



THE SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING ACHIEVED BY Middle School Students

The Trinity Education for Excellence Program (TEEP), is a three-to-six-year, tuition-free, out-of-school time, pipeline opportunity. Middle and high school students gain academic enrichment, leadership development, meaningful employment experience, peer mentoring, and high school and college admissions support. 2021 marked TEEP's 22nd anniversary as a program of Trinity Boston Connects.





Beginning as rising 7th graders, young people of color engage three consecutive summers in a five-week, summer intensive. Morning sessions focus on academic confidence through project-based curricula. Afternoon sessions offer experiential learning. Participants meet for several community-building events during the school year.

Graduates of the middle school program continue in TEEP's Leadership Development Program (LDP). LDP serve as mentors and paid counselors to their younger peers. They also participate in year-round college and career mentoring.

This report focuses on the social and emotional development of **11 middle school students in the 2021 summer camp** (held in-person following the virtual, pandemic season). A companion report presents the development of LDP participants.

SUMMER CAMP CONTENT

TEEP provided middle school students with a safe and welcoming space where they could share their opinions and voice concerns. Participants were given the necessary tools to build their self-advocacy skills and express themselves in different situations.

Every morning, students were asked opening/check-in questions that encouraged reflection. They were engaged in starting conversations and began developing the early skills of public speaking. An enrichment workshop during the day included curriculum with an intentional focus on advocacy. Participants were encouraged to speak their opinions, thoughts and concerns, to be themselves in every space, and express themselves in healthy and meaningful ways. Youth experimented and learned about different art mediums. Field trips were tied to art enrichment. Each week focused on a new art medium. The students visited public installations that were created by people of color around Boston. At the end of the summer, youth shared their summer highlights with TEEP friends and family at Moakley Park.

Three of the older participants stepped into roles as anthropologists for the summer. They were responsible for observing and documenting everything that transpired. In addition to observing, they were responsible for creating a weekly newsletter that was shared with the TEEP community, TBC staff, and via social media. Every newsletter contained sample work from TEEP participants' writing, as well as story highlights.

the difference we make

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



academic & career success

positive relationships

better physical & mental health

The Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) of the middle school participants was observed and assessed by three trained LDP mentors in July (pre) and then again in August (post) of 2021. The SEED Impact Competency Ladders™ were customized for this purpose to reflect the program's intentions for youth achievement.

Both pre- and post- assessments were conducted for only seven (64%) of the 11 middle school participants.

On average,

- They were observed to achieve a **22 percent gain in SEL** from pre- to post-assessment—**noteworthy gains** over a summer experience!

SEL is an integral part of individual human development. A meta-analysis of over 200 programs, covering three decades of research, found that those focused to develop social and emotional wellbeing 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); 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).¹

Through well-rounded instruction, continuous evaluation, and authentic partnerships between SEL providers, families and communities, SEL advances educational equity and excellence.² Youth with stronger SEL are more likely to gain academic and career success, foster positive relationships, and attain better physical and mental health, leading them to achieve more meaningful contributions to society.³

THREE STUDENT SEL SUCCESS STORIES: As observed by TEEP Leaders

Violet is very polite and kindhearted. She is quiet and reserved when first meeting her. She was seen having more and more fun and making new friends as she progressed through the program. She was comfortable expressing herself around smaller groups of people, and still finding her voice in larger settings. Violet was among the first to be done with assignments and was always willing to help a fellow student. In her words: "The summer taught me to show respect toward the space I am in and leave that place better than I found it."

—Violet, rising 7th grader

Aisha is compassionate, which helped her fit in with other students and made her fun to be around. She developed a great chemistry with the TEEP team. Her mother reported that after participating in TEEP this summer, Aisha engages more with other kids than before."

—Aisha, rising 7th grader

Brandon is an outgoing student, comfortable being around peers. In class, he was respectful, compassionate, and first to break the ice and speak when it was quiet. Over the summer he began stepping out of his comfort zone to find new things to do with the whole TEEP group. He bonded with LDP counselors and showed them great respect. His LDP mentor noted, "Brandon made me feel like a great counselor especially for it to be my first time, and also made me feel like a big brother to him and the other boys."

—Brandon, rising 8th grader

¹Durlak, 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.

²Casel.org. 2020. What Is SEL. [online] Available at: <<https://casel.org/what-is-sel/>> [Accessed 20 October 2020].

³Council of Distinguished Scientists National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development. The Aspen Institute, September 2017.

How We Measure Social-Emotional Learning

SEED Impact provided tools to measure SEL gains across three domains (Being, Doing, and Relating), and guided the TEEP leaders to define progressive outcomes depicted as competency ladders that participants climb.

SEL KEY The highest stage of each ladder articulates the ideal outcomes toward which participants are encouraged by TEEP to aspire, as here described:



BEING
self-confidence and self-efficacy

Students are becoming more composed, capable, confident, and self-directed. An elevation of spirit and/or increased optimism about their self and world is witnessed.



DOING
capacity to perform

Students' ability to make decisions is growing. They are becoming prepared to take on bigger challenges.



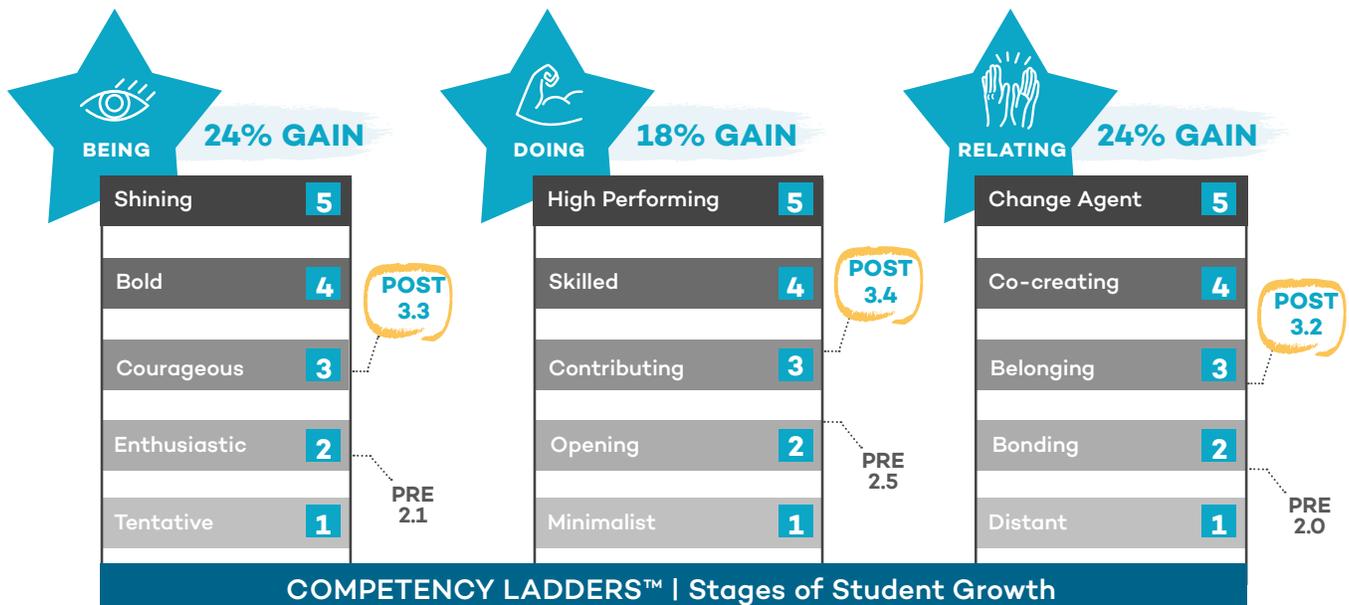
RELATING
ability to engage with others

Students are gaining confidence and becoming more comfortable in their interactions with others. They seem interested in others' success as well as their own.

Progress is measured by evaluating how much of the unclimbed ladder has been mastered pre to post.

GROWTH IN SEL COMPETENCIES

From July (pre) through August (post), seven Middle School students were observed to gain an average of **22 percent in SEL**—advancing more than one rung (20 percent) on the ladders. As shown below, dramatic gains were observed in all three SEL domains:



The students as a group advanced in:

Being practices: from “Enthusiastic” to “Courageous”

Doing practices: from “Opening” to “Contributing”

Relating practices: from “Bonding” to “Belonging”



BEING

- 2 students advanced two or more rungs
- 3 students advanced one rung
- 2 students remained at same rung

IN THEIR WORDS: LDP Mentors

The LDP mentors captured thoughtful observations over the summer in each domain:

“ In the beginning of the summer Amber was more reserved but in a sense that she was uncomfortable with being in a new space and getting adjusted to the TEEP values. As the summer went on it was clear to see that Amber was a quiet person naturally, but she was able to use restraint and other values when she got too excited and would do things to avoid going against the covenant.

“ Andrew was open to expressing himself in the community regardless of what others think or believe.

“ Aisha has different friend groups and is comfortable being herself in those groups, a cheerful student.

IN THEIR WORDS: continued

The LDP mentors captured thoughtful observations over the summer in each domain:

“ Jon enjoys participating in class. When playing games, he shows great enthusiasm.

“ There is positive energy whenever Slade is around. He contributes his fair share.

“ Lily gets her work done, elevates the conversation we have in class, and is able to bring her fellow classes in to participate.

DOING

2 students advanced two or more rungs

0 students advanced one rung

5 students remained at same rung





RELATING

- 2 students advanced two or more rungs
- 3 students advanced one rung
- 2 students remained at same rung

IN THEIR WORDS: continued

The LDP mentors captured thoughtful observations over the summer in each domain:

“Amber is quiet, but she likes to surround herself with people who have big personalities and who like to laugh a lot and just be very energetic. She has made relationships with a lot of counselors especially with her staying late when her mom would pick her up. She also now builds a really strong friendship with most of the kids in the group, and she wasn't doing that at first.

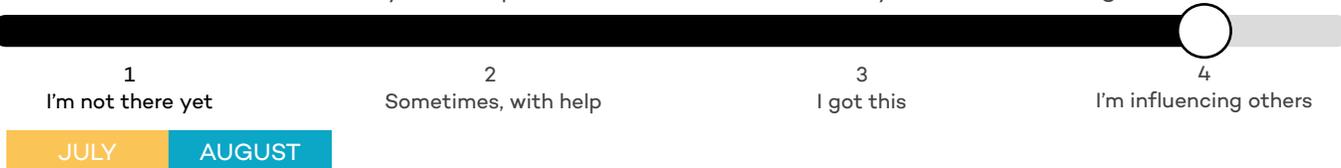
“Stacia gets along with staff and students. She knows how to build a relationship with both.

“Zandi has been confident in the space, and she feels very comfortable with being herself in any and every situation. I admire how she leads for others by trying to fully understand the value of the week.

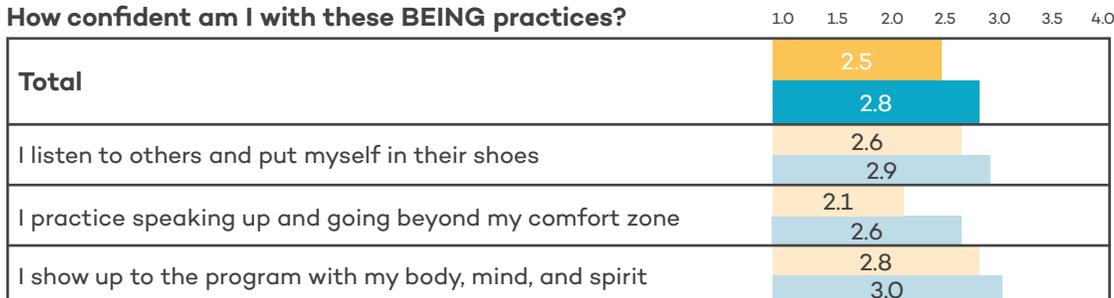
PARTICIPANT SELF-REFLECTION

Participants were invited to engage in self-reflection, using a survey tool that was customized by the TEEP staff, with guidance from SEED Impact. Seven of the 11 participants completed the self-assessment in both July and August. Results are provided below:

To self-assess their mastery of the practices shown below, they used this rating scale:



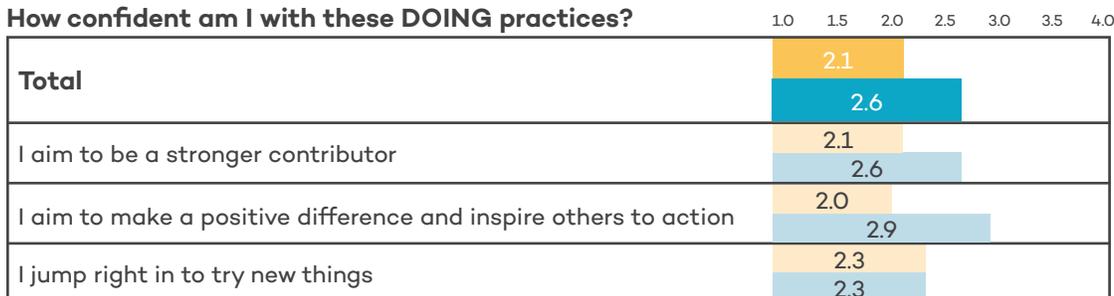
How confident am I with these BEING practices?



PRE: The average self-rating 2.5 out of 4.0 max) indicated **"Sometimes with help."**

POST: The average self-rating 2.8 out of 4.0 max) indicated **"Sometimes with help."**

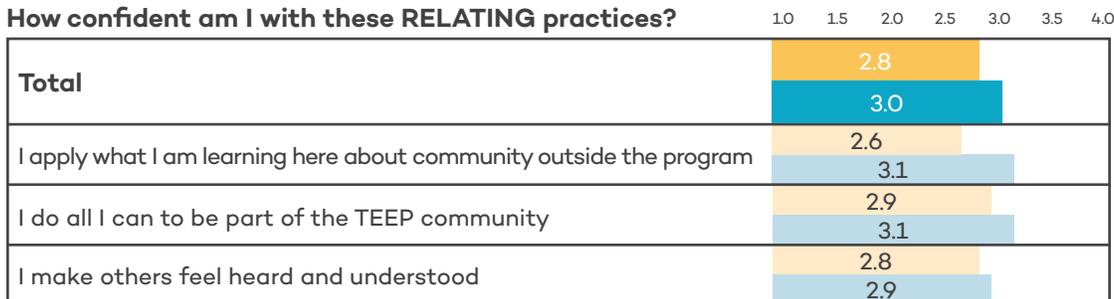
How confident am I with these DOING practices?



PRE: The average self-rating (2.1 out of 4.0 max) indicated **"Sometimes with help."**

POST: The average self-rating (2.6 out of 4.0 max) indicated **"Sometimes with help."**

How confident am I with these RELATING practices?



PRE: The average self-rating (2.8 out of 4.0 max) indicated **"Sometimes with help."**

POST: The average self-rating (3.0 out of 4.0 max) indicated **"I got this."**

High-achieving students rated these practices 3.0 or higher in August:

- I show up to the program with my body, mind, and spirit (3.0)
- I apply what I am learning here about community outside the program (3.1)
- I do all I can to be part of the TEEP community (3.1)

Correlation. Student self-assessments and the SEL mastery levels observed by LDP mentors were very much in sync on the DOING practices, at both the start and end of summer. For BEING, students self-assessed higher at the start of summer than did the LDP mentors, however the two perspectives were similar at the end of the camp. For RELATING, the students assessed their practices much higher than did the LDP mentors at both start and end of the summer.

IN THEIR WORDS: STUDENTS

“

I learned that I sometimes have to lead people and not follow. I'm learning how to interact with people, and I can use this to make more friends outside TEEP.

– Stacia

“

I am learning respect because I like to joke a lot but not everyone will understand that I was joking, and I need to respect that. Also, integrity because a lot of time I would slack off if I dropped something and leave it.

– Zandi

“

Something I'm learning that can be used in the future is leaving the place better than we found it so I could show respect towards the place.

– Violet

“

I like to make others around me feel welcome and feel like they can be themselves. I'm learning new sentence starters.

– Brandon



IN THEIR WORDS: PARENTS



From the bottom of my heart, thank you for accepting my son into your program, he truly enjoys participating every day ... He has grown into a mature professional young man. Due to your support and leadership, he is strong and confident in himself. He is able to communicate his needs and wants and accept constructive criticism. I'm confident with your ongoing support, my son will be the next leader in the community. – TEEP Parent



My daughter loved the program and felt encouraged and supported by both staff and fellow camp goers. This program has taught my daughter to be responsible for herself and her time. This is an important lesson as she grows older and has to juggle multiple competing priorities. – TEEP Parent



[My son] is learning how to express himself better. He enjoys having connections, and is glad to make friends. He usually is only comfortable around family but from what I heard from his older sister, he was warming up to the counselors and the other kids. He is becoming more comfortable with himself. My son has always been shy but is coming out of his shell because TEEP isn't like school where he has to worry about grades, etc. – TEEP Parent



Thank you for the great job you are doing for these teens. My child is shy and not sociable. After participating in TEEP, she engages more with other kids than before. I think what you're doing with the youth is great. – TEEP Parent



NOTE: The names for all quotes in this report are fictitious to protect student anonymity.