



BOOSTING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING WITH SHORT DAILY LESSONS

Consistent learning helps students perform and behave better.

The benefits of social-emotional learning in the classroom are well-documented.

Several studies show that students exposed to [SEL increased their achievement test scores](#) by 11 to 17 percentile points more than students without SEL training. They also had greater motivation to learn, reduced disruptive behavior, fewer disciplinary referrals, and reduced anxiety and depression.

But for many teachers, the thought of adding another item to lesson plans can be daunting. Luckily, new research shows that as little as five to 10 minutes of focused and consistent SEL instruction each day produces significant and positive changes in student behavior and learning.

Consider the experiences of teachers at Longfellow Elementary School in Salida, Colo., which recently adopted the *In Focus* SEL program.

"My initial reaction was, 'Oh man, here's another thing I have to learn,'" says Karen Thorpe, a kindergarten teacher at Longfellow. "But as I've used it, it's so quick and easy, and it lines itself up beautifully in my lesson plans."

Charlie Rahe, a fifth-grade teacher, says he saw an immediate change in how students reacted to read-alouds.

"As I read something aloud, they'd say, 'Oh well, if this person had shown more empathy towards this character, then they might have avoided some of these problems'," he recalls. Students were changed as social and emotional beings and as deep and empathetic readers.

notes Sarah Johnson, another fifth-grade teacher at Longfellow. “We’ve talked about where your emotions lie, and I think that helps them see how real it is, and how important it is to regulate your emotions.”

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING SEL

Successfully integrating SEL without disrupting your instructional day can be a challenge.

McSheehy’s interest in SEL developed from his own personal growth and his desire to bring the tools he’d learned into his classroom. *In Focus* is an attempt to help other teachers do the same.

“I listened to what teachers and administrators told me over the years — that they don’t have time, that they’re not trained, that it’s too expensive,” McSheehy says. “So I made something quick, easy, simple. Teachers know it’s doable, and it’s economical for administrators.”

Ben Jacobson, another Longfellow fifth-grade teacher, adds: “If you spent a lot of time prepping a science lab, you can still have the time to prep the *In Focus* lessons because they’re so short. Just from that little bit of time you get a lot of value.” ■

Changing the Classroom, Changing Lives

The real-world impact of teaching SEL is now well-known: behavior moderates, classroom management becomes easier, and even test scores go up. But *In Focus* developer McSheehy says he believes that these are only the side effects of a more fundamental obligation educators have to children: to improve their lives.

“When a classroom is really emotionally safe and students are able to be authentic and vulnerable, they are able to hear from other students about their lives, their feelings and challenges,” McSheehy says. “They don’t feel so alone or like something is wrong with them. They feel more OK about themselves. That form of connection is an incredible type of support.” ■

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ABOUT THOUGHTFUL LEARNING

Our SEL guides improve students’ self-esteem, behavior, and test scores in just minutes a day. Each guide has a year’s worth of easy-to-teach activities to calm emotions, focus minds, and boost achievement. Students learn not just mindfulness but also brain structures. They then use their growing emotional intelligence in reading, writing, thinking, and learning. To find out more, see *In Focus* [K-2](#), [3-5](#), or [6-8](#).

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Thoughtful Learning

A LITTLE SEL GOES A LONG WAY

"Consistency is critical," explains former teacher Tom McSheehy, now a social worker and creator of the *In Focus* program, which includes short daily lessons that integrate easily into the curriculum. The daily application of the learning is more important than the lesson's length, he says.

"You touch it, you practice it, and you come back to it. This rewires the brain more quickly and makes it stick. My research has validated that. Short but consistent," McSheehy says.

According to McSheehy's own analysis, schools adopting *In Focus* for SEL chart measurable growth in students'

personal responsibility, goal-directed behavior, decision-making, and relationship skills. In two schools analyzed together, attendance improved by more than 50%, and behavioral referrals decreased by nearly 55%. There was an 81% decline in fighting.

The lessons tie to three areas of the brain that produce emotions and responses to them: the brain stem, the limbic system, and the frontal cortex. Daily discussions of these functions help students recognize and explain the unfolding of their social and emotional responses and learn to control the process a little better.

"I'll ask, 'Are you in your brainstem? Are you in your limbic system?' And they almost trust that a little bit more, because they've seen pictures of the brain,"

Best Practices for SEL in the Classroom

McSheehy suggests these four strategies to make teaching SEL easier and more effective.

1. SET ASIDE TIME EVERY DAY FOR SEL:

Students deal with challenges and emotions throughout the school day, so it's important that teachers provide daily instruction on how to manage these situations. This is especially easy when the SEL curriculum is built on short, progressive, day-by-day lessons. "I didn't have to dream up very much," recounts Carol McIlvaine, a third-grade teacher at Longfellow. "I could open the *In Focus* book, see what we were going to be doing for the week, and get the lessons ready one at a time."

2. EMPLOY SEL PRINCIPLES DURING REAL CONFLICT:

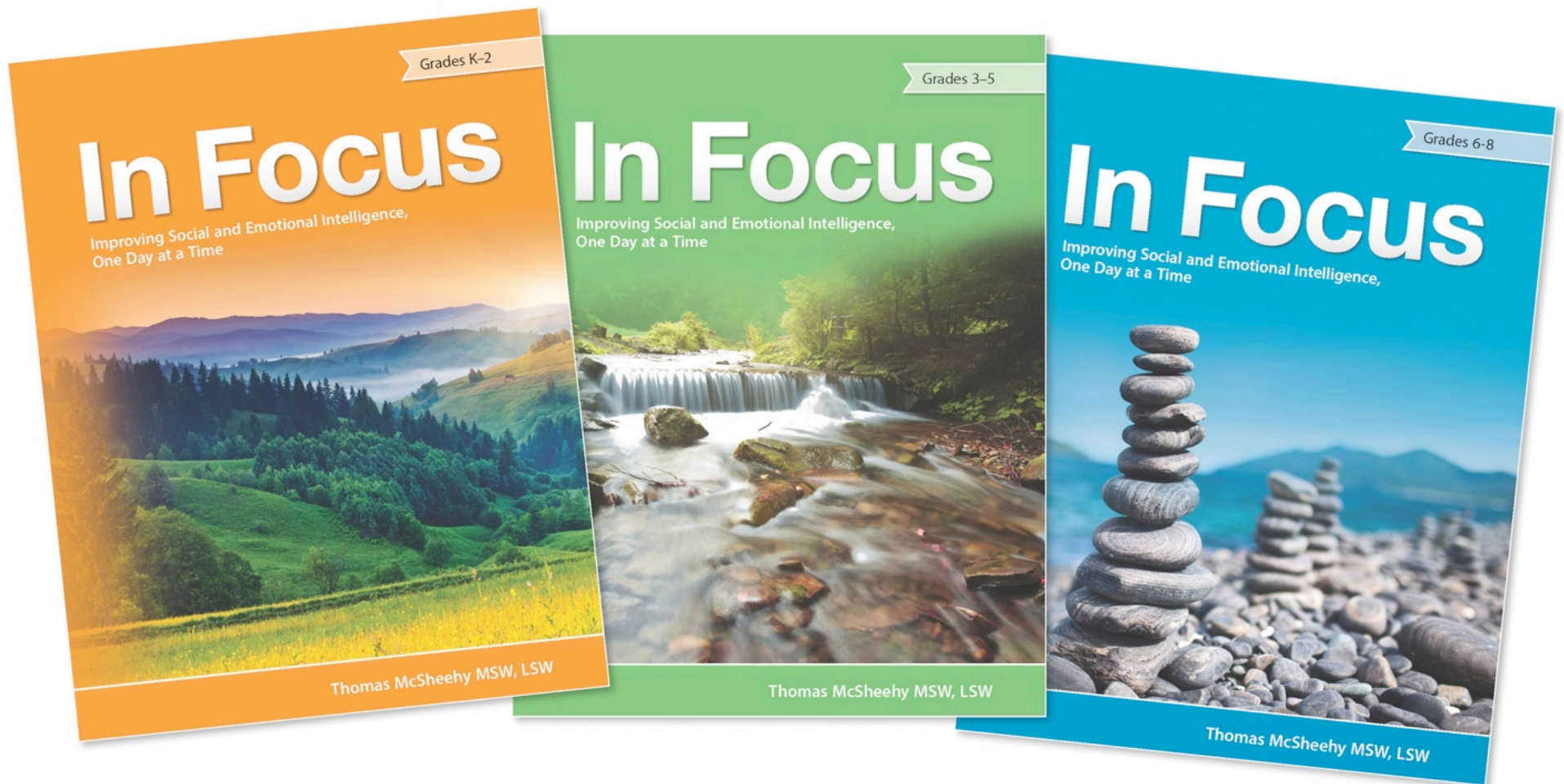
Coaching students to employ SEL strategies when situations arise at school shows them how to use their knowledge of emotions, applying the principles to improve relationships. "Out on the playground, I'll remind them of what we've talked about," Johnson notes. "I'll say, 'Remember when we talked about this scenario? How did we handle it? Are you handling it appropriately?' Things like that, so it ties into the whole day."

3. BE VULNERABLE AND AUTHENTIC:

When teachers are honest about their own emotions, they become more influential instructors and create opportunities to model how they use SEL tools in their own lives. "But that can be scary for teachers because you don't have to bring yourself into writing, reading, and math as much," McSheehy says. "If you're doing the lesson on sadness and it's uncomfortable for you, tell them why you don't want to do it and how you're going to work through it. 'I'm going to be doing this, but know that a part of me is sitting in the corner.' That's an amazing SEL lesson."

4. INCLUDE SEL IN TEST PREP:

Conflict, relationships, and behavior are not the only areas of a student's life in which their social-emotional intelligence can be applied for the benefit of themselves and others. Students encounter a raft of emotions during testing. Stress in all its forms, and specifically the sort of stress and anxiety associated with testing, is a rich environment for students to practice their skills. "I can't control how much we test them," Johnson laments, "but I can remind them of strategies from *In Focus* to help themselves regulate their emotions and their stress levels when they're testing. And it's been really neat to see them apply the strategies we've taught them, the different breathing exercises, the mindful moments, the body-relaxation techniques." ■



The Effect of the **In Focus** Curriculum on Student and Teacher Social Emotional Growth, Behavior, and Academic Performance

January, 2018

IN FOCUS AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCY

We examined the effect of In Focus curriculum on students' social and emotional competency using the following established social-emotional assessments:

The Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA)

The DESSA(K-8th) scale is a nationally standardized measure that captures children's social emotional competence in the following 8 sub-areas: Personal Responsibility, Optimistic Thinking, Goal-Directed Behavior, Social Awareness, Decision Making, Relationship Skills, Self-Awareness, and Self-Management. A Social-Emotional Composite score is calculated to indicate children's overall social emotional performance.

AIR/CASEL Social and Emotional Learning Assessment (AIR/CASEL SEL)

A 17-item short-form of AIR/CASEL social and emotional learning assessment, developed in collaboration between Washoe County School District and the Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning (CASEL). This measure taps into domains such as self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

DATA

Data was collected from two elementary schools located in Chicago, Illinois and Longmont, Colorado. Both schools have K-8 grades and have 90% low income students. The two social emotional scales (DESSA and AIR/CASEL SEL) were completed at the beginning and end of the first year of the In Focus implementation. Teachers were administered a social and emotional self-assessment at the beginning and end of the year. Data related to behavior, conduct, academic performance, and attendance was also collected and assessed.

DESSA

- 217 children in treatment group (25 classrooms)
- 20 children in control group (2 classrooms)

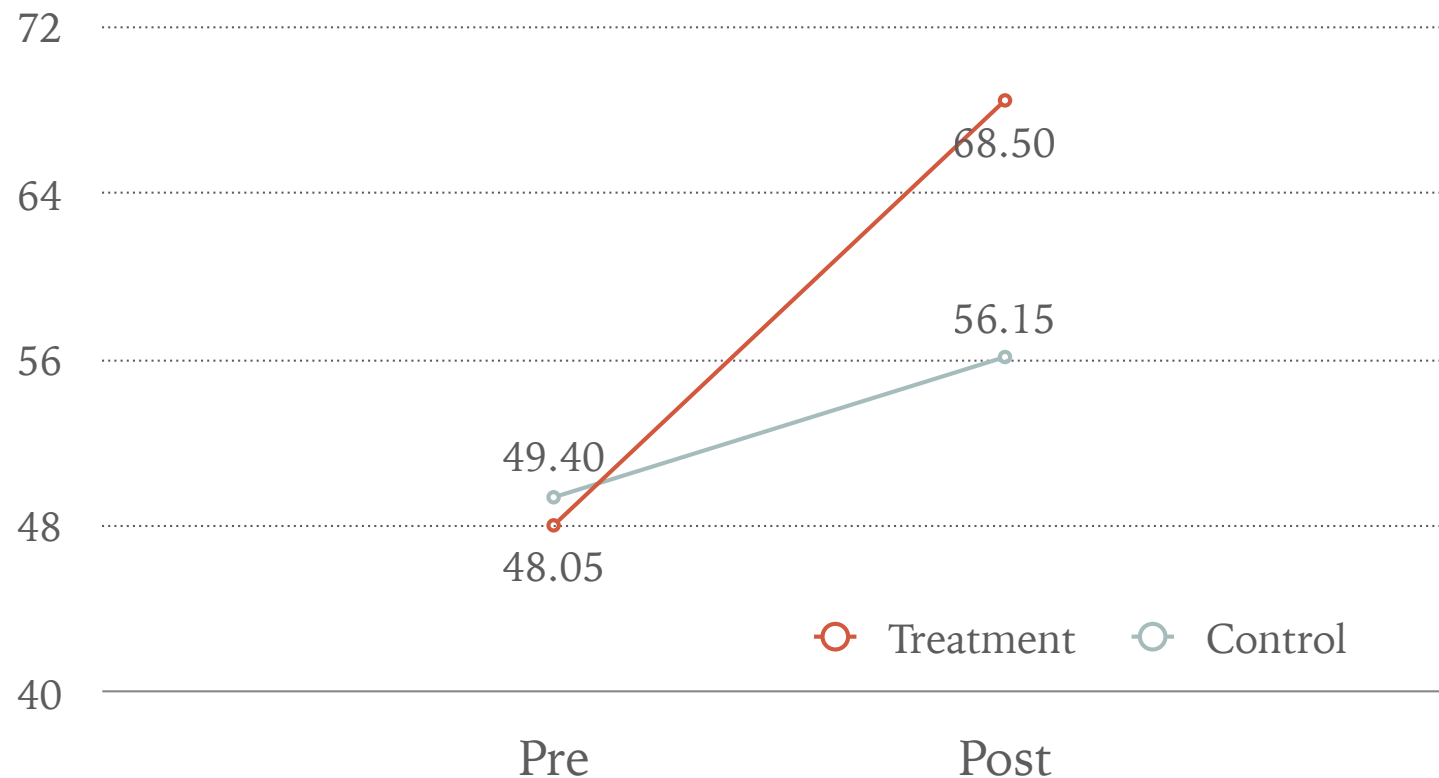
AIR/CASEL SEL

- 745 children in the treatment group (29 classrooms)
- 10 children in the control group (1 classroom)

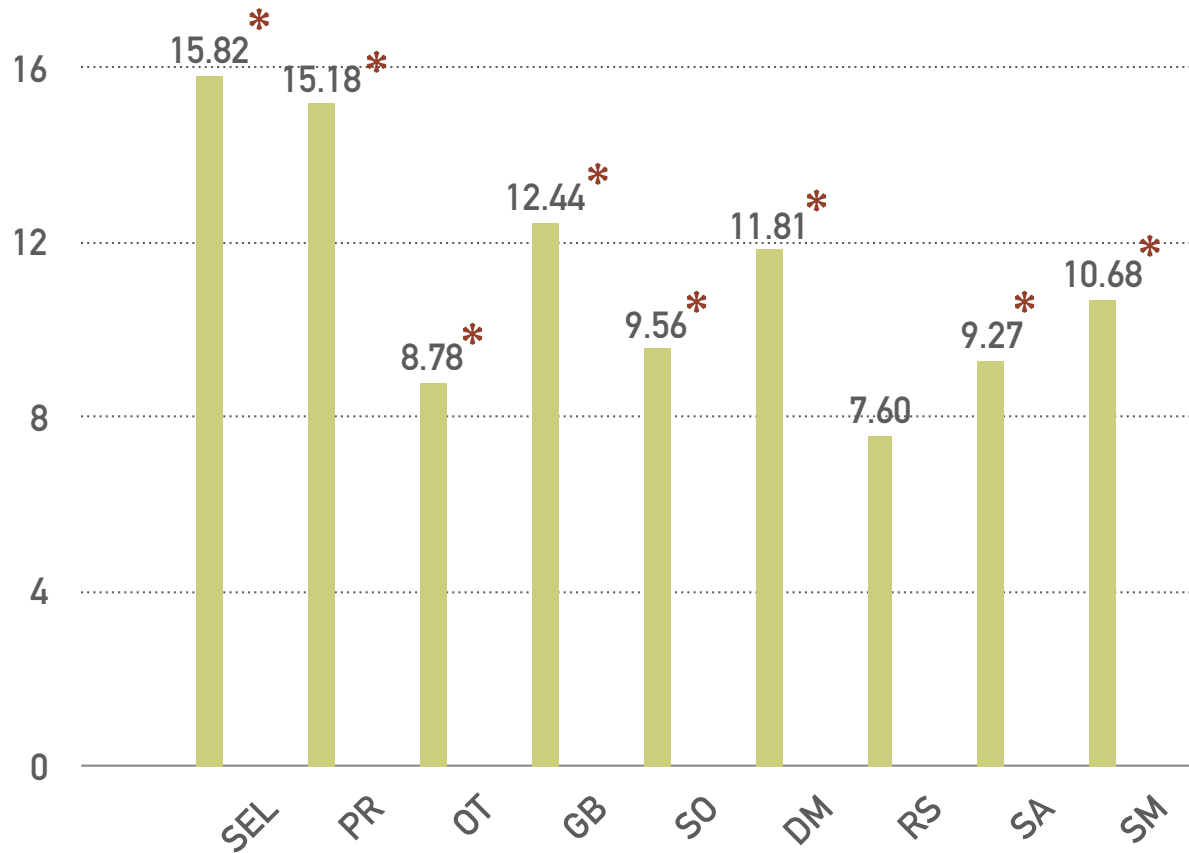
Average DESSA Composite T-Score between Treatment and Control Groups Over One Year of In Focus Implementation

Teachers assessed each students from 1st to 8th grades on the DESSA measure at the beginning and end of the one-year intervention. The graph below shows the pre- and post-tests of DESSA Composite T-score between the treatment and control groups. The T-score ranges from 2 to 72:

40 or below at risk
41-59 typical
60-72 strong



TREATMENT EFFECT OF IN FOCUS FROM REGRESSION ADJUSTED MODEL



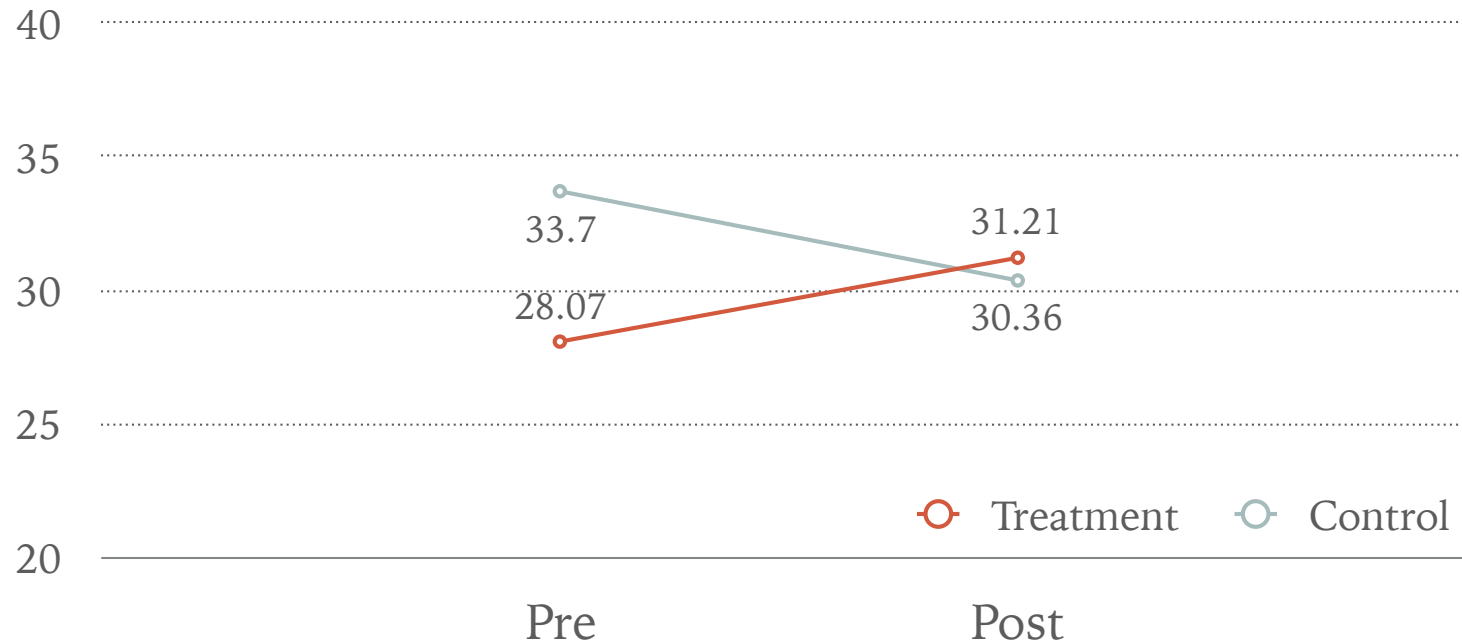
The values indicate the difference in T-scores between the treatment and control groups after adjusting for student's gender, grade year, and baseline score. The asterisk * indicates that the In Focus treatment effect is significant.

SEL - Social-Emotional Learning Composite
PR - Personal Responsibility
OT - Optimistic Thinking
GB - Goal-Directed Behavior
SO - Social Awareness
DM - Decision Making
RS - Relationship Skills
SA - Self-Awareness
SM - Self-Management

AIR/CASEL SEL

The AIR/CASEL SEL (short form) uses 17 items to assess a broad range of students' social emotional competencies. Students from 4th to 8th grades rated themselves on each item on a 4-point scale (0-Very Difficult; 1-Difficult; 2-Easy; 3-Very Easy). The total score was calculated as sum of all 17 items for each student, with a range of 0 to 51.

Average AIR/CASEL SEL Total Score between Treatment and Control Groups Over One Year of In Focus Implementation



AIR/CASEL SEL

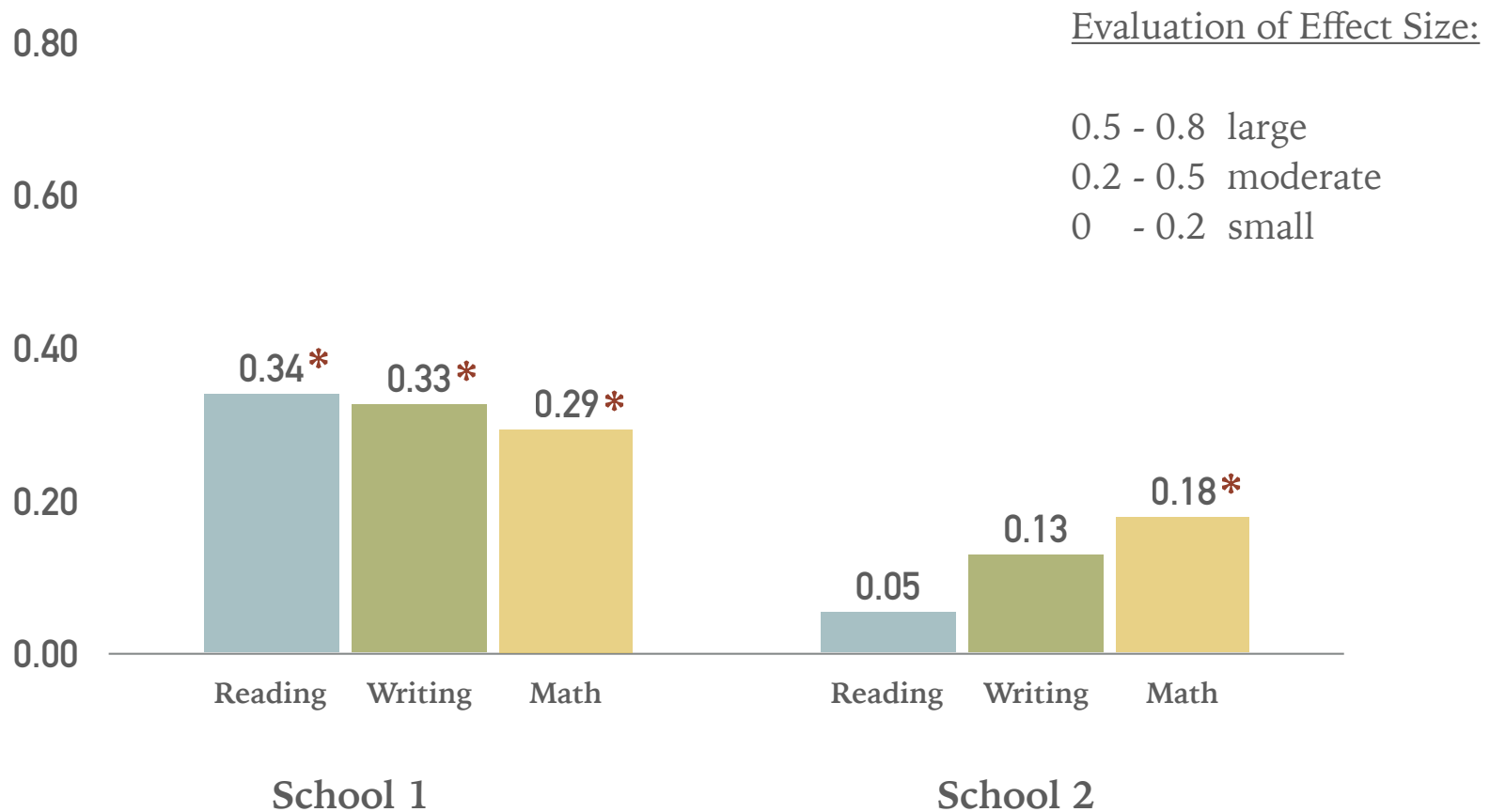
A t-test was conducted to examine the statistical significance of the difference in students' pre- and post- average score of AIR/CASEL SEL measure in the treatment group and control group. Results of the t-test shows significant improvement of the score in the treatment classrooms ($p < .05$), but no significant difference in AIR/CASEL SEL score in the control classrooms ($p > .05$).

T-Test of Average AIR/CASEL Total Score

| | Difference | <i>t</i> | p-value |
|-----------|------------|----------|---------|
| Treatment | 3.14 | 8.0831 | 0.001* |
| Control | -3.13 | 0.912 | 0.813 |

THE IN FOCUS EFFECT AND ITS ASSOCIATION WITH ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

We used a regression model to examine the association between the students' social emotional competence score and their academic outcomes for students who received In Focus teaching over the year.



THE IN FOCUS EFFECT AND ITS ASSOCIATION WITH STUDENT CONDUCT

The school administrators also collected students' conduct and referral information for students who received In Focus teaching over the year.

School 1

| | | |
|-------------------|---|--------|
| Attendance | ↑ | 54.6% |
| Behavior Referral | ↓ | 54.28% |

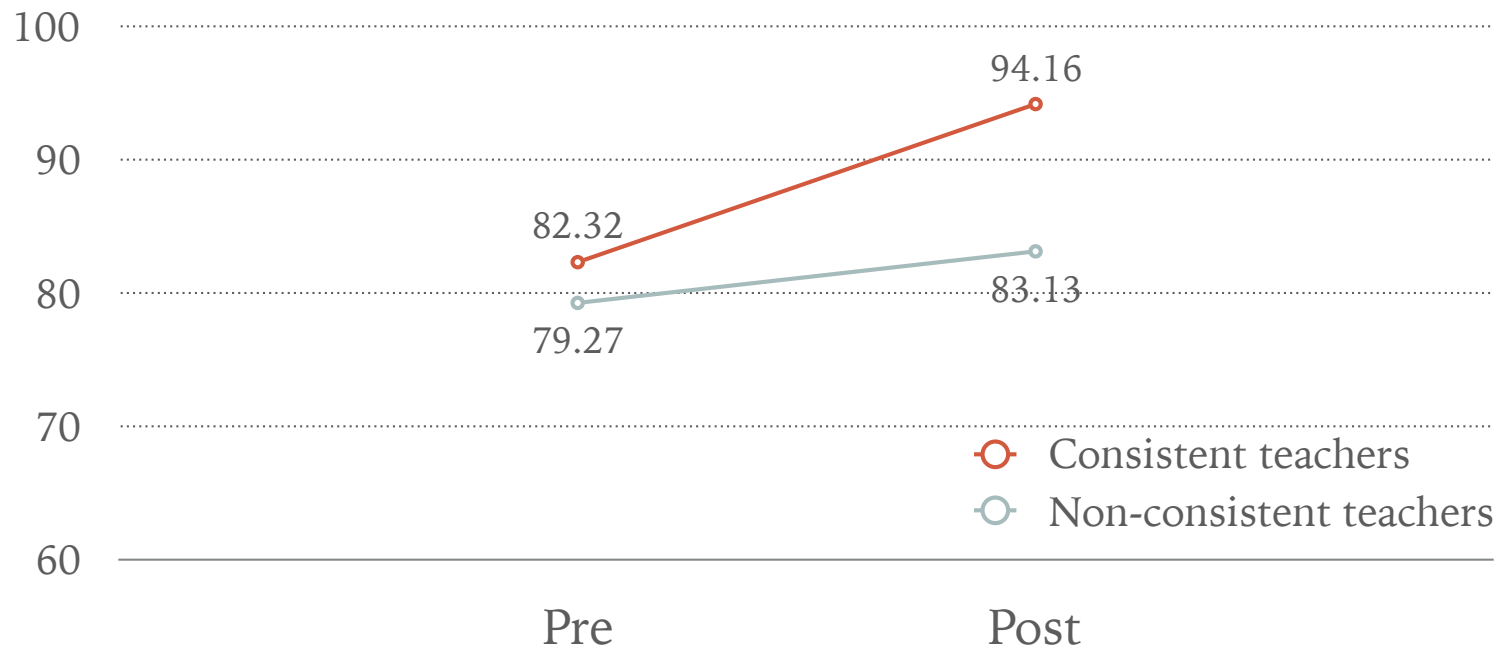
School 2

| | | |
|---------------------------------|---|--------|
| Offensive Language, Harassment | ↓ | 66.67% |
| Group Inappropriate Behaviors | ↓ | 27.03% |
| Intimidation, Threats, Coercion | ↓ | 33.33% |
| Bullying | ↓ | 33.33% |
| Fighting | ↓ | 81.82% |
| Assault | ↓ | 25% |
| Battery | ↓ | 90.91% |

TEACHERS' IMPROVEMENT IN SOCIAL EMOTIONAL TEACHING

We also collected survey data from teachers' self assessment of social emotional teaching at the beginning and the end of In Focus implementation. The survey included 44 questions assessing teachers' understanding and awareness of best practices for teaching and modeling social emotional learning.

Average Teacher Social Emotional Teaching Total Score Over One Year of In Focus Implementation



TEACHERS' IMPROVEMENT IN SOCIAL EMOTIONAL TEACHING

A t-test was conducted to examine the statistical significance of the difference in teachers' pre- and post- average score of social emotional teaching in the consistent teacher group and non-consistent group. Results of the t-test shows significant improvement of SE teaching among consistent teachers ($p < .05$), but no significant difference among the non-consistent teachers ($p > .05$), indicating that the In Focus framework shows larger impact when implemented consistently.

T-Test of Teachers' Total Score (Treatment & Control)

| | Difference | <i>t</i> | p-value |
|----------------|------------|----------|---------|
| Consistent | 11.84 | 1.97 | 0.033* |
| Non-consistent | -3.87 | -0.711 | 0.244 |