Student Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and School Climate Outcomes of Youth Communication SEL Programs

Youth Communication's (YC) social and emotional learning (SEL) programs have **a sizeable and positive impact** on student SEL skills, youth engagement, and school climate (e.g., classroom behavior, teacher-student relationships, student attitude about school). These findings are the result of end-of-program surveys administered to students and teachers, as well as an analysis of publicly available school survey data from the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE).

During the 2018-2019, YC partnered with six schools in NYC, located in The Bronx, Queens, Manhattan, and Brooklyn. One school housed grades 6 through 12 and used YC programs across all grades during a weekly advisory period. One 6-12 school used YC programs in their middle school advisories. A third school was a high school in its second year and used YC programs for social work circles in both 9th and 10th grades, the only grades in the school. The last three schools were all 9-12 schools that used YC programs across all grade levels in weekly advisory periods. All schools had a higher than average rate on one or more of the following dimensions: students with free or reduced lunch status, students with marginalized racial identities, students with Individualized Education Plans, students who were experiencing homelessness or who were in foster care, or poor school-wide attendance.

Youth and Adult Self-Report Data on Program Effectiveness, SEL Outcomes, and School Climate

Youth Communication, with the assistance of the leadership of the the YC partner schools, administered end-of-program surveys to students in YC SEL programs, as well as the teachers who facilitated the groups. Over 500 surveys were returned.

In questions related to positive youth SEL outcomes, the **large majority of teachers and students agreed that there was across-the-board improvement in SEL skills**, as defined by the Collaborative for Academic
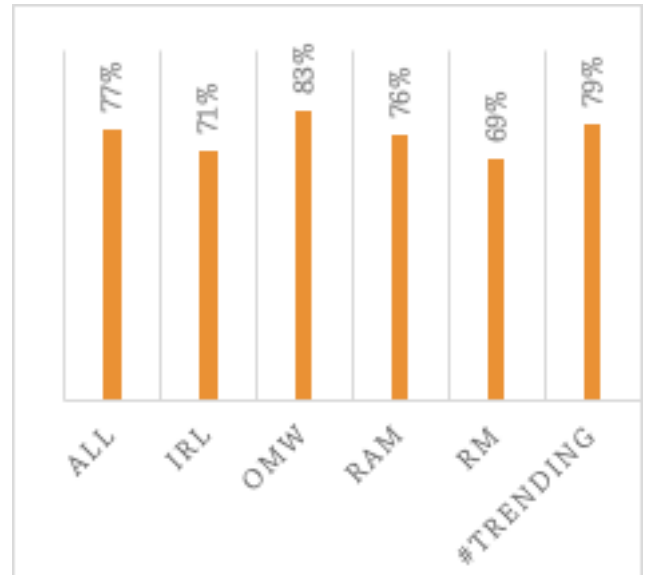
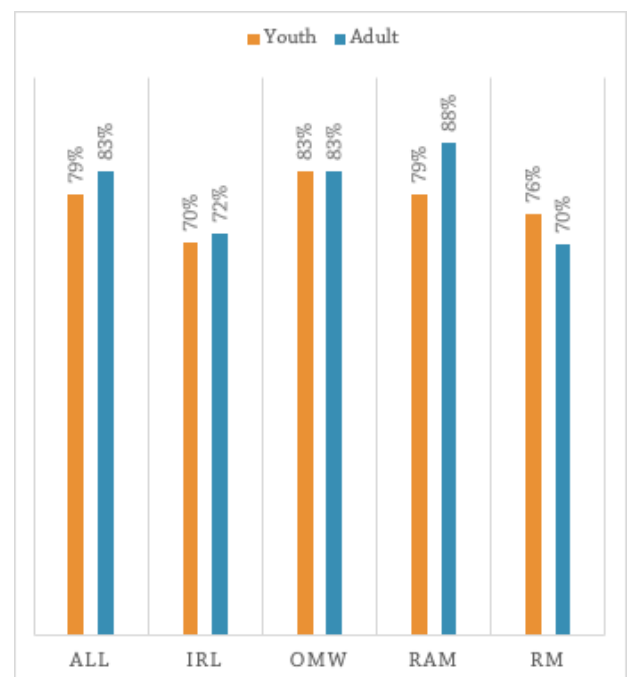Figure 1. Percent Youth and Adults Who Agree with Positive SEL Outcomes

Figure 2. Percent Youth and Adults Who Agree with Positive School Climate Outcomes (e.g., increased connection, empathy)

and Social Emotional Learning (CASEL). (See Figure 1.) The largest improvement participants reported was in the CASEL competency social awarness, followed closely by self-management. These gains can be attributed to two main features of the program design—reading stories by a variety of young people (social awareness) and sitting among a group of peers reading and discussing the stories, which allows students to learn the perspective of others (social awareness), as well as turn-taking and active listening (self-management).

On survey items related to school climate and culture, which includes questions asking about teacher-student relationships, student access to a caring adult with whom to talk, teacher and student empathy, and teachers' strengths-forward mindsets, teachers and students again agreed, across the board, that **YC programs helped improve the school climate and culture**. (See Figure 2.)

When adult facilitators were asked to compare YC SEL programs to other SEL curricula they had used, over 90% agreed that **YC programs were more effective than other programs** they tried. (See Figure 3.) They also reported that YC programs were **more engaging** (over 80%). When asked about the effectivess of the session plans, 96% of teachers reported that the session plans were **easy to use**. 91% of teachers found the **accompanying professional development program critical to the success** of the program.

In addition to the Likert scale items, students were asked the general, open-ended question "What else would you like us to know about your experience in the program?" Some of those responses included:

- "I was able to gain a new perspective on different things that i never thought about before which helped me understand others around me better."
- "I really enjoyed reading stories written by other teenagers like me because i was able to relate to some of the stories and i was also able to know how to deal with some of the problems i've been going through."
- "I was able to relate to lots of stories. It was fun listening to someone start from nowhere go to a better place."
- "this group made me realize that i'm not alone and there's always going to be someone you can count on"

A quantitative analysis was done on these open-ended responses, using a Grounded Theory approach to inductively create categories for the responses. Tallies were then created using those categories. (See Figure 4.) Students most frequently reported that **YC programs were engaging and relatable, and the stories and activities helped them understand themselves and others better**.
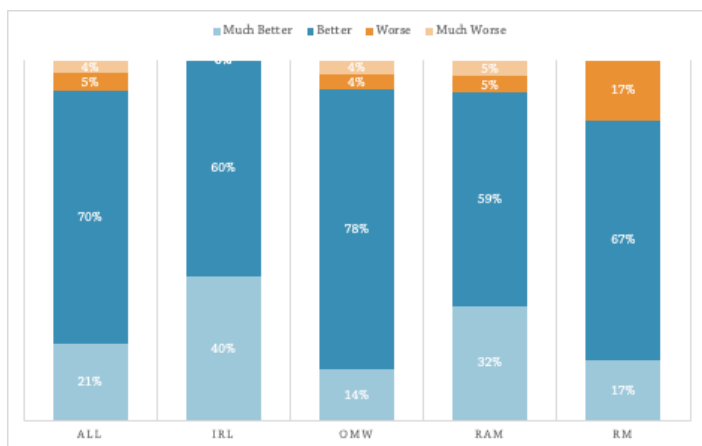

Figure 3. Percent Adult Agreement with Program Effectiveness as Compared to Other SEL Programs
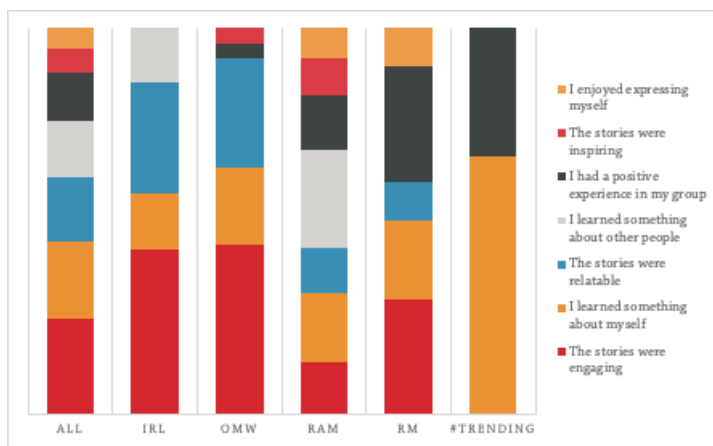

Figure 4. Quantitative Analysis of Student Responses to Open-Ended "What Else Would You Like Us to Know About Your Experience in the Program?" Question

Table 1. Percent change of YC partner schools versus comparison group on NYC DOE school climate questions

New York City Department of Education School Survey Item	% Change YC Partner Schools	% Change Comparison Group
Teachers say students listen carefully when teacher gives directions.	+29%	-25%
Teachers say students behave well even when teacher isn't watching.	+26%	-25%
Students say most students behave well even when teacher isn't watching.	+24%	+1%
Teachers say students follow the rules in class.	+23%	-11%
Students say most students think doing homework is important.	+22%	-4%
Students say most students follow the rules in class.	+21%	-11%
Students say most students feel it is important to come to school every day.	+21%	-1%
Students say most students feel it is important to pay attention in class.	+21%	-2%

The differences between YC partner cchools and the comparison group are statistically signficiation with a p<.001

School Culture and Climate Data Collected by New York City Department of Education

Every year, the NYC DOE conducts school climate surveys system-wide. Teachers, students, and parents are surveyed on a wide variety of topics. We analyzed NYC DOE schools using YC SEL programs across all grade levels at the school, calculating the percent change from the year prior to the beginning of the partnership to after the first year of the partnership.

A comparison group of schools was selected, using school size, grades served, % free/reduced lunch, school theme/focus, geography in NYC, and racial/ethnic makeup of the student body, as the criteria for inclusion. The same analysis was done for the comparison schools as the YC partner schools. (See Table 1.)

Overall, **YC partner schools saw an 8% increase** on the average of school survey items related to school climate, student behavior, teacher-student relationships, and social and emotional learning. Comparison schools saw an average 2% decrease on the same items.

When breaking down the school survey data by individual items, the results are even more striking. **YC partner schools saw a more positive percent change on every item related to school climate, student behavior, teacher-student relationships, and social emotional learning** over comparison schools. The table above includes the 8 survey items with the most positive percent change in YC partner schools, compared to the same items for the comparison group. These results are statistically significant (p<.001).

Overall, YC partner schools saw an increase in teacher and student perceptions of student behavior and attitude to school. This aligns with the findings of the YC-conducted survey of adults and youth.

For more information on these findings, please contact Tim Fredrick, Ph.D., Senior Director of Education Programs at tfredrick@youthcomm.org.

Abbreviations on Figures 1 through 4:
ALL: All YC SEL programs
IRL: In Real Life (HS SEL)
OMW: On My Way (work readiness)
RAM: Real as Me (girls' empowerment)
RM: Real Men (positive masculinity)
#trending (MS SEL)