

Evaluation Aim/Purpose:

1. This study aimed to evaluate the relationship between program methods and SEL skill growth in children by analyzing data from pre- and post-tests administered to thousands of students in a school-year afterschool setting. By applying these findings, we sought to inform and enhance our approach within the shorter time frame and smaller population of a week-long sleepaway camp.
2. The study also aimed to identify what SEL skills the students most often struggled with and areas of strength to make effective program adjustments to better align with students' developmental needs and program goals.

Methods:

1. 1,675 children ages 8-18 were surveyed with the Hello Insight SEL Youth Survey in the pre phase and 1,177 in the post phase, with 498 lost to follow-up. Participants were randomly selected from our 110-school site afterschool population across Los Angeles County; the same children were surveyed in February and May of the '23-'24 school year. Our sleepaway camp attendees are recruited almost exclusively from this population as well. Data collection was performed by Site Coordinators, after a one-hour training, and by the Impact Manager. Surveyed children were exposed to the same program ethos, structure, SEL focus, and often staff as sleepaway camp participants.
2. We measured proficiency in the following SEL skill domains: Self Management, Academic Self-Efficacy, Social Skills, Mastery Orientation, as well as Contribution and Positive Identity for youth over age 11. We then measured differences in overall skill proficiency from pre-test to post-test.

Findings:

Finding #1

Among youth ages 8-11, 86% had SEL skill growth in one or more skill domains. 52% had overall positive skill growth after exposure to our programming. Among youth age 11 and older, 94% had skill growth in one or more skill domain, and 62% had overall positive skill growth after exposure to our programming.

Finding #2

Our populations' strongest skills were consistently Social Skills and Academic Self-Efficacy. Youth struggled consistently with the Self-Management skill.



Implications for Practitioners:

1. **Focus on Social Emotional Learning.** Integrate activities that support the five CASEL Framework domains. Examples include group work and team building exercises to build trust and collaboration, offering choice-making opportunities to foster autonomy, and activities like leading tasks or cleaning up after meals to enhance responsibility and self-regulation. These intentional practices promote holistic development and empower youth to thrive in all areas.
2. **Uplift Youth Voice.** Encourage active camper participation by empowering them to make choices about their camp experience. Regularly seek and incorporate their feedback to adjust activities and daily programming, ensuring accommodations are made in real-time and informing improvements for future sessions.
3. **Hire Diverse Staff.** To ensure equity and inclusion through culturally responsive practices, hire diverse staff who reflect the students you serve, providing representation across identities – race, gender, sexual orientation, body size, ability, etc., – and offering tailored support for neurodivergent youth and those with disabilities to create a thriving, relatable, and inclusive environment.

