%)	\$0 (0%)	\$155 (51%)
Offsite SEL/Trauma Trainings for REACH Team	\$0 (0%)	\$0 (0%)	\$47 (30%)	\$0 (0%)
New Personnel	\$278 (54%)	\$0 (0%)	\$0 (0%)	\$0 (0%)
SEL Presentation for Parents	\$0 (0%)	\$0 (0%)	\$0 (0%)	\$11 (4%)
Total per student cost	\$512	\$721	\$155	\$302

Note. SEL = social-emotional learning; REACH = Resilience Education to Advance Community Healing (REACH). Costs are reported in 2024 dollars; total across categories for each site may not align due to rounding.

Source. Authors' analysis of interview data conducted in October 2023–June 2024 and July–September 2024, surveys administered in October 2023–June 2024, and publicly available sources including Illinois Report Card data, district and school websites, and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics databases. A full list of data sources and additional details about each data source can be found in Appendix C.

Community Partnership Grants offered districts a flexible funding model designed to support locally tailored responses to post-pandemic challenges.

Established to address unfinished learning and disparities in student wellness, the grants aimed to reduce inequities in meeting students' social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs. Central to the program was the goal of building sustainable partnerships between schools, community-based organizations, and mental health providers—partnerships intended to outlast the grant period.

Grantees were encouraged to design strategies grounded in evidence-based needs assessments and community input. This flexibility allowed for a wide range of approaches, including integrated wellness supports, expanded learning time, and active family and community engagement. However, the open-ended nature of the grant led to considerable variation in

how funds were used and the costs of implementation. In our two Community Partnership Grant case study sites, we observed differences not only in spending levels but also in cost drivers. Sites that built new internal programs often faced higher expenses, particularly for staffing and facilities. In contrast, schools that contracted external services tended to incur lower costs, especially when those services aligned with existing systems.

Each case study site translated the grant’s flexibility into distinct spending choices shaped by local priorities and capacities (see Exhibit 20). Sequoia Middle School concentrated 72% of its spending on staff participation in districtwide wellness initiatives. While direct costs were modest, the real investment came from staff time spent planning and attending events outside regular hours—an opportunity cost not fully captured in financial reports but critical to the program’s success. Pine Valley Elementary School took a different approach by contracting a full-time mental health counselor. This intervention was smoothly integrated into existing structures like the multi-tiered systems of support team, minimizing additional demands on staff or facilities. Because the counselor’s role fit within the school’s existing framework, the additional costs were relatively contained.

Exhibit 20. Community Partnership Grants Costs Breakdown by Case Study Site

Community Partnership Grant activities by case study Site	Overall cost	Per student implementation cost	Percentage of costs in each school
Sequoia Middle School			
School Staff Attendance at Committee Activities	\$63,920		72%
Staff Participation in Activities Committee	\$14,478		16%
External Partnerships	\$10,147		11%
Total	\$88,545		
Pine Valley Elementary School			
Counselor Contract and Office Costs	\$123,565		73%
Staff + Parent Time, Materials, and Facilities Costs From Working With the Counselor	\$31,684		19%
Behavioral Health Consultant	\$13,535		8%
Materials for Parent University	\$1,000		1%
Total	\$169,785		

Note. Community Partnership Grant funds are incorporated in overall program implementation costs and per student implementation costs. Community Partnership Grant recipients received a total of \$635,000 over the duration of the grant. Our cost study focuses specifically on the 2023–24 school year, during which \$311,471 was disbursed to each grantee. These funds are incorporated in overall program implementation costs and per student implementation costs. Costs are reported in 2024 dollars.

Source. Authors’ analysis of interview data conducted in October 2023–June 2024 and July–September 2024, surveys administered in October 2023–June 2024, and publicly available sources including Illinois Report Card data,

district and school websites, and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics databases. A full list of data sources and additional details about each data source can be found in Appendix C.

Personnel costs accounted for the vast majority of costs across all but one of our case study sites.

Using the ingredients approach, costs were categorized into four components: personnel, facilities, materials, and contracts. Across all three initiatives—the SEL Hub, REACH, and Community Partnership Grant programs—personnel costs consistently emerged as the primary driver of total expenditures, reflecting the central role of staff in planning, training, and delivering SEL supports. These costs were primarily tied to teacher and staff time, including professional development, team planning, and direct implementation activities. In several cases, schools made substantial investments in staffing, such as hiring new personnel or dedicating existing staff to SEL-related roles. Even when excluding pre-existing commitments, personnel remained the largest cost category across nearly all sites. These findings are visually summarized in Exhibit 21, which displays each site’s percentage distribution across spending categories.

Personnel costs represented the largest share of implementation at all three SEL Hub case study schools. Maple devoted 87% of costs to staff time for SEL Hub Team planning and schoolwide professional development. Elmwood attributed 93% to personnel, driven by a nine-member leadership team, ROE-led meetings, and monthly restorative practice training. At Elysian, personnel comprised 95% of overall costs and three-fourths of new costs, including planning, all-staff training, and coordination of SEL activities, with additional expenses for off-site training and travel.

Staff time and training drove the majority of REACH implementation costs across Lagoon, Buena Vista, Bailey, and Ocean. Lagoon allocated 94% to hiring a counselor and staff training. Buena Vista dedicated 97%, primarily for staff time delivering a daily SEL block and weekly professional development. Bailey’s modest approach focused on SEL training and REACH Team planning, while Ocean directed 90% to staff and parent time, with the remaining 10% for contracted services to support SEL capacity building. Across sites, staff time—whether through new hires, classroom integration, or ongoing training—was the most substantial investment.

Personnel costs were also the key driver of costs to schools at the Community Partnership Grant case study sites. Sequoia Middle School devoted 57% to personnel for planning and executing over 100 social events. Even at Pine Valley Elementary, where contracted services were a larger share, those contracts often supported personnel-like functions, such as hiring

SEL staff. Overall, staffing—whether direct employment or contracted roles—was central to implementing grant-funded initiatives.

Exhibit 21. Personnel Costs Were the Largest Driver of Implementation Costs for Almost All Case Study Sites

		Total Cost	Personnel Costs	Contracted Services Costs	Facilities and Related Travel	Materials Cost
REACH	Buena Vista Elementary	\$721	97%	0%	1%	3%
	Lagoon Elementary	\$512	94%	0%	2%	4%
	Bailey Elementary	\$155	93%	0%	7%	0%
	Ocean High	\$302	89%	10%	0%	0%
SEL Hubs	Elysian Elementary	\$148	95%	0%	5%	0%
	Elmwood Elementary	\$394	93%	5%	2%	0%
	Maple Elementary	\$379	87%	0%	10%	3%
Community Partnership Grant	Sequoia Middle School	\$237	57%	20%	4%	20%
	Pine Valley Elementary	\$351	22%	61%	17%	1%

Note. Exhibit 21 breaks down total costs for our case study sites and displays each site’s percentage distribution across four spending categories: Personnel, Contracted Services, Facilities and Related Travel, and Materials. Costs are reported in 2024 dollars.

Source: Authors’ analysis of interview data conducted in October 2023–June 2024 and July–September 2024, surveys administered in October 2023–June 2024, and publicly available sources including Illinois Report Card data, district and school websites, and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics databases. A full list of data sources and additional details about each data source can be found in Appendix C.

Policy Considerations

The total costs of implementing SEL programming go well beyond what can be seen in school budgets. Knowing what each intervention truly costs to schools may allow state and district policy makers to weigh spending decisions given limited resources. Identifying differences in costs across sites, especially under flexible grant structures, can help inform conversations about balancing local autonomy with strategic guidance.

Differences in local implementation influence the resources required.

Local implementation choices significantly impact the resources needed for SEL programs. Each school’s unique preferences, decision making, and capacity shape its approach and costs. For example, in the REACH program, one site hired a full-time staff member for implementation—an unanticipated decision that substantially increased expenses. This demonstrates how local decisions can drive overall investment, even within a shared program framework. Flexible

funding policies, such as those in the Community Partnership Grant, empower communities to tailor strategies to local needs. While this flexibility is a strength, it also leads to variation in program costs and approaches. Some sites rely on existing staff and facilities, while others invest in new personnel or infrastructure, resulting in a broader range of resource needs. Future flexible funding policy designs that provide clear goals and guidance can also help localities align spending with intended outcomes and manage additional resource demands beyond initial funding.

Considerations of resource use and cost implications can support sustainable policy making.

Differences in costs across the three programs demonstrate how even well-structured policies must interact with the realities of local implementation. In both the SEL Hub and REACH programs, the majority of school-level expenditures were tied to staff time spent on PL, skill-building, and direct implementation with students. As with many educational initiatives, SEL efforts demand time for training and collaboration—elements that are often overlooked in cost evaluations. This highlights the need for school and district leaders to have the resources and training necessary to incorporate cost analysis into their decision-making. Such analysis should include considerations of opportunity costs associated with staff time, materials, and facilities when evaluating new programs

5. Staff and Student Well-Being and Relationships with School Culture: Findings from the SEL-W Survey

The Illinois Learning Renewal–SEL Well-Being (SEL-W) survey was designed as an exploratory tool to better understand the social-emotional well-being of students and educators across Illinois during a period of unprecedented change. While the state has long used the 5Essentials survey to capture perceptions of school climate, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for more direct measures of emotional health and resilience. The SEL-W survey addresses this gap by providing new insights into how students and staff are experiencing SEL and well-being in school.

Research Questions

- How do students and staff perceive their own social and emotional well-being?
- To what extent is school climate related to students' social and emotional well-being and attendance?
- To what extent is school climate related to staff's social and emotional well-being and teacher retention?

Administered by AIR in partnership with ISBE, the SEL-W survey was implemented over three consecutive school years (2022–23 through 2024–25) as part of the Learning Renewal–SEL initiative. This chapter includes exploratory analyses of survey response patterns, differences across demographic and school characteristics, and relationships between SEL-W indicators, school climate measures from the 5Essentials Survey, and outcomes likely influenced by social-emotional well-being. These analyses are intended to generate hypotheses and inform future research and practice, rather than provide causal conclusions. A technical report—including detailed psychometric properties of the survey measures—is provided in Appendix D.

Overall, students reported competency in social awareness and decision making, but more difficulty in SEL competencies related to self-management.

Students generally responded positively to survey questions related to their social-emotional well-being in the SEL-W survey, with more than three-quarters of students responding positively to items associated with social awareness, responsible decision making, relationship skills, self-concept, and emotional knowledge (see Exhibit 12). Students were somewhat less likely to respond positively to survey items related to self-management, with two-thirds of students responding positively to statements related to emotion regulation.

This finding suggests that, among students who took the SEL-W survey between 2022–23 and 2024–25, students were likely to be aware of their emotions, but they experienced challenges handling their emotions.

THE ILLINOIS LEARNING RENEWAL–SEL-W SURVEYS

The staff survey is based on a conceptual framework that was adapted from recent AIR work on educator well-being for the Council of Chief State School Officers (Yoder et al., 2023). Most items were used in a prior study of SEL in Illinois.

The survey consisted of 30 questions (with response options ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree) for staff to self-report their competencies and well-being across six constructs:

- *School working conditions*: Adults in the school cooperate to support and demonstrate students' social and emotional skills.
- *Learning Renewal–SEL practices*: Staff perceptions of their knowledge and preparedness to promote students' social-emotional well-being through instructional and relational practices.
- *Emotional intelligence*: Staff are aware of their emotions and are comfortable expressing and handling their emotions.
- *Capacity to support students*: Staff preparedness to provide social-emotional support and respond to students' needs in the classroom and school setting.
- *Personal well-being*: Staff general sense of health, balance, and ability to manage daily responsibilities in ways that support focus and effective functioning.
- *Professional well-being*: Staff feel burned out or frustrated with their jobs, are struggling to find motivation in their work.

The survey of students' SEL competencies was based on the Washoe County School District Social and Emotional Competency Assessment. This survey aligns with the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning's five core SEL competencies and consists of 40 questions (with response options ranging from very difficult to very easy) for students to self-report their competencies across eight SEL constructs:

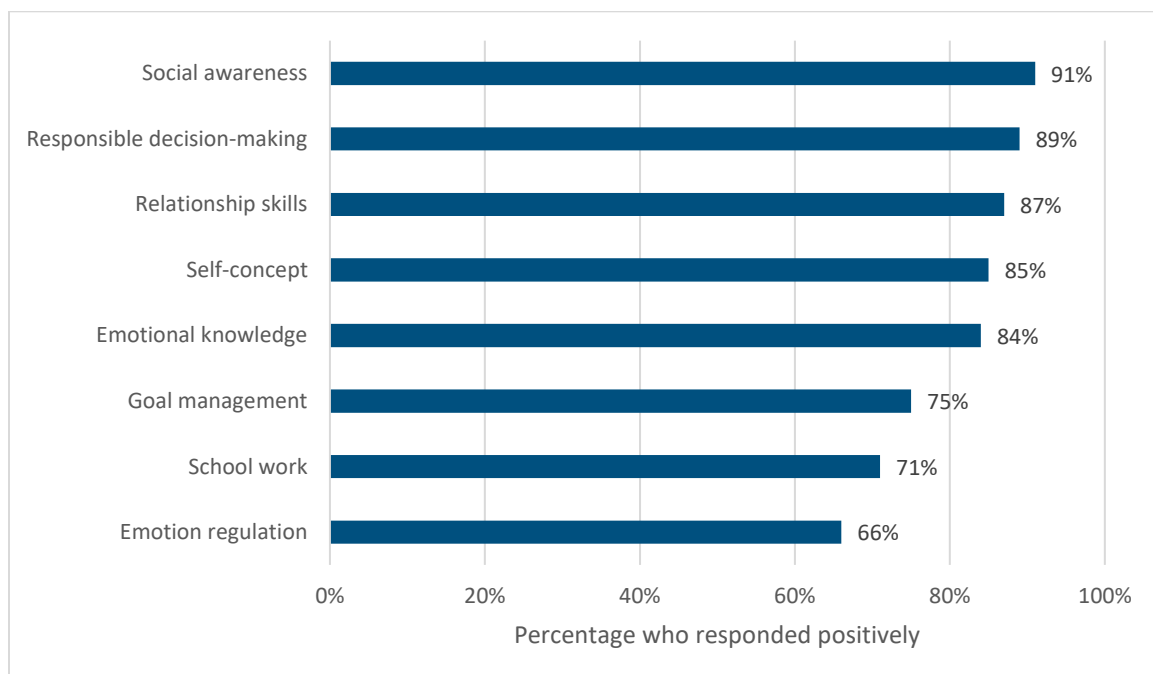
- *Self-awareness*: Knows their strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a growth mindset.
 - *Self-concept*: Being self-aware about strengths, weaknesses, and strategies for improvement.
 - *Emotional knowledge*: Being self-aware of their emotions, how emotions affect their behaviors and thoughts, and how to handle their emotions.
- *Social awareness*: Understands the perspectives of others and empathizes with them.
- *Self-management*: Effectively manages stress, controls impulses, and motivates themselves to set and achieve goals.
 - *Emotional regulation*: Controls behavior and continues to work even when experiencing difficult emotions.
 - *Goal management*: Sets goals, creates plans to achieve goals, and finishes difficult tasks.
 - *School work*: Completes schoolwork, prepares for tests, stays focused in class, and plans ahead to accomplish work on time.

- *Relationship skills*: Communicates clearly. Listens well, cooperates with others, resists inappropriate social pressure, negotiates conflict constructively, and seeks and offers help when needed.
- *Responsible decision making*: Makes constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety, and social norms.

For the survey analyses presented in this chapter, SEL-W survey data collected by AIR (and collected by a third-party vendor for schools in Chicago Public Schools) were aggregated to the school level.

For more details on measurement properties on the SEL-W survey measures, please see Appendix E.

Exhibit 22. Student Perceptions of Their Own Social-Emotional Well-Being



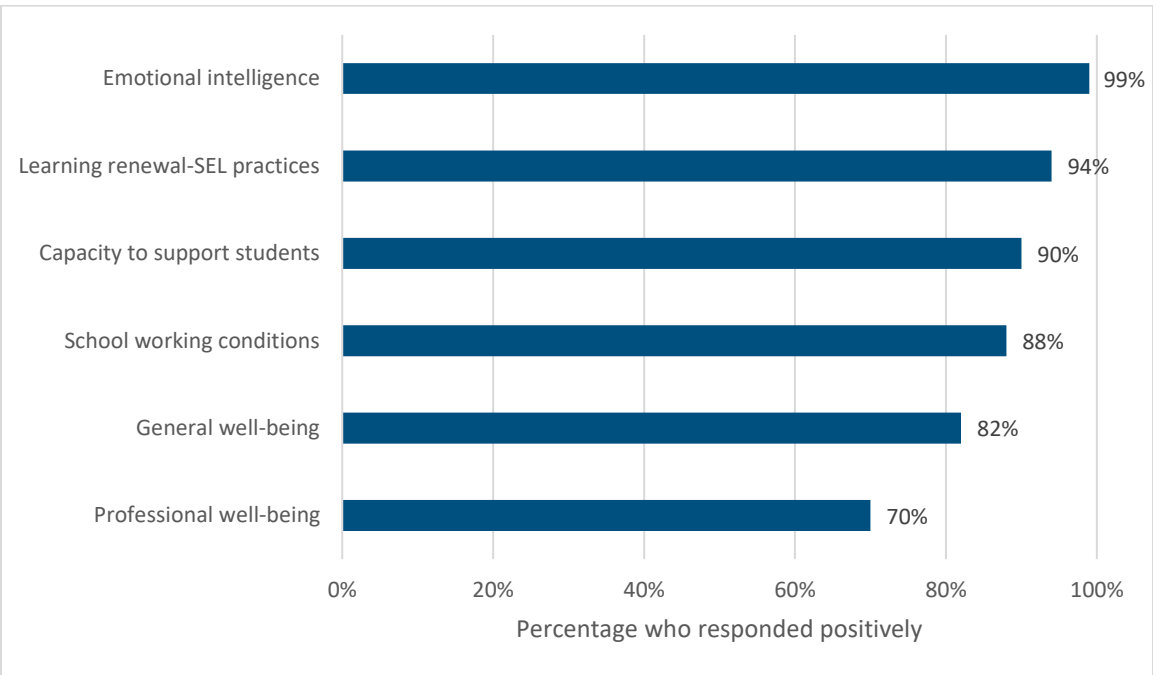
Note. Percentages reflect participants' tendency to choose "easy" or "very easy" in response to each construct, determined through Rasch modeling, which combines item-level responses to estimate an overall inclination. Please see Appendix D for more information about the methodology.

Source. The Illinois Learning Renewal–SEL Well-Being Student Survey, administered in 2022–23, 2023–24, and 2024–25.

School staff generally reported positive SEL well-being, but they reported lower levels of professional well-being.

Staff who responded to the SEL-W staff survey generally responded positively to survey questions, with positive responses to 88% or more of items related to school culture, staff capacity to support students, and emotional intelligence (see Exhibit 23). However, staff responses to survey questions related to their own well-being were less positive. In particular, only 70% of staff responded positively to questions associated with professional well-being, indicating that almost one-third of staff expressed concerns with burnout and frustration at work.

Exhibit 23. Staff Perceptions of Their Own Social-Emotional Well-Being



Note. Percentages reflect participants’ tendency to choose “agree” or “strongly agree” in response to each construct, determined through Rasch modeling, which combines item-level responses to estimate an overall inclination. Please see Appendix D for more information about the methodology.

Source. The Illinois Learning Renewal–SEL Well-Being Staff Survey, administered in 2022–23, 2023–24, and 2024–25.

Schools with higher levels of student SEL well-being also tend to report more positive school climate, as well as higher student attendance rate.

Across school climate measures in the 5Essentials survey, Parent Supportiveness and Student–Teacher Trust showed the strongest associations with students’ SEL and well-being across domains. Parent Supportiveness was consistently related to all outcomes, with the largest

coefficients for Relationship Skills and Decision Making and a strong link to Self-Awareness. Student–Teacher Trust was most strongly related to Relationship Skills and Decision Making, with moderate associations elsewhere. Other school climate factors (for example, Safety, Academic Personalism, Peer Support) were positively related but generally smaller in magnitude. See Exhibit 27 for a list of outcome measures and definitions.

Exhibit 24. Relationships Between Survey Measures, 5Essentials Survey Measures, and Student Attendance

	Self-awareness		Social awareness	Self-management			Relationship skills	Decision making
	Self-concept	Emotion knowledge		Emotion regulation	Goal management	School work		
Parent Supportiveness	0.399	0.335	0.315	0.259	0.311	0.373	0.411	0.431
Student–Teacher Trust	0.249	0.258	0.381	0.169	0.230	0.295	0.531	0.427
Human & Social Resources in the Community	0.302	0.216	0.258	0.155	0.172	0.258	0.410	0.338
Academic Engagement	0.138	0.264	0.242	0.173	0.262	0.230	0.379	0.341
Academic Personalism	0.205	0.190	0.299	0.148	0.221	0.209	0.380	0.322
Safety	0.193	0.156	0.276	0.061	0.145	0.289	0.394	0.317
Peer Support for Academic Work	0.074	0.127	0.226	0.009	0.154	0.280	0.399	0.311
Student Peer Relationships	0.085	0.167	0.178	0.019	0.110	0.248	0.412	0.335
Student Attendance Rate	0.10	0.03	0.20*	0.05	0.09	0.25*	0.23*	0.12

Note. Dark green cells indicate strong relationships (standardized relationships exceeding 0.5), light green indicates moderate relationships (standardized relationships between .25 and .50), dark blue cells indicate weak relationships (standardized relationships between .10 and .30), and light blue cells indicate minimal relationships (standardized relationships below .10). A detailed description of analyses and results is provided in Appendix D. *Source.* The Illinois Learning Renewal–SEL Well-Being Student Survey, administered in 2022–23, 2023–24, and 2024–25; Illinois state report card data and 5Essentials data for the 2022–23 AND 2023–24 school years.

Schools with higher levels of teacher SEL well-being also reported more positive school climate measures and higher teacher retention rates.

Across staff SEL and well-being outcomes, Instructional Leadership and School Commitment demonstrated the strongest relationships. Instructional Leadership showed the highest

associations overall, particularly with School Working Conditions, Capacity to Support Students, and Learning Renewal–SEL Practices, with moderate links to Professional Well-Being. School Commitment also exhibited strong relationships, most notably with Professional Well-Being and School Working Conditions, alongside moderate associations with Capacity to Support Students. Other constructs, including Collective Responsibility, Teacher–Principal Trust, Teacher–Teacher Trust, Collaborative Practices, Teacher Influence, and Teacher Safety, were positively related but generally smaller in magnitude. See Exhibit 27 for a list of outcome measures and definitions.

Exhibit 25. Relationships Between Survey Measures, 5Essentials Survey Measures, and Teacher Retention

	School working conditions	Learning Renewal-SEL practices	Emotional intelligence	Capacity to support students	General well-being	Professional well-being
Instructional Leadership	0.625	0.486	0.359	0.548	0.281	0.445
School Commitment	0.533	0.353	0.180	0.396	0.276	0.514
Collective Responsibility	0.476	0.324	0.249	0.393	0.178	0.290
Teacher–Principal Trust	0.484	0.341	0.159	0.358	0.111	0.385
Teacher–Teacher Trust	0.484	0.254	0.266	0.337	0.221	0.260
Collaborative Practices	0.324	0.255	0.295	0.315	0.182	0.179
Teacher Influence	0.352	0.233	0.128	0.256	0.170	0.245
Teacher Safety	0.222	0.176	0.022	0.218	0.127	0.309
Teacher Retention	0.168*	0.054	0.148*	0.113*	0.218*	0.022

Note. Dark green cells indicate strong relationships (standardized relationships exceeding 0.5), light green indicates moderate relationships (standardized relationships between .25 and .50), dark blue cells indicate weak relationships (standardized relationships between .10 and .30), and light blue cells indicate minimal relationships (standardized relationships below .10). A detailed description of analyses and results is provided in Appendix D.

Source. The Illinois Learning Renewal–SEL Well-Being Staff Survey, administered in 2022–23, 2023–24, and 2024–25; Illinois state report card data and 5Essentials data for the 2022–23, 2023–24 school years.

Policy Considerations

By administering the SEL-W survey and analyzing the data annually, AIR provided ISBE with timely information about the social and emotional well-being of staff and students within a large swath of public schools across the state. In addition, schools that agreed to participate in survey data collection received reports of findings for the students and staff in their school,

giving them the information they needed about overall levels of well-being and gaps in well-being across groups that could inform future school policies and practices. Overall, the evaluation of survey data led to the following policy implications.

Students are aware of their emotions but need more support with emotional regulation and management.

In the student SEL-W survey, students were least likely to respond positively to survey questions related to emotion regulation and school work, two measures of students' self-management skills. Example survey questions include "working on things even when I don't like them," "staying calm when I feel stressed," and "doing my schoolwork even when I do not feel like it." This finding demonstrates that students may need more support more direct instruction on how to limit the influence of their emotions on their behaviors, particularly as they relate to completing assignments and doing well in school.

Staff report high levels of emotional intelligence and capacity to support students' social-emotional well-being; survey results suggest that staff themselves may need additional support for their own well-being.

School staff were least likely to respond positively to survey items related to their personal well-being and their professional well-being. For example, 46% of staff reported feeling burned out by their job, and 40% reported feeling frustrated by their job. This finding highlights the importance of creating a schoolwide culture of social and emotional well-being and may reflect the statewide and nationwide school staff shortage, leading to staff taking on an above-average amount of responsibilities throughout the school.

Schools may want to prioritize family engagement and support, as families are essential contributors to students' social and emotional health.

Across the school climate measures in the 5Essentials survey, parent supportiveness was consistently, positively related to students' social-emotional well-being. Although teachers and school leaders play a pivotal role in supporting student well-being, additional outreach to parents with specific strategies to support their students may also help to improve students' well-being.

SEL-W SURVEY ANALYSIS METHODS AND DATA

Sample. Descriptive analyses of responses to the SEL-W student and staff surveys include all survey respondents. In Exhibit 26 below, we show the number of students, staff, and schools that responded to surveys during each year of survey administration. Please note that the Washoe County School District Social and Emotional Competency Assessment student survey is regularly administered in Chicago Public Schools, and the evaluation team was able to receive these survey data from the survey vendor. However, the staff survey was not administered to schools in Chicago Public Schools. Because many schools only participated in survey data collection for 1 year, and because survey responses were relatively stable over the years, data from all 3 years of survey data collection are combined and analyzed together. To avoiding potentially misleading results for schools with low survey response rates, our sample included schools with a response rate of at least 50% on the SEL-W survey.

Exhibit 26. Sample of Students, Staff, and Schools During 3 Years of Survey Administration

			Spring 2023	Spring 2024	Spring 2025
All respondents	Student survey	Number of individuals	11,209	16,551	15,201
		Number of schools	208	243	128
	Staff survey	Number of individuals	2,943	3,493	3,755
		Number of schools	93	143	102
Schools in which at least 50% of students responded	Student survey	Number of individuals	67	89	75
		Number of schools	8,180	13,465	14,167

Data. Outcome data come from publicly available school report card data files created by ISBE on an annual basis. Measures of student and teacher behavioral outcomes (student attendance and teacher retention) are included in school report card data files, while measures from the 5Essentials school climate survey are provided in separate data files. Definitions for outcome measures are provided in Exhibit 27.

Exhibit 27. Outcome Measures Included in the Survey Analysis

Student and teacher behavioral outcomes
Student attendance rate. Percentage of enrolled days students attended school.
Teacher retention. The percentage of teachers who remain teaching in the school, averaged across the three most recent school years.
Student perceptions of school climate from the 5Essentials survey
Parent supportiveness. The extent to which students perceive their parents as supportive of their academic efforts and school engagement
Student–teacher trust. The extent to which students feel safe and comfortable around their teachers, and that their teachers treat them with respect.
Human & social resources in the community. The availability and quality of supportive relationships and resources in their community that help them succeed academically and personally.
Academic engagement. The degree to which students are actively involved in and committed to their learning.
Academic personalism. Teachers relate with students in the classroom and support them in achieving learning goals.
Safety. Perceptions of personal safety inside the school building and traveling to and from school.
Peer support for academic work. Students behave in ways that promote academic achievement.
Student peer relationships. The quality of relationships among students in the school. This measure captures whether students feel respected, supported, and included by their peers, and whether positive social interactions are common.
Teacher perceptions of school climate from the 5Essentials survey
Instructional leadership. Teachers feel that school leadership sets high standards for teaching and learning.
Collective responsibility. Teachers in the school take responsibility both for student success and for supporting students who are struggling.
School commitment. Teachers’ reports of how loyal they are to the school.
Teacher–principal trust. The extent to which teachers feel respected and well-regarded by their principal.
Teacher–teacher trust. Teachers feel respected by other teachers in the school.
Collaborative practices. Teachers work together to improve instruction and student learning.
Teacher influence. Teachers feel that they have an influence on school culture, policies, and practices.
Teacher safety. The extent to which staff believe the school provides a secure, orderly setting free from threats or harm.

Analytic Methods. We calculated the percentage of positive responses within each survey construct (depending on the response options in each survey). For the staff survey, this corresponded to the sum of those who responded “agree” or “strongly agree,” expressed as a percentage. For the student survey, percentage positive corresponded to the sum of respondents who reported that a particular SEL skill was easy or very easy. Reporting on the percentage of positive responses provides easy-to-understand information on survey participants’ overall responses.

We examined relationships between 5Essentials survey measures and SEL outcomes and teacher and student behavioral outcomes using bivariate regression models. Because schools may have taken the survey during more than one school year, regression models included a control variable for the school year in which SEL constructs and outcomes were measured. Relationships have been standardized, and following guidance from Cohen (1988), we classified relationships to be minimal (below 0.10), small (between 0.10 and 0.30), moderate (between 0.30 and 0.50) and strong (above 0.50) in magnitude.

For the full technical report on the SEL-W Survey analyses conducted as part of this study, please see Appendix D.

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Appendix A. Implementation Analyses

Case Study Sample and Methods

We used a purposive, stratified sampling approach to identify 12 case sites across the state that were implementing one of the three social-emotional learning (SEL) programs (Patton, 2002). To construct our sample, we began by purposively sampling three of the six SEL Hub regions in the state with varying geographic contexts: Areas 1, 3, and 6. In each of these regions, we identified a set of sociodemographic variables we anticipated would influence implementation: urbanicity (rural, suburban, or urban), size (small, medium, or large), and socioeconomic status (SES).¹⁵ To examine implementation across these meaningful contexts, we stratified participating schools by these indicators. Subsequently, we presented the list of potential case sites to regional SEL coaches, who helped us identify and connect with four case sites in their regions implementing one of the three Learning Renewal–SEL programs. In many situations, case sites were implementing more than one of the programs; however, we focused our interviews on the primary program being implemented. Exhibit A–1 displays our case study sampling approach.

Exhibit A–1. Case Study Sampling Approach by Program

Hub area	Program	Case pseudonym	Urbanicity	Size	SES
1	REACH	Ocean	Suburban	Small	High
	REACH	Buena Vista	Suburban	Medium	Low
	CPG	Magnolia	Suburban	Medium	Low
	SEL activities	Elysian	Suburban	Medium	Low
3	REACH	Lagoon	Rural	Small	Low
	CPG	Pine Valley	Suburban	Medium	Low
	CPG	Sequoia	Urban	Large	Low
	SEL activities	Elmwood	Suburban	Medium	Low
6	REACH	Bailey	Rural	Medium	High
	CPG	Easton	Rural	Small	Low

¹⁵ Variable definitions derived from the Common Core of Data.

Hub area	Program	Case pseudonym	Urbanicity	Size	SES
	SEL activities	Blossom	Rural	Small	Low
	SEL activities	Maple	Rural	Small	Low

Note. SES = socioeconomic status; CPG = Community Partnership Grant; SEL = social-emotional learning.

Within each case, we aimed to interview a minimum of three participants or as many individuals as needed to reach a point of saturation (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). After each round of interviews, we analyzed the data using NVivo qualitative software. During each round of analysis, our team conducted interrater reliability to ensure we reached an 85% agreement threshold before continuing to code the data. We first coded etic themes derived from our interview protocols, followed by a round of emic coding focused on emergent themes from stakeholder perspectives. Data were then analyzed by theme for each case site to construct individual case profiles of implementation.

After completing implementation profiles, we conducted a cross-case analysis within and across each of the three Learning Renewal–SEL programs. After this initial comparison, we explored the extent to which these experiences varied by Hub area, urbanicity, size, or SES. Overall, we found the greatest variability in rural school implementation, which we highlight throughout our findings. Finally, despite the distinctness of each of the three Learning Renewal–SEL programs, our interviews surfaced common facilitators, barriers, promising practices, and sustainability concerns across them all. These findings were the most relevant to policy makers considering future statewide SEL policy implementation and are the focus of this chapter.

Appendix B. Outcomes Study Methods and Supplemental Tables

The outcome study focuses on the characteristics and outcomes of schools that engaged in activities hosted by SEL Hubs. Data on participation in SEL Hub activities were provided by SEL Hub Coach logs that documented Hub activities and participation. Although data were provided for all entities, including district staff and nonprofits, to measure schools' engagement with SEL Hubs, we limited the data to records that identified public K–12 schools as the entity participating in SEL Hub activities. Because of the volume of SEL Hub records and the inconsistency with which the content of the activities and the number of participants varied across records, the outcome study focused on the unique number of days in which schools engaged in SEL Hub activities and did not consider more qualitative characteristics of the activities. Finally, because data provided for Chicago Public Schools did not provide details about the timing and frequency of activities (the data only identified which schools participated during the school year), the outcome analysis excludes Chicago Public Schools.

Based on the number of unique days school staff participated in SEL Hub activities during the 2022–23 and 2023–24 school years, schools that engaged in SEL Hub activities were placed into one of the five engagement categories:

- **minimally engaged:** participated once in only 1 year
- **partially engaged:** participated more than once in only 1 year
- **engaged:** participated both years, total of 4 or fewer days total
- **very engaged:** participated both years, between 5 and 7 days total
- **highly engaged:** participated both years, 8 or more days total

Measures of teacher and student outcomes came from three primary data sources: publicly available Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) school report card data, publicly available school-level data on the 5Essentials survey, and student-level administrative data provided by ISBE. Outcomes were measured during the 2022–23 and 2023–24 school years. To account for baseline (pre-pandemic) differences across schools in statistical models, all outcomes were also measured in the 2018–19 school year.

Outcome analyses consisted of a school-level regression analysis where dummy indicators for levels of engagement predicted teacher and student outcomes in the 2022–23 and 2023–24

school years. The reference category for the SEL Hub engagement dummy variables included 775 schools that did not engage with SEL Hubs during these two school years and also were not identified as REACH schools or schools receiving services through Community Partnership Grants. To account for pre-existing differences across schools with different levels of SEL Hub engagement, all outcome models controlled for the outcome measure during the 2018–19 school year as well as the following school characteristics:

- distribution of students by race/ethnicity (Black, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and another racial group, with White as the reference category)
- percent of students who are female
- percent of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch
- percent of students who are English learners
- percent of students who have an individualized education program
- average enrollment size
- average operating expenses per pupil
- school type (middle school and high school, with elementary school as the reference category)
- geographic area of the school (area 1 as the reference category)
- school urbanicity (city, rural, and town with suburban as the reference category)

Descriptive statistics for all baseline outcome measures and school characteristics are provided by level of SEL Hub engagement in Exhibit B–1. Results of outcome models are provided in Exhibit B–2.

Exhibit B–1. School Characteristics Measured in 2019, by Level of SEL Hub Engagement

School characteristic	Not engaged	Minimally engaged (2022–23)	Partially engaged (2022–23)	Minimally engaged (2023–24)	Partially engaged (2023–24)	Engaged	Very engaged	Highly engaged
Distribution by race/ethnicity (percent)								
White	59.4%	62.2%	55.6%	57.0%	64.2%	65.2%	69.6%	74.4%
Black	10.9%	9.6%	13.3%	14.2%	9.4%	9.5%	9.5%	10.0%
Hispanic/Latino	19.3%	18.4%	23.0%	19.5%	18.8%	16.6%	14.3%	9.1%
Asian	5.7%	5.4%	3.7%	4.5%	3.1%	4.7%	2.5%	1.8%

School characteristic	Not engaged	Minimally engaged (2022–23)	Partially engaged (2022–23)	Minimally engaged (2023–24)	Partially engaged (2023–24)	Engaged	Very engaged	Highly engaged
Another racial/ethnic group	4.6%	4.4%	4.4%	4.8%	4.5%	4.0%	4.2%	4.7%
Other demographic characteristics (percent)								
Female	48.7%	48.3%	48.3%	48.5%	48.6%	49.0%	48.8%	48.6%
Eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch	39.3%	39.1%	45.6%	48.2%	51.6%	42.8%	45.6%	47.5%
English learner status	12.1%	11.4%	11.8%	11.0%	11.6%	8.8%	6.0%	3.6%
Student participates in an Individualized Education Program	15.7%	15.7%	16.0%	16.0%	16.4%	15.1%	15.9%	16.8%
Other school characteristics (average value)								
Total enrollment	479	550	523	457	452	521	545	532
Operating expenses per pupil	14,039	14,019	13,772	13,649	12,295	13,100	12,252	11,678
School type								
Elementary school	72.0%	67.5%	63.2%	63.5%	69.6%	57.0%	49.3%	54.0%
Middle school	15.9%	16.6%	21.9%	22.7%	15.2%	20.5%	25.0%	18.7%
High school	12.1%	15.9%	14.9%	13.7%	15.2%	22.6%	25.7%	27.3%
School area								
Area 1	65.5%	66.4%	56.3%	50.2%	35.7%	45.4%	31.3%	10.3%
Area 2	2.8%	11.4%	14.9%	10.9%	6.7%	27.0%	21.5%	20.6%
Area 3	9.2%	8.1%	4.6%	10.9%	19.6%	10.4%	15.3%	22.0%
Area 4	17.3%	8.1%	4.0%	12.8%	9.8%	3.3%	4.5%	7.0%
Area 5	1.2%	4.4%	15.2%	1.4%	1.8%	9.5%	22.6%	24.5%
Area 6	4.0%	1.5%	5.0%	13.7%	26.3%	4.5%	4.9%	15.7%

School characteristic	Not engaged	Minimally engaged (2022–23)	Partially engaged (2022–23)	Minimally engaged (2023–24)	Partially engaged (2023–24)	Engaged	Very engaged	Highly engaged
School urbanicity								
City	9.2%	12.5%	6.6%	18.5%	14.3%	11.0%	6.6%	7.5%
Rural	19.5%	20.7%	25.5%	29.4%	33.9%	34.1%	38.2%	41.4%
Suburban	61.3%	60.1%	60.6%	40.8%	32.6%	42.4%	43.4%	32.9%
Town	10.1%	6.6%	7.3%	11.4%	19.2%	12.5%	11.8%	18.2%
Student academic and behavioral outcome measures								
Student attendance rate	94.9%	94.8%	94.6%	94.7%	94.7%	94.7%	94.5%	94.4%
Chronic absenteeism rate	11.0%	10.9%	12.0%	12.2%	12.4%	12.0%	13.2%	14.0%
High incidence of disciplinary incidents	19.9%	17.6%	25.8%	27.2%	26.1%	23.6%	26.9%	38.4%
Expulsions	10.0%	10.1%	13.4%	13.1%	17.4%	17.3%	19.4%	22.1%
Average standardized achievement test scores (elementary and middle schools only)								
English language arts	0.16	0.12	0.03	0.04	–0.04	0.05	0.03	–0.01
Mathematics	0.15	0.12	0.02	0.00	–0.07	0.02	–0.01	–0.08
High school student outcomes (percent)								
Grade 9 on track	86.8%	89.9%	90.2%	85.7%	88.4%	87.8%	87.5%	87.8%
Dropout	3.7%	3.2%	3.7%	4.1%	4.2%	3.5%	3.7%	4.0%
Graduation	87.0%	90.2%	87.6%	86.8%	88.0%	88.7%	87.6%	87.7%
Standardized measures of school climate (teacher)								
School commitment	0.01	0.08	–0.13	0.01	0.03	0.05	0.07	0.02
Teacher–principal trust	0.00	0.04	–0.09	0.10	0.02	0.05	0.12	–0.10
Teacher–teacher trust	0.14	0.04	–0.09	0.02	–0.11	0.05	0.00	–0.19
Collective responsibility	0.10	0.02	–0.08	0.01	–0.10	0.10	0.07	–0.15
Standardized measures of school climate (student)								

School characteristic	Not engaged	Minimally engaged (2022–23)	Partially engaged (2022–23)	Minimally engaged (2023–24)	Partially engaged (2023–24)	Engaged	Very engaged	Highly engaged
Safety	0.19	0.14	0.00	–0.04	–0.05	0.02	–0.05	–0.23
Student–teacher trust	0.14	0.06	–0.02	–0.14	–0.03	0.01	0.12	–0.19
Teacher outcomes								
Retention rate	86.1%	87.4%	85.9%	85.2%	85.2%	87.2%	87.0%	86.7%
Attendance rate	76.0%	74.5%	75.9%	75.1%	74.1%	75.3%	74.9%	75.9%

Exhibit B–2. Relationships Between Outcome Measures and Levels of SEL Hub Engagement

Outcome and levels of engagement	2022–23			2023–24		
	Coefficient	Standard error	p value	Coefficient	Standard error	p value
Chronic absenteeism	Number of schools = 2,793			Number of schools = 2,794		
Minimally engaged	–0.338	0.469	0.471	–0.606	0.500	0.225
Partially engaged	0.712	0.459	0.121	–1.225	0.505	0.015
Engaged	0.434	0.451	0.335	–0.212	0.435	0.626
Very engaged	–0.972	0.486	0.045	–1.006	0.469	0.032
Highly engaged	0.267	0.445	0.549	0.277	0.430	0.520
Student attendance	Number of schools = 2,778			Number of schools = 2,777		
Minimally engaged	0.129	0.099	0.193	–0.016	0.105	0.882
Partially engaged	–0.189	0.097	0.051	0.139	0.107	0.192
Engaged	–0.166	0.095	0.081	–0.066	0.092	0.473
Very engaged	0.190	0.103	0.064	0.167	0.099	0.091
Highly engaged	–0.069	0.094	0.466	–0.126	0.091	0.166
Disciplinary incidents	Number of schools = 2,713			Number of schools = 2,737		
Minimally engaged	–0.023	0.029	0.439	0.079	0.033	0.015
Partially engaged	0.057	0.029	0.050	0.053	0.033	0.108
Engaged	0.029	0.028	0.317	0.041	0.029	0.155
Very engaged	0.071	0.031	0.021	0.078	0.031	0.012
Highly engaged	0.097	0.028	0.001	0.078	0.028	0.006

Outcome and levels of engagement	2022–23			2023–24		
	Coefficient	Standard error	p value	Coefficient	Standard error	p value
Expulsions	Number of schools = 2,725			Number of schools = 2,755		
Minimally engaged	0.003	0.016	0.857	–0.023	0.017	0.177
Partially engaged	0.015	0.015	0.336	0.020	0.017	0.246
Engaged	–0.012	0.015	0.442	–0.020	0.015	0.185
Very engaged	–0.008	0.016	0.615	–0.013	0.016	0.418
Highly engaged	–0.009	0.015	0.560	–0.015	0.015	0.310
Teacher attendance	NA			Number of schools = 2,803		
Minimally engaged				–1.124	1.244	0.366
Partially engaged				–4.697	1.251	0.000
Engaged				–1.070	1.084	0.324
Very engaged				–2.522	1.169	0.031
Highly engaged				–1.392	1.073	0.194
Teacher retention	Number of schools = 2,798			Number of schools = 2,799		
Minimally engaged	0.418	0.455	0.358	0.036	0.535	0.947
Partially engaged	0.362	0.448	0.419	0.657	0.538	0.222
Engaged	–0.694	0.440	0.115	–0.440	0.467	0.347
Very engaged	0.699	0.474	0.140	1.149	0.504	0.023
Highly engaged	0.541	0.435	0.214	0.907	0.463	0.050
Student-teacher trust	Number of schools = 2,337			Number of schools = 2,313		
Minimally engaged	–0.037	0.054	0.493	–0.001	0.061	0.981
Partially engaged	–0.099	0.053	0.059	–0.002	0.061	0.980
Engaged	–0.102	0.052	0.049	–0.105	0.052	0.044
Very engaged	0.001	0.056	0.988	0.061	0.056	0.283
Highly engaged	–0.097	0.051	0.057	–0.072	0.052	0.163
Safety	Number of schools = 2,337			Number of schools = 2,313		
Minimally engaged	–0.026	0.044	0.555	0.041	0.051	0.419
Partially engaged	–0.005	0.043	0.911	–0.029	0.051	0.561
Engaged	–0.015	0.042	0.724	–0.079	0.044	0.071
Very engaged	0.056	0.045	0.212	0.074	0.047	0.120
Highly engaged	–0.106	0.042	0.011	–0.063	0.044	0.146

Outcome and levels of engagement	2022–23			2023–24		
	Coefficient	Standard error	p value	Coefficient	Standard error	p value
Teacher–teacher trust	Number of schools = 2,331			Number of schools = 2,303		
Minimally engaged	–0.035	0.065	0.591	0.010	0.075	0.893
Partially engaged	0.003	0.063	0.966	0.118	0.074	0.109
Engaged	–0.018	0.062	0.776	–0.052	0.065	0.425
Very engaged	0.022	0.067	0.749	0.039	0.070	0.574
Highly engaged	–0.059	0.062	0.343	–0.058	0.064	0.368
Teacher–principal trust	Number of schools = 2,356			Number of schools = 2,333		
Minimally engaged	–0.109	0.073	0.133	–0.075	0.083	0.369
Partially engaged	–0.095	0.071	0.178	–0.101	0.081	0.213
Engaged	–0.114	0.070	0.103	–0.066	0.071	0.358
Very engaged	–0.040	0.075	0.595	–0.045	0.077	0.556
Highly engaged	–0.145	0.070	0.038	–0.211	0.070	0.003
School commitment	Number of schools = 2,356			Number of schools = 2,332		
Minimally engaged	–0.055	0.061	0.369	–0.069	0.071	0.328
Partially engaged	–0.034	0.059	0.569	–0.052	0.069	0.452
Engaged	–0.132	0.059	0.024	–0.128	0.061	0.036
Very engaged	0.024	0.063	0.699	0.046	0.066	0.483
Highly engaged	–0.070	0.059	0.235	–0.106	0.060	0.079
Collective responsibility	Number of schools = 2,357			Number of schools = 2,333		
Minimally engaged	–0.069	0.060	0.252	–0.032	0.072	0.655
Partially engaged	–0.085	0.059	0.151	0.049	0.070	0.488
Engaged	–0.100	0.058	0.085	–0.113	0.062	0.068
Very engaged	–0.020	0.063	0.743	–0.007	0.067	0.916
Highly engaged	–0.095	0.058	0.101	–0.092	0.061	0.135
High school graduation	Number of schools = 501			Number of schools = 497		
Minimally engaged	1.766	1.195	0.140	0.711	1.247	0.569
Partially engaged	–1.077	1.201	0.370	0.089	1.205	0.941
Engaged	0.166	1.060	0.876	–0.330	0.965	0.732
Very engaged	1.304	1.057	0.218	–0.023	0.968	0.981
Highly engaged	0.912	0.969	0.347	–0.227	0.880	0.796

Outcome and levels of engagement	2022–23			2023–24		
	Coefficient	Standard error	p value	Coefficient	Standard error	p value
Dropout	Number of schools = 504			Number of schools = 499		
Minimally engaged	0.066	0.341	0.847	–0.086	0.326	0.793
Partially engaged	0.588	0.344	0.088	–0.242	0.315	0.442
Engaged	0.202	0.300	0.502	–0.041	0.251	0.870
Very engaged	0.095	0.302	0.752	–0.410	0.253	0.106
Highly engaged	0.324	0.276	0.241	–0.010	0.230	0.966
Grade 9 on-track	Number of schools = 504			Number of schools = 504		
Minimally engaged	0.955	1.826	0.601	1.586	1.721	0.357
Partially engaged	–1.095	1.837	0.552	–1.469	1.665	0.378
Engaged	–0.957	1.605	0.551	0.313	1.318	0.812
Very engaged	0.471	1.607	0.769	1.003	1.320	0.447
Highly engaged	0.193	1.464	0.895	1.073	1.203	0.373
Standardized English language arts achievement	Number of schools = 2,141			Number of schools = 2,140		
Minimally engaged	0.019	0.018	0.290	0.037	0.019	0.055
Partially engaged	0.019	0.017	0.269	0.011	0.019	0.567
Engaged	–0.003	0.017	0.874	0.011	0.017	0.540
Very engaged	0.008	0.019	0.675	0.016	0.019	0.401
Highly engaged	–0.006	0.018	0.742	–0.012	0.018	0.492
Standardized mathematics achievement	Number of schools = 2,141			Number of schools = 2,140		
Minimally engaged	0.037	0.017	0.024	0.046	0.019	0.016
Partially engaged	0.046	0.016	0.005	0.057	0.019	0.003
Engaged	0.006	0.016	0.713	0.027	0.017	0.113
Very engaged	0.031	0.018	0.085	0.040	0.019	0.032
Highly engaged	0.029	0.017	0.086	0.028	0.017	0.114

Note. The five levels of engagement with SEL Hubs include minimally engaged (participated 1 day in the year in which the outcome is measured, but not in the other school year), partially engaged (participated more than 1 day in the year in which the outcome is measured, but not in the other school year), engaged (participated in both school years but a total of 4 or fewer days), very engaged (participated in both school years between 5 and 7 days), and highly engaged (participated in both school years, 8 or more days total). Statistical analyses compare outcomes of schools at each level of engagement to schools that did not engage with SEL Hubs, REACH, or

Community partnership grants. Statistical models included baseline (2018–19) measures of the outcome as well as the following school characteristics: distribution of students across demographic groups including race/ethnicity, sex, eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch, English learner status, and students who have an individualized education program; school enrollment size and operating expenses per pupil; school type (middle school or high school with elementary school as the reference group); geographic area; and urbanicity (city, rural, or town with suburban as the reference category). Teacher attendance data were provided by the Illinois State Board of Education at the school level starting in 2023–24, and therefore analyses do not examine teacher attendance in 2022–23. The baseline measure of teacher attendance captures the district-level attendance rate.

Appendix C. Cost Study Analyses, Methods, and Sample

This appendix provides a detailed account of the methodology, data sources, and analytic decisions used in the cost study of Illinois’ three Learning Renewal–SEL components: the SEL Hub, REACH, and Community Partnership Grant programs. Using the ingredients approach, the study estimated the full cost of program implementation—including both direct expenditures and in-kind resources—across 10 case study sites.¹⁶

This appendix includes costing decision rules and assumptions (Exhibit C–1); characteristics and average per-student costs of each case study site (Exhibit C–2); descriptions of our primary data sources (Exhibits C–3 and C–4); and descriptions of publicly available data sources used to assign prices to resources (Exhibit C–5). The appendix also includes detailed descriptions of how the cost study team organized implementation activities into program components and cost categories, and how prices were assigned using state and federal data.

Finally, the appendix discusses key limitations, including the small sample size, the exclusion of regional support costs for some programs, and challenges in distinguishing between overlapping SEL components.

Methodology

The cost study aims to understand the resources used to implement each of Illinois’ three Learning Renewal–SEL initiatives. We applied the “ingredients approach” (Levin et al., 2018) to estimate the costs incurred to each case study site due to the sites’ participation in one of the three Learning Renewal–SEL components offered by the state. The ingredients approach, a widely used cost study methodology, can produce comprehensive cost estimates of all resources used in a program, regardless of how those resources are acquired (e.g., state dollars, local funds, volunteered, in-kind resources). Using the ingredients approach allows us to capture overall program implementation costs, going beyond what is reflected in a school or district budget. Capturing total costs, including personnel time, facilities used, and materials, provides policy makers and practitioners with the full cost implications of an initiative, including time and resources that may have been redirected from other efforts. The ingredients

¹⁶ Twelve sites participated in the initial interviews, but only 10 sites participated in our cost study follow-up interviews and cost-specific interviews. One of the sites is a district and was excluded from findings due to comparability.

approach also allows us to determine the new costs of program implementation; that is, any cost above and beyond what a district would typically spend on day-to-day operations. For example, if a principal were to stay after their regularly allotted hours to complete an activity related to the intervention, this would be an example of a new cost.

Calculating Costs

Applying the ingredients approach involves identifying all the resources (or ingredients) used to implement a specific program (or perform a certain activity). For example, a curricular intervention in the classroom involves the time teachers spend training for and implementing the curriculum, the curricular and training materials, the licensing fee for use of the curriculum, and the time classroom space is dedicated towards the intervention that is being implemented. In this example, each of these components contributes to the cost of implementing the curricular intervention.

After identifying the ingredients for each SEL program implementation across 10 case study sites, we created comprehensive resource cost models, categorizing costs into key components (e.g., leadership team meetings, professional development courses) as well as resource types (i.e., personnel, materials, facilities, contracts).

We carefully tracked our assumptions while analyzing interview transcripts and creating resource cost models. For example, if a specific school facility rental rate could not be found, the average rental rate of surrounding schools was used as proxy for facility price. All assumptions were recorded in our Costing Decisions Rules document (see Exhibit C–1).

Overall Costs and Newly Incurred Costs

We considered two distinct categories of costs: **overall program implementation costs** and **newly incurred costs**. This distinction allows us to assess both the comprehensive resource demands of the program and the incremental financial burden it places on districts.

- **Overall program implementation costs** refer to the total value of all resources used to support the program, including both existing and new resources. This includes the reallocation of resources already available within the district, such as teacher time during regularly scheduled professional development or the use of existing facilities like the school cafeteria. These costs represent the full scope of investment required, regardless of whether additional spending occurred.
- **Newly incurred costs** are a subset of overall costs and refer specifically to resources that were not previously part of the district’s routine operations. These are additional expenditures or commitments made solely to support the program. For example, if a principal stays beyond their regularly allotted hours to complete an activity related to the

intervention, that extra staff time would be considered a newly incurred cost. Other examples might include hiring new personnel, purchasing new materials, or renting additional space.

Exhibit C–1. Costing Decision Rules

Category	Rationale	Decision/formula	Source
Personnel			
Annual salaries	In interviews, we asked for specific staff member names who were involved in various components of the intervention. If all staff were involved, we used school directories to determine names and match salaries.	We were able to match staff names to publicly available salary information for the 2023–24 school year. For any staff we could not find, we used the average office and administrative salaries in the Bureau of Labor Statistics.	GovSalaries database U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
Hourly salaries	All teachers were considered 9-month employees, and all school administrators were considered 12-month employees. Parents were also considered 12-month employees.	Teachers' annual salaries were divided by 1,400 hours. Administrators' annual salaries were divided by 2,080 hours.	ISBE Educator Employment Information Public Data Sets
Benefit rates	All teachers and administrators employed by the school receive an equivalent benefit rate.	We applied a .52 benefit rate to annual and hourly salary calculations for all FTE teachers and administrators.	ISBE Educator Employment Information Public Data Sets
Parent salaries	Parent time spent was considered a societal cost of the intervention.	Average parent hourly salary was \$50.	U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
Materials			
Lunch costs	For meetings where lunch was provided, we assumed an average lunch cost per person.	We used \$15 per person for an average lunch cost.	U.S. General Services Administration, FY2024_PerDiemMasterRatesFile
Materials	For known goods, we used listed prices on Amazon, when available.	Amazon prices were specific to items.	Amazon.com
Facilities			
School facilities	All school facilities used should be costed out, because they represent an opportunity cost.	We used facility rental rates from the case study site. When rental rates were not available, we used the average rental rates from neighboring districts.	Participating school district public websites

Category	Rationale	Decision/formula	Source
ROE facilities	ROE facilities were not included as we were only considering intervention costs at the school level.	Not applicable	
Contracts/Other			
Contracted services	If a contract created by a school district or ROE, costs need to be distributed to each case study school.	We used a funding formula to determine the school-level prices for contracts from the total district cost: $Cost = Contract\ Total * \left(\frac{School\ Enrollment}{District\ Enrollment} \right)$	Illinois Report Card 2023–2024, 2024 Report Card Public Data Set
Transportation mileage rates	If school personnel were required to travel, we considered these additional costs.	We used the federal mileage rate of \$0.67 per mile	U.S. General Services Administration, POV mileage rates
Student enrollment counts	We used ILLINOIS state enrollment reports for each school for the 2023–24 school year. Costs were divided by the total number of students enrolled at each school.	Each school had different enrollment counts.	Illinois Report Card 2023–2024, 2024 Report Card Public Data Set

Note. ROE = Regional Office of Education; ISBE = Illinois State Board of Education; FTE = full-time equivalent.

Costs Analyzed for SEL Hub and REACH Case Study Sites

In examining costs at SEL Hub and REACH case study sites, our analysis focuses exclusively on **site-specific costs**—those incurred directly by the participating schools and districts. We intentionally excluded costs borne by the Regional Offices of Education (ROEs) in their role supporting the SEL Hub and delivering the REACH program. This means we did not account for resources such as the time spent by ROE-employed SEL coaches or the use of ROE facilities, even when those facilities were used to train school personnel. Our aim was to isolate the costs experienced at the school site level to better understand the direct financial and resource implications for participating schools.

Costs Analyzed for Community Partnership Grant Case Study Sites

Unlike our approach for SEL Hub and REACH sites, examining costs at Community Partnership Grant Case study sites included the grant funds provided by the state. The cost study team analyzed how Community Partnership Grant funds were spent at the case study site level, analyzing cost patterns related to staff time, materials, contracts, and facilities.

Sample

The cost study sites were intentionally aligned with those in the implementation study. While the implementation study included 12 sites, the 2023–24 cost study collected data from 10 of these sites. For one site, data were gathered at the district level rather than the school level, so our cost study findings present results for nine individual school sites. The sample included schools that participated in the SEL Hub program, REACH program, and Community Partnership Grant program, representing three regions (SEL Areas 1, 3, and 6) to reflect geographic diversity. For more details about site selection and sampling, please refer to the implementation study Appendix A. Exhibit C–2 presents the case study sites and their characteristics.

Exhibit C–2. Characteristics of Case Study Sites, 2023–24 School Year

Case study site		SEL hub region	School size (# of students)	Grade span	Percent low income	District size (# of schools)	Location	School spending per student
SEL Hub	Maple Elementary	Area 6	>200	PK–8	>50%	1	Southern IL	\$13,000
	Elmwood Elementary	Area 3	<200	PK–8	>90%	1	Central IL	\$18,000
	Elysian Elementary	Area 1	>300	3–5	>75%	6	Chicago suburb	\$20,000
REACH	Lagoon Elementary	Area 3	~375	K–5	<60%	4	Western IL	\$12,000
	Buena Vista Elementary	Area 1	~450	K–3	<50%	8	NW of Chicago	\$19,000
	Bailey Elementary	Area 6	~475	PK–2	<50%	4	Southern IL	\$14,000
	Ocean High School	Area 1	~1,300	9–12	<60%	1	Chicago suburb	\$22,000
	Sequoia Middle School	Area 3	>300	5–8	>65%	25	Central IL	\$18,000
	Pine Valley Elementary	Area 3	>500	PK–4	>40%	3	Central IL	\$15,000

Source. Illinois Report Card 2023–2024. <https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/>.

Cost Study Data

The cost study relied on a variety of data sources including interviews, surveys, and publicly available documents (see Exhibits C–3, C–4, and C–5).

Exhibit C–3. Primary Data Sources

Primary data sources	Description	Data collection time frame	<i>n</i>
Initial interviews	Initial interviews with district and school leaders, counselors, and teachers at 10 case study sites. ¹⁷ These 45-minute interviews were tailored to each program and included implementation questions (i.e., How often do you meet? What professional learning activities do you attend as part of reach?). At the end of the interview, respondents were told that they would receive a 15-minute questionnaire about the time and resources needed to implement the program.	October 2023 to June 2024	35
Follow-up surveys	All interviewees received surveys after their interviews to provide more detailed information on resources used in program implementation (e.g., hours spent in professional learning activities, location of professional development). Interviewees received emails with individualized survey links. Just over half of all interviewees completed the survey: one of three SEL Hub study sites, three of four REACH study sites, and three of three Community Partnership Grant sites.	October 2023 to June 2024	18
Cost-specific follow-up interviews	A second round of 20- to 30-minute interviews with school and district leaders focused exclusively on program implementation and related resource use, including staff time, materials (e.g., curriculum), and facilities. These interviews enhanced our understanding of the main program components at each case study site and the related resources employed as a result of the school's or district's participation in the SEL program. Interview protocols were individually designed to address knowledge gaps at each case study site. At least one interviewee from each of the 10 study sites participated in a follow-up interview.	July 2024 to September 24	12

¹⁷ Twelve sites participated in the initial interviews but only 10 sites participated in our cost study follow-up interviews and cost-specific interviews. One of the sites is a district and was excluded from findings due to comparability.

Exhibit C–4. Primary Data Sources by Case Study Site

	No. of survey respondents	No. of interviewees at initial interview	No. of interviewees at follow-up interview
SEL Hub Program			
Maple Elementary School		2	1
Elmwood Elementary School	2	3	1
Elysian Elementary School		3	2
REACH Program			
Lagoon Elementary School	4	3	1
Buena Vista Elementary School		3	2
Bailey Elementary School	2	4	1
Ocean High School	2	4	1
Community Partnership Grant Program			
Pine Valley Elementary School	5	6	1
Sequoia Middle School	1	3	1
Magnolia School District	2	4	1

Exhibit C–5. Publicly Available Data Sources

Data source	Description	Data location/link
Illinois Report Card 2023–2024, 2024 Report Card Public Data Set	Used to determine student enrollment counts and other school-level demographic information	https://www.isbe.net/pages/illinois-state-report-card-data.aspx ; retrieved August 1–September 27, 2024
ISBE Educator Employment Information Public Data Sets	Used to determine educator salaries and benefits for the 2023 and 2024 school years	https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Educator-Employment-Information.aspx
ISBE Financial Reimbursement Information System	Used to gather information on contracted services and expenditures for Community Partnerships	https://apps.isbe.net/FrisInquiryNet/ ; retrieved August 1, 2024–September 27, 2024
Participating school district public websites	Used to identify staff, confirm student enrollment counts, and facility rental rates	Study schools participated anonymously; retrieved June 1, 2024–November 1, 2024
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics Query System	Used to determine parent and school counselor salaries	https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oesrcm_a.htm ; retrieved August 1, 2024–November 1, 2024
U.S. General Services Administration, POV mileage rates (archived)	Used to determine mileage rates	https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-a-trip/transportation-airfare-rates-pov-rates-etc/private-owned-vehicle-pov-

		mileage-reimbursement/pov-mileage-rates-archived?_gl=1*t5cb2y*_ga*NDg4NTAzNzA1LjE3NTMzODY2MDE.*_ga_HBYXWFP794*cze3NTMzOTQ1OTQkbzlkZzEkdDE3NTMzOTQ5MTQkaJE4JGwwJGgw#auto ; retrieved August 1–November 1, 2024
U.S. General Services Administration, FY2024_PerDiemMasterRatesFile	Used to determine regional per diem and lodging costs for educator travel	https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates ; retrieved August 1–November 1, 2024
GovSalaries database	Used to determine educator salaries when state and district data are not available	https://govsalaries.com/cat/school-district ; retrieved August 1–November 1, 2024
Amazon	To determine prices of specific items	https://www.amazon.com/ ; retrieved August 1–November 1, 2024

Note. ISBE = Illinois State Board of Education.

Analysis

Based on the interview and survey data, the study team identified the main program components (e.g., training for all staff, student SEL activities) and cost categories (e.g., personnel, materials, facilities) for each site. We then assigned prices to each of the identified ingredients using publicly available state data sources, such as available salary data for teachers and administrators, facility rental rates, mileage rates from the U.S. General Services Administration, and other publicly available pricing data for goods and services.

Limitations

The methods, data, and subsequent study findings provide prospective policy adopters and education practitioners with practical information about how the three SEL programs were implemented and the associated costs. However, to help put the findings in context, readers should be aware of some limitations of the study. Below, we detail limitations that should be considered when interpreting cost study findings and policy implications.

The cost study’s small sample size limits our ability to generalize findings to all schools participating in the Learning Renewal–SEL programs. Given the variation in implementation strategies across programs, the sample size of three case study sites for the SEL Hub program, four case study sites for the REACH program, and three case study sites for the Community Partnership Grant program is quite small and limits our ability to claim that our findings represent what is happening in schools and districts across the state.

The case studies of schools implementing the SEL Hub and REACH programs provide details exclusively on school-level costs and do not consider costs to the SEL Hub to support schools.

Unlike our analysis of the Community Partnership Grant program, the cost analyses for case study sites participating in the SEL Hub Program and the REACH program only represents costs incurred to each school as a result of participating in the SEL Hub program and/or the REACH program. It does not include costs incurred by each regional SEL Hub supporting program implementation. Therefore, for schools participating in the SEL Hub and REACH programs, our cost study findings only represent costs incurred at the school or district level.

Some school staff at case study sites were unaware of the differences between the state’s SEL programs and were not able to attribute SEL activities to specific programs. Throughout interviews and survey responses, respondents at case study schools that implemented REACH and SEL Hub programming struggled to differentiate the two programs due to the overlap in program resources and personnel as well as ambiguity regarding the intervention and its naming conventions. Therefore, if both programs existed in the district, it was not always clear which program interview and survey respondents were discussing.

Appendix D. Social–Emotional Learning and Well-Being Survey Technical Report

As part of an evaluation in partnership with the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to support SEL and mental well-being across the state’s educational system, AIR administered the Illinois Learning Renewal–SEL Well-Being (SEL-W) Surveys in three consecutive school years (2022–23, 2023–24, and 2024–25) to gain insight into Illinois student and staff social–emotional learning and well-being. Each survey used multiple items or questions to assess eight overarching constructs related to students’ SEL competencies and six related to staff well-being. In our analyses, we applied a statistical model that combined items to enable us to generate a holistic and reliable score for each construct.

The staff survey is based on a conceptual framework that was adapted from recent AIR work on educator well-being for the Council of Chief State School Officers (Yoder et al., 2023). Most items were used in a prior study of SEL in Illinois. The survey consisted of 30 questions for staff to self-report their competencies and well-being across six constructs. (See page Chapter 5 in the report for more details about the survey; a complete list of survey items and corresponding scales is available in Appendix E).

The survey of students’ SEL competencies was based on the Washoe County School District Social and Emotional Competency Assessment (WCSD-SECA). This survey aligns with the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning’s five core SEL competencies and consists of 40 questions for students to self-report their competencies across eight SEL constructs (Gordon et al., 2022).

Survey Sample

Over the course of three consecutive school years (2022–23, 2023–24, and 2024–25), survey data were collected from over 10,000 staff members and 40,000 students from Grades 4–12 across Illinois schools.¹⁸ The student survey data include both Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and non-CPS schools. The staff survey was administered only in non-CPS schools (Exhibit D–1).

¹⁸ The student survey data include 15,507 CPS students from Grade 4 to 12 and 27,454 non-CPS students from Grades 5 to 12.

Exhibit D–1 ISBE SEL-W Survey Respondents and Number of Schools

School year	Staff survey		Student survey			
	N of schools	N of individuals	N of non-CPS schools	N of non-CPS individuals	N of CPS schools	N of CPS individuals
2022–23	93	2,943	54	5,291	154	5,918
2023–24	143	3,493	83	11,794	160	4,757
2024–25	102	3,755	57	10,369	71	4,832

Note. CPS = Chicago Public Schools. Only K–12 public schools are included in the table. Total number of K–12 public schools in Illinois was $N = 3,841$ in 2022–23; $N = 3,389$ in 2023–24; $N = 3,835$ in 2024–25.

Source. ISBE SEL-W Staff and Student Survey administered in spring 2023, spring 2024, and spring 2025, and Chicago Public Schools Student Washoe County School District Social and Emotional Competency Assessment from 2022–23, 2023–24, and 2024–25 school years.

Research Questions

The analyses aimed to address the following questions at both the individual and school levels.

- Preliminary RQ. To what extent did each SEL-W student and staff survey measure the same construct across gender and race/ethnicity groups?
- RQ 1. Were there differences by urbanicity and school level on any of the student and staff measures?
- RQ 2. Adjusting for school context, were there differences in average responses to the student and staff SEL-W measures by gender and race/ethnicity?
- RQ 3. Did schools with higher levels of 5E’s Supportive Environment also have higher levels of student SEL well-being?
- RQ 4. Did schools with higher levels of Effective Leaders and safety also had higher levels of staff well-being?
- RQ 5. Did schools with higher levels of student and teacher well-being also have higher levels of student and teacher attendance and teacher retention? (student and staff)

Analysis and Results

Preliminary RQ. To what extent did each SEL-W student and staff survey scale measure the same construct across gender and race/ethnicity groups?

To evaluate the psychometric equivalence of the SEL-W survey measures across sample groups, we conducted Rasch analysis using Winsteps version 3.91. First, we performed Rasch modeling on each construct to examine general model fit statistics, including person- and item-level infit,

outfit, and reliability. We applied thresholds of 0.8 to 1.2 for infit and outfit (Wright & Linacre, 1994), and considered reliability above 0.6 as indicative of good model fit.

Next, we focused the analysis on assessing whether individual survey items functioned equivalently across demographic groups including race/ethnicity and gender as well as between CPS and non-CPS student survey data, using Differential Item Functioning (DIF) analysis. DIF identifies items that may exhibit measurement bias or be interpreted differently by subgroups, potentially compromising the validity of comparisons across populations. We assessed DIF by comparing item difficulty estimates across groups. We adopted a threshold of $|DIF| \geq 0.64$ (Zwick et al., 1999) to indicate potential bias.

As shown in Exhibits D–2 and D–3, both the student and staff measures generally demonstrated good psychometric properties based on the criteria we set on the person- and item-level infit, outfit, and reliability, indicating that they are functioning as intended. However, the self-concept construct shows relatively lower person reliability. This suggests that the measure may be less consistent in distinguishing between students with varying levels of self-concept, potentially limiting its effectiveness in capturing meaningful differences across individuals.

Exhibit D–2. Student SEL-W Survey Psychometric Fit Statistics

Survey Construct	N of observations	N of items	Person			Item		
			Infit	Outfit	Reliability	Infit	Outfit	Reliability
Self-concept	40,873	4	0.98	0.98	0.58*	1.00	0.99	1.00
Emotion knowledge	41,001	6	0.99	0.99	0.66	1.00	0.99	1.00
Social awareness	40,861	5	0.99	0.99	0.60	1.00	0.99	1.00
Emotion regulation	40,776	4	0.98	0.98	0.69	0.99	0.99	1.00
Goal management	41,936	4	0.96	0.96	0.69	0.99	0.99	1.00
School work	40,829	6	0.99	0.99	0.76	1.00	1.00	1.00
Relationship skills	40,866	6	0.99	0.99	0.67	0.99	1.00	1.00
Decision making	40,702	5	.98	0.98	0.64	1.00	0.99	1.00

Note. The construct self-concept shows a person reliability below 0.60. Despite this, we have decided to retain the construct for several reasons: (a) the scale includes only four items, and removing any item could further reduce its

stability; (2) all other statistics fall within acceptable ranges, suggesting the overall fit may still be adequate; and (c) the construct is based on well-established measures, and the low reliability may be attributable to chance.

Source. ISBE SEL-W Student Survey administered in spring 2023, spring 2024, and spring 2025 and Chicago Public Schools Student Washoe County School District Social and Emotional Competency Assessment from 2022–23, 2023–24, and 2024–25 school years.

Exhibit D–3. Staff SEL-W Survey Measures Psychometric Fit Statistics

Measure	N of observations	N of items	Person			Item		
			Infit	Outfit	Reliability	Infit	Outfit	Reliability
School working conditions	10,141	4	0.94	0.95	0.75	0.98	0.96	1.00
Learning Renewal-SEL practices	10,148	4	0.97	1.01	0.64	0.99	1.01	1.00
Emotional intelligence	10,143	6	0.97	1.01	0.70	0.98	1.01	1.00
Capacity to support students	10,142	4	0.97	0.99	0.68	0.98	0.99	1.00
General well-being	10,139	8	1.01	1.00	0.83	1.00	1.00	1.00
Professional well-being	10,116	4	0.98	0.93	0.94	0.97	0.95	1.00

Source. ISBE SEL-W Staff Survey administered in spring 2023, spring 2024, and spring 2025.

The DIF analysis indicates that most survey items were interpreted similarly across diverse student groups. This includes students attending CPS schools versus those from other regions (student survey only), students across different grade levels (student survey only), respondents self-identified as White, African American, or Hispanic,¹⁹ and male versus female respondents. These findings suggest that the items generally function equivalently across these demographic groups, supporting the valid use and interpretation of scale scores in our sample.²⁰

¹⁹ We did not include the other racial groups in the DIF analysis due to their small sample sizes. These racial groups include American Indian, Asian, Middle Eastern, Native Hawaiian, and two or more races. Respondents who selected “prefer not to answer” to the race/ethnicity question were also excluded from the DIF analysis.

²⁰ Based on our Differential Item Functioning (DIF) analysis, we found that all 40 questions in the student survey were below the established threshold for both race and gender. In the staff survey, out of 30 questions, only one item exceeded the DIF threshold based on race. This problematic item, which is part of the Emotional Intelligence scale, is: “I look at others’ facial expressions and body language to know how they are feeling.” Specifically, African American staff were significantly more likely to select a higher rating on the response scale for this item compared to White or Hispanic teachers. Given that this is the sole item with DIF above the threshold, and considering the theoretical connection between the item and the Emotional Intelligence construct, we have decided to retain this item for the analysis.

RQ 1. Were there differences by urbanicity and school level on any of the student and staff measures?

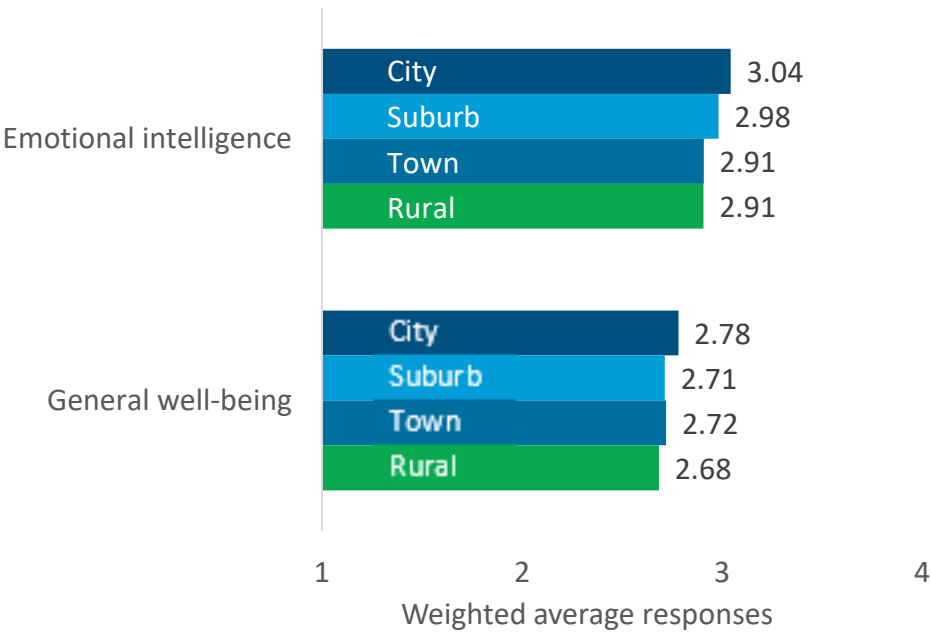
To answer RQ 1, we first calculated a school-level score that is representative of student and staff responses. We adopted a weighted aggregation approach to aggregate respective student-level and staff-level Rasch scale scores to the school level while accounting for person standard error. Each individual's Rasch scale score was accompanied by a person-level standard error, which indicates the uncertainty associated with that score. Rather than treating all scores equally, we weighted each score based on its precision, giving more influence to scores with lower uncertainty.

Specifically, we calculated weights for each student and staff member as the inverse of the squared standard error (i.e., inverse variance). These weights were then used to compute a weighted average of scores within each school. This approach ensures that students and staff with more reliable scores contribute more substantially to the school-level estimate.

The resulting school-level score represents a precision-weighted average of respective student and staff responses on the scale, providing a more accurate and stable estimate than a simple unweighted mean. Additionally, we calculated the standard error of the school-level score to quantify the uncertainty of the aggregated estimate. We combined all 3 years of data to answer this research question.

The survey results reveal differences in social–emotional well-being and related competencies across school settings. Staff members working in urban schools reported higher levels of emotional intelligence (mean = 3.04) and general well-being (mean = 2.78) compared to their counterparts in suburban (emotional intelligence mean = 2.98; well-being mean = 2.71), town (emotional intelligence mean = 2.91; well-being mean = 2.72), and rural schools (emotional intelligence mean = 2.91; well-being mean = 2.68; Exhibit D–4; $p < .05$).

Exhibit D–4. Urban School Staff Reported Higher Levels of Emotional Intelligence and Overall Well-Being Compared to Their Counterparts in Rural Schools

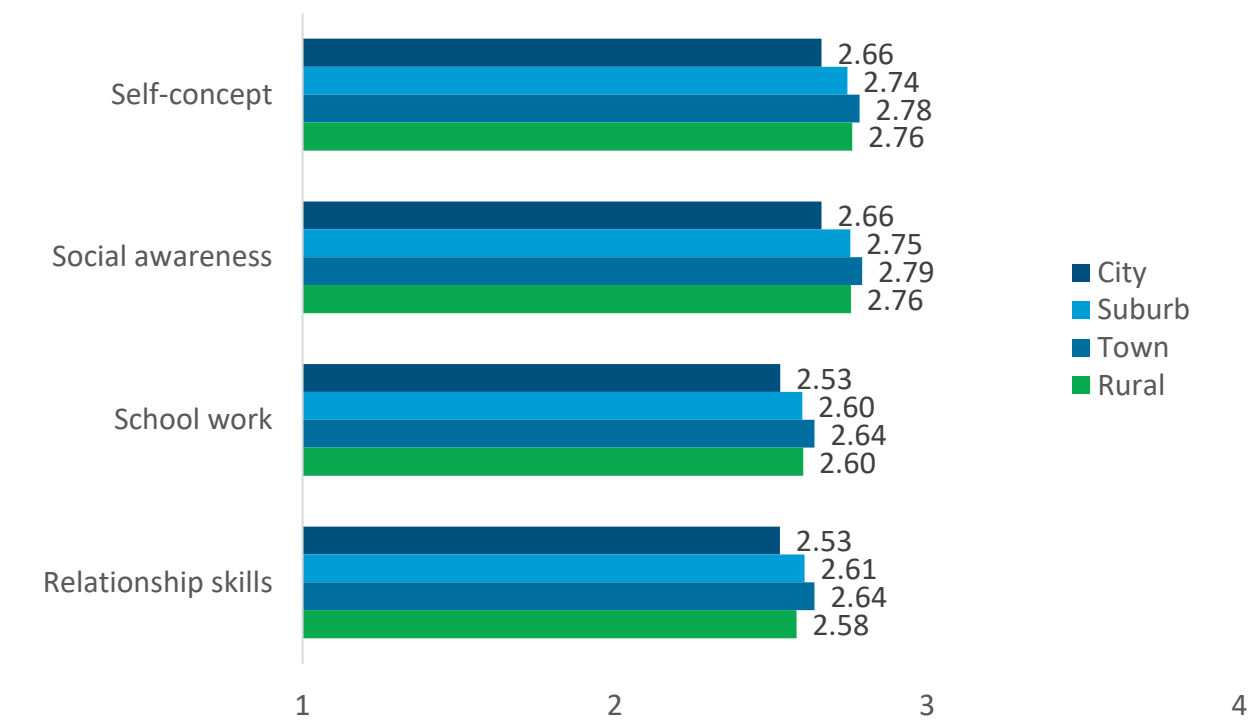


Note. $N = 192$ schools. Results display precision-weighted means of staff responses for each domain.
Source. ISBE SEL-W Staff Survey administered in spring 2023, spring 2024, and spring 2025.

For students, the data indicate that those attending schools located in towns and rural areas generally reported higher average scores than city schools in several constructs, including self-concept, social awareness, school work, and relationship skills (Exhibit D–4; $p < 0.05$). Although suburban schools appeared to score higher than city schools on those scales, the differences were not statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level.²¹

²¹ The student data included Chicago Public Schools student responses, whereas the staff survey did not include staff from Chicago Public Schools.

Exhibit D.4. Students Attending Schools in Town and Rural Areas Tended to Score Higher Than City Schools on Average in Self-Concept, Social Awareness, School Work, and Relationship Skills



Note. N = 373 schools. Results display precision-weighted means of student responses for each domain.
Source. ISBE SEL-W Student Survey administered in spring 2023, spring 2024, and spring 2025, and Chicago Public Schools Student Washoe County School District Social and Emotional Competency Assessment from 2022–23, 2023–24, and 2024–25 school years.

RQ 2. Adjusting for school context, were there differences in average responses to SEL-W measures by gender and race/ethnicity?

To investigate differences by gender and race on eight scales, a series of multilevel linear mixed-effects models (MLMs) were employed, one for each outcome (i.e., Rasch scale scores of the survey measures). This approach was selected to account for the nested data structure, where students are nested within their respective schools and in their participating school year allowing for the modeling of both between-group and within-group variance. The model is specified as follows:

$$Y_{i(j,k)} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * gender_i + \beta_2 * race_i + \mu_j + v_k + \varepsilon$$

Where:

- $Y_{i(j,k)}$ = outcome for student i from school j and school year k
- β_0 = overall intercept
- β_1, β_2 = fixed effect coefficients for gender and race
- $u_j \sim N(0, \sigma_{rcdts}^2)$ = random intercept for school
- $v_k \sim N(0, \sigma_{schoolyear}^2)$ = random intercept for school year
- $\varepsilon_i \sim N(0, \sigma^2)$ = residual error at the student level

Each MLM was specified with gender and a recoded race variable as fixed effects,²² while including random intercepts for both school and school year to control for the non-independence of observations within these clusters. Finally, we calculated model adjusted mean estimates for each level of the fixed effects for easy interpretation.

The data indicate that male staff reported higher scores in School Working Conditions, General Well-Being, and Professional Well-Being while reporting lower scores in emotional intelligence than female staff (see Exhibit D–5). In the student results, male students generally reported a higher level of SEL–well-being than female students in six of the eight measures (Exhibit D–6).

Exhibit D–5. Male Staff Reported Higher School Working Conditions, General Well-Being, and Professional Well-Being but Lower Emotional Intelligence Than Female Staff

Survey Construct	Female	Male
School Working Conditions	2.96	3.01*
Learning Renewal-SEL Practices	2.97	2.98
Emotional Intelligence	3.00	2.89*
Capacity to Support Students	2.89	2.88
General Well-Being	2.72	2.75*
Professional Well-Being	2.63	2.69*
<i>N</i>	7,760	1,529

Note. An additional 879 staff either selected “Other,” chose “Prefer not to say,” or left the gender question unanswered. Results display precision-weighted means of student responses for each domain. Scores range between 1 and 4.

* $p < .05$.

Source. ISBE SEL-W Student Survey administered in spring 2023, spring 2024, and spring 2025, and Chicago Public Schools Student Washoe County School District Social and Emotional Competency Assessment from 2022–23, 2023–24, and 2024–25 school years.

²² We retained participants who identified as White, African American, or Hispanic, and grouped individuals from other racial backgrounds into an “Other” category to ensure a sufficient sample size for the analysis.

Exhibit D–6. Male Students Generally Reported Higher Levels of Well-Being Than Female Students

Survey Construct	Female (comparison)	Male
Self-Concept	2.69	2.76*
Emotion Knowledge	2.67	2.74*
Social Awareness	2.74	2.73*
Emotion Regulation	2.46	2.57*
Goal Management	2.60	2.69*
School Work	2.58	2.62
Relationship Skills	2.57	2.61
Decision-Making	2.71	2.71*
<i>N</i>	20,153	20,046

Note. An additional 2,718 students either selected “Other,” chose “Prefer not to say,” or left the gender question unanswered. Results display precision-weighted means of student responses for each domain. Scores range between 1 and 4.

* $p < .05$.

Source. ISBE SEL-W Student Survey administered in spring 2023, spring 2024, and spring 2025, and Chicago Public Schools Student Washoe County School District Social and Emotional Competency Assessment from 2022–23, 2023–24, and 2024–25 school years.

RQ 3. Did schools with higher levels of 5E’s Supportive Environment also have higher levels of student SEL well-being?

The analysis aimed to examine the relationship between 5Essentials survey measures and SEL outcomes using bivariate regression models. To ensure the results are as representative and reliable/valid as possible, we retained schools with a response rate of 50% or higher in the analytic sample avoiding potentially inaccurate results for schools with only a small percentage of respondents.

Each model assessed the extent to which individual SEL constructs predicted selected 5Essentials measures. Based on team discussions, no additional school-level covariates were included at this stage, as the primary focus was on evaluating the strength and direction of the associations between constructs. To address repeated observations of schools across multiple years, each school–year combination was treated as an independent unit of analysis. Year-specific dummy variables were incorporated into the regression models to ensure that comparisons were made within the same school year.

Parent Supportiveness and Student–Teacher Trust showed the strongest associations with students’ SEL and well-being across domains. Parent Supportiveness was consistently related to

all outcomes, with the largest coefficients for Relationship Skills ($r = 0.411$) and Decision-Making ($r = 0.431$) and a strong link to Self-Awareness ($r = 0.399$). Student–Teacher Trust was most strongly related to Relationship Skills ($r = 0.531$) and Decision-Making ($r = 0.427$), with moderate associations elsewhere. Other school climate factors (e.g., Safety, Academic Personalism, Peer Support) were positively related but generally smaller in magnitude.

Exhibit D–7. Parent Supportiveness and Student–Teacher Trust Were Most Strongly Related to Student SEL and Well-Being

5Essentials Measure	Self-awareness		Social awareness	Self-management			Relationship skills	Decision-making
	Self-concept	Emotion knowledge		Emotion regulation	Goal management	School work		
Parent Supportiveness	0.399	0.335	0.315	0.259	0.311	0.373	0.411	0.431
Student–Teacher Trust	0.249	0.258	0.381	0.169	0.230	0.295	0.531	0.427
Human & Social Resources in the Community	0.302	0.216	0.258	0.155	0.172	0.258	0.410	0.338
Academic Engagement	0.138	0.264	0.242	0.173	0.262	0.230	0.379	0.341
Academic Personalism	0.205	0.190	0.299	0.148	0.221	0.209	0.380	0.322
Safety	0.193	0.156	0.276	0.061	0.145	0.289	0.394	0.317
Peer Support for Academic Work	0.074	0.127	0.226	0.009	0.154	0.280	0.399	0.311
Student Peer Relationships	0.085	0.167	0.178	0.019	0.110	0.248	0.412	0.335

Note. Values represent standardized beta coefficients from regression models, with each construct predicting the selected 5Essentials measures within the same school year. Bolded values are statistically significant.

Source. ISBE SEL-W Student Survey administered in spring 2023, spring 2024, and spring 2025, and Chicago Public Schools Student Washoe County School District Social and Emotional Competency Assessment from 2022–23, 2023–24, and 2024–25 school years.

RQ 4. Did schools with higher levels of Effective Leaders and safety also had higher levels of staff well-being?

The analysis was similar to RQ 3 with staff 5Es indicators and staff survey data in the model. Across staff SEL and well-being outcomes, Instructional Leadership and School Commitment demonstrated the strongest relationships. Instructional Leadership showed the highest

associations overall, particularly with School Working Conditions ($r = 0.625$), Capacity to Support Students ($r = 0.548$), and Learning Renewal–SEL Practices ($r = 0.486$), with moderate links to Professional Well-Being ($r = 0.445$). School Commitment also exhibited strong relationships, most notably with Professional Well-Being ($r = 0.514$) and School Working Conditions ($r = 0.533$), alongside moderate associations with Capacity to Support Students ($r = 0.396$). Other constructs, including Collective Responsibility, Teacher–Principal Trust, Teacher–Teacher Trust, Collaborative Practices, Teacher Influence, and Teacher Safety, were positively related but generally smaller in magnitude.

Exhibit D–8. Instructional Leadership and School Commitment Were Most Strongly Related to Staff SEL and Well-Being

5Essentials Measure	School working conditions	Learning Renewal–SEL practices	Emotional intelligence	Capacity to support students	General well-being	Professional well-being
Instructional Leadership	0.625	0.486	0.359	0.548	0.281	0.445
School Commitment	0.533	0.353	0.180	0.396	0.276	0.514
Collective Responsibility	0.476	0.324	0.249	0.393	0.178	0.290
Teacher–Principal Trust	0.484	0.341	0.159	0.358	0.111	0.385
Teacher–Teacher Trust	0.484	0.254	0.266	0.337	0.221	0.260
Collaborative Practices	0.324	0.255	0.295	0.315	0.182	0.179
Teacher Influence	0.352	0.233	0.128	0.256	0.170	0.245
Teacher Safety	0.222	0.176	0.022	0.218	0.127	0.309

Note. $N = 169$. Values represent standardized beta coefficients from regression models, with each construct predicting the selected 5Essentials measures within the same school year. Bolded values are statistically significant.

RQ 5. Did schools with higher levels of student and teacher well-being also have higher levels of student and teacher attendance and teacher retention? (student and staff)

Analysis of staff survey data revealed a positive association between staff well-being and retention rates at the school level. Specifically, schools where staff reported higher levels of general well-being tended to exhibit greater staff retention. Furthermore, schools with higher levels of perceptions of school working conditions, higher levels of emotional intelligence, and greater capacity to support students also demonstrated higher retention rates among staff. These findings underscore the importance of understanding how cultivating positive organizational climates and equipping staff with the emotional and instructional resources needed to thrive are related to staff retention, as these factors appear to be associated with staff members’ decisions to remain in their roles.

Exhibit D–9. Staff General Well-Being Measure Significantly Related to Retention

SEL-W survey measure	Retention: standardized beta
School Working Conditions	0.168*
Learning Renewal-SEL Practices	0.054
Emotional Intelligence	0.148*
Capacity to Support Students	0.113*
General Well-Being	0.218*
Professional Well-Being	0.022

Note. $N = 157$. Values represent standardized beta coefficients from regression models, with each construct predicting retention rates within the same school year.

* $p < .05$.

Across student SEL domains, School Work, Relationship Skills, and Social Awareness demonstrated the strongest associations with attendance. The largest standardized coefficients were observed for Self-Management: School Work ($\beta = 0.25$), followed by Relationship Skills ($\beta = 0.23$) and Social Awareness ($\beta = 0.20$), indicating meaningful associations between these competencies and attendance rates. Other constructs, including Self-Concept, Emotion Regulation, Goal Management, and Decision-Making, showed positive but smaller associations, while Emotion Knowledge was minimal. Taken together, results highlight the role of school-oriented self-management and interpersonal skills in students' attendance.

Exhibit D–10. Student Self-Management Competency in School Work Was Found to Be Significantly Related With Attendance Rate

SEL-W Student Survey Measure	Attendance rate: standardized beta
Self-Concept	0.10
Emotion Knowledge	0.03
Social Awareness	0.20*
Emotion Regulation	0.05
Goal Management	0.09
Self-Management: School Work	0.25*
Relationship Skills	0.23*
Decision-Making	0.12

Note. $N = 228$. Values represent standardized beta coefficients from regression models, with each construct predicting attendance rates within the same school year.

* $p < .05$.

Appendix E. Social–Emotional Learning and Well-Being Survey Constructs and Items

For the **SEL-W Student Survey**, the Illinois State Board of Education administered the long-form version of the Washoe County School District Social and Emotional Competency Assessment (WCSD-SECA). For more information about the WCSD-SECA, visit <https://www.washoeschools.net/directory/accountability/school-climate/social-emotional-assessment>

Exhibit E–1. WCSD-SECA Student Survey

Self-Awareness: *Self-Concept*

- Knowing what my strengths are.
- Knowing how to get better at things that are hard for me to do at school.
- Knowing when I am wrong about something.
- Knowing when I can't control something.

Self-Awareness: *Emotion Knowledge*

- Knowing when my feelings are making it hard for me to focus.
- Knowing the emotions I feel.
- Knowing ways to make myself feel better when I'm sad.
- Noticing what my body does when I am nervous.
- Knowing when my mood affects how I treat others.
- Knowing ways I calm myself down.

Social Awareness

- Learning from people with different opinions than me.
- Knowing what people may be feeling by the look on their face.
- Knowing when someone needs help.
- Knowing how to get help when I'm having trouble with a classmate.
- Knowing how my actions impact my classmates.

Self-Management: *Emotion Regulation*

- Getting through something even when I feel frustrated.
- Being patient even when I am really excited.
- Staying calm when I feel stressed.

- Working on things even when I don't like them.

Self-Management: *Goal Management*

- Finishing tasks even if they are hard for me.
- Setting goals for myself.
- Reaching goals that I set for myself.
- Thinking through the steps it will take to reach my goal.

Self-Management: *School Work*

- Doing my schoolwork even when I do not feel like it.
- Being prepared for tests.
- Working on assignments even when they are hard.
- Planning ahead so I can turn a project in on time.
- Finishing my schoolwork without reminders.
- Staying focused in class even when there are distractions.

Relationship Skills

- Respecting a classmate's opinions during a disagreement.
- Getting along with my classmates.
- Sharing what I am feeling with others.
- Talking to an adult when I have problems at school.
- Being welcoming to someone I don't usually eat lunch with.
- Getting along with my teachers.

Responsible Decision-Making

- Thinking about what might happen before making a decision.
- Knowing what is right or wrong.
- Thinking of different ways to solve a problem.
- Saying "no" to a friend who wants to break the rules.
- Helping to make my school a better place.

The **SEL-W Staff Survey** was developed by AIR, based on Yoder et al. (2023), to assess educator well-being and related conditions in Illinois schools. Drawing on AIR’s framework for supporting educator well-being, the survey includes 30 items organized into six constructs: school working conditions, Learning Renewal–SEL practices, emotional intelligence, capacity to support students, personal well-being, and professional well-being. The purpose of the survey is to provide actionable insights for improving staff well-being and creating supportive environments, not for accountability purposes.

Exhibit E.2. SEL-W Staff Survey Constructs and Items

School Working Conditions

1. The culture in my school supports the development of everyone’s social and emotional learning.
2. Adults in this school interact with students in ways that support students’ social and emotional skills.
3. Leaders in this school are good examples of managing their own emotions well and showing empathy and understanding for others.
4. There is a great deal of cooperative effort among the staff members in my school.

Learning Renewal–SEL Practices

5. My school supports me in developing my own social and emotional strengths.
6. I understand how mental health issues may affect students’ behavior in school.
7. I feel confident in my ability to provide instruction on social and emotional learning.
8. At my school I feel supported to respond to trauma experienced by students.

Emotional Intelligence

9. I notice how I am feeling and think about why I feel that way.
10. I look at others’ facial expressions and body language to know how they are feeling.
11. I generally understand what causes my feelings.
12. I have a wide and specific vocabulary for talking about my feelings.
13. I am comfortable expressing my feelings, both pleasant and unpleasant ones.
14. I have a lot of different strategies for handling my feelings.

Capacity to Support Students

15. I am well-prepared to support students’ social and emotional development.
16. I know what to do if a student shows signs of a mental health problem.
17. School leaders have communicated a clear vision for how we address students’ mental health, stress, and trauma in our school.
18. Staff know how social and emotional learning is supposed to improve our school.

General Well-Being

19. When I do things, my mind wanders off and I’m easily distracted.
20. I find it difficult to stay focused on what’s happening in the present.
21. I worry too much about different things.
22. I feel nervous, anxious, or on edge.
23. I have a poor appetite or overeat.
24. I have little interest or pleasure in doing things.
25. I feel down, depressed, or hopeless.
26. I feel tired or have little energy.

Professional Well-Being

27. I feel burned out from my work.
28. I feel frustrated by my job.
29. I feel energized by my work.
30. I look forward to going to work every day.

Appendix F. Community Partnership Grant

Overview

This appendix provides a detailed overview of the Community Partnership Grant, including the program’s purpose and design, the major data sources used in the study, the goals that guided grant activities, and summary information about the organizations involved in implementation. It also summarizes the strategies grantees adopted as a result of receiving the grant.

The Community Partnership Grant was a 2-year program managed by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and funded through the American Rescue Plan’s Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief fund. The program aimed to “address the post-pandemic gaps in opportunity and unfinished teaching/learning that school districts in Illinois are facing ... [and] decrease the gaps in meeting students’ social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs” by fostering “enduring partnerships between schools, community-based organizations, and mental health providers” to support children, parents, and school staff (ISBE, 2021, n.d.). An additional aim of the grant was that the partnerships between school and community organizations “last beyond the grant” (ISBE, 2021, p3).

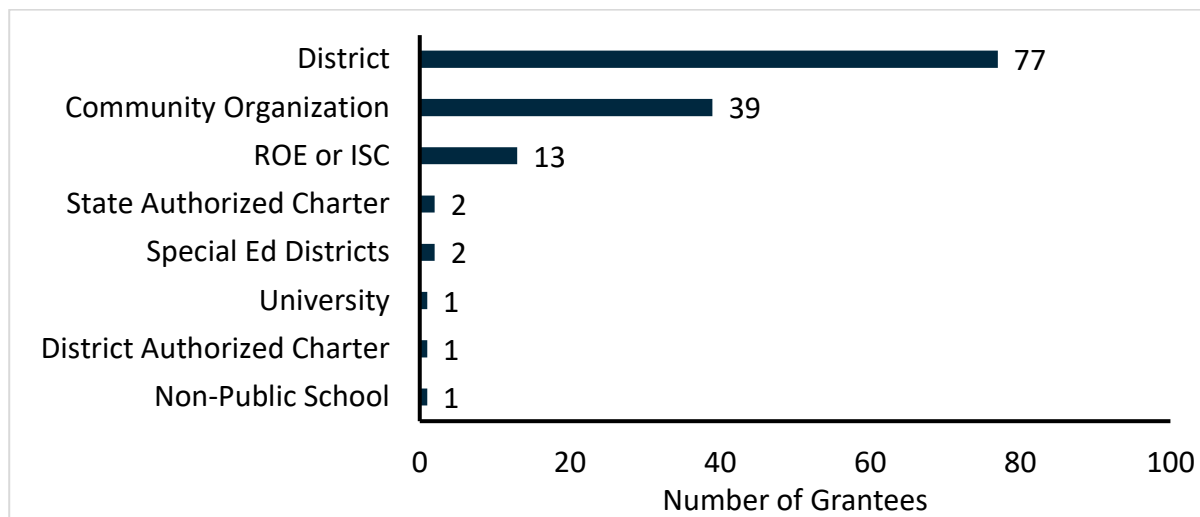
Community Partnership Grant funding was delivered to grantees amid efforts to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, wherein students, schools, and communities continued to face a barrage of pressing challenges related to learning loss, staff morale, and physical and mental health challenges. To this end, the grant was intentionally designed to “provide communities the flexibility to determine the best approach to respond to the local mental health needs” and “allow funds to be used for a range of responses” (ISBE, 2021, p4).

Grantees were expected to focus on Community Partnership Grant efforts across five key areas:

1. Addressing out-of-school barriers to student wellness (e.g., mental health services, trauma support)
2. Expanding learning opportunities (e.g., afterschool and summer programs)
3. Engaging parents and the community as educational partners
4. Providing integrated student wellness supports through community partnerships
5. Engaging with marginalized communities and addressing specific needs (e.g., LGBTQ, substance abuse prevention)

All 136 applicants were awarded the grant and received a total of \$635,000 spread over 2 years. Exhibit F–1 displays the organization types of grant recipients. Recipients had strict deadlines for spending the funds in each fiscal year (Fiscal Years 2023 and 2024) but were able to receive 3-month extensions to complete spending by the end of September of the next fiscal year.

Exhibit F–1. Number of Community Partnership Grant Recipients, by Recipient Type



Source. Illinois State Board of Education Administrative Data.

Exhibit F–2 displays results from a grantee survey asking grant recipients to identify the primary strategy Community Partnership Grant recipients implemented and all strategies that were adopted as part of the grant. The primary strategy asked grantees to select just one of the above strategies as their top strategy. A plurality of respondents cited providing direct access to a mental health professional as their top strategy (41%), followed by direct access to expanded learning time opportunities (23%) and SEL-related professional development (17%).

The survey also collected short responses where recipients described the strategies and practices the Community Partnership Grant enabled. These reveal that even within the general categories displayed in Exhibits F-1 and F-2 the implementation decisions made by each recipient were unique to each site. One of the most commonly cited approaches was for school districts to work with external partners to provide mental health services and professional development training that did not exist in the district. For example, an ROE in western Illinois focused on partnering with the local health department to bring in mental health services, noting:

School-based therapist [from the local health department] offered behavioral/mental health services at all four participating school districts. These services occurred [year-round]. Many professional trainings were provided to administrators, teachers, school

support staff members, health professionals, community members and parents throughout the life of the grant [by the local health department]. Trainings were held on Mental Health First Aid, Trauma Informed Practices, HOPE Research, and SEL. These trainings benefited not only the participants but the students that participants teach and work with.

Exhibit F–2. Summary of Community Partnership Grant Recipients Strategies Implemented

Strategy	Primary strategy	All strategies
Provided students with direct in-person access to a certified mental health professional	41%	78%
Provided direct access to expanded academic learning time opportunities	23%	61%
Provided professional development or coaching for teachers, school leaders, and/or staff to meet the social–emotional or mental health needs of students	17%	89%
Engaged family or community members on topics of personal or student social development and emotional well-being or directly offered families access to a certified mental health professional	6%	86%
Engaged school personnel, staff, or administrators on topics of personal or student social–emotional development and well-being or directly offered school personnel access to a certified mental health professional	6%	80%
Provided any other non-SEL form of professional development or coaching for teachers	3%	66%
Covered fees, membership, transportation, or other costs for students to access after- or outside-of-school programming (e.g., YMCA, Boys and Girls Club)	2%	40%
Purchased subscriptions to mental wellness services or on-demand virtual meetings with certified mental health professionals for teachers, students, or parents (e.g., Calm or Better Help subscriptions)	2%	28%

Note. $N = 109$. For primary strategies, survey respondents were asked “If you had to choose just one of the strategies listed as the primary strategy employed by your Community Partnership Grant, which would you select?” For all strategies, survey respondents were presented with the list of strategies presented in the exhibit and asked to select as many strategies as were implemented in any capacity using Community Partnership Grant funding.

Source. Illinois State Board of Education Community Partnership Grantee Survey 2024–25.

Others invested more grant funding in district-operated services and infrastructure by directly hiring new positions, emphasizing district operated professional development, and meeting curricular or infrastructural gaps. For example, a rural school district in southwestern Illinois used grant funding to do the following:

Hire an Early Childhood Director ... [and] two social workers, one who served as our McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaison and one who taught Personal Development to all freshman students. Both social workers also worked one-on-one and in groups with at-risk students and their families...Second Step Curriculum Kits were purchased for students grades K-5 to support SEL. School Websites and Student Information Systems were purchased to communicate information about grades, attendance, and upcoming events to students, their families, and the entire community. Ten Family Engagement Nights were held at the various grade schools and high schools, including a Community Resource Night that included over 30 community businesses and organizations. SEL trainings and professional development opportunities were provided to teachers and school staff, including a Youth Mental Health First Aid workshop.

Many sites adopted hybrid approaches in their strategies, balancing mental health and social-emotional learning-related interventions with additional academic resources for students. For example, a high school district in a suburb south of Chicago noted:

The Community Partnership Grant was used to establish a learning academy staffed with one instructor, one instructional assistant, one school counselor, and one social worker to provide both academic and behavioral support for students. Students were offered opportunities for after-school tutoring and summer school to enhance their learning ... parents were given the chance to meet with the school counselor and social worker for guidance on academic and behavioral matters.

Finally, grantees that were community organizations tended to implement programming that was aligned with their mission and services. For example, one recipient, a non-profit organization in south Chicago, implemented programming to address specific priority areas of the organization that were aligned with the grant, including offering afterschool programming, economic opportunity, and teenage health risks, like drug use and pregnancy. For example, in addition to hiring a social worker, the organization did the following:

Offered employment to high achieving students to assist in tutoring younger youth ... [and] partnered with [a hospital] for immunizations and covid shot updates as well as community health seminars, ... [a] behavior and drug addiction treatment center to address the high rate of HIV in the community, ... [held] weekly character development seminars, ... [and had] three career days. School aged youth completed a minimum of 3 hours a day of programming hours, 5 days a week, at our site, with a minimum of 4 hours per week in an enrichment activity such as homework assistance during in-school session, recreation/sports, computer applications, character development/life skills, or a service project.

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