THE HOME WE CREATE

A CASE STUDY ON HOW WRITING POSITIVELY IMPACTS SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES OF STUDENTS

THE WRITER

EXPRESSION

ANXIETY

PERSISTENCE

EMPATHY

REFLECTION

PRIDE

CONFIDENCE

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
WASHINGTON, DC

826
NATIONAL
YOUTH WRITING

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Brianca Wright is a first-year doctoral student in Counseling Psychology at Howard University. A native of Pensacola, Florida, Brianca strives to improve the educational standards in underprivileged communities. It is her mission to change the narrative of Black children in the United States by implementing social and emotional learning practices and restorative justice methods while addressing the current disciplinary procedures used in the education and legal systems.

Brianca is a graduate of Florida State University with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Criminology and a Masters of Arts in Education and Human Development from the George Washington University. As the inaugural research fellow with 826 National, Brianca has researched the therapeutic influences of writing and how it supports social and emotional growth throughout 826 programming. This report is a product of her 826 Research Fellowship.

Prior to her time with 826, Brianca served as an AmeriCorps member with City Year Jacksonville, which fostered her idea that children's outward behavior is a physical manifestation of distress below the surface. In addition to advocating for systemic reform, Brianca continues to promote social justice and equality for young males as cofounder of Sons of Sophistication (SOS), Inc. The mission of SOS is to empower, validate, and nurture Black and Brown adolescent boys through a targeted values-based curriculum and intentional mentorship to promote equity within the juvenile justice system. As cofounder and chief impact officer, Brianca orchestrates and facilitates workshops aligned with evidence-based social and emotional learning practices and the program's seven core values to promote growth in minority males. As an avid leader and firm advocate for the growth of our youth, Brianca Wright is committed to investing her time and skills in the potential of our nation's future and the young generations who will lead it.

ABOUT 826

826 is the largest youth writing network in the country. 826 National serves as the hub of the movement to amplify student voices and champions the belief that strong writing skills are essential for academic and lifelong success. The 826 Network now serves more than 710,000 students ages 6 to 18 in under-resourced communities each year online via 826 Digital and through chapters in nine cities: Boston, Chicago, Detroit/Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti, Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York City, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and Minneapolis/St. Paul. 826 National was established in 2008 to support a growing network of writing centers founded by author Dave Eggers and educator Nínive Calegari in San Francisco in 2002. We work toward a country in which the power and the joy of writing is accessible to every student in every classroom. Together, we believe writing is the key to cultivating a new generation of creative and diverse thinkers who will define a better, brighter, and more compassionate future.

*** To learn more about how you can get involved with 826's movement for writing and creativity, please visit the 826 National website at **826national.org**.

ABOUT THE 826 NATIONAL RESEARCH FELLOW PROGRAM

This fellowship is a leadership program for current graduate-level and post-doctoral researchers of color in the fields of education, child development, learning sciences, psychology, digital media, and public policy. Among the K–12 students 826 serves, nearly 90% are students of color. In alignment with 826's mission and values to ensure that every student, especially those who need it most, has equal access to the power and joy of writing, we extend our focus to supporting higher education students of color in fields that lack diverse representation.

With this professional development opportunity, fellows conduct research on writing education practices and their impact on K–12 students and their communities and publish that research with the lens of addressing practical industry and practitioner needs. In this process, fellows have the opportunity to expand the influence research has in government, education, philanthropy, and industry decision-making. Fellows develop new skills and perspectives that are critical to becoming a leader in the field of literacy and writing education.
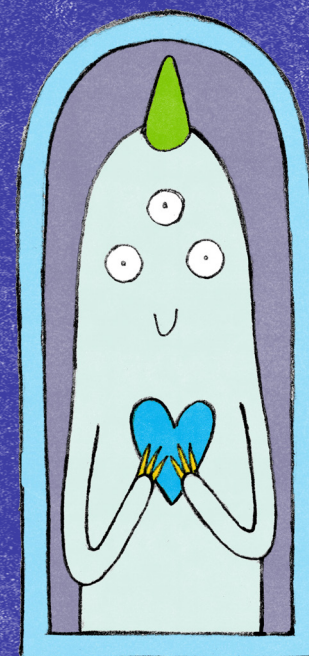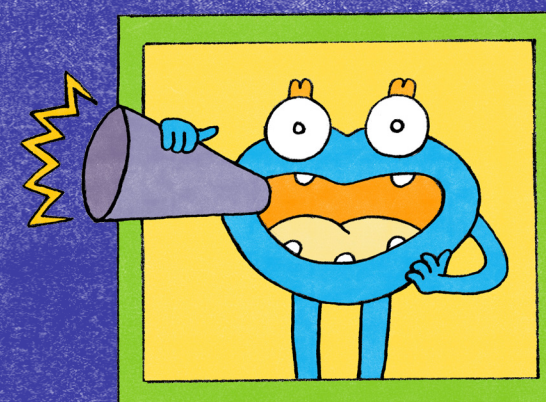

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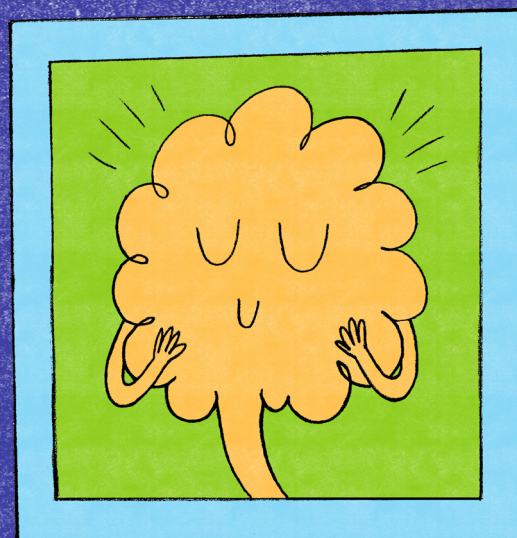
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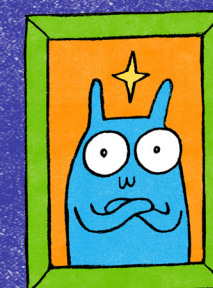
EMPATHY

EXPRESSION

CONFIDENCE

PRIDE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While the world is currently moving into a post-pandemic era, young people are facing an unparalleled mental health crisis as one in five children struggle with mental health challenges. In 2022, more than 40% of teens stated they struggled with feelings of sadness or hopelessness, and more than half of caregivers stated they were concerned about their child's mental health. This crisis is exacerbated by disparities in mental health across race and socioeconomic status. The suicide rate for children of color is almost twice the rate of their white counterparts (Hoffman, 2022), and low socioeconomic status is correlated with higher risk for mental health concerns (Hudson, 2005).

With nearly 10 million students in K–12 public schools nationwide in need of mental health support, schools and community organizations are key players in restoring children's mental wellness. This effort is often tackled through social and emotional learning (SEL)–an educational focus that addresses the social, emotional, and behavioral components of mental health. There is strong evidence that writing encourages social and emotional growth (McGee, 2022). Writing is an outlet to communicate and navigate through life's challenges. Schools and community organizations provide a space for students to write and thereby gain agency by expressing their thoughts and emotions through their stories.

This report uses 826 as a case study to explore the efficacy of creating spaces for students to build their social and emotional competency through the impacts of writing.

KEY FINDINGS

1. 826 PROGRAMMING SUPPORTS STUDENTS' SEL SKILL BUILDING. When surveyed, overall, 93% of students agreed that 826 is a supportive environment. Within the 826 environment, students reported demonstrating key SEL competencies: self-management skills (93%), self-awareness (90%), social awareness (88%), and relationship-building (84%) skills.

2. THERE ARE CLEAR PATTERNS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES. The survey results support existing research that there is overlap in the development of SEL skills. The results show a new finding that there is a sequence in SEL development. Specifically that self-management skills develop before self- and social awareness skills.

3. THE MORE TIME STUDENTS SPEND WITH 826 PROGRAMMING, THE MORE THEY REPORT DEMONSTRATING SEL SKILLS. Students with high attendance reported significantly higher demonstration of SEL skills than students with low attendance.

4. BLACK AND HISPANIC/LATINX STUDENTS REPORT THEY DEMONSTRATE SEL SKILLS DURING 826 PROGRAMMING EQUALLY TO, IF NOT MORE SO, THAN WHITE STUDENTS. Research has shown that students of color are at higher risk of mental health challenges due to socioeconomic disparities and inequities in access to care. The results here suggest that 826, and programs like it, can be a protective factor to help mitigate mental health disparities based on race and socioeconomic status.

5. MALE STUDENTS MAY NEED MORE SUPPORT THAN FEMALE STUDENTS TO DEVELOP SEL SKILLS. Female students reported demonstrating almost all SEL survey items significantly more than male students. These results support prior research that has shown that female students tend to be more verbally expressive, have a more positive outlook on their environment, and more self-aware and emotionally aware. These results also suggest more research is needed to better understand how best to support SEL development particularly for males.

6. AS A RESULT OF WORKING WITH 826, STUDENTS ARE BETTER ABLE TO UNDERSTAND AND ARTICULATE DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES THROUGH THEIR WRITING, IN TURN BUILDING THEIR SELF- AND SOCIAL AWARENESS. In a writing assessment that measures six key writing skills, one skill, stance, was used to evaluate students' growth in SEL. Stance measures a student's ability to communicate a clear perspective through their writing and the characters and elements portrayed in it. This skill relates to the SEL competencies of expression and empathy. Students showed a statistically significant gain of 5.3% on stance scores from pretest to posttest, and so demonstrating improvement in SEL skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this case study provide explicit evidence that writing supports SEL skill building. We put forward four recommendations that researchers, policymakers, and educators can follow to support students' mental health needs through writing and SEL:

1. MORE RESEARCH ON THE SEL SKILL-BUILDING PROCESS. Research on the developmental trajectory or patterns of SEL skills will allow for the creation of curricula that is mindful of the developmental needs of young people, providing support to those who need it when they need it.

2. EXPLICIT CURRICULUM STANDARDS AROUND WRITING AND SEL. Writing and SEL standards should be incorporated into educational standards, while recognizing the individualized needs of students based on race, gender, age, etc.

3. TRAINING IS NEEDED ON:

A. CREATING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT. To effectively support students' skill building, educators need training on how to implement strategies for creating a learning environment which feels like a safe environment.

B. TEACHING WRITING AND SEL. Proper training of educators and community organizations to teach writing and SEL both separately and together will ensure that educators are aware of the most effective practices and recent research.

4. MORE FUNDING FOR SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS. To promote a student-first model, more funding is needed to create and sustain schools and community organizations so that they can provide effective instruction and supportive environments.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTAL HEALTH

While the world is currently moving into a post-pandemic era, young people are facing an unparalleled mental health crisis as one in five children struggle with mental health challenges; among these, only 20% receive supportive services (Abramson, 2022). The most common concerns regarding children's mental health are attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and anxiety, with symptoms related to depression typically being most common in adolescents (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023b). Prior to 2020, the rate of youth experiencing depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts was increasing. Since 2020, the pandemic has disrupted learning, relationships, and routines, intensifying young people's mental health concerns and resulting in an increase in isolation and decrease in social interactions. In 2022, more than 40% of teens stated they struggled with feelings of sadness or hopelessness, and more than half of caregivers stated they were concerned about their child's mental health (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). These drastic changes in students' well-being are alarming, as these mental health concerns can result in disruptions in their functioning both at home and school if untreated.

1 in 5
children struggle with mental health, with only 20% receiving supportive services

Mental health is crucial from early childhood through adulthood. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021), mental health consists of a person's "emotional, psychological, and social well-being," and it impacts thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Students' mental health concerns have been exacerbated in the aftermath of the pandemic, as they have sacrificed much of their academic and social lives (O'Leary & TSUI, 2022). For some, the repercussions of the pandemic will take a lifetime to overcome, leading to the argument that the COVID-19 pandemic meets the qualifications to become an adverse childhood experience (ACE). ACEs are "traumatic events that occur during childhood . . . that have lasting, negative effects on health, well-being, and opportunity" (TED, 2015). If one considers the COVID-19 pandemic to be an ACE, this means that all children born before the year 2020 have a new baseline of at least one ACE. As people accumulate ACEs, they become more susceptible to negative physical and psychological health outcomes. Furthermore, as the number of ACEs increase, the severity of the health concerns increase, leading to detrimental outcomes such as substance use, heart concerns, and overall delays in brain development. To mitigate these negative health effects, action is needed.

HOW SEL SUPPORTS MENTAL HEALTH

With nearly 10 million students in K–12 public schools nationwide needing attention regarding their mental health, schools and community organizations are key players in restoring children's mental wellness (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). In addition to providing academic instruction to young people, schools work to prioritize three components of mental health: interaction with others (social), feelings (emotional), and behaviors (Rossen & Cowan, 2014).

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a process which addresses the social, emotional, and behavioral components of mental health taught in schools. Social and emotional development is not the equivalent to positive mental health nor does it replace mental health services, though it can support mental health by bolstering protective factors such as by promoting emotionally safe environments, building relationships that are responsive to needs, and allowing room for overall skill development (CASEL, 2017). Protective factors work to help mitigate potential mental health risks. Prior to developing SEL skills, youth first need to feel safe in their environment. Social and emotional learning practices can increase social and emotional health, which are fundamental parts of mental wellness. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), SEL is "an integral part of education and human development" and "is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to . . . achieve personal and collective goals, . . . establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions" (2017).

Mental Health Disparities

Mental health challenges due to socioeconomic (SES) disparities and inequities in access to care, especially in children, can have lifelong consequences (Howell & McFeeters, 2008). The experience of racism and discrimination that many children and adolescents from minority backgrounds face have lasting effects on mental health (Hoffman et al., 2022). These experiences combined with inequitable access to care and overall disproportionate mental and behavioral health conditions lead to a suicide rate for children of color that is almost twice the rate of their white counterparts (Hoffman et al., 2022). SES is also a determining factor in the prevalence of mental illness, as low SES is correlated with higher risk for mental health concerns (Hudson, 2005). The disparities lie in the use of mental health services. Black and Hispanic children living in urban areas tend to receive fewer mental health services than their white counterparts. In addition, living in urban areas is a known risk factor for many psychiatric diseases, due to the higher stress exposure and vulnerability (Adli, 2011).
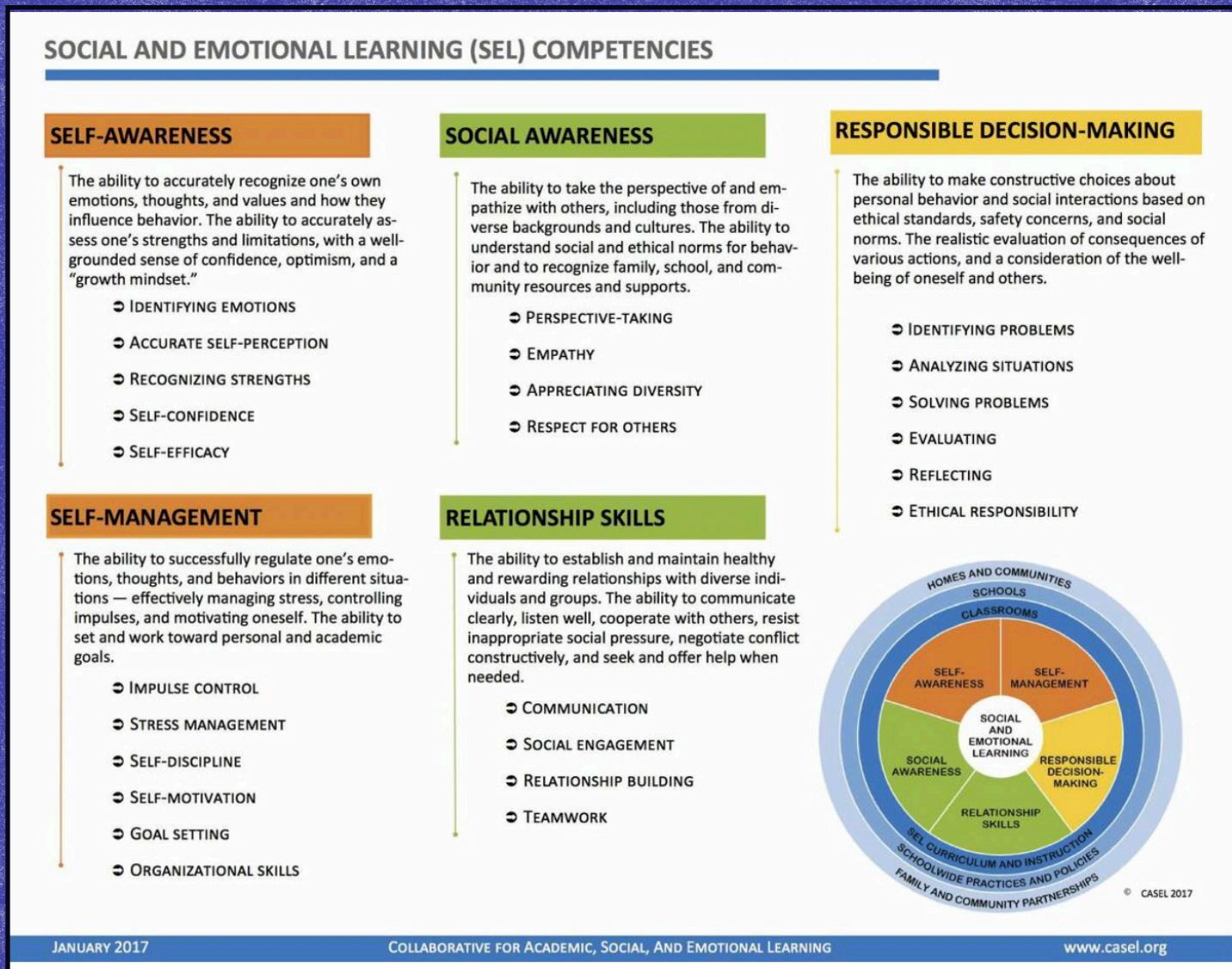
2X
suicide rate for children of color as compared to their white counterparts

WHAT IS SEL?

CASEL has created a framework that breaks social and emotional learning into five competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills (CASEL, 2017). Since students spend the majority of their time in school and after-school programming, these venues are the ideal environments to incorporate lessons about these competencies. The Education Endowment Foundation has found that, "on average, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) interventions have an identifiable and valuable impact on attitudes to learning and social relationships in school" (2021). Schools can support student wellness through building relationships and providing a space to build students' protective factors (Rossen & Cowan, 2014). These factors include emotion regulation, problem-solving, and stress management, all of which can be implemented into instruction. In 2022, the U.S. Department of Education allocated funds for an influx of mental health professionals working within schools; however, despite these additional resources, student support teams have faced burnout due to the high demand of student concerns (Prinstein & Ethier, 2022). Additional support is needed to address the needs of students.

Figure 1. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Competencies

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) COMPETENCIES

SELF-AWARENESS

The ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior. The ability to accurately assess one's strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a "growth mindset."

- IDENTIFYING EMOTIONS
- ACCURATE SELF-PERCEPTION
- RECOGNIZING STRENGTHS
- SELF-CONFIDENCE
- SELF-EFFICACY

SOCIAL AWARENESS

The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

- PERSPECTIVE-TAKING
- EMPATHY
- APPRECIATING DIVERSITY
- RESPECT FOR OTHERS

RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

The ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. The realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the well-being of oneself and others.

- IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS
- ANALYZING SITUATIONS
- SOLVING PROBLEMS
- EVALUATING
- REFLECTING
- ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY

SELF-MANAGEMENT

The ability to successfully regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations — effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. The ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals.

- IMPULSE CONTROL
- STRESS MANAGEMENT
- SELF-DISCIPLINE
- SELF-MOTIVATION
- GOAL SETTING
- ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS

RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. The ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.

- COMMUNICATION
- SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT
- RELATIONSHIP BUILDING
- TEAMWORK

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THE NEED FOR A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

When considering the first steps to working with children in this post-pandemic era, it is more critical than ever for children to feel safe within their learning environment. Before they are ready to learn, children must first have an environment where they feel a sense of belonging (Jacob Ham, 2017). A safe environment unlocks the learning brain. The learning brain is a state in which a person is open to new information and is comfortable with ambiguity without being afraid to make mistakes; these are preconditions for the learning process. When someone is not in their learning brain as a result of lived experiences, they are conditioned to be in the survival brain. The survival brain is hyper-focused on threats, does not like ambiguity, thinks in black and white, may be easily agitated, and is prone to rigidity. As a result, someone in the survival brain does not like making mistakes and doubts their ability to learn. The survival brain triumphs over the learning brain in the absence of a perceived safe environment. The longer the survival brain is intact and the more stress one experiences, the harder it is to move into the learning brain. The best way to keep students in the learning brain is through building attachments with safe and supportive adults.
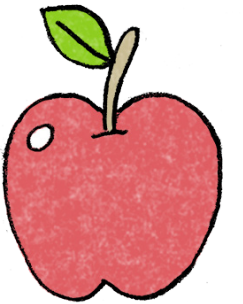
SCHOOLS AS A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

When school staff ensure they are creating an environment where children feel safe, they are able to unlock students' curiosity and eagerness to learn and play. An avenue for schools to support young people in developing a healthy identity, managing emotions, and building empathy is through SEL (CASEL, 2017). Through cultivating trusting and collaborative relationships built on meaningful SEL curriculum and instruction, school staff, families, and communities can achieve educational equity and excellence. Social and emotional learning empowers young people and adults to co-create thriving schools and contribute to safe, healthy, and just communities that address various forms of inequity.
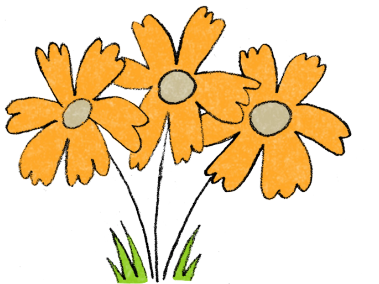
COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AS A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Educators and school personnel are not the only contributors to supporting students in exploring their social and emotional competence through writing. Community partners can provide access to SEL through their relationships with schools, providing a safe and developmentally rich setting for learning (CASEL, 2019). These partnerships can provide communities with additional resources to address their unique needs through trusted organizations who have a deep understanding of the community and who can specifically focus on student mental health. Community programs offer opportunities for young people to practice their social and emotional skills in settings that are personally relevant and can open opportunities for their future.
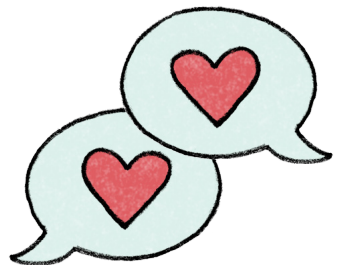
CONSISTENT RELATIONSHIPS

Both schools and community organizations support children's need for consistent and safe relationships created in spaces where safety and belonging are priorities (CASEL, 2019). These relationships promote students' abilities to maintain their learning brain and engage in material related to both academics and personal development.

WRITING IMPACT OF SEL

Students need an outlet to express their innermost thoughts now more than ever as student mental health concerns become more apparent in schools. There is strong evidence that writing is a strong protective factor for supporting SEL. Writing is an outlet for expressing one's innermost thoughts, unlocking opportunities to explore and build social and emotional intelligence and resilience, which in turn has a positive impact on mental health (Lepore & Kliewer, 2013). The beauty of writing is it can be integrated into every aspect of learning, so with an intentional focus on creative and intellectual expression, writing can encourage social and emotional growth (McGee, 2022). When provided a space to write, students gain agency to their voice by expressing their thoughts and emotions through their stories. In this process, writing is a key component to communicate and navigate through life's adversities.

REFLECTIVE WRITING

Different styles of writing promote different aspects of the SEL competencies. For example, reflective writing creates an opportunity for people to think about their beliefs and actions for the purpose of learning and development (Thatcher, 2021). Reflective writing is a process of examining life experience or situation through self-reflection, a process which builds **SELF-AWARENESS**. CASEL defines self-awareness as "the abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts" (2017). Self-awareness is a key component for a balanced well-being, and writing is an effective place to start to build this skill set. Reflective writing can increase self-awareness by helping people learn from their experiences and interactions, as it requires the writer to be curious and analytical by asking themselves questions and being continuously open. Reflection is a mode of inquiry: a deliberate way of systematically recalling writing experiences to reframe the current writing situation. It allows writers to recognize what they are doing in that particular moment (cognition), as well as to consider why they made the rhetorical choices they did (metacognition). The combination of cognition and metacognition, accessed through reflection, helps writers begin assessing themselves as writers, recognizing and building on their prior knowledge about writing" (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015).

DISCLOSURE WRITING

Journaling, or disclosure writing, is another form of writing that can combat emotional avoidance and promote movement toward emotion-focused coping skills encompassing self-awareness exploration, which is the first step toward **SELF-MANAGEMENT** (Taylor et al., 2016). CASEL defines self-management as "the abilities to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations" (2017). Writing is a powerful tool which has been shown to reduce symptoms of depression and redirect the narratives people tell themselves about the world by breaking self-defeating thought processes (Seligman, 2011; Cohen & Sherman 2014). Similarly to reflective writing, disclosure writing allows people to process challenging emotions and communicate ideas that may be too complicated or difficult to say directly. Being able to recognize and name specific emotions and reflect on times when these emotions were felt creates opportunities to build emotion regulation and resilience. This creative **DECISION-MAKING** can lead to increased self-

esteem and self-efficacy as well as improved mental health, providing space to exercise self-control and improve decision-making.

CREATIVE WRITING

Storytelling, or creative writing, is a powerful tool that can be used to make sense of the world and to escape a world one may not be ready to face. Through stories, both those received and those self-created, people are able to learn about themselves, promoting **SELF-AWARENESS** (Miller, 2020). Creative writing stimulates an increase in confidence, which encourages people to be more accepting of others, therefore building **SOCIAL AWARENESS** (Healey, 2013). This avenue gives people the freedom to express their words, using metaphors and imagery to capture the essence of what they want to convey while entering an imaginary world. Writing creatively offers a unique way to explore thoughts, feelings, ideas, and beliefs. Writing can help students learn about themselves and others. Addressing real-world challenges with fictional characters can help children conceptualize challenging aspects of social interactions and **RELATIONSHIP SKILLS**. As students learn to navigate difficult emotions, especially in challenging situations, writing can be helpful. Exploring the emotions and perspectives of characters promotes empathy, providing students the opportunity to appreciate others and be open to other perspectives. Through personal narratives and creative writing, students can transfer their emotions to fictional characters, giving themselves space to process and explore their emotions while solving problems that may otherwise feel out of their control.

CASE STUDY

With young people's mental health continuing to be a public health concern, especially following the pandemic, an emphasis on access resurfaces regarding not only students' learning but also their social and emotional development and mental health. Writing can be a tool to support this development. 826 is an organization with the goal to encourage the exploration of endless possibility through the power of writing. This case study explores 826's impact in creating spaces for students to build their social and emotional competencies through writing.

> "The flexibility and the patience they had with working with us–it's been a stressful year, especially after COVID, and they made it easier for me to bounce back to the scholar I know I can be."
>
> *Ajensy R., Grade 12, 826 Boston, Young Authors' Book Project*

WHAT IS 826?

826 is the largest youth writing network in the country. The 826 Network now serves more than 710,000 students ages 6 to 18 in under-resourced communities each year online via 826 Digital and through chapters in nine cities: Boston, Chicago, Detroit/Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti, Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York City, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and Minneapolis/St. Paul. As a community partner, 826 promotes SEL within its curriculum, which is designed to teach young people writing through amplifying their voices–both in and outside of the classroom–and promoting access to strong writing education. By providing an average of over 10,000 hours of writing instruction annually nationwide, 826 provides safe and creative spaces across chapters for students to write. With over 3,000 volunteers providing individualized writing support, students build relationships with mentors in addition to each other. 826 provides core programming that includes tutoring, publishing, and workshops. Here are a few examples of 826 programming that were observed during this case study.

DISCLOSURE

Prompt

Interview your partner, asking open-ended questions, and create a profile piece sharing who they are.

Workshop

Within 826 programming, workshops provide opportunities for students to explore project-based writing skills through a creative lens. As facilitated by 826DC, this semester-long program provided students the opportunity to disclose information about themselves and learn about each other through a series of interviews. With the information they gathered, students wrote about each other, creating a profile piece with a lede and headline. These pieces were then compiled to create a digital magazine.

REFLECTIVE

Prompt

Reflect on what you ate during the fall break and write a simile and/or metaphor describing the food.

In-Schools Program

In this program, 826 staff and volunteers work with local public schools to support students and teachers through individualized assistance as they tackle various writing projects through in-school programming. During one of the sessions for this semester-long program with 826DC, after the fall break, students engaged using literary devices in writing about the meals they ate with their loved ones.

CREATIVE

Prompt

Write a travel story from the perspective of King Carl.

Field Trip Program

Field trips are an opportunity for schools to visit their local 826 writing center to engage in interactive, high-energy writing activities. During the podcasting field trips hosted by 826 Valencia, students create and record their own story that follows the adventures of King Carl, a blowfish who embarks on extravagant adventures. Using literary devices to describe the intricacies of the adventure, students are encouraged to choose the destination and obstacles he faces, incorporating action and dialogue. In this one-time, four-hour session, volunteers and staff work with students in small groups to develop and revise their work. Once they have written, students enter the podcasting booth and record their piece. The podcasts are publicly available to amplify student voices and so students can feel proud of their work as they share their voices.

Significance of 826 Locations

Each of the nine chapters serves students from underserved communities with access to high-quality writing programming promoting publishing for young people. These chapters are located in areas of concern, since, as described above, young people of color and those in lower-SES communities tend to have less access to mental health services. For example, 826LA is located in Los Angeles, where 48% of the population is Hispanic/Latinx. 826michigan serves communities in Detroit, Ann Arbor, and Yspilanti, where the average poverty rate is 28.67%. 826NYC serves New York City, where the population is 24% Black and 29% Hispanic/Latinx.

MINNEAPOLIS–ST. PAUL
BOSTON
ANN ARBOR/ DETROIT
NEW YORK CITY
CHICAGO
WASHINGTON, D.C.
SAN FRANCISCO
LOS ANGELES
NEW ORLEANS, LA

WHAT 826 MEASURES

826 measures impact by evaluating their tenets and outcomes through surveys and writing assessments. This report focuses on a subset of this process related to SEL.

826 TENETS

The components that make 826 unique are rooted in their Theory of Change. 826's Theory of Change grounds 826 culture in eight tenets, many of which are conducive to the needs for social and emotional development (see Table 1). These guiding principles support students unlocking access to the power and joy of writing, freeing them to write their own path forward.

Grounded by these tenets, 826 aims to see positive outcomes in the areas of access; student outcomes in voice, writing skills, and SEL; and teacher support. The student outcomes that are directly related to SEL are listed in Table 2. See the full Theory of Change for more details.

Table 1. 826 Tenets

ENVIRONMENT	**Culture of Creativity**	We create an environment where students are valued as creators and are encouraged to try new ideas and experiment with their work.
	Welcoming & Brave Space	We provide a space students can call their own where they feel safe to reflect and brave to share their experiences. We strive to ensure that our programs and practices are inclusive and encourage learning from one another.
	Collaborative Community	We build and connect communities through partnerships with local schools and teachers, nonprofits, and teaching artists. We strive to support our students with a diverse community including parents, volunteers, and peer mentors.
CONTENT	**Diverse Core Programs & Innovative Curricula**	Through a range of programs designed to fit the needs of our students, teachers, and community, we provide students with dedicated time to be creative and to express their voices through the writing process. Our curricula is standards-aligned, culturally relevant, and thought-provoking.
	Celebrating & Amplifying Student Voice	Our students build confidence and take pride in their work as we amplify their writing in professional publications and honor students' voices at community events. Through this process we encourage students to see themselves as authors and changemakers who take the lead in our national dialogue.
PEDAGOGY	**Student-Driven**	Through approaches such as project and inquiry-based learning, students have agency over their work as they are encouraged to explore their interests, ideas, and personal stories through writing.
	Individualized Support	Our volunteers are trained to provide individualized support to students as they express, communicate, and reflect on ideas through writing, whether in a small group or whole-class setting.
	Students as Leaders	We activate the skills and agency students build through the writing and publication process and continue to support them as they grow into leaders through youth-leadership roles and as stewards of 826.

SURVEYS

One avenue 826 uses to assess their Theory of Change is surveys that evaluate the experience one has when engaging with 826 programs and staff. Within every chapter, surveys are administered to the older students (5th grade and older), younger students (4th grade and younger), parents, teachers, and volunteers. This report specifically focuses on older students, as some of the more complex SEL skills develop later in maturation. Focusing on older students may capture the trajectory of and provide insight into the development of these SEL skills.

Table 2. 826 SEL Measures

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING		
	Confidence	Students believe in themselves.
	Self-Fulfillment	Students feel proud and a sense of accomplishment.
	Persistence	Students do their best and stick with it, even when it's hard.
	Community	Students feel a sense of belonging and responsibility.
	Reflection	Students use their writing to reflect on their thoughts and experiences.
	Empathy	Students are better able to understand the perspectives of others.

The Older Student Survey consists of 25 questions asking students to reflect on their experience with 826, their growth during the program, their writing, and their potential future. Of the 25 survey items, 15 questions were chosen for this study based on their alignment with four of the five SEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship skills. An additional category, environment, was added to address the environmental conditions necessary for the development of the SEL skills. The survey items and their alignment with each competency are outlined in Table 3.

826 MEASURES ALIGNMENT TO SEL FRAMEWORK

Most items were scored on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 4 (very true). A rating of 3 or higher was considered "agreement." Five items, indicated by the asterisk in Table 3, were rated on a 3-point scale ranging from 1 (less true now) to 3 (more true now). A rating of 2 or higher was considered "agreement."

Table 3. Selected Survey Items by SEL Competency

SELF-AWARENESS	• Reflection: When I write, I better understand myself and my life.* • Pride in Publishing: I would feel proud to see my work published. • Confidence: I feel confident in my writing.* • Pride in Writing: I feel proud of my writing.* • Critical Thinking: My writing helps me to think clearly about topics, issues, and ideas.
SELF-MANAGEMENT	• Persistence: I keep working on my writing even when it's hard.* • Challenge: The 826 team challenged me to do my best work.
SOCIAL AWARENESS	• Expression: My writing helps others to understand me and know me better. • Empathy: When I write, I imagine how other people might think and feel.*
RELATIONSHIP SKILLS	• Making a Difference: I can use my voice/writing to make a difference in my community.
ENVIRONMENT	• Community: I felt like I was part of a team or community when I was with 826. • Safety: I felt safe and supported with 826. • Value: I felt my thoughts and opinions were valued. • Respect: The 826 team respected my cultural background and who I am. • Creativity: I felt I could be creative and try new things.

Indicates items that were asked on a 3-point scale

SAMPLE

The survey was administered at the end of programming to 2,017 students across the 826 Network. In this study, group differences within this sample are further assessed, taking into consideration grade, race, gender, and attendance.

"The most memorable part was when I got to sit down and talk to the volunteers, who listened and gave me very good feedback. They also showed interest in the things I was passionate about."

Ka'Mari E., Grade 12, 826michigan, Personal Essay Program

TRAJECTORY

While research has shown that the adolescent brain is highly malleable, allowing significant growth in social and emotional skills (Ross et al., 2019), there is limited research on the growth patterns of these competencies throughout adolescence. Some research suggests that individual SEL skills do not follow a specified growth trajectory (Ross et al., 2019), as the development of these skills is dynamic and can fluctuate throughout childhood. However, it is hypothesized that there may be some patterns across the competencies measured here.

Figure 2. Possible Developmental Trajectory
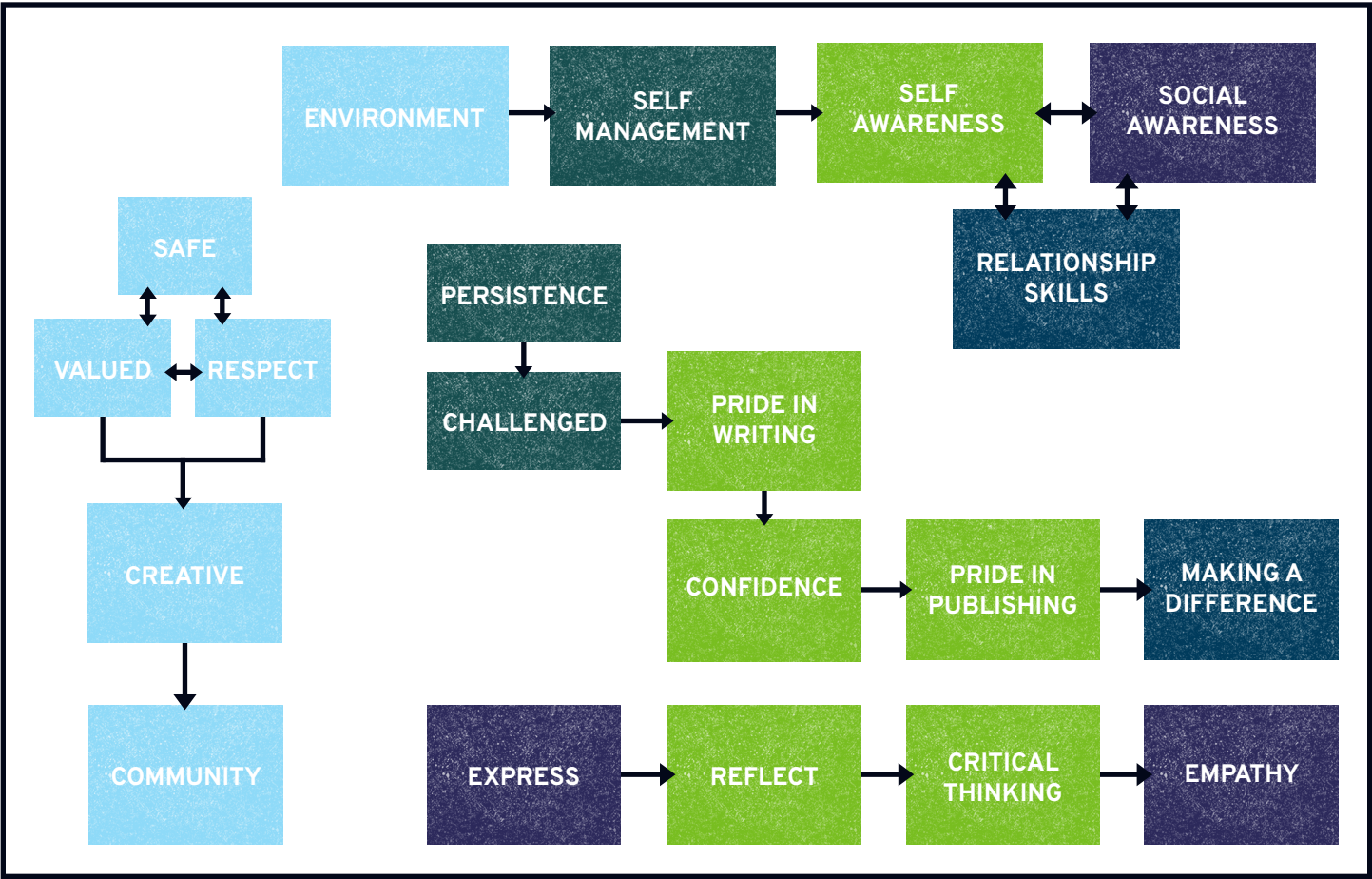
As established earlier, one of the first steps to building SEL skills is to create a supportive environment where students have a sense of community. Students need to have a warm and welcoming environment where they feel **safe** and ready to learn. Community is also built through ensuring children's needs are met and validating their experiences so they feel **valued**. Once a child feels they are in a space where they are **respected**, along with the previously listed components, they are able to freely be **creative**. Thus, based on the trajectory, it was expected that students would rate items related to environment highest, with Safety, Value, and Respect highest within that category, followed by Creativity, leading to **community**.

Once a supportive environment has been established, students can then have the space to build self-management skills. Children begin to build **persistence** during middle childhood (Ray, 2016). Persistence is a skill that can be strengthened over time, though it depends heavily on one's tolerance, emotion regulation, and ability to push through **challenges** (Ray, 2016). Overcoming challenges helps students build **pride** in their abilities as they display proficiency in their play and school work (Cherry, 2022). Children recognize their abilities through interactions with their peers and understanding their strengths and talents through praise, both of which can support the development of **confidence**. Confidence is one's trust in their abilities; those who receive little to no encouragement will start to doubt their abilities. Students' desire to be **published** and share their voice is directly tied to their confidence and pride in their writing. Lastly, sharing their voices as published authors leads to the belief that one can **make a difference**. It was expected that student ratings for survey items that assess the self-management competency (Persistence, Challenge) would be highest, followed by those that assess self-awareness (Pride in Writing, Confidence, Pride in Publishing), followed by relationship skills (Making a Difference).

Concurrently, in order for a child to **express** themselves in written form, they first need to be able to identify and verbalize their emotions. Expression develops early in childhood; however, the expression of emotions develops more in middle childhood (Ray, 2016). The first step of **critical thinking** is considering more than one point of view. Children begin to become more introspective and build the ability to **reflect** around the age of 7 (Ray, 2016). **Empathy** may be a skill that builds over a longer period of time, as there are two facets of empathy that rely on different brain structures and developmental pathways: affective empathy, which develops earlier, and cognitive empathy (Kerr-Gaffney et al., 2019). Affective empathy is the ability to share the feelings of another person, while cognitive empathy is one's ability to recognize and comprehend another's emotions. Cognitive empathy increases during childhood and matures during early adulthood (Dorris et al., 2022). It was expected that there may be an overlap of development of self-awareness and social awareness, leading to Empathy being rated lowest.

ASSESSMENT

Assessments are another method to assess the impact of 826's Theory of Change. In the 2021–22 school year, 464 students across 826 programming were assessed on their writing skills using the Analytic Writing Continuum (AWC). This rubric, created by the National Writing Project, measures growth in student writing across six writing attributes. This assessment is administered once in the fall and again at the end of programming. This case study focuses on stance, the attribute that describes students' ability to communicate a clear perspective as demonstrated through a distinctive and sophisticated tone and style that adds interest for the audience (NWP). The AWC scores stance on a scale from 1-6, evaluating to what degree the writing demonstrates a clear perspective through the characters and elements portrayed in it. Stance was chosen to evaluate students' growth in writing as relates to the SEL competencies of expression and empathy, as these competencies capture a student's ability to take on the thoughts and feelings of others and communicate it through their writing.
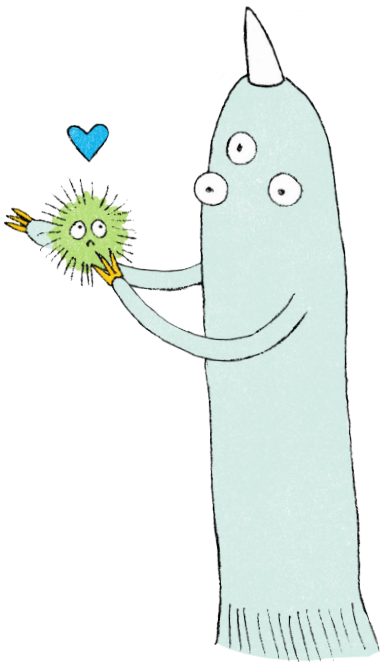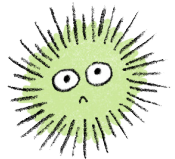
RESULTS

RESULTS BY COMPETENCY

Overall, almost all students rated all SEL competencies positively, rating environment and self-management highest, followed by self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship skills, meaning that they agreed that they experienced or demonstrated these skills. This loosely follows the trajectory as laid out in Figure 2, with environment and self-management rated slightly higher and relationship skills lowest. The means for each item are shown in Table 4.

» Within the 3-point scale items, the self-management competency was rated significantly higher than self-awareness and social awareness. Pride in Writing (within the self-awareness competency) was rated significantly higher than Empathy (within the Relationship Building competency); this was the only significant difference in ratings across this set of competencies.

» Within the 4-point scale items, as expected, environment items were rated significantly higher than other competencies, as was the Pride in Publishing aspect of the self-awareness competency. However, there was no significant difference between self-awareness, relationship skills, and social awareness. While the higher ratings for environment and self-management follow the proposed trajectory, the ratings for the other competencies were mixed.

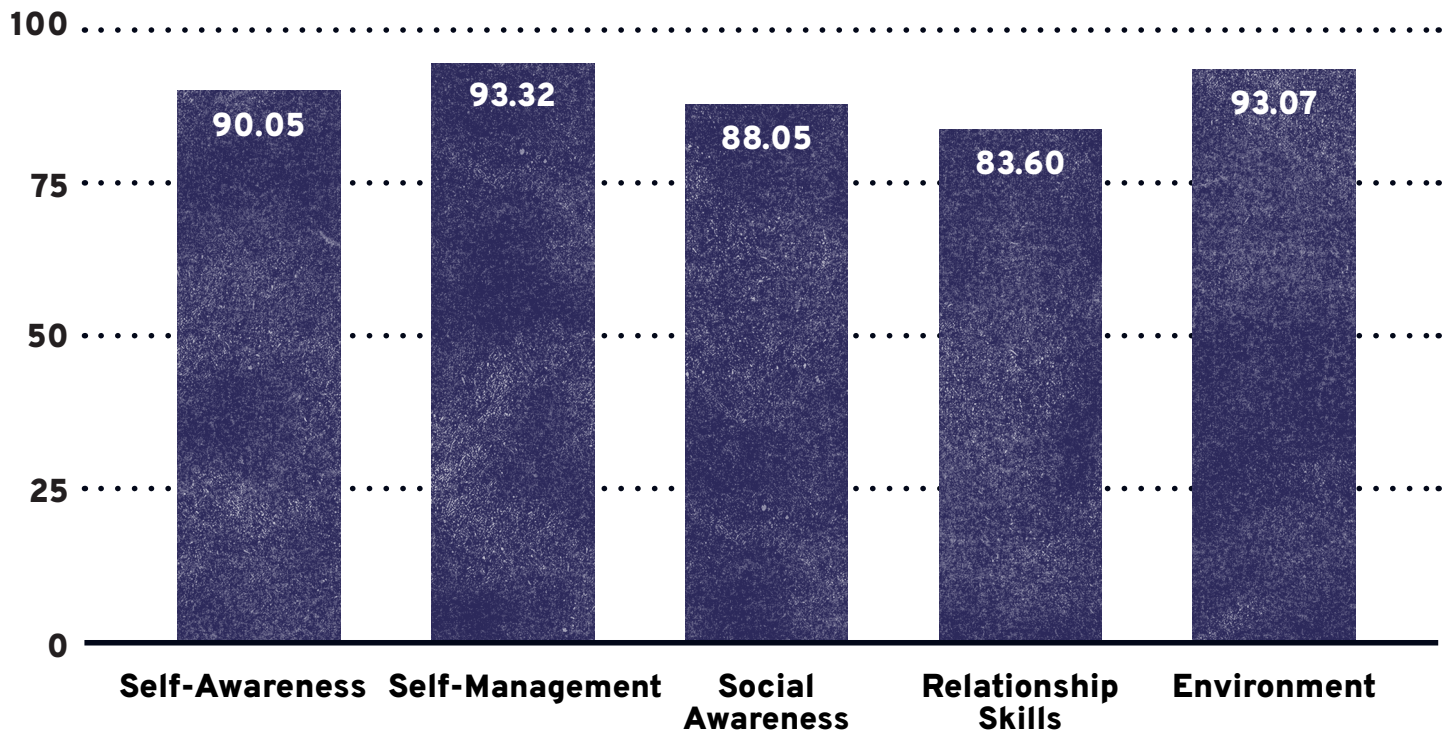**Figure 3. Average % Agreement Across Broad SEL Competencies**

Table 4. Mean Ratings by Each Competency

3-Point Scale		Mean (SD)*
Self-Management	Persistence	2.71 (.735) a
Self-Awareness	Pride in Writing	2.66 (.704) b, c
	Confidence	2.45 (.572) b
	Reflection	2.43 (.606) b
Social Awareness	Empathy	2.42 (.643) b, d
4-Point Scale		**Mean (SD)***
Environment	Respect	3.78 (.545) a
	Safety	3.67 (.607) b
	Value	3.60 (.658) c
	Creativity	3.57 (.684) c
Self-Management	Challenge	3.54 (.713) c
Environment	Community	3.41 (.792) d
Self-Awareness	Pride in Publishing	3.35 (.882) e
	Critical Thinking	3.29 (.756) f
Relationship Skills	Making a Difference	3.28 (.804) f
Social Awareness	Expression	3.24 (.802) f

Letters indicate statistical significance across items, with a being difference from b, c from d, and so forth. See Appendix for details.

IMPLICATIONS

The high level of agreement from students across the competencies provides evidence that 826 programming supports SEL. Specifically, the data from the student survey support the trajectory of how students develop these competencies. Having rated environment and self-management items the highest, students reported that they feel challenged by 826; however, the challenging work was not a deterrent, as students still felt the desire to persevere and were prepared to learn as a result of the welcoming and brave space, further reinforcing the growth of their self-management. These parameters created space and opportunity for students to build on the other social and emotional competencies.

» Of the 3-point scale items, the self-management competency was rated significantly higher than self-awareness, which in turn was significantly higher than social awareness, suggesting that the pattern in which students rated the competencies is congruent with how they develop these competencies during their time working with 826. This pattern follows the trajectory.

» For the 4-point scale items, environment and self-management items were rated significantly higher than the other three SEL competencies. Students rated Safety and Respect significantly higher than other options, reinforcing the concept that students need to feel safe and respected in order to enter the learning brain and welcome content. The results show that the SEL competencies (self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship skills) may be more interconnected than expected. While it was expected that Making a Difference (within the relationship skills competency) would be rated lowest due to the time needed to develop this skill, there was no significant difference in ratings between Making a Difference, Critical Thinking (self-awareness), and Expression (social awareness). The higher-than-expected rating for Expression could be the result of 826 programming, which emphasizes students' use of their voice and provides opportunities for them to share it. Students' ability to see themselves affecting change could vary depending on the writing prompts provided during programming. Students who were guided to "write a letter to an elected official" would have a direct route to seeing themselves make change in their community, while those who received the topic "write about a superhero" may require additional support to make this connection. The lower-than-expected rating for social awareness could be due in part to the connection of this skill to the relationship skills competency. In addition to supporting prior research that SEL skills are highly malleable, these results also show a clear pattern for the development of self-management skills within a nurturing environment.

"[826LA] helped me, encouraged me, made me feel seen, and made me more confident about my writing!"

Leslie C., Grade 12, 826LA, Personal Essay Program
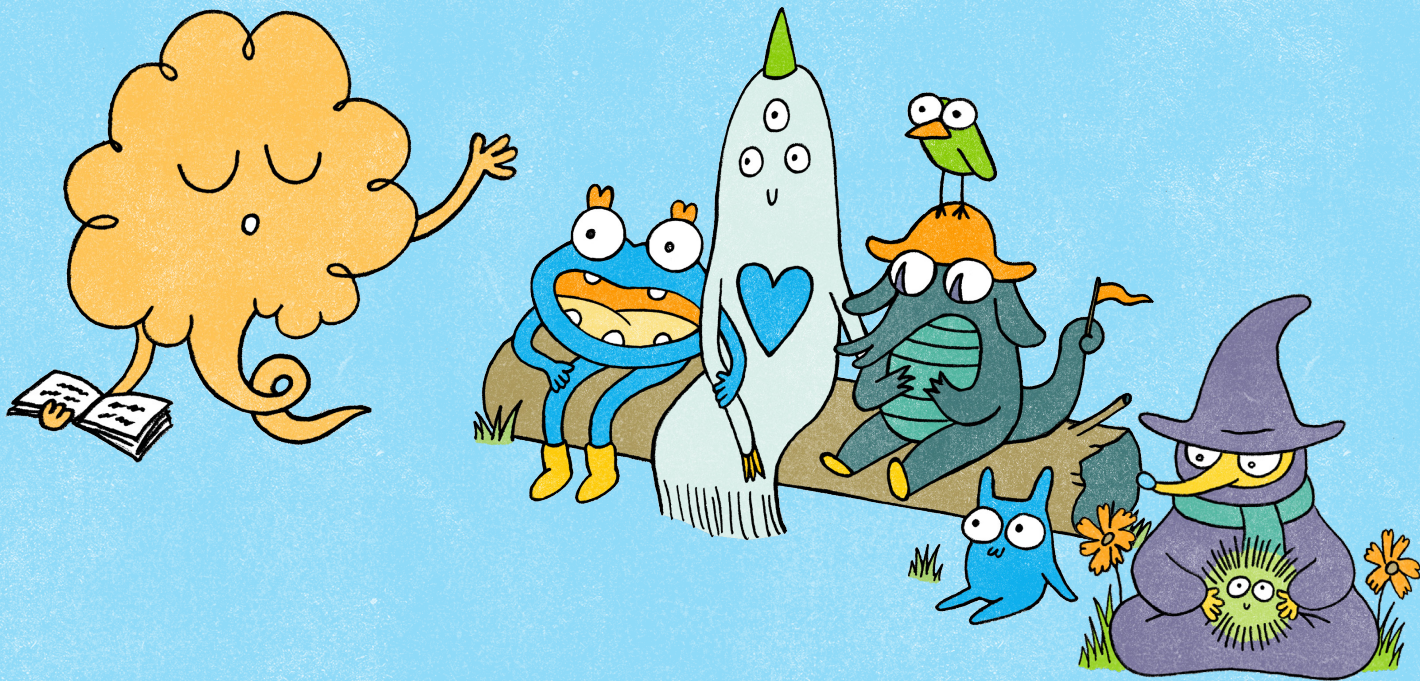
RESULTS BY ATTENDANCE

Of the 2,017 students, attendance data was available for 861 students. Student attendance was broken into two categories of low (16 sessions or fewer) and high (more than 16 sessions). These categories are equivalent to attendance at 826 programming one or two times a month during the school year (low) and three times or more (high).

» Within the 3-point scale items, the low-attendance group rated self-management and the Pride in Writing aspect of self-awareness significantly higher than the high-attendance group. However, these two items were rated very high by both groups, with most students rating the highest level of 3. Although the high-attendance group rated Confidence, Reflection, and Empathy higher than the low-attendance group, this difference was not significant.

» Within the 4-point scale items, high-attendance students rated all items higher than low-attendance students, and significantly so for Respect, Safety, Challenge, Community, and Creativity.

IMPLICATIONS

The high ratings given by higher-attendance students across survey items provide evidence that the more time students spend with 826, the more they grow in SEL competencies. Students with high attendance experienced a more supportive environment and stronger community and developed stronger self-management skills than students with low attendance. Self-awareness (specifically, Pride in Publishing and Critical Thinking), social awareness (Expression), and relationship skills were not significant across low- and high-attendance groups, suggesting that these competencies take longer than the length of a program to develop more fully. To promote social and emotional growth, prolonged, consistent, and repetitive engagement with community organizations such as 826 is recommended.

> "At 826 Valencia, I was able to ask questions, and I feel like it made me more confident. The fact that even when I was tired they were the best support and the best comfort space I could be at, and at the end I ended up believing in myself because of the support they gave me."
>
> *Danai M., Grade 12, 826 Valencia, In-Schools Program*

Table 5. Mean Ratings by Attendance

3-Point Scale		Low Attendance (n = 548) Mean (SD)	High Attendance (n = 313) Mean (SD)
Self-Management	Persistence**	2.74 (.036)	2.6 (.033)
Self-Awareness	Pride in Writing**	2.74 (.036)	2.57 (.033)
	Confidence	2.33 (.030	2.55 (.033)
	Reflection	2.37 (.033)	2.49 (.035)
Relationship Skills	Empathy	2.38 (.034)	2.46 (.037)
4-Point Scale			
Environment	Respect**	3.73 (.031)	3.84 (.027)
	Safety**	3.61 (.028)	3.73 (.031)
Self-Management	Challenge**	3.47 (.040)	3.68 (.033)
Environment	Community**	3.31 (.044)	3.61 (.038)
	Creativity**	3.48 (.039)	3.59 (.039)
	Value	3.57 (.028)	3.59 (.038)
Self-Awareness	Pride in Publishing	3.19 (.049)	3.46 (.048)
Relationship Skills	Making a Difference	3.18 (.043)	3.44 (.043)
Social Awareness	Expression	3.14 (.035)	3.37 (.043)
Self-Awareness	Critical Thinking	3.21 (.033)	3.35 (.043)

****Indicates statistical significance between groups at p<.05. See Appendix for details.*

RESULTS BY RACE

Of the 2,017 students, race/ethnicity information was available for 469. This analysis focuses on Black/African American, Hispanic/Latinx, and white students.

» While Black/African American students had the highest mean ratings across all items except for safety, for which the means were almost identical for all three groups, there was no significant effect of race for any competency.

» However, when only comparing Black/African American students and white students, significant differences emerge. Black/African American students rated the Confidence and Critical Thinking aspects of the self-awareness competency significantly higher than white students. Given that 826 serves 88% students of color, the sample for white students was much smaller than for Black/African American students and thus may have affected significance.

IMPLICATIONS

Black and Hispanic/Latinx students rated items similarly to white students, and some items significantly higher. Research has shown that students of color are at higher risk of mental health challenges due to socioeconomic disparities and inequities in access to care. The survey results provide evidence that community writing programs can be a protective factor promoting a safe space to develop social and emotional skills, particularly for Black students. Students learn best in an environment that promotes positive growth experiences, relationships, and emotional support.
When it comes to the Hispanic/Latinx students who engage with 826, they tend to be English language learners (ELL). Of the students who engage with 826 programming, 25% are ELL, which is more than twice the percent of ELL students in the public school system. Despite the language barrier, these students report demonstrating SEL skills similarly to Black/African American and white students. When given equal access to high-quality writing education opportunities, there were no racial disparities in the development of SEL skills.
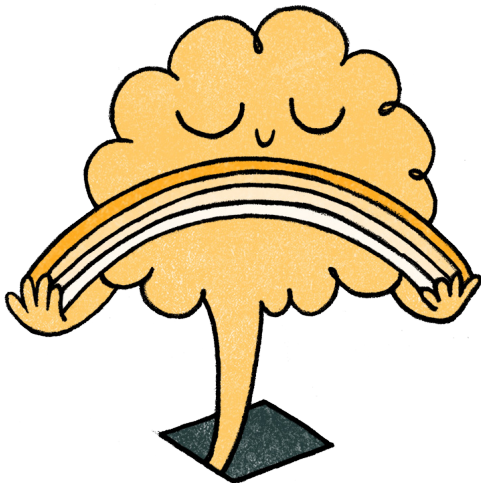
"When we go over a new writing idea and at the end students share out their ideas and what they wrote and their thought process, [it] opens up a whole new perspective for me."

Zahra A., Grade 11, 826MSP,
Young Authors' Book Project

Table 6. Mean Ratings by Race

3-Point Scale		White (n = 40) Mean (SD)	Black/AfrAm (n = 114) Mean (SD)	Hisp/Latinx (n = 207) Mean (SD)
Self-Management	Persistence	2.65 (.126)	2.74 (.063)	2.64 (.045)
Self-Awareness	Pride in Writing	2.56 (.121)	2.69 (.063)	2.53 (.040)
	Confidence	2.26 (.094)	2.52 (.069)	2.45 (.041)
	Reflection	2.22 (.125)	2.45 (.072)	2.45 (.045)
Social Awareness	Empathy	2.26 (.129)	2.33 (.079)	2.50 (.043)
4-Point Scale				
Environment	Respect	3.74 (.082)	3.83 (.051)	3.84 (.030)
	Safety	3.76 (.085)	3.72 (.0756)	3.71 (.038)
Self-Management	Challenge	3.57 (.106)	3.67 (.070)	3.55 (.051)
Environment	Value	3.54 (.096)	3.66 (.060)	3.62 (.042)
	Creativity	3.51 (.115)	3.59 (.063)	3.55 (.045)
	Community	3.14 (.163)	3.55 (.079)	3.47 (.057)
Self-Awareness	Pride in Publishing	3.28 (.171)	3.54 (.092)	3.39 (.064)
Relationship Skills	Making a Difference	3.14 (.177)	3.47 (.085)	3.31 (.056)
Self-Awareness	Critical Thinking	3.18 (.120)	3.40 (.091)	3.34 (.051)
Social Awareness	Expression	3.14 (.138)	3.39 (.081)	3.28 (.060)

RESULTS BY GENDER

Of the 2017 students, gender information was available for 401. This analysis focuses on the populations with the most students: Female and Male.

» Within the 3-point scale items, none of the competencies were significant, though female students rated all items higher than male students.

» Within the 4-point scale items, female students rated all items higher than male students and significantly so in environment (Respect, Safety, Value, Community), self-management (Challenge), and relationship skills.

IMPLICATIONS

Female students rating all items higher than male students could relate to research that shows that women are more verbally expressive than men (Ray, 2016). In early childhood, girls tend to demonstrate greater emotional expressivity, especially for positive emotions, and boys show less language ability, so their expression tends to be more physical in nature, which could explain their lower ratings (Ray, 2016). Women and girls also generally have a more positive outlook on their environment (Caprara et al., 2006), which could explain their significantly higher ratings on most of the environment items. Additionally, the significant differences present in self-awareness (Pride in Publishing) and relationship skills supports existing research that shows women tend to be more self-aware and emotionally aware (Ross et al., 2019). Varying development based on gender, especially during adolescence, contributes to differences within social and emotional development. These results suggest that male students may need more support than female students when it comes to developing SEL skills. More research is needed to better understand how best to support SEL development particularly for males.

SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS

Together, these results shed light on the trajectory of social and emotional development while highlighting the needs of specific groups of students. Social and emotional development is dynamic and fluctuates throughout development. The predicted trajectory that has been used as a lens throughout this study

"I got to just let out my own feelings about a certain moment since it's a memoir."

Johanna M., Grade 10, 826NYC,
Young Authors' Book Project

Table 7. Mean Ratings by Gender

3-Point Scale		Female (n = 189) Mean (SD)	Male (n = 212) Mean (SD)
Self-Management	Persistence	2.59 (.041)	2.49 (.039)
Self-Awareness	Pride in Writing	2.57 (.041)	2.41 (.041)
Social Awareness	Empathy	2.56 (.043)	2.38 (.042)
Self-Awareness	Confidence	2.55 (.040)	2.43 (.039)
	Reflection	2.51 (.040)	2.36 (.042)
4-Point Scale			
Environment	Respect**	3.84 (.035)	3.72 (.042)
	Safety**	3.81 (.034)	3.60 (.047)
	Value**	3.69 (.040)	3.51 (.047)
Self-Management	Challenge**	3.68 (.042)	3.51 (.049)
Environment	Creativity**	3.67 (.041)	3.43 (.054)
	Community	3.56 (.048)	3.37 (.054)
Self-Awareness	Pride in Publishing**	3.56 (.048)	3.28 (.064)
Relationship Skills	Making a Difference**	3.49 (.047)	3.17 (.058)
Self-Awareness	Critical Thinking	3.43 (.051)	3.24 (.051)
Social Awareness	Expression	3.42 (.052)	3.23 (.052)

**Indicates statistical significance. See Appendix for details.

follows the pattern of (Environment - Self-Management - Self-Awareness - Social Awareness - Relationship Skills). While the survey results support existing research that there is overlap in the development of these skills, some clear patterns also emerged. As expected from existing research, young people need a foundation of a safe environment before the other SEL competencies can develop. These results support a new finding: self-management skills follow this foundation and create the conditions for students to start building on the other competencies. To promote social and emotional growth, consistent and repetitive engagement with community partners such as 826 is recommended.

RESULTS BY STANCE

Students' ability to communicate perspective (empathy) through their writing was assessed through stance, which focuses on perspective. Students showed a statistically significant gain of 5.3% on stance from pretest to posttest. Further, of the 464 students who were assessed, more than half (233 students) showed improvement on stance. Here are two examples in which a student demonstrated growth from pretest to posttest.

Example A: 7th Grade Student

Before	After
"In the NIA after school sometimes we can be silly or funny. It's fun because we get to go outside and play and do homework and art."	"One day I came home just sad. I just didn't want to talk to them because I am not in the mood. Then when they ask me why I just tell them I don't want to talk to anyone. They try to make me laugh, cooking my favorite food. I was no longer feeling down with all the great things my family do for me."

When answering a reflective prompt, one student began the year with a writing sample that scored 1.5 out of 6 in stance. This writing was flat in tone and did not display an understanding of empathy or self-awareness. When assessed again at the end of 826 programming, the same student wrote at a level 4, demonstrating the ability to speak in the first person and capture a somber tone. Through this new piece, the student conveyed their own emotions and an awareness of how those emotions affect others.

Students used writing both as a way to process their emotions and also as a way to process what was happening around them. Example B leans toward creative writing as the student works to process their emotions. This student began the year writing at a level 2 in stance. In the second writing submission, the student was able to describe an event in their life and how it impacted them. The student was able to capture their own thought process and emotions regarding the situation, using this prompt as a means of catharsis. In order to have the ability to talk about this situation using their perspective, thoughts, and emotions, the student needed to mature in their ability to self-reflect and express themselves. Students reported the

Example B: 5th Grade Student

Before	After
"In Mickey Mouse's house there spawn a bad ghost who wanted all My Little Pony toys. Their name is Mickey, the ghost is a boy."	"We were all having a fun time, saying funny jokes when... Chris-joker made a joke about me! I felt hurt, truly! But I kept it all inside because Bat-smith was laughing... I was very shocked. As Bat-smith walked back, he looked so cool, like a model. I was very impressed, and happy that I now know someone who really cares about me, and I am very thankful."

most memorable experiences about working with 826 were "expressing how I felt" and feeling "more confident about myself."

IMPLICATIONS

As a result of working with 826, students were better able to understand and articulate different perspectives through their writing, in turn building their self- and social awareness. Taking on the perspective of others also works to develop empathy, which has been established to be a complex skill.

CONCLUSION

The pandemic has left young people in need of additional support to build their protective factors and mitigate the negative effects of COVID-19 on their mental health. This case study shows that a community writing organization such as 826 is uniquely positioned to provide that support. To begin to manage the effects of the

"Everyone always asking me to share my ideas. Usually no one really asks me to share."

Sam Z., 826 Valencia, Workshop Program

pandemic, children need an environment with trusted adults where they can feel safe, respected, and have their experiences validated. Then they need to engage in activities such as writing that allow them to reflect, disclose, and create, thereby building social and emotional skills. More opportunities such as the ones 826 offers are needed within schools and other community partners so that students everywhere can access spaces and writing education to promote SEL. In order to do so effectively, here are a few recommendations:

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. MORE RESEARCH ON THE SEL SKILL-BUILDING PROCESS. Research on the developmental trajectory or patterns of SEL skills will allow for the creation of curricula that is mindful of the developmental needs of young people, providing support to those who need it when they need it.

2. EXPLICIT CURRICULUM STANDARDS AROUND WRITING AND SEL. Writing and SEL standards should be incorporated into educational standards, while recognizing the individualized needs of students based on race, gender, age, etc.

3. MORE EDUCATOR TRAINING IS NEEDED ON

A. CREATING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT. To effectively support students' skill building, educators need training on how to implement strategies for creating a learning environment which feels like a safe environment.

B. TEACHING WRITING AND SEL. Proper training of educators and community organizations to teach writing and SEL both separately and together will ensure that educators are aware of the most effective practices and recent research.

4. MORE FUNDING FOR SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS. To promote a student-first model, more funding is needed to create and sustain schools and community organizations so that they can provide effective instruction and supportive environments.

APPENDIX

826 SEL Measures (selected paired *t*-tests)	*t*-value	*p*-value
Persistence - Pride in Writing	3.452	<.001
Persistence - Confidence	2.644	.008
Persistence - Reflection	3.167	.002
Persistence - Empathy	4.508	<.001
Pride in Writing - Empathy	3.503	<.001
Respect - Safety	9.225	<.001
Safety - Value	3.656	<.001
Challenge - Community	6.433	<.001
Community - Pride in Publishing	2.395	.017
Pride in Publishing - Critical Thinking	2.243	.025
Attendance	*t*-value	*p*-value
Persistence	2.570	<.001
Pride in Writing	2.993	<.001
Respect	-1.966	<.001
Safety	-2.114	.005
Challenge	-3.057	<.001
Community	-4.029	<.001
Creativity	-1.382	.289
Race/Ethnicity	*t*-value	*p*-value
Confidence	-1.908	.003
Critical Thinking	-1.273	.047

Gender	*t*-value	*p*-value
Respect	2.155	<.001
Safety	3.463	<.001
Value	2.839	<.001
Challenge	2.692	<.001
Creativity	3.477	<.001
Pride in Publishing	3.565	<.001
Making a Difference	4.269	.014
Assessment	*t*-value	*p*-value
Stance	-5.25	<.001

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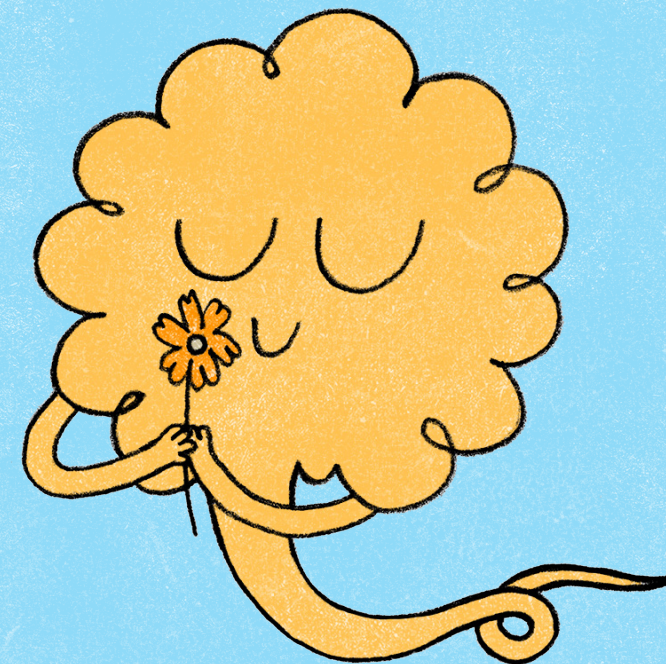*Pediatrics, 150*(4). Article e2022058227.

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