Empowering Education evaluation of impacts, 2017-2018

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Overview.

Empowering Education (EE) is a non-profit community organization partnering with districts and schools nationwide. The organization "is dedicated solely to enabling learning by contributing to the social and emotional wellness of students, families, and educators" and provides curriculum resources, professional development, and implementation coaching and counseling supports to schools (https://empoweringeducation.org). Several studies related to the use and potential impact of the Empowering Education curriculum resources and professional development were conducted during the 2014-15 through 2016-2017 school years by researchers at both the University of Denver and the University of Colorado Denver. These included six schools that have worked with Empowering Education the longest.

Summary of Two Year Implementation Evaluations.

The Empowering Education curriculum, *Empowering Minds: A Mindfulness-Based Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Curriculum,* is comprised of 30 lessons, designed on the basis of the mindfulness, brain-based learning, and cognitive behavioral therapy theoretical models, which support the five core Collaborative for Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) competencies. Evaluations of the effectiveness of the *Empowering Education* curriculum were conducted during the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years, spanning the first two years of implementation.

During this time, Empowering Education participation grew from one to six participating schools, and from a limited number of students to many hundreds across the six school sites. During the 2014-2015 school year, first year of implementation, the curriculum was implemented originally by EE staff, however the following year the curriculum was implemented by the school teachers. During the first year, there were 4 teacher participants and 19 randomly selected students used for data analysis. During the second year, both the teacher participants increased to 9 teachers, and the student participants increased to 110 students. From the first to second year of implementation, the number of student respondents completing the Child Trends survey was reduced from 176 students, analyzed through 12 paired t-tests, to 33 student respondents, analyzed through 9 paired t-tests.

For both evaluations, however, several key measurement aspects remained consistent: use of the Child Trends survey for both students and teachers, frequency of survey administration (three times per year - beginning/pretest, middle, and end/posttest), and method of analysis. Once the survey responses were received, paired, and coded, average growth scores were also calculated for analysis, for each of the applicable skill areas for teachers and students. Paired t-tests were conducted to determine statistically significant growth from the beginning/pretest to the end/posttest. The results, seen in Table 2 (below), indicate that there is a statistically significant impact of the EE curriculum on certain social emotional skills growth. Although, there is a difference between the findings when compared to the teacher and student survey responses, this is attributed to the fact that Child Trends recommends the use of teacher scores, versus that of students, when there is a discrepancy, because teachers tend to be more reliable reporters.

An in-depth program evaluation, completed during the 2014-2015, analyzed the effectiveness of Empowering Education's Mindfulness Based Social-Emotional Learning program as it pertained to 3rd through 5th grade students, with and without behavior plans. Over an eight-week period, the behavior of a group of 12 highly diverse students was observed using the Behavioral Observation of Students in Schools (BOSS). Students in the experimental group were those who had a previously established behavior plan, while those in the control group were those who had not had a previously established behavior plan. Each of the student's teachers were given a social emotional learning (SEL) rating, on a Likert scale, of between 1 and 4. Although the findings indicated that students in the control group more likely to demonstrate on-task behavior, there was a statistically significant correlation between a teacher's SEL rating and on-task behaviors. This indicates that the teachers who integrated Empowering Education's Mindfulness-Based SEL curriculum, had an impact on student behavior in terms of an increase in on-task behavior.

Table 2

Statistical Significance of Skill Gains by Teacher and Student Reponses

Teacher Survey Responses	2014-2015 SY	2015-2016 SY
Persistence	Yes	Yes
Self-Control	Yes	Yes
Social Competence	Yes	Yes
Student Survey Responses	2014-2015 SY	2015-2016 SY
Self-Control	No	Yes
Academic Self-Efficacy	No	No
Persistence	No	No
Mastery Orientation	No	No

Web-Based Data Analytics.

The frequency with which resources were viewed was analyzed by the type of access (unique visits versus revisits), as well as by grade level. The two resources most accessed by practioners overall, were Mindfulness in Schools and Trauma Informed Schools Resource Curriculum. The one resource most commonly accessed across all grade level groupings were I-Statements. In the K-2 grade level, the data indicated that practioners had specific interests in Coping Skills, and Problem Solving Peacefully. Practioners at the 3-5 grade level were specifically interested in the Lizard-Wizard Brain, Conflict Resolution, Breathing Buddies, and Mindful Listening and Body resources. For the 6-8 grade level, practitioners were specifically interested in Mindful Body, Emotional Literacy, and the Adolescent Brain. [See Appendix ? for complete list of EE Curriculum resources.]

In analyzing the EE resources that accrued 100 total pageviews or more, all CASEL competencies were addressed, see Figure 1 below. Of those resources, the CASEL subareas of Identifying Emotion, Accurate Self-Perception, and Impulse control, were most frequently linked to resources available at all three grade level groupings. When separated, the K-2 and 3-5 grade levels had numerous resources linked to the Stress-management CASEL competency, as well.

Figure 1 - EE Resources Most Frequently Accessed by CASEL Competency (resource categories with 100+ views)
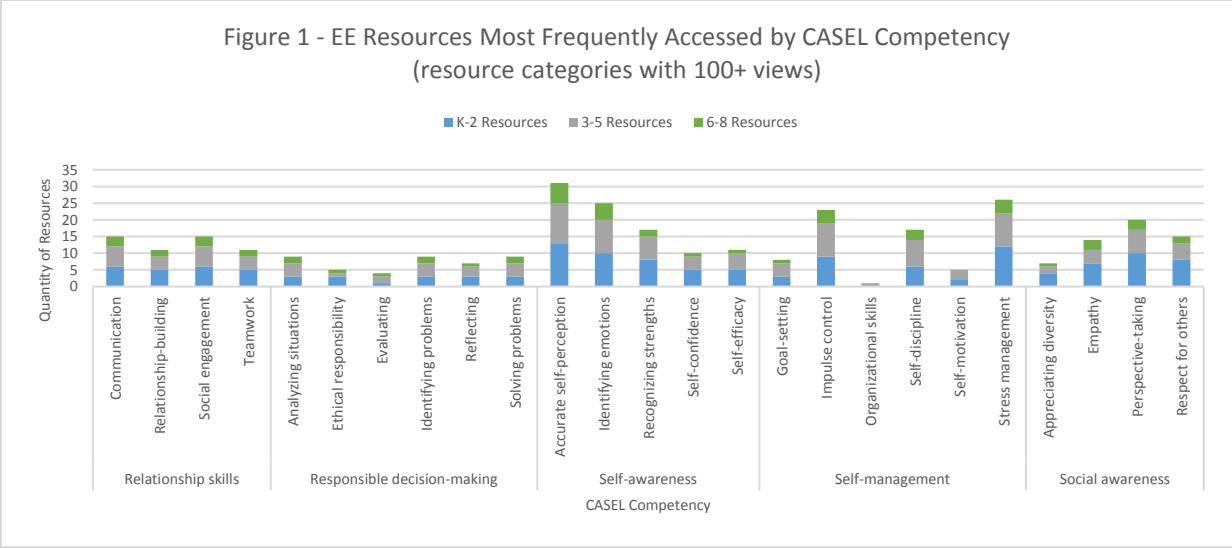
Conclusion.

Having reviewed the several evaluation documents and assessments of the Empowering Education materials, including the web analytics evidence of regular teacher interest and use in the Empowering Education curriculum resources, we are confident identifying the work of this organization as highly promising for schools to utilize in their efforts to support the development of social emotional learning competencies and school climate. In addition, we have visited Empowering Education professional learning sessions, talked with teachers in the schools, observed the Empowering Education curriculum activities in practice, and reviewed the content of the curriculum materials and other online resources. We feel these materials are well-developed, and the curriculum materials, pedagogical activities, and professional learning supports and implementation coaching are easy to use and consistent with the research on most promising practices.

We will be working with the organization to develop a more comprehensive evaluation of the impact of its materials and professional learning supports for teachers now that the resources are fully developed and have been in use in some school sites for a sufficient period of time.

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