



DENVER'S
SEAL
INITIATIVE

*Prioritizing
Social, Emotional and
Academic Learning
for Denver's Youth*

**YEAR 3
STATUS REPORT**

SEPTEMBER 2020





HOW THE SEAL INITIATIVE IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

- ▶ Over the past three years, the Denver Afterschool Alliance (DAA) and Denver Public Schools (DPS) have been participating in the Wallace Foundation’s *Partnerships for Social Emotional Learning Initiative*. Together, we are building partnerships between day-school and out-of-school-time (OST) partners that enhance adult social emotional learning practices and youth experiences. Locally known as the Social, Emotional and Academic Learning (SEAL) Initiative, DAA and DPS formed a system-level leadership team to support the implementation of this work at six DPS elementary schools.

The impact being created by this SEAL work is evident at each of the Phase I school communities. As you walk down the halls, student work adorns the walls, and the sounds of students and staff engaging in positive interactions echo throughout. Step into a classroom either during school or after school, and you’ll find adults explicitly teaching social emotional skills, elevating youth voices, and giving youth opportunities to lead. And, finally, visit a morning meeting to experience how day-school and OST leaders come together to align their language, practices and expectations.

This report highlights what we have learned about this partnership, along with the promising practices that lead to positive outcomes. As the SEAL Initiative moves into its final year of implementation, Phase I site leaders and their teams are reflecting on and documenting these promising practices as Denver look to sustain and scale its SEAL commitment.



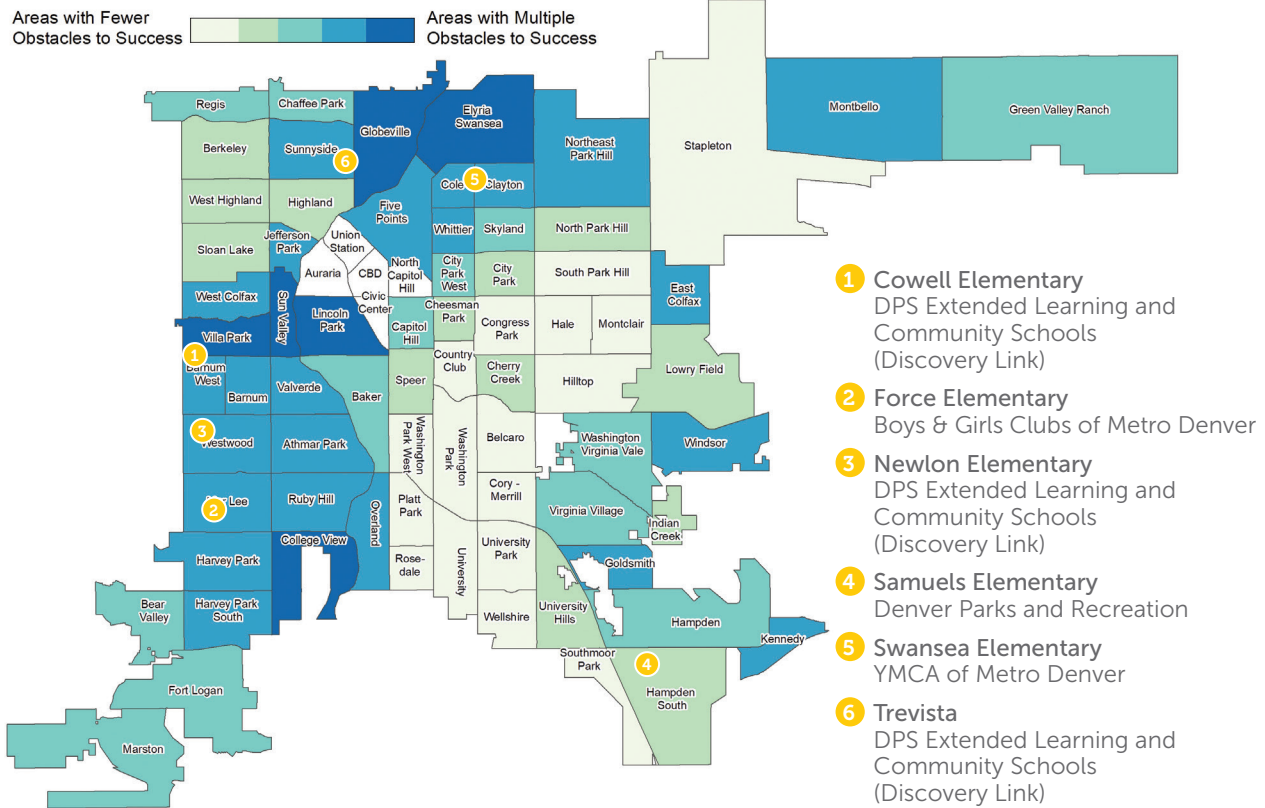
The Wallace Foundation selected the RAND Corporation and xSEL Labs as technical assistance partners to support the measurement and tracking of the PSEL Initiative’s development.

RAND administers an annual staff survey to all day-school and OST staff members to gauge their perceptions of the SEAL work happening in their community. RAND also uses a validated observational tool to assess the quality of day-school and OST climates, as well as the quality of their social emotional learning instruction. Finally, xSEL Labs administers the SELweb to K through 5th-grade students, which measures their self-reported competencies as well as their demonstration of social emotional learning skills.

Locally, the SEAL team developed a walk-through tool to consistently gather feedback on the nature and quality of SEAL instruction; they also created an information system to store outputs and outcomes for their professional learning offerings. Finally, Denver Public Schools provided all of the demographic information in this report.

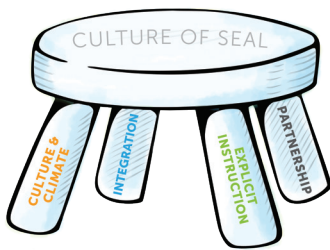
The SEAL Initiative enhances the learning environments in six elementary school and OST programs that serve youth, families and communities with relatively limited opportunity. By consistently delivering high-quality practices, this initiative is working to address systemic opportunity gaps in Denver.

2019 CHILD WELL-BEING INDEX



	PHASE I SITES	DPS AVERAGE
Free and reduced-price lunch (FRL) status	88%	65%
Special education status	13%	12%
Non-White youth	92%	75%

OUR APPROACH TO SEAL SUCCESS



SEAL INITIATIVE: SUMMARY OF YEAR 3 LEARNINGS

1

A SEAL-RICH CLIMATE & CULTURE SETS THE STAGE FOR IMPACT

2

ADULTS ARE DEVELOPING HIGH-QUALITY PRACTICES

3

YOUTH ARE BUILDING SEAL SKILLS

4

OUR PLAYBOOK OF PROMISING PRACTICES

A SEAL-RICH CLIMATE & CULTURE SETS THE STAGE FOR IMPACT

- ▶ In Year 3, the SEAL team helped Phase I sites evaluate their emotional climate and strengthen the leadership supports that lead to high-quality SEAL practices. As a result, Phase I staff reported feeling more confident, and RAND researchers saw notable growth in how they delivered SEAL practices.

*“Our teachers and staff are the **culture** of the school. Their care for students and one another sets a culture of **love and acceptance.**”*

- Jessica M., Principal

SEAL TEAM SUPPORTS:

- ▶ Quarterly walkthroughs by SEAL coaches helped sites develop deeper day-school and OST partnerships and created buy-in from staff.
- ▶ SEAL coaches supported the implementation of schoolwide culture and climate practices.
- ▶ Monthly team meetings between day-school and OST staff led to stronger partnerships, innovations, and the adoption of common language and practices that helped to strengthen each site’s climate and culture.

USING SEAL WITH CONFIDENCE

To create a SEAL-rich climate & culture, day-school and OST staff must feel confident that their practices will make a difference.

95%

of Phase I staff say they **“feel confident I can help students develop their social and emotional competencies”** in 2020, up from 91% in 2019.

75%

of Phase I staff say they can **“deal with almost any social emotional learning problem”** in 2020, up from 68% in 2019.

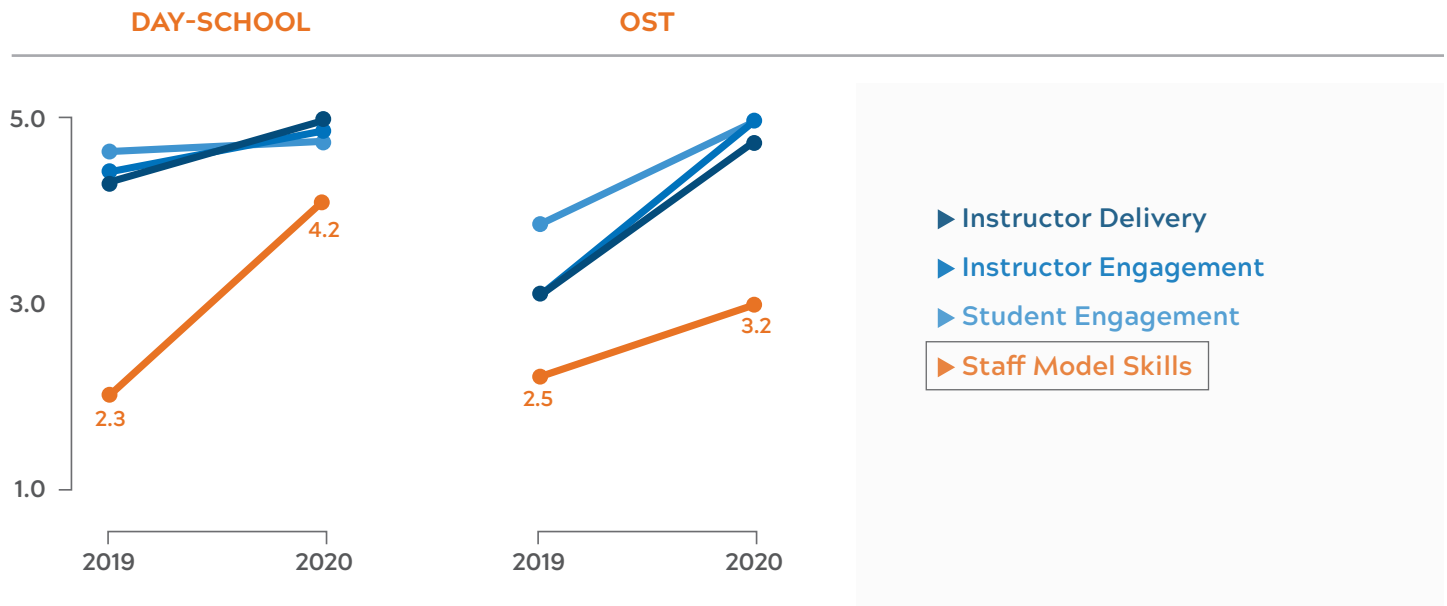
LEADING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SEAL

Key indicators show that both day-school and OST programs have strong leadership practices that help create a SEAL-rich culture.

	DAY-SCHOOL PERCENT IN AGREEMENT			OST PERCENT IN AGREEMENT		
	2018	2019	2020	2018	2019	2020
My school/program has developed a clear vision for social and emotional learning.	55%	85%	89%	88%	100%	100%
My school/program has a clear set of instructional practices for getting to specific social emotional learning outcomes.	41%	75%	79%	70%	89%	89%
The culture in my school/program supports the development of children’s social and emotional skills.	69%	89%	86%	97%	100%	100%


STRENGTHENING ALL ASPECTS OF SEAL INSTRUCTION

After observing more than 250 instructional and non-instructional activities in spring 2020, RAND researchers found that the quality of social emotional learning instruction had improved since Spring 2019. Both day-school and OST programs had significant growth in the “staff model skills” domain.



2

ADULTS ARE DEVELOPING
HIGH-QUALITY PRACTICES

- 
- ▶ With Year 3's increased attention and emphasis on professional learning, the SEAL team reached more than nine out of ten Phase I staff through a diverse set of learning opportunities. Participants continue to report that these opportunities are changing the way they work with youth and think about SEAL, and there are indications that Phase I site staff are taking on the responsibility of improving their SEAL practices.

SEAL TEAM SUPPORTS:

- ▶ SEAL coaches delivered *SEAL U*, a professional learning series that creates the space for staff to examine and practice one SEAL concept in under an hour.
- ▶ *Relationships, Planning and Presence* workshops help educators examine their relationships with youth, how they plan programs, and how to cultivate a positive presence.
- ▶ The SEAL team conducted four professional learning communities (PLC) with all Phase I site staff to review data, discuss SEAL strategies, and get implementation support.
- ▶ Local partner StandUP provided technical assistance to build the SEAL team's coaching capacity through 1:1 mentoring, modeling effective facilitation, and professional development supports.

**ROBUST OPPORTUNITIES TO DEVELOP
ADULT PRACTICES AND MINDSETS**

Day-school and OST staff continue to report that the professional learning opportunities had a positive influence on how they work with youth.

96%

of Phase I staff said that it **"changed the way I interact with students."**

88%

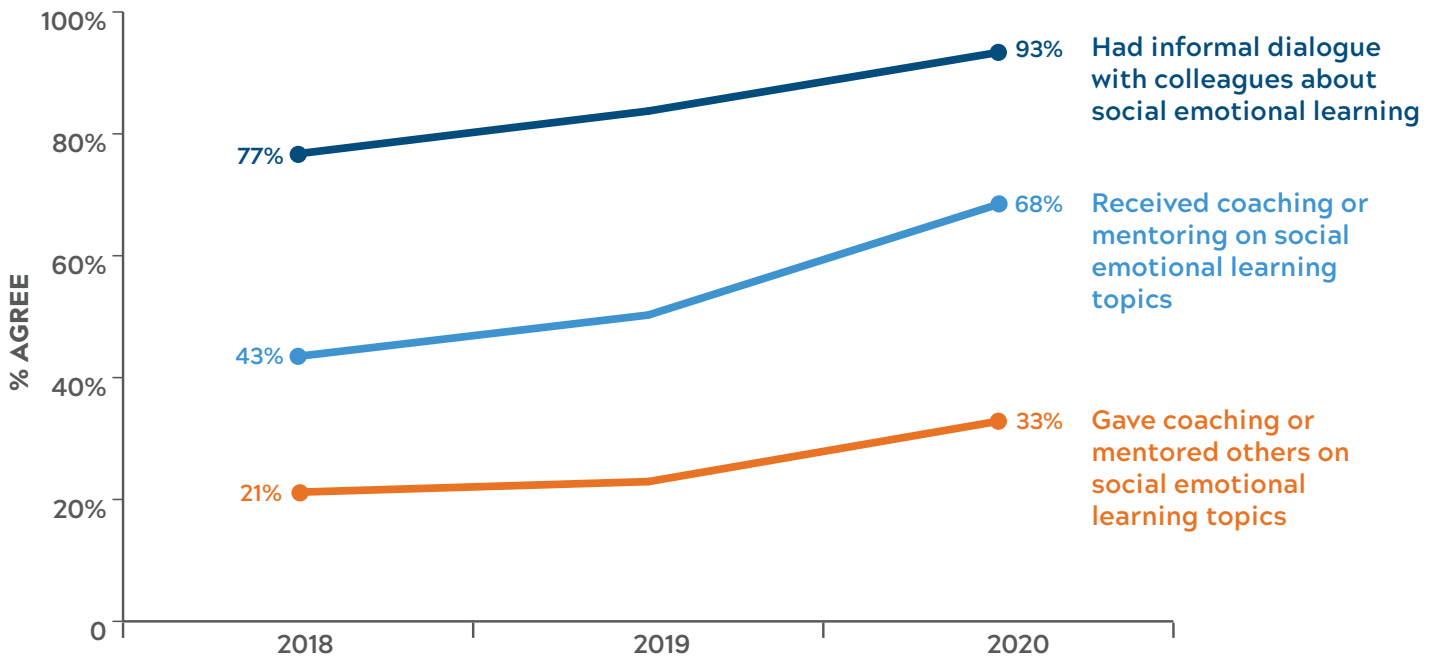
of Phase I staff said that it **"adequately prepared me to address students' social emotional learning."**

“SEAL U was an opportunity for our staff to reflect on the adult side of social emotional learning. This time allowed us to **build relationships** among adults and reflect on the relationships we have with youth.”

- Sarah K.,
SEAL Coordinator

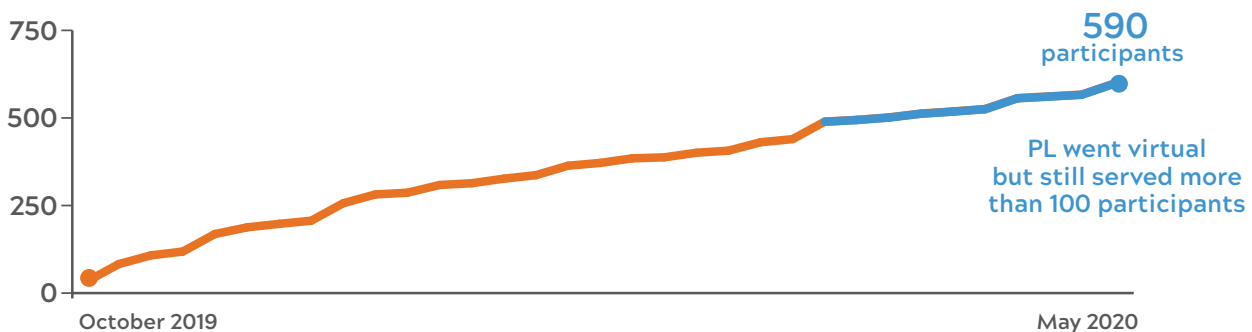
INSTITUTIONALIZING SEAL LEARNING

An increase in informal professional learning practices suggests that a culture of learning is now deeply embedded at Phase I sites.



SUPPORTING ADULT PRACTICES

SEAL coaches delivered 35 SEAL U sessions at Phase I sites, reaching nearly 600 participants. In response to COVID-19, the SEAL team transitioned to an online platform to continue helping staff reflect on their SEAL practices.



3

YOUTH ARE
BUILDING SEAL SKILLS

- ▶ When day-school and OST align programs and practices, youth are able to build the repertoire of SEAL skills that help them thrive. Throughout the course of this initiative, various measures have revealed how youth are building these skills.

*“SEAL provided students with the tools to **navigate** the challenging situations and feelings they encounter.”*

- Sara U., OST Lead

SEAL TEAM SUPPORTS:

- ▶ Coaches led teams through mini-walkthroughs to observe explicit SEAL instructional activities.
- ▶ Workshops and trainings were provided to support the implementation of social and emotional curricula.
- ▶ Coaches observed day-school and OST programs to create a cycle of continuous quality improvement.
- ▶ The SEAL team developed a comprehensive curriculum specific for OST providers.

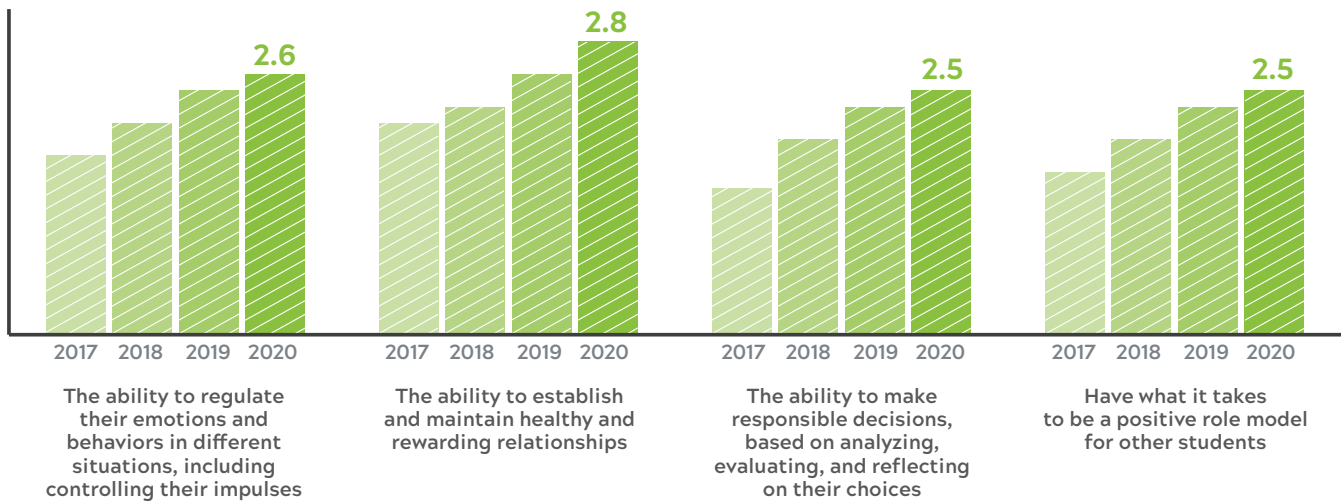


OBSERVING GROWTH IN YOUTH SEAL SKILLS

Since the beginning of the SEAL Initiative, both day-school and OST staff have been asked to reflect on how youth demonstrate SEAL skills. From 2017 to 2020, day-school staff reported that significantly more youth are exhibiting SEAL skills such as self-management and responsible decision-making.

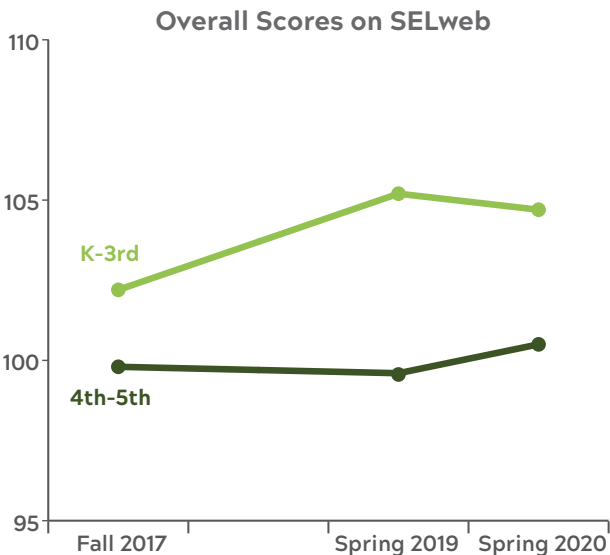


In the past few months, what portion of students display the following competencies most of the time?
(Scale is 0-4, where 0 is none and 4 is nearly all.)

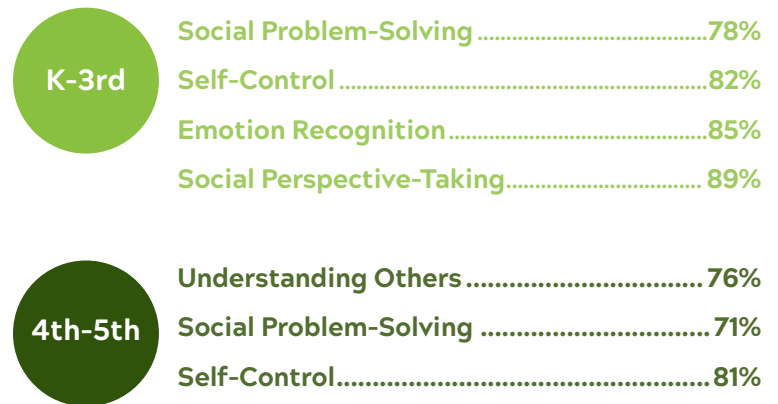


ASSESSING YOUTH COMPETENCIES

By asking youth to respond to complex social scenarios, the SELweb assessment reveals how youth are internalizing and demonstrating key social and emotional skills. Kindergarten to third-grade youth have consistently performed strongly on SELweb compared to the second average, while fourth- and fifth-grade youth have performed at the average level.

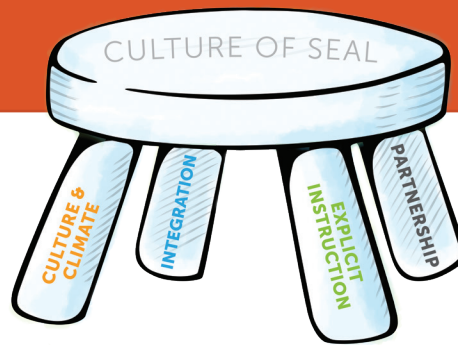


Percent of Youth Demonstrating Above or Average Skills



4

OUR PLAYBOOK OF PROMISING PRACTICES



OUR APPROACH TO SEAL SUCCESS

Build a culture of social, emotional and academic learning with these four promising practices.

Culture & Climate

Creating a welcoming, supportive and culturally and linguistically reflective environment that fosters learning and growth. This positive culture acts as the foundation for modeling and practicing SEAL.

- ▶ Create a philosophy and language that reflects day-school and OST programs as a single community.
- ▶ Develop a common language and alignment of practices to create a fluid experience for youth.
- ▶ Establish a vision. Building a SEAL culture takes time, and all partners must understand where the work is headed and the role they play.
- ▶ Provide professional learning, implementation support and coaching services that connect back to your vision.
- ▶ Find formal and informal data collection tools to demonstrate progress and areas of opportunity.
- ▶ Focus on adult practices and the continual development of their emotional intelligence with direct connection to how that relates to their work with other adults and youth.

Explicit Instruction

Explicitly teaching the three SEAL competencies (Self Awareness & Self Management, Social Awareness & Relationship Skills and Responsible Decision Making) through intentional lessons focused on specific SEAL skills.

- ▶ Select a social emotional curriculum that fits your site's culture and demographics, and recognize that there is no "one size fits all" approach.
- ▶ Create a robust scope and sequence of professional learning opportunities to support educators in both day-school and OST settings.
- ▶ Provide implementation supports and prioritize the teaching of social emotional learning skills.

- ▶ Over the past three years, we have learned how to make SEAL a robust part of day-school and OST programs' approach to working with youth. Our playbook of promising practices, which are described in detail below, is available to other agencies, school districts and intermediaries that want to learn how to best structure their systems and deploy resources. Through our experience, we have learned that investing in each SEAL practice is important, but integrating them together is the key to success.

Integration

Infusing SEAL skills and competencies into rigorous content delivery and throughout program activities. This provides context and reinforcement of lessons taught during explicit instruction and brings relevance to skill acquisition.

- ▶ Implement SEAL Signature Practices into all meetings and events.
- ▶ Integrate social emotional learning skills and practices into academic content and all OST program activities.
- ▶ Connect youth's social emotional learning skills to their learning process.
- ▶ Combine social emotional learning data with other data collection practices to emphasize the importance of SEAL practices and growth.

Partnership

Developing partnerships between day-school, OST programs and other providers. This creates a school-wide community that fosters a SEAL-rich environment in all areas of school.

- ▶ Create a connected community by making time for adults to develop strong relationships with each other.
- ▶ Host joint professional learning opportunities where day-school and OST programs work together to make plans, recognize each other's strengths, and solve problems.
- ▶ Ensure that major decisions are not made by one partner (or one person) and encourage collaborative decision-making.
- ▶ Encourage cross-observations between day-school and OST programs so that staff can learn from and champion each other.

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ABOUT THE YEAR 3 STATUS REPORT

The story of the SEAL Initiative's third year is one of deepening partnership, acceleration, collaboration, perseverance and resilience. As adults continue to infuse SEAL into their daily practices, we are building spaces where youth can learn, connect, and thrive. Now, amidst the impact of an unprecedented pandemic, the role of SEAL is becoming even more important and Phase I sites are leaning on their foundation of relationships with youth, families and communities to support them through these unprecedented challenges.

In addition to our funder, the Wallace Foundation, we are grateful for our technical assistance partners, the Rand Corporation, CASEL, the Weikart Center, XSEL Labs, and StandUP, who have helped us elevate SEAL across Denver.