

# Trinity@McCormack

A Healing & Inclusive Educational Community



2020  
2021  
REPORT

TRINITY  
BOSTON  
connects



ANALYSIS AND REPORT BY



**Trinity@McCormack** is an embedded, clinical, school-based program delivered at the McCormack Middle School. Through a collaborative partnership with school staff, it is focused on the needs of students whose experiences with trauma and stress would otherwise result in school failure. The program's mission is to create an educational environment that understands, embraces, and supports the holistic needs of each student. Through intensive individual and community support, students increase social-emotional skills, such as self-regulation and relational skills, critical to school engagement and well-being.

In March 2020, we all woke up to a new world—to a danger that we did not understand and could not control nor escape. The COVID-19 pandemic was a shocking impetus for global trauma. Suddenly, just doing our daily activities could cost lives, including ours and those dear to us.

**For about 15 months, as the world existed in a paralyzing state of not-knowing, some of us glimpsed for the first time what many young people, especially youth of color, already live with on a daily basis: trauma.**

Scholars have said that the real impact of trauma is not the event itself, but what people are left with after experiencing the event. Trauma brings the fears and dangers of our nightmares into real life. Trauma reveals the deepest levels of our vulnerability, and forces us to live without self-protection, void of self-determination and feelings of self-efficacy.

Society is now proving that we know how to heal from a public health pandemic. We know how to develop innovative responses, mobilize resources that help people get through hard times, and come together to reaffirm self-determination in spite of stress and fear. It can be done.

However, as the country and our school systems begin to return to in-person activities, we must not forget the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on us personally. Without a similarly robust response to racial inequities, youth of color will continue to live with trauma, no matter how fast in-person schooling resumes.

For youth in the Trinity@McCormack program, their pandemic has not ended. Almost every traumatic event—abuse, neglect, poverty, or loss of a loved one—can be traced to the **pandemic of racism**, which only gets worse as students return to schools and school systems that did not adequately support them in the first place.



**I am glad to have made it through middle school. High school is going to be chill."**

-8th grade student, third year with Trinity

## TRAUMA IMPACTS LEARNING

The Trinity@McCormack program creates the safety, self-efficacy and support that young people experiencing trauma need to heal, learn, and thrive.

- Restorative practices help students come together, find strength in community, and learn what they and others need to feel a deep sense of belonging.
- Community events create fun, collaborative, and empowering experiences, at a time when school may not yet be a place where students feel successful nor welcome.
- Individual therapy allows students to safely process and make meaning of traumatic experiences, and learn to cope without being overpowered by fear, anger, shame, or hopelessness.
- Training and coaching with teachers, administrators, and other school staff creates a healing ecosystem that acknowledges, understands, and responds to the impact of trauma on developing minds.

Our school-embedded model allows us to offer targeted interventions, and further walk with youth, supporting them daily as they work to find stability and strength in schools that are not designed to meet their needs.

# Social-Emotional, Holistic Learning

**Research shows that youth with stronger SEL are more likely to make meaningful contributions to society & gain:**



**ACADEMIC & CAREER SUCCESS**

**POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS**

**BETTER PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH**

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is an integral part of individual human development. It is equally important at the systems level, in advancing educational equity and excellence through authentic partnerships between schools, families, and communities.<sup>1</sup>

A meta-analysis of over 200 programs, covering three decades of research, found that programs focused to develop social and emotional well-being had lasting, positive effects. Students showed decreased emotional distress, such as anxiety and depression, improved social and emotional skills (e.g., self-awareness, self-management, etc.), improved attitudes about self, others, and about school (including higher academic motivation, stronger bonding with teachers), better classroom behavior (e.g., following classroom rules), decreased classroom misbehavior and aggression, and improved academic performance (e.g., standardized achievement test scores).<sup>2</sup>

An SEL program provides well-rounded instruction and continuous evaluation.

For the past four years, Trinity@McCormack has been using the SEED Impact Competency Ladders™ to assess and accelerate SEL growth for middle-school participants resulting in actionable findings.

## Historical Highlights

**15%**

**2017-2018**  
Increase  
in SEL  
Competencies

**10%**

**2019-2020**  
Increase  
in SEL  
Competencies

**13%**

**2020-2021**  
Increase  
in SEL  
Competencies

<sup>1</sup>CASEL.org. 2020. What Is SEL?. [online] Available at: <<https://casel.org/what-is-SEL/>> [Accessed 20 October].

<sup>2</sup>Durlak, J., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions (PDF). *Child Development*, 82(1), 405-432.

**REMARKABLE RESULTS FOR A PERIOD WHEN OUTSIDE CONDITIONS COULD HAVE DERAILED PROGRAMMING**



## How We Measure Social-Emotional Learning

SEED Impact guided the Trinity staff to define progressive outcomes depicted as competency ladders that participants climb.



## Student SEL Gains 2017-21

Complete data sets were available for 13 students over three years. On average:

**Thirteen students in the program from one to three years achieved an average increase of 23 percent.**





# SEL Competencies Correlate with School Success



## 2020-21 FINDINGS

### SEL BENEFIT 1: ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

**Realized gains in SEL translated almost immediately to improved academic performance.**

Trinity@McCormack three-year student grades rose by **21 percent from 6th grade through 8th grade**. Many of the highly traumatized students referred by teachers to receive Trinity's intensive supports may not have graduated 8th grade, much less have raised their academic performance, if not for Trinity@McCormack.

In comparing SEL achievements with course grades, there was a fairly strong correlation (0.63) across the four quarters of 2020-2021, in spite of major disruptions and unusual circumstances throughout the school year.

### SEL BENEFIT 2: ATTENDANCE

**Realized gains in SEL translated to more consistent attendance.**

As observed by their clinicians throughout the 2020-21 school year:

- Five students improved their attendance from the previous year,
- Three students maintained their already high attendance rates from the previous year, and
- The remaining five students were inconsistent throughout the pandemic school year.

A modest correlation (0.41) for each of the four quarters of 2020-2021 affirms that SEL competencies delivered by Trinity@McCormack, particularly in Being and Doing, were associated with more consistent attendance. This further affirms the decision made by McCormack Middle School teachers to refer students with low attendance to be enfolded in the Trinity@McCormack community and benefit from consistent, personalized clinical supports.

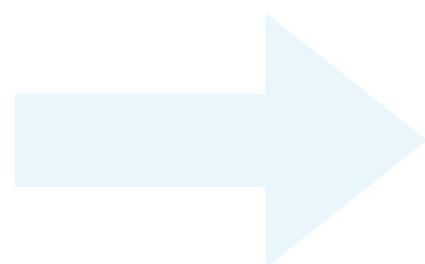
### SEL BENEFIT 3: EMOTIONAL REGULATION

**Realized gains in SEL translated to marked improvements in Emotional Regulation (ER).**

As observed by their clinicians throughout the school year, six students exhibited marked improvements in their abilities to self-regulate during classroom hours. One student carried over his already strong behaviors from the prior year. The remaining six students fluctuated in their classroom behaviors as the year progressed.

“Now I am able to think about my goals and the things I need to do to accomplish them. I want to be a flight attendant and I know that doing well in school will help me get there.”

-8th grade student,  
second year with Trinity



“  
My English language proficiency is low and I don't have many friends. But I have a very positive relationship with my family, clinician and teachers.”

-8th grade student, second year with Trinity



#### SEL BENEFIT 4: SELF-ADVOCACY

Realized gains in SEL may also play a role in students' ability to effectively assert their learning needs. As observed by their clinicians throughout the school year, five students exhibited marked improvements in self-advocacy.

#### ALL FOUR SEL BENEFITS:

- Sonya struggled with emotional regulation and work completion during virtual classes. She was having particular challenges with math. Her Trinity clinician teamed with her math teacher to identify strategies that allowed her to be successful academically.
- While Anna struggled to remain engaged, her work with her clinician and school community translated to significant increases in overall grade averages from previous years.
- Albert also struggled to remain connected to the school community, as he worked with his clinician through severe mental health challenges. While he often felt resigned, saying that “he would never get it right,” he managed to raise his final 8th grade average significantly from 6th grade.
- Jon developed helpful and school-appropriate self-regulation strategies. He has grown so much in developing a trusting relationship with the clinician, using words to verbalize how he is feeling, and using therapy to discuss topics that are important to him. While this has not manifested in tangible growth around grades or attendance, it is apparent in Jon’s self-confidence and psychological insight that he will carry with him into high school.
- Bruno has named that it feels significantly easier to ask for help from teachers when he is in-person compared to when he was learning online.
- Samora has an increased ability to verbalize her feelings and to recognize how they impact her behavior. This makes it easier to problem-solve. In contrast, at the start of 7th grade, Samora was unable to use words to explain how she was feeling and recognized very limited options to manage challenging situations.
- David was really depressed earlier in the fall. He was very clear that he was not okay and that something needed to change. He advocated to his clinician, his community supports, and psychiatrist that his depression was worse and he needed other interventions. He has grown so much verbalizing what he needs in ways that adults can listen and act on them.



“

I have been learning to reflect on positive aspects of me and think about my strengths and abilities.”

-8th grade student,  
second year with Trinity

## Participant Self-Reflection

In June 2021, students were invited to self-reflect on how much they have changed compared to when they first joined Trinity@McCormack.

### AVERAGE RATINGS OF 9 PARTICIPANTS (MAX = 5)



\* Pandemic uncertainties may have been factors..



## In Their Words: Students



I used to think school was just boring, but once I got to 7th grade my mind changed a lot because I started listening to older people about school and how I can get a job when I finish."



I am more likely to walk away than to engage. There was a time in 6th grade when my teacher asked me something, it wasn't even a big deal, but I cussed her out so bad. Now, I'd just put my headphones on and keep it moving."



I feel that my communication skills have improved. I feel more confident in asking for help or asking questions."



I changed a lot by letting people have second chances now. I used to like once they slip they're gone from my life, kinda sad to be honest."

# Trinity Students Are the SEL Success Stories – Meet Three

## MEET ALBERT, AGE 15

37 percent SEL increase over three years with Trinity, 2018-21

Near the start of 6th grade, Albert was referred to the Trinity program by his teachers who were concerned that he frequently arrived to school up to two hours late if at all, and he was failing to connect socially with other students. As part of the intake process, Albert's mother shared that tragically, he had lost his older brother to community violence a few years prior. The grieving process had negatively impacted Albert's school engagement, to the point where Albert had to repeat the 5th grade. Albert now perceived himself as "a bad learner." He expressed little hope for his academic prospects and found it hard to get motivated for school.

**Albert responded very positively to joining the smaller, Trinity community. He rapidly came to be well-known and celebrated by Trinity staff and students alike. Midway through his 6th grade year, during a Trinity field trip, Albert was able to share his love and talent for roller skating.**

Albert utilized weekly therapy sessions to begin exploring the grief of his brother's death and the resulting anxiety. Albert was able to connect to his emotions on a deeper level through rap music, and took to sharing new songs with his clinician as a way of exploring his loss.

### Trinity's embedded model:

- Sparked a major turning point in Albert's ability to see himself as valued within a social group, and
- Provided consistent clinical supports, which led to a dramatic improvement in his daily school attendance and feeling less confused and behind in classes.



His increasing academic engagement and social confidence carried him through the first half of 7th grade. Unfortunately, this momentum was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially, Albert struggled to remain involved. Home visits from his clinician at the beginning of his 8th grade year rekindled his sense of belonging within Trinity and the school community.

Albert began to develop a strong interest in math. His personal commitment to working hard in math expanded to all his academic classes. When given the opportunity to return to in-person learning in the spring of 8th grade, Albert continued to improve academically and built strong relationships with multiple teachers who were impressed with Albert's hard work. He was also able to maintain meaningful friendships with peers. Near the end of 8th grade, Albert voiced a hope to remain connected with his current friends into adulthood.

## SUMMARY

Albert now expresses a sense of confidence in his abilities to manage the academic transition to high school. He is excited for what his future holds, and willing to reach out to peers and adults as he encounters new challenges.



## MEET SAM, AGE 14

### 18 percent SEL increase over three years with Trinity, 2018-2021

Sam was referred to the Trinity program in the fall of her 6th grade year, following frequent referrals to the principal's office, and behavioral suspensions. She was failing all her classes, and the school did not know how to support her. Sam engaged immediately with Trinity staff. She showed excitement to be part of a smaller community and succeed in school, as well as trauma creating barriers to her success.

Sam had recently moved to Massachusetts to live with her dad, after the passing of her great grandmother who had raised her. Having had little contact for much of Sam's life, the transition to living together was a lot for Sam and her father. She was entering pre-adolescence and struggling to make sense of traumatic experiences from early childhood. Her brain was stuck in survival mode. With all her attention on staying safe, and understanding a new city, school, and home environment, Sam had little bandwidth to focus on school.

Upon entering the Trinity program, Sam struggled to use words to explain how she was feeling or why she was upset. Communicating her emotions through her behaviors often got her into trouble.

**The school narrative was that Sam was “oppositional, avoidant of learning, and didn’t care about her education.”**

Expressing emotions through behaviors rather than language is a very common result of toxic stress and trauma in young people. Sam responded to social-emotional skill-building; she began to develop a strong vocabulary of emotions and worked with her clinician to identify her emotions. This work took place both in therapy sessions, and throughout the day with support of the entire Trinity team.

#### Trinity's embedded model:

- Allowed a clinician to support Sam's self-expression in real time, challenging classes, and
- Demonstrated for teachers and staff how to support Sam through difficult moments.

As Sam grew in ability to express her emotions, she was able to talk about her childhood trauma in therapy. Over time, she learned to manage big emotions; she identified strategies to feel calm and empowered when upset or triggered.

The switch to virtual classes during the COVID pandemic, created an opportunity for Sam and her clinician to engage in more traditional talk therapy sessions during which Sam continued to grow in her ability to connect feelings to words, and reflect on how her thoughts impacted her feelings and her behavior. By 8th grade, Sam could regularly and expertly assess her emotional reactions.



In the spring, Sam travelled back to New Jersey to attend a funeral where she would see people who had deeply hurt her in the past. Everyone was concerned about the impact this would have on Sam's mental health. She worked proactively with her clinician, anticipating how she might feel and respond during these interactions. Sam's clinician also prepared her dad to support Sam during this difficult time. Sam was able to attend the funeral and feel protected by the adults around her. This was an incredibly important moment for her, to see her own efficacy lived out in a context that had once taken away her power and feelings of safety.

## SUMMARY

As an 8th grader, Sam now uses language to communicate how she feels. She is able to maintain positive relationships with peers and adults. She has developed her own understanding of the people and boundaries that make her feel respected and safe. She feels confident communicating these boundaries, and empowered in her ability to determine her future. Sam will always carry the harm caused by her early childhood trauma. However, it no longer dictates her daily behaviors nor determines her sense of self. She has re-claimed her self-efficacy and now has skills to make choices that support her in reaching her personal and academic goals.

## MEET ROSALYN, AGE 14

### 29 percent gain over two years with Trinity, 2019-21

At age 11, knowing very little English, Rosalyn moved to Massachusetts from the Dominican Republic with her mom and younger brother. Rosalyn developed strong relationships at the McCormack Middle School, where she was enrolled in the school's Sheltered English Immersion program for recent immigrants learning English. Her teachers described her as kind, sweet, friendly, and respectful with adults and peers. During enrollment, her mom shared that Rosalyn had lost her dad when she was very young to community violence; she had few memories of him. Rosalyn had been exposed to ongoing community violence and had been shot prior to moving to the U.S. Clearly, Rosalyn's trauma history was impacting her ability to succeed in school, despite her best attempts to learn.



Rosalyn was referred to Trinity by teachers reporting that she was attentive in class but struggled to retain information. Her teachers had learned through Trinity's teacher-training how trauma impacts students' developing brains; they worried about the impact of past traumatic experiences on Rosalyn's abilities in school.

Rosalyn described herself as "a rebel" when she was in the Dominican Republic. She missed a lot of school and didn't care about succeeding. In the move to Boston, she changed her approach, explaining: "I want to learn, do well, and excel."

Almost three months after joining Trinity, the world was hit with the pandemic; daily routines changed overnight. New things can be very anxiety-provoking.

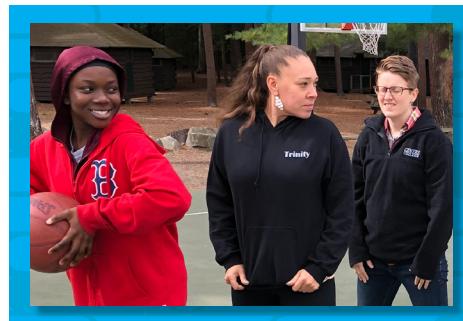
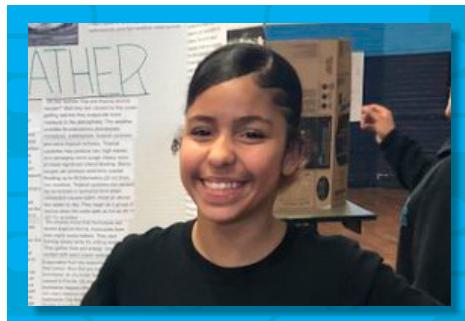
**Rosalyn used her anxiety as fuel to grow. She stayed connected to her teachers and school work, despite not having Internet for the first six months of the pandemic. She remained fully engaged in the Trinity program.**

While Rosalyn's resilience and academic growth were inspiring, her challenges as a new immigrant were ongoing. Rosalyn used therapy to explore her identity as an immigrant Latinx young woman, a bilingual learner, and a pandemic warrior. She explored and unpacked her journey as an immigrant. Therapy served as a place where Rosalyn could construct a story of empowerment and strength.

Rosalyn worried that she was not doing well in school because her English language proficiency was not evolving at the same speed as her peers. Being isolated at home had a major impact, but she did not let that keep her down.

#### Trinity's embedded model:

- Kept Rosalyn focused on her school work and committed to her education, and
- Maintained her self-exploration in therapy throughout the pandemic.



## SUMMARY

Rosalyn learned to identify her needs and to reach out to appropriate people for specific supports. She unpacked her experiences of anxiety, identified her strengths and protective factors, and learned new coping tools in response to big emotions. Her grades for 2020-2021 were outstanding. Experiencing her own resilience in the pandemic reinforced Rosalyn's self-confidence and belief that she will do well in high school.



## Parent Appreciation



The Trinity clinician was the first person dealing with my daughter's problem and I really appreciate what you did for her - help and support. She graduated from middle school! I am proud of her. And we don't argue that much now." -Parent of 8th Grader



Lately my daughter hasn't had any outbursts, she's trying to do more work and be more involved. She's being more respectful to her teachers. Her ability to sit in class and actually be engaged has much improved. She is good about taking breaks and going back to class as she should be. She has better understanding of her boundaries with teachers she feels closest to." -Parent of 7th Grader



My son doesn't have an attitude as much as he used to. He's been a little more open with the teachers, asking more questions ... He's still doing a few things that he shouldn't be doing with classmates, like staying online with friends until midnight. But Trinity's been good for him." -Parent of 7th Grader



My son not being at school this past year meant he was able to avoid conflict. He doesn't want to fight or argue with people. Being home calmed him down a lot ... At home, he gets up and cleans up and wants to be in school, wants to do things. He is being proactive in his life. When the school didn't believe him, you at Trinity did. You had his back ... You all checked in and did a good job making sure if we needed anything." -Parent of 8th Grader



He'll get up and go in the mornings ... and do all of his lessons. He's really staying focused and getting all his grades up; he's always happy about school now ... He used to be shy, but Trinity helped him open up, talk more, and interact better with kids his age. You delivered food when I needed it for Thanksgiving. With all the services that I needed, you were always there to help me." -Parent of 8th Grader



Our daughter seems more responsible and more inclined to go to school and get good grades. Before she was not interested. She used to make excuses. Now she seems more motivated, willing and responsible. She is also more engaged with me in a positive manner and I have not been redirecting her as much as I used to."

-Parent of 7th Grader (Spanish)