June 16, 2024

To: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE)

From: Sam Newman, Research Analyst, Los Angeles Unified School District

Subject: Mini-grant proposal to OESE Discretionary Grants fund

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*Background*

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and remote learning in 2020, Austin Beutner, the former Superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), piloted a literacy tutoring program called Primary Promise for 750 1st graders (Harter, 2023). Primary Promise supported high-need[1] students by providing small-group[2], high-dosage sessions[3], hiring and training tutors, monitoring students' progress weekly, and scheduling tutoring sessions during the school day[4]  (D'Souza, 2023). Research has shown that tutoring is the most effective academic intervention for improving student learning (Dietrichson et al., 2017), and that the characteristics exhibited by Primary Promise are among the most impactful across various tutoring programs (Nickow et al., 2020). However, limited research has been conducted on the impact of Primary Promise.

There is currently a petition among Parents Supporting Teachers (PST) to reinstate Primary Promise, which was discontinued in May 2023 by current LAUSD Superintendent Alberto Carvalho due to unsustainable costs (Change.org, n.d.). To

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[1] High-need students were defined as students who were MLLs, students experiencing homelessness, foster youth, and had low reading scores (Los Angeles Unified School District, 2021).
[2] Four to five students per group
[3] Twenty to thirty sessions three to four times a week
[4] As opposed to outside school hours

support this petition and momentum to reinstate Primary Promise, we are applying for

$200,000[5] to hire two external education researchers. They will design, distribute, and

analyze a survey[6] evaluating the socio-emotional learning (SEL) benefits for students

who received the intervention. While Primary Promise needs evaluation for its academic

impact and its effect on social-emotional learning (SEL), our primary interest lies in

understanding the SEL benefits that the intervention may offer, given that the effects of

tutoring on SEL are less understood.

*Research Question*

How does Primary Promise affect the social-emotional learning of K-3rd graders?

*Research Design*

If granted the funding to evaluate this research question, the researchers could

use three different constructs to measure social-emotional learning: self-awareness,

self-management, and relationship skills (figure 1). Each construct could be assessed

using three Likert-scaled survey questions[7]. The survey will be administered to students

who received Primary Promise (intervention) and those who did not (control). The

results will be compared to determine if there is a statistically significant increase in

survey responses from students in the intervention group.

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[5] Average pay for education researcher in Los Angeles is $100,000
[6] We are unsure if survey is the best way to collect data given that respondents (1st graders) may not be able to read independently. We would rely on the researchers discretion.
[7] Survey would have 12 questions total

An example of a survey question measuring self-awareness could be, "You know what makes you feel upset or angry," with response options ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree[8].

Once the survey data is collected, researchers will use RStudio to calculate the factor loadings between the survey questions and each construct, as well as the regression weights between the three constructs and social-emotional learning (SEL). Factor loadings above 0.5 indicate a strong relationship between the question and the construct. Researchers will also examine the error terms associated with each observed survey question to explore these relationships.

There is a concern about potential covariance among the different constructs and observed characteristics, but this will be clarified once the data is analyzed.

*Figure 1: Structural equation model (SEM) for Social Emotional Learning*
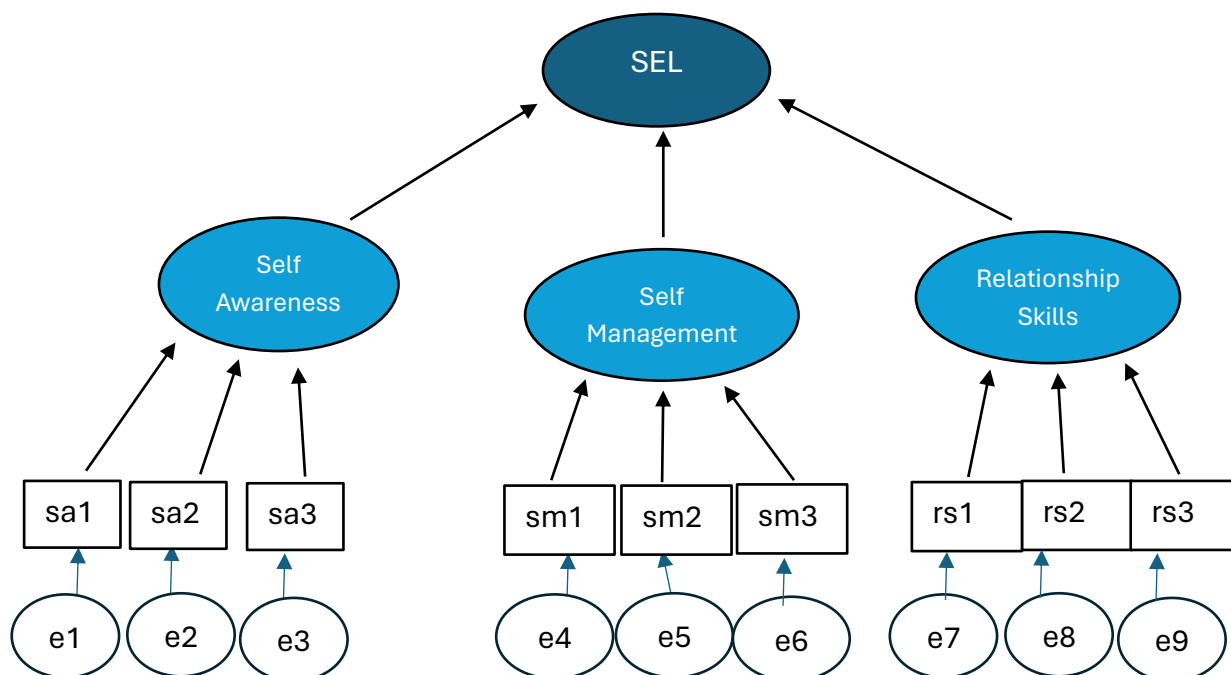
After analyzing the loading values and regression weights, the researchers will assess the model fit using several measures, including the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI). Based on these indices, adjustments may be made to refine the model. This could involve adding or removing paths, improving items with low loadings, and potentially addressing covariances between questions. These steps aim to enhance the model's overall fit and better align it with the observed data.

*Discussion*

Once the model is well-fitted, we can begin to draw conclusions about how Primary Promise affects social-emotional learning (SEL). It may show that one construct exhibits a larger improvement than the others, or that all constructs mutually influence each other, resulting in significant gains in SEL. However, there are potential confounding variables that the randomized controlled trial (RCT) does not control for, such as tutor quality and differences in school or classroom culture (e.g., varying levels of student effort), which could complicate the interpretation of results. There is a possibility that no causal relationship between the intervention and SEL will be evident, or that participation in Primary Promise may come at the opportunity cost of other learning experiences that have a greater impact on SEL. The range of potential outcomes underscores the necessity for external researchers to evaluate our program.

We hope that the researchers discover conclusive evidence that Primary Promise enhances students' SEL growth, thereby reinforcing the case for reinstating Primary Promise in LAUSD.

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Example Survey Questions

*Self-Awareness* (Strongly Agree - Strongly Disagree) – 5 answers

1. I can tell when I feel happy or sad
2. I know what I'm good at, like drawing or playing games.
3. I know what makes me feel upset or angry

*Self-Management* (always – never) – 5 answers

4. When I'm upset, I take a deep breath to calm down.
5. I can wait my turn when playing a game
6. I finish my homework even when it's hard

*Relationship Skills* (always – never) – 5 answers

7. I share my toys with friends.
8. If a friend is sad, I help make them feel better.
9. I listen when others are talking.