Lessons Learned:
Social Emotional Learning Pilot, Year 3

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Overview of the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Pilot

Sprockets partnered with The PEAR Institute, an affiliate of Harvard Medical School and McLean Hospital, to offer a three-year professional development pilot focused on social emotional learning. PEAR's work with out-of-school time programs and schools is rooted in the belief that "high-quality programming can build youth social emotional resiliency and contribute to school and life success." Sprockets & PEAR designed the SEL pilot with the goals of contributing to workforce professional development, improving programming and service delivery of participating organizations, and increasing collaboration between systems to advance the field's ability to support SEL in youth.

Members of the pilot are youth-serving professionals (youth workers, program managers, school district personnel, and leaders of youth-serving organizations) working with middle and high school-aged youth. Sprockets expanded beyond its St. Paul borders to Minneapolis and Brooklyn Park in order to build the capacity across the Twin Cities metro region and serve as a leader in this effort both regionally and nationally.

During Year 1, cohort members began their deep dive into learning about PEAR's Clover Model and Holistic Student Assessment (HSA) during monthly meetings and three multi-day conferences. Programs also had the opportunity to administer and utilize the HSA for the first time. During Year 2, cohort members were able to participate in two different but connected groups: the Train the Trainer (T3) cohort, during which members learned how to teach the Clover Model and HSA to others, and the Professional Development & Implementation (PDI) cohort, designed to continue supporting cohort members in implementing and deepening their understanding of PEAR's SEL tools. During Year 3, cohort members

built their capacity to implement and integrate the Clover Model and HSA in their programs and organizations, as well as embarked on longer-term SEL sustainability planning.

Research shows[1] improving practitioners', programs', and systems' intentionality and capacity to support youth's SEL leads to improved outcomes for youth. Evaluation data from the three-year pilot demonstrates that participants have a strong understanding of the developmental & SEL needs of their youth, and by and large have the tools & skills necessary to support their development.

Professional Learning Community (PLC)

Year 3 of the SEL Pilot featured a Professional Learning Community (PLC), intended to boost cohort members' capacity to intentionally implement and integrate their use of the Clover Model and HSA data within their programs/organizations in order to support the social emotional learning and development of youth. An additional aim of the PLC was to deepen cohort members' understanding of the Clover Model & SEL generally within the context of specific topics – e.g. brain development, trauma, and cultural identity – in order to better equip participants with the knowledge to address common realities their youth experience.

A total of 15 individuals took part in the PLC, representing 10 programs and eight organizations. Some of these individuals were new to the pilot but represented programs/organizations that were involved over the three years. The emphasis of the PLC from its onset was on the development of an in-depth plan for intentionality in Clover Model & HSA use for each participating program. Within the first two meetings of the PLC, participants engaged in the following:

- Mapped their organizational/professional SEL journey
- Outlined their initial plans for HSA administration, HSA data collection & use, and Clover Model training & implementation
- Completed a detailed implementation plan that included program-specific standards for successful implementation

These intentionality practices were utilized as referenced checkpoints over the course of the PLC. During periodic check-ins, participants assessed their progress in relation to their plan. When there were opportunities for improvement or increased and deeper intentionality, participants worked with PLC facilitators to develop strategies to get programs on track and on pace to meet their goals (e.g. special Clover training sessions, inviting more program staff to cohort experience, etc.).

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[1] See for example, 'Social and Emotional Learning in Teacher Preparation Standards', Jane E. Fleming and Mary Bay, in *Building Academic Success on Social and Emotional Learning: What Does the Research Say?* (2004).

Towards the final third of the cohort year, the focus of the PLC shifted towards equipping programs/organizations with the ability to sustain their SEL intentionality efforts long-term, particularly after consistent cohort and facilitator support (via the pilot experience) ended. Cohort members assessed the sustainability of their SEL-focused work (use of Clover and HSA in program/organization) in two different ways: 1. After the pilot's conclusion and 2. In the event that the cohort member left their organization and the SEL work had to continue without them present to lead it. Participants then embarked on the Sustainability Tool Project, which directed them to develop an SEL tool tailored to their program structure that could "live beyond" their own tenure there. To end the pilot, cohort members presented these tools to one another and reflected together on what everyone had created and ways to potentially improve upon these tools.

During Year 3, cohort members administered 559 HSAs (pre/post) and 195 HSA-Rs to youth throughout the Twin Cities. Cohort members and other program staff/mentors used the assessment to better understand the SEL strengths and potential areas for growth reported by youth in their programs. They also used the data to better understand how their program was (or was not) meeting the SEL needs of program participants, and subsequently made adjustments and changes to their program and/or the environment to address these needs.

Progress Towards Intended Impact

The end of Year 3 allows an opportunity to assess the progress the entire pilot made towards its original goals & intended impact. At the start of the pilot, leaders identified impact areas (outcomes) this project aimed to address. Results were measured using a survey of cohort members. The evaluation team at PEAR designed the survey, which measured self-reported impacts for participants:

1. **Practitioner understanding of Youth development/Clover: Increased understanding of youth development benchmarks, trauma, resiliency, and strengths-based approaches.** At the end Year 3, nearly 92% of cohort respondents stated they 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that they "feel equipped to support the SEL needs of youth in [their] organization." No one disagreed with this statement, in contrast to 38% of respondents either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement at the beginning of the pilot (prior to Year 1). Additionally, 100% of respondents at the end of Year 3 stated they "understand the needs of young people at different times in their development." This impact area represents one of the primary goals of the pilot and was heavily emphasized during each pilot year. Furthermore, the pilot was designed to build on the knowledge gained about SEL & development from year to year. Thus at the end of three years, it is extremely encouraging to see the positive gain (as reported by participants) made in this particular impact area.

2. **Collaboration: Increased collaboration within participant organizations and with schools or other OST programs.**

At the end of Year 3, 75% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that "their organization collaborates internally to advance the SEL of youth." This is in contrast to only 63% either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement prior to the start of Year 1. Essentially no change occurred from the pre-pilot to the end of the pilot related to respondents feeling that "their organization has the capacity to collaborate between in-school and out of school programs to advance the SEL of youth."

The results reflected a significant lesson learned over the course of the pilot. Generally speaking, if the connection between an out of school program and a school was not already established at the beginning of the pilot, neither the PLC nor the pilot overall were the conduits to make the connection. Being a part of a large system in which change is difficult to approve and slow moving in occurrence made it hard for schools to stay engaged throughout the duration of the pilot. By the end of the pilot, one school district had stopped participating while the remaining OST programs working with schools (One2One and Minneapolis Community Education) continued to adapt their strategies for working with youth within a larger system. It was clear OST programs were not able to lead this change within schools. Instead, OST programs had to position themselves as supporting the desired change within a school (or district).

Cohort members representing one organization, One2One, took the initiative and used the SEL tools available to them to build and strengthen their connection with locals schools. For instance, they were among the first organizations in the cohort to align their youth's school data with HSA data. The ability to demonstrate the correlations between behavior, academics, and SEL data was a huge driver in getting greater buy-in from their partner schools. In the upcoming year, One2One will assess all students in at least one school, train advisory teachers to read and use the data, and use the results to explore how participation in their program impacts the students at that school (in comparison to non-participating students). One2One offers a powerful example of how HSA and the Clover Model can not only be positioned to transform healthy (but distant) relationships between schools and OST programs into healthy and deep ones, but also to help OST programs communicate with, show their value to, and support the school day.

The challenge of developing collaborative efforts between OST programs and schools was not always rooted in a system issue, but sometimes was a capacity problem. Some OST programs were connected to schools, but did not have the staffing support needed to fully implement HSA and the Clover Model in addition to all their other responsibilities. Other OST programs did not prioritize connecting with schools as an aim of their work. Nevertheless, for those with strong connections to their local schools, using the HSA and Clover Model proved to be a successful way to strengthen that connection. Participants were able to use the content, knowledge and ideas offered

within the cohort space to inform their work helping schools better support their youth's SEL & development.

3. **Culture: Increased awareness of cultural differences in SEL, ability to support cultural differences and to respond culturally appropriately to SEL needs.**
At the end of the Year 3, 100% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they "are aware of cultural differences in SEL," "are able to support cultural diversity in [their] approach to SEL in youth," and "are able to respond to cultural diversity in [their] approach to SEL in youth." This is in comparison to 56%, 69%, and 81% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing with those statements at the beginning of the pilot, respectively. Similar to youth development, understanding the cultural nuances & implications of SEL in youth was a significant focus of learning in every year of the pilot. This was an impact area in which the knowledge, expertise and perspective of cohort members significantly and positively challenged, enriched, and enhanced understanding not only of SEL generally, but also the HSA and Clover Model tools specifically. Group discussions were especially enlightening, and participants often reported bringing back learning acquired within the cohort space back to their program's/organization's staff and work. These results show that increased training and intentional focus on building cultural understanding can result in improvement among youth development staff.

4. **Impact: Use of HSA data to inform strategies to highlight strengths and offset challenges and make meaningful changes within a participant's organization to better meet youth SEL needs.**
Prior to the start of Year 1, 100% of respondents stated they either disagreed or strongly disagreed that they knew "how to interpret HSA survey results" and were "able to use HSA to inform SEL-based interventions." By the end of Year 3, those percentages flipped nearly entirely, with 83% either agreeing or strongly agreeing that they knew how to interpret HSA survey results, and 100% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing they could use the HSA to inform SEL-based interventions. This indicates that as participants learned about the HSA, its interpretation and potential uses over the three-year pilot, they increasingly saw its value in helping support SEL in youth. Additionally, by the end of Year 3, 92% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that "HSA data can inform [their] strategies for highlighting strengths and offsetting challenges in youth," representing a significant increase from 25% prior to Year 1.

Understanding how to implement, interpret and use youth-related data using specific tools is not a skill many youth work professionals gain during formal education. Therefore, it is important to consider how training is provided to youth work professionals in the future. The value found in the tools by this pilot's cohort members may indicate a need to include learning youth data interpretation skills in formal

education as well as a need for organizations to prioritize youth work gaining this skill set early on when working in their programs.

5. **Training and support: Better knowledge of how to care for self to better work with youth, learning skills to adapt work to address SEL development, being equipped to identify and support SEL needs of youth in organization.**
At the end of the Year 3, 92% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they "feel prepared to identify the SEL needs of their organization," compared to 37% prior to Year 1. The same percentage agreed or strongly agreed at the end of Year 3 that they "know how to make programming more intentionally focused on SEL outcomes," compared to 44% prior to year 1. Furthermore, at the end of Year 3, 100% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they "have the skills to adapt [their] work to include a developmental approach to SEL," compared to 56% prior to Year 1. Thus, the intensive training and support provided to participants over the three-year period proved invaluable in building their skill and confidence being more intentionally focused on SEL. In terms of self-care, there was a small increase in respondents' agreement or strong agreement in feeling that they "know how to care for [themselves] so [they] do not feel overwhelmed or burnt out," jumping from 75% agreement to 86% agreement from pre-Year 1 to post-Year 3.

Despite the significant positive change, half of respondents still agreed or strongly agreed that they "need more professional development to support the SEL need of youth" at the end of Year 3. This is in contrast to 94% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement prior to Year 1. Many cohort participants feel they still have room to grow and learn in this impact area. This likely reflects the addition of new cohort participants each year, as well as how vast, nuanced, and complex being intentional about SEL is. Opportunities for the PLC experience to continue beyond the duration of the pilot may be valuable for some participants.

6. **Communication: Increased ability to communicate SEL needs of youth to teachers, families, youth, funders, policy makers, administrators, after school practitioners, and ability to communicate with peers internally.** At the end of Year 3, 86% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they could "describe challenging behaviors through a developmental perspective," compared to 69% feeling similarly prior to the beginning of the pilot. Additionally, there was slight improvement in respondents' agreement or strong agreement that they could "describe how a strength-based developmental approach improves SEL skill development" – from 50% to 58% from pre-Year 1 to post-Year 3. Respondents feel capable of communicating about youth challenges in a more understanding way, yet there is some room for improvement. A struggle certain cohort members mentioned dealing with was how to convince their staff & colleagues to use the HSA & the Clover Model when either they already have other SEL tools, or when it was not a program/organization-wide expectation to adopt them. Fortunately,

encouraging cohort members to be innovative and willing to introduce these tools in various ways and to different audiences proved a helpful strategy over time. Continuing to support the communication and translation of this work from the SEL "champion" to the other key stakeholders should be an impact area of continued focus when looking at sustainability in years ahead.

Lessons on Making SEL an Intentional & Sustainable Practice

The three-year pilot was an initial effort in building intentional & sustainable SEL practices for youth in OST programs, and ultimately, understanding what supports and structures OST programs and organizations need to do so. Thus its end offers an opportunity to reflect and identify both unanticipated results and key lessons learned related to the project to inform the next iteration of this work:

A multi-year approach is critical to deep & lasting understanding. Each year of the pilot had a particular focus. In Year 1, cohort members learned about the Clover Model and HSA and explored how they aligned and differed from their personal and organization youth development approaches. In Year 2, cohort members deepened their understanding and commitment to the model and tool through intensive content learning & train the trainer processes. Year 2 also focused on participants' intentionally bringing the Clover Model and HSA back to their organizations. During Year 3, cohort members focused on making their SEL work sustainable over time. This structure – allowing sufficient time for participants to thoroughly learn content, building upon knowledge and progress from year-to-year, and focusing on a gradual implementation of the framework and tool within programs – not only made the effort more manageable for often understaffed and overextended participants, but also built a strong foundation for sustained practice over time. Participants end their pilot experience with a strong enough understanding of the Clover Model and HSA to continue the process of implementing them in their most fitting area and use given their programmatic context.

Tailored support, coaching, and internal collaboration are critical to sustainability. At the end of three years, participants/programs were at various stages along their sustainability journey. Some were comfortably along their journey and had made significant progress on their implementation and sustainability goals established at the beginning of the pilot. For others, their journey was slower going and they needed more time and support to get sustainable. Having the capacity to offer consistent one-on-one coaching tailored to the needs of the program and focused on building internal collaboration within an organization is critical to helping these programs get to the next level in SEL sustainability. Additionally, critical external factors like funding constraints and turnover impeded some programs' ability to reach their full potential. These external factors slowed down progress towards sustainability no matter how internally capable a participant, program, or organization was. Finding ways to maintain the

relevancy of the cohort experience with such a varied group is also critical for continued engagement in building community and sustainability.

Expect challenges. There were several unanticipated challenges that occurred throughout the course of the pilot that required flexibility and adaptation from both organizers and participants. School and school district involvement shifted or waned over the three-year period, which made it difficult not only to build relationships between OST and school entities, but also limited the inroads made on introducing the Clover Model and HSA to schools in the region. As SEL became a regional priority, many schools or districts decided to use their own SEL models and tools rather than work with OST programs and leaders. The expectation that schools and OST programs go through the process similarly may have been too shortsighted and unrealistic. Working to develop a regional implementation plan that is both specific to schools and complimentary to the work happening in the OST field will likely be challenging (but not impossible) moving forward. Key to making this happen will be continued and consistent financial commitment to organizations working towards in order to allow authentic relationship building, planning and implementation to occur over time.

Over the course of the pilot, it became clear that programs that focused on building long-term relationships with youth – especially mentoring programs – were more successful using the HSA pre and post survey data. Programs not structured in this manner (without the time or capacity to use the information deeply) often struggled to effectively make use of data. Fortunately, the HSA-R was a good tool to help <u>all</u> programs learn more about their impact on SEL through programming. Yet programs were only successful if they planned to conduct the survey, analyze and use the results in a timely and organized manner. In the future, helping programs figure out early on whether their structure (or what aspect of their programming) works well with HSA use will prevent a waste of time and resources.

The biggest challenge faced over the course of the pilot was turnover. From year to year, not only did the level of involvement from organizations in the pilot change, but more importantly, staff within organizations identified to lead their SEL work changed. Critical knowledge and planning was lost during these transitions, the impacted program staff had to spend significant time catching up with the rest of the group. The depth and quality of the intentionality and sustainability of SEL practices within these programs most impacted by turnover were considerably diminished. Turnover is a challenge that impacts all elements of successful youth programming, so engaging in intentional efforts to prevent and mitigate the issue will help strengthen and sustain SEL work with youth.

Plan for sustainability as early as possible. Given the challenge of making anything new a sustainable practice within an organization, it is critical to start the planning of sustainability at the very onset of any future endeavors in this work. For example,

teaching participants how to facilitate the "how" related to implementing the Clover Model and HSA – meaning the integration of Clover and HSA in the day-to-day, minute-to-minute, interaction-to-interaction program setting – into the Train-the-Trainer (Year 2) process would have been a more effective way to ensure cohort members were ready to discuss sustainability at the very beginning of Year 3, rather than midway through.

Furthermore, it is critical to think early on about how the SEL learning & growth occurring will live outside and beyond the "champion" identified to lead it. In early conversations about sustainability, many cohort members felt it was unlikely that the SEL work they had begun would last if they were to depart from their organizations. (This realization partially prompted the introduction of the Sustainability Tool Project.) In the future, an early, formal assessment of internal supports may be necessary for each program to identify the best ways to spread SEL's reach within an organization. Furthermore, an early emphasis on developing program specific tools (e.g. activities for youth, assessments for staff, worksheets, etc.) is critical, as they often help make SEL tangible and communicable, as well as can easily live beyond any person's tenure at their organization.

HSA Administration Data

	YR 3		
	Youth	**Staff/Teacher/Mentor**	**Total**
HSA (pre or post)	559	317	876
HSA-R	195	135	330
Total	754	452	1206

	Combined (youth & mentor)			
	Y1	**Y2**	**Y3**	**Total**
HSA (pre or post)	1092	961	766	2819
HSA-R	380	187	330	897
Total	1472	1148	1096	3716

Cohort Participants

Organization	Program/Site	Year of Involvement			
		YR 1	YR 2	YR 3	All Three Years
CLUES	Youth in Action (YA!)				X
Boys & Girls Club	Administration		X	X	
	East Side Club		X	X	
	Jerry Gamble Club		X	X	
	Little Earth Club		X		
	Mt. Airy Club		X	X	
	Patrick Henry Beacon Club		X	X	
	Southside Village Club		X	X	
	West Side Club		X	X	
	Olson Beacon Club			X	
Minneapolis Community Education	Administration				X
	Anderson	X	X		
	Anthony	X	X		
	Anwatin		X		
	Folwell	X	X		
	Hmong International			X	
	Lucy Laney	X			
	Northeast				X
	Ramsey (Justice Page)				X
	Sanford			X	

Neighborhood House	Youth Works		X		
	GRIP		X	X	
	TOP			X	
One2One Mentoring	Brooklyn Middle		X	X	
	Crest View Elementary				X
	North View Middle				X
	Park Center Senior High	X			
	Southdale YMCA	X			
Parkway Middle School		X			
The Sanneh Foundation	Conway Recreation Center				X
	Dreamline				X
St. Paul Youth Commission	Youth Commission		X		
St. Paul Public Schools	Guidance & Counseling Services	X	X		
	Youth Intervention		X		
St. Paul Public Services	BIP		X		
Wilder Foundation	Youth Leadership Initiative (YLI)				X
Sprockets	Administration				X

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