Implementing Social and Emotional Learning programs in the BC context:

"SEL as a public health approach to education"

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Territory Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge that I am joining you today from the shared, traditional, and unceded territory of the Katzie First Nation and Kwantlen First Nation, two bands of Coast Salish peoples.

Photo of Alouette Watershed

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) IS a Public Health Approach to Education

Social and Emotional Learning as a Public Health Approach to Education

Mark T. Greenberg, Celene E. Domitrovich, Roger P. Weissberg, and Joseph A. Durlak

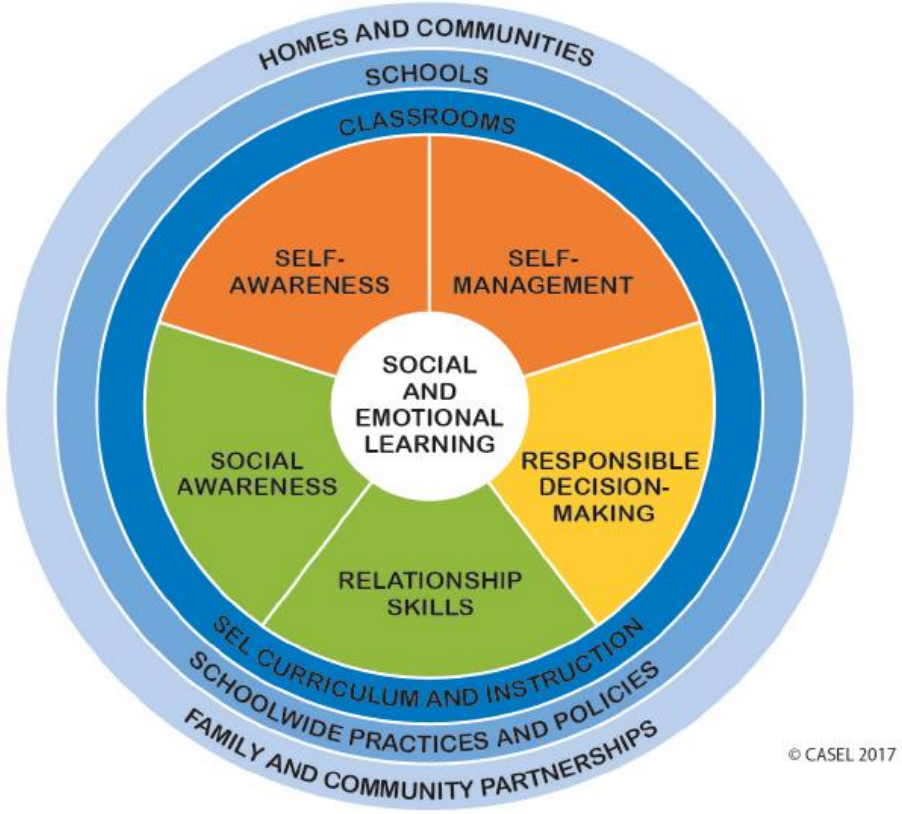
Summary

Evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) programs, when implemented effectively, lead to measurable and potentially long-lasting improvements in many areas of children's lives. In the short term, SEL programs can enhance children's confidence in themselves; increase their engagement in school, along with their test scores and grades; and reduce conduct problems while promoting desirable behaviors. In the long term, children with greater social-emotional competence are more likely to be ready for college, succeed in their careers, have positive relationships and better mental health, and become engaged citizens.

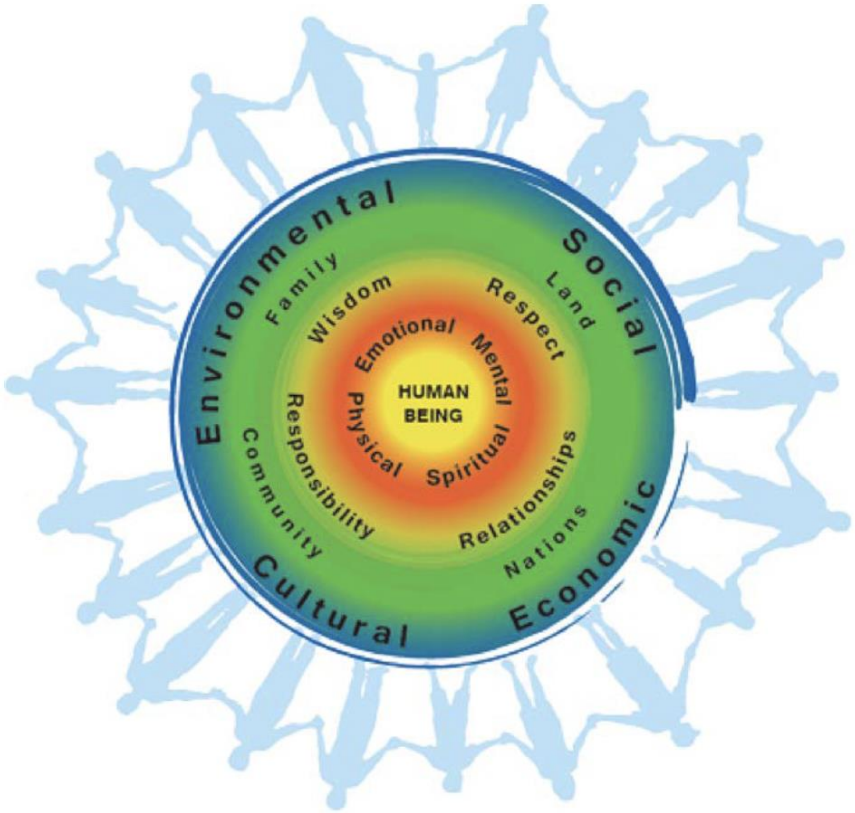
Those benefits make SEL programs an ideal foundation for a public health approach to education—that is, an approach that seeks to improve the general population's wellbeing. In this article, Mark Greenberg, Celene Domitrovich, Roger Weissberg, and Joseph Durlak argue that SEL can support a public health approach to education for three reasons. First, schools are ideal sites for interventions with children. Second, school-based SEL programs can improve students' competence, enhance their academic achievement, and make them less likely to experience future behavioral and emotional problems. Third, evidence-based SEL interventions in all schools—that is, *universal interventions*—could substantially affect public health.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

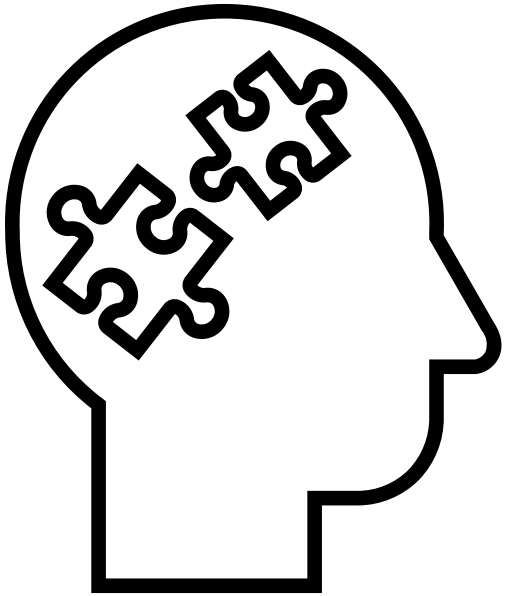
- SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to:
  - **Develop healthy identities**
  - **Manage emotions**
  - **Achieve personal and collective goals**
  - **Feel and show empathy for others**
  - **Establish and maintain supportive relationships**
  - **Make responsible and caring decisions.**



Social and Emotional Learning

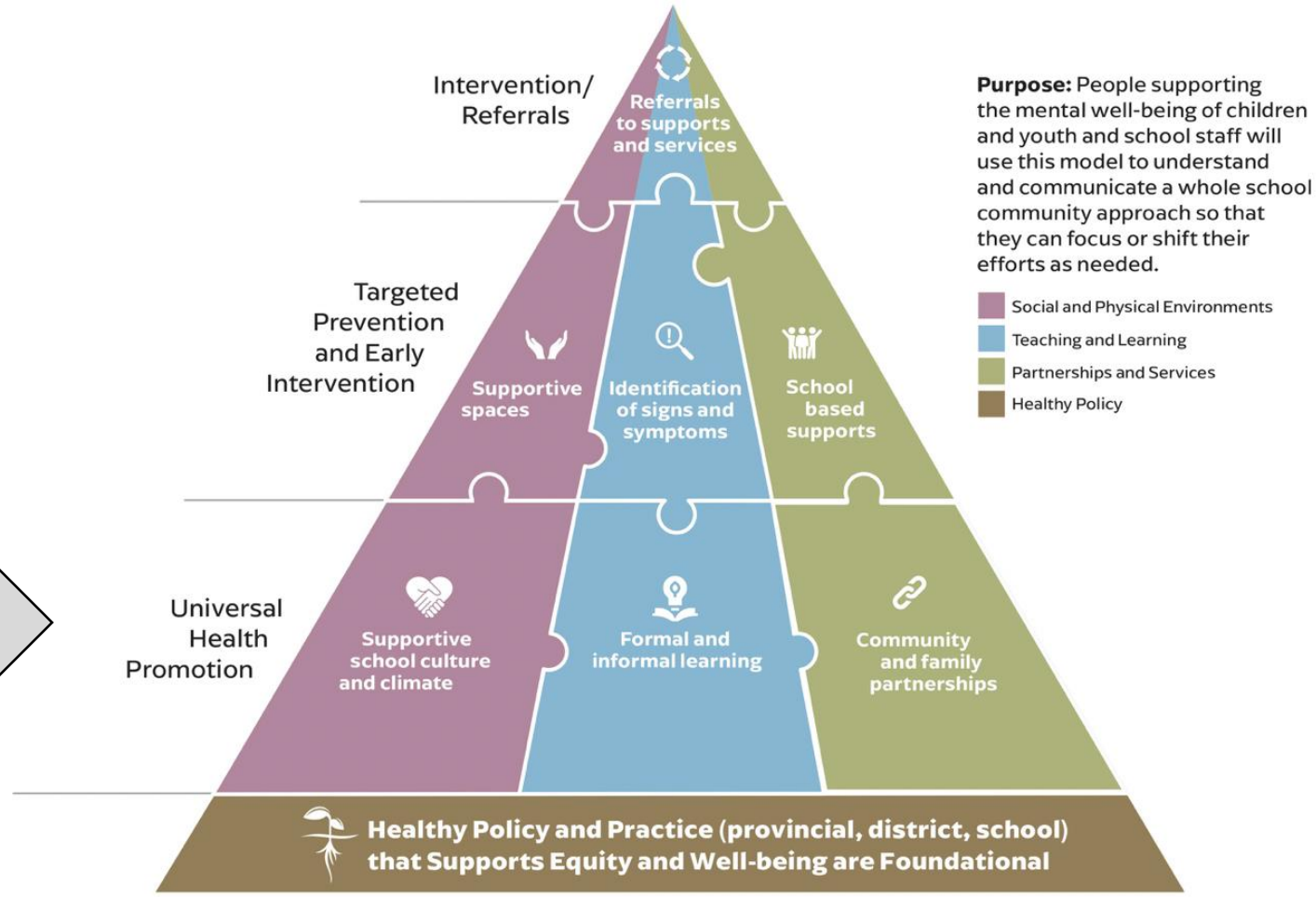


The First Peoples Principles of Learning



What is the connection between SEL & Mental Health?

SEL programs/practices are (generally) Universal Interventions (*Tier 1*)



Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre, 2023

SEL can be effective for promoting the broader definition of *mental health* (few symptoms of psychopathology AND well-being) (Suldo, 2016)

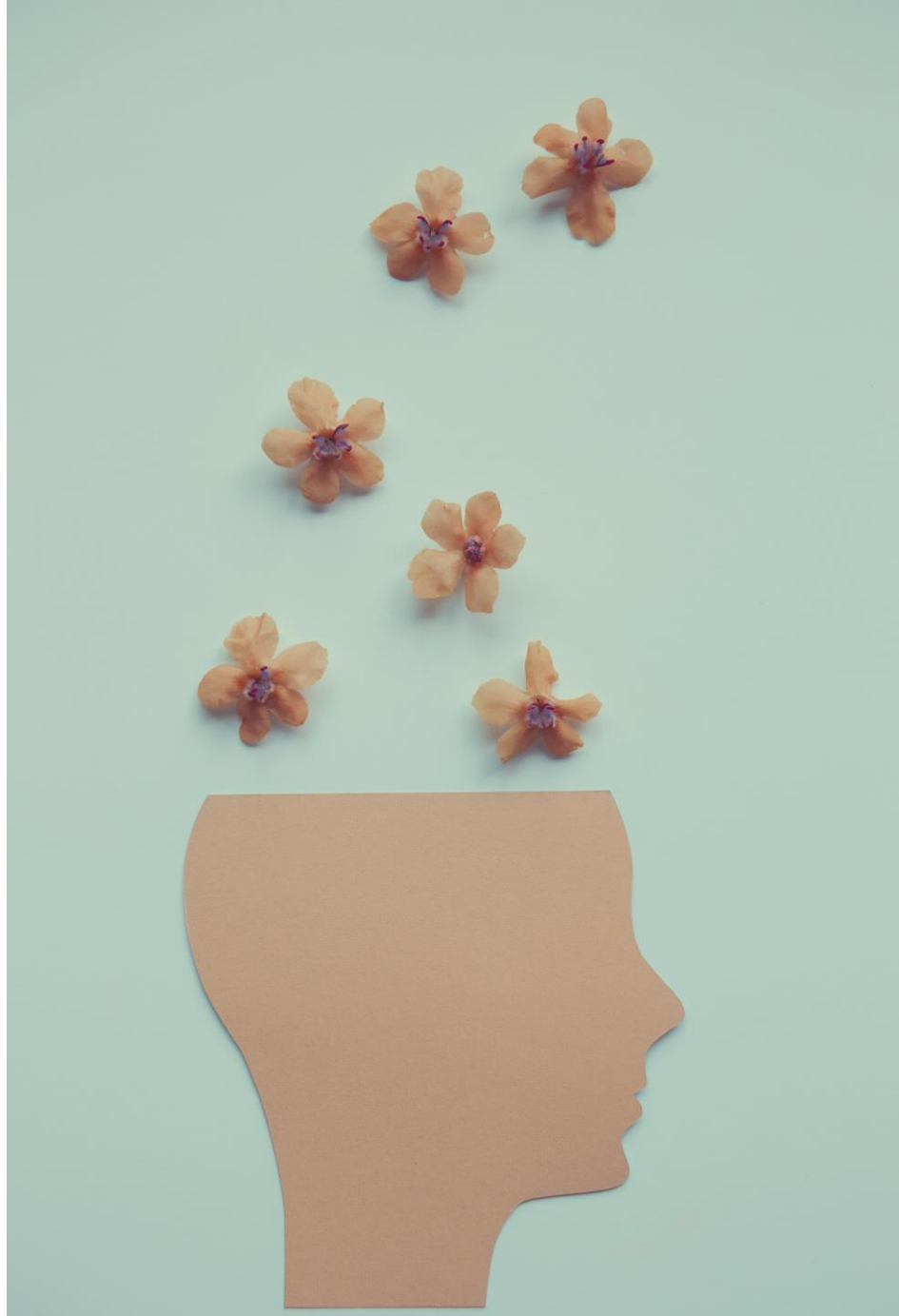
Well implemented SEL programs in schools have been shown to lead to reductions in students' **emotional distress**, including:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Stress
- Social withdrawal

And **SEL programs for Educators** have been shown to:

- Improve emotion regulation
- Improve mindfulness skills
- Reduce psychological distress
- Reduce "time urgency" stress

And these findings hold over time (i.e., after follow-up studies)



(Durlak et al., 2011; Jennings et al., 2017, 2019)

What to focus on?

Mental Health Literacy

“Stress Literacy” & Emotion Awareness

Supportive Relationships

Adult SEL

Important collaboration between schools & public health

Schools can be…

- Where both teachers and students can **enhance their mental health literacy.**
- Community hubs where **mental health literacy activities are made available** to parents and interested members of the community.
- Sites where young people who may have a mental illness or mental health problem can be **identified, referred for care and supported**.
- Sites **where mental health care can be delivered** – such as through school health clinics/youth health centres or school-based mental health care providers.

Teachers in BC are feeling stressed & stretched to keep up with students' growing mental health concerns

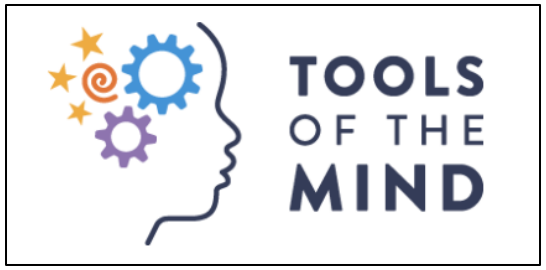
“Stress Literacy” & Emotion awareness

- Improved Literacy around the ***stress response*** (brains!) & coping skills is associated with increased adoption of adaptive coping.

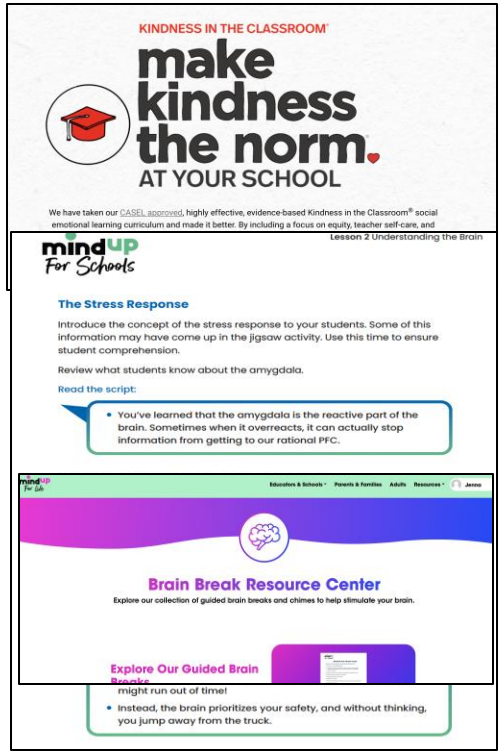
- **Emotion awareness** is indirectly related to internalizing disorders through adaptive emotion regulation, especially in youth
  - *Name it to Tame it*

Some programs that have a stress and/or emotion focus
With recent empirical evidence from a BC context

PreK - 2



Elementary & Middle



High-school

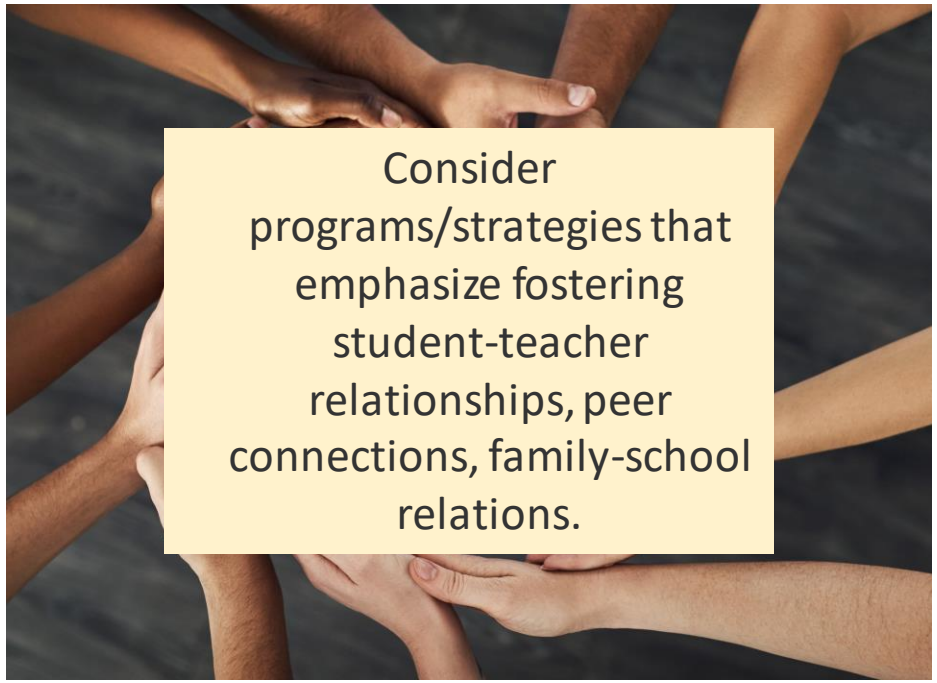
Notable gap in BC-based research on high-school SEL programs

*Opportunity for future research collaborations

(Van Beveren et al., 2019; Eastabrook et al., 2014; Varlow et al., 2009)

Relationships: Students learn & cope best when they feel safe & have a sense of belonging

- Positive relationships can **counteract the negative impacts** of stress (and even trauma) on developing & learning brains.
- Positive student-teacher relationships have been associated with healthier patterns of cortisol regulation in students.



(Ahnert et al., 2012; Longobardi et al., 2016; Roorda et al., 2011)

Adult SEL & Well-being

There are **downstream effects** for supporting caregivers', educators', and health-care professionals' stress & well-being

- *Reductions* in teacher stress & burnout (via intervention) related to students' improved perceptions of teacher support & greater confidence in their academic abilities (Carroll et al., 2021)

- Negative association between healthcare profession burnout and empathy (Wilkinson et al., 2017)

- Parental emotional intelligence (EQ) has direct effect on child mental health - and indirect effect through child's own EQ (Sánchez-Núñez et al., 2020).

Jennings & Greenberg, 2009

Adult knowledge about social and emotional development (SED) & SEL

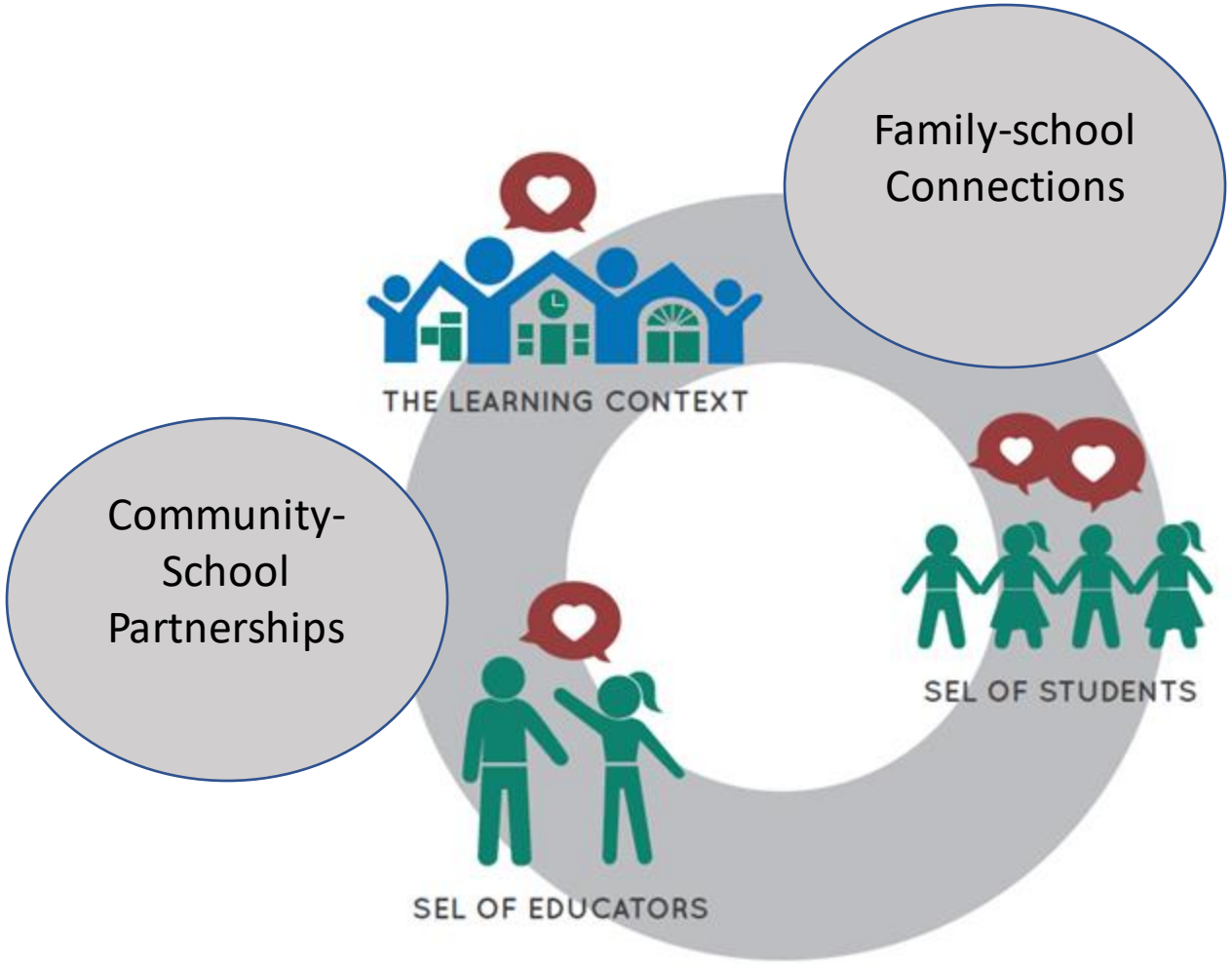
- One resource created in BC, for BC is **Feelings First**
- Focus on foundational early years
- Stay tuned for an online **training program** currently under development (piloted later this year) for **ECEs, HCPs, & caregivers**

Initiative of BC Healthy Child Development Alliance

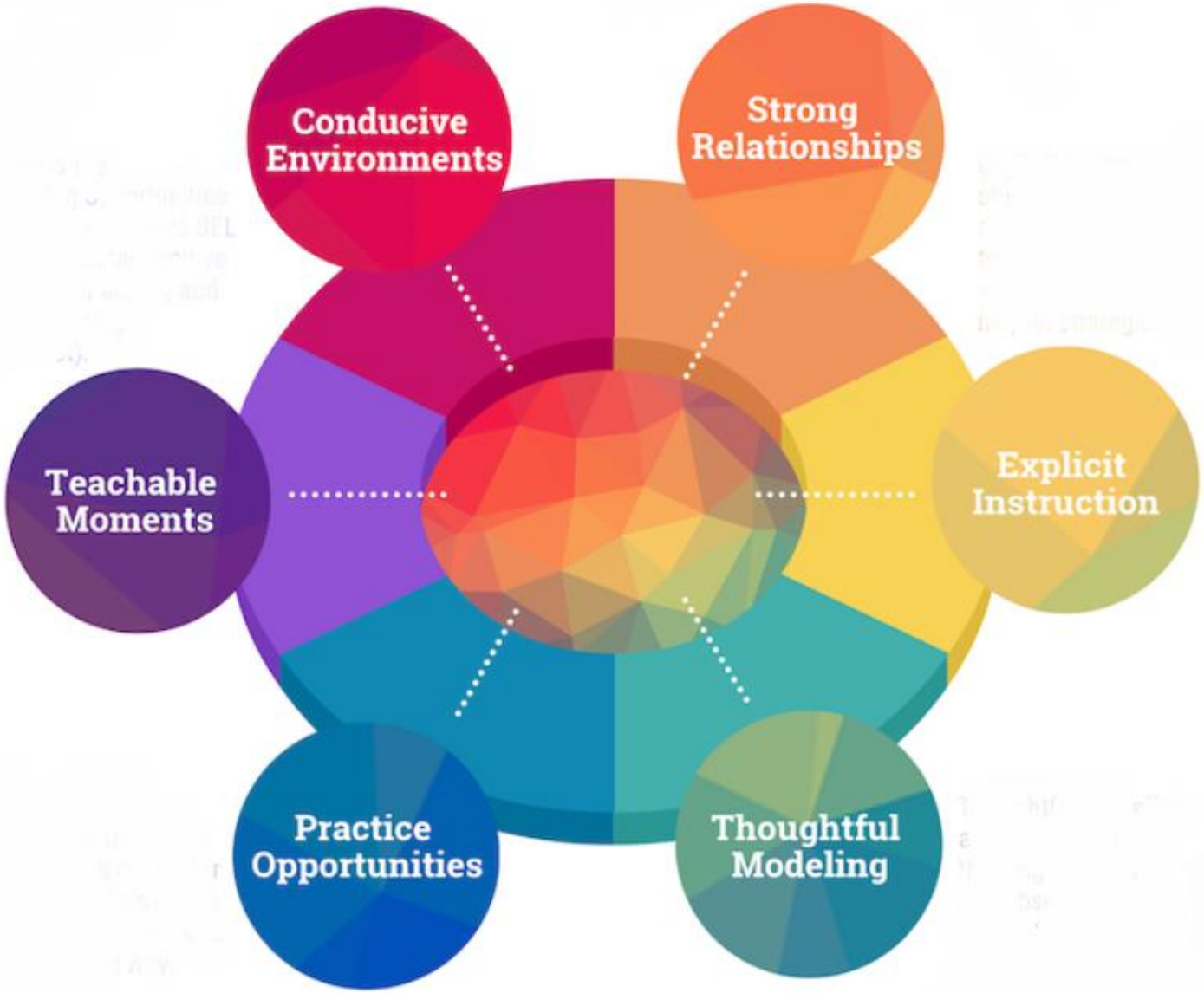
If you would like to be on the mailing list for updates regarding this project, please contact Dr. Angela Low at angela.low@phsa.ca

Important considerations for SEL interventions: *Current directions in the field*

- **Systemic SEL**



There are **Multiple Entry Points** for SEL



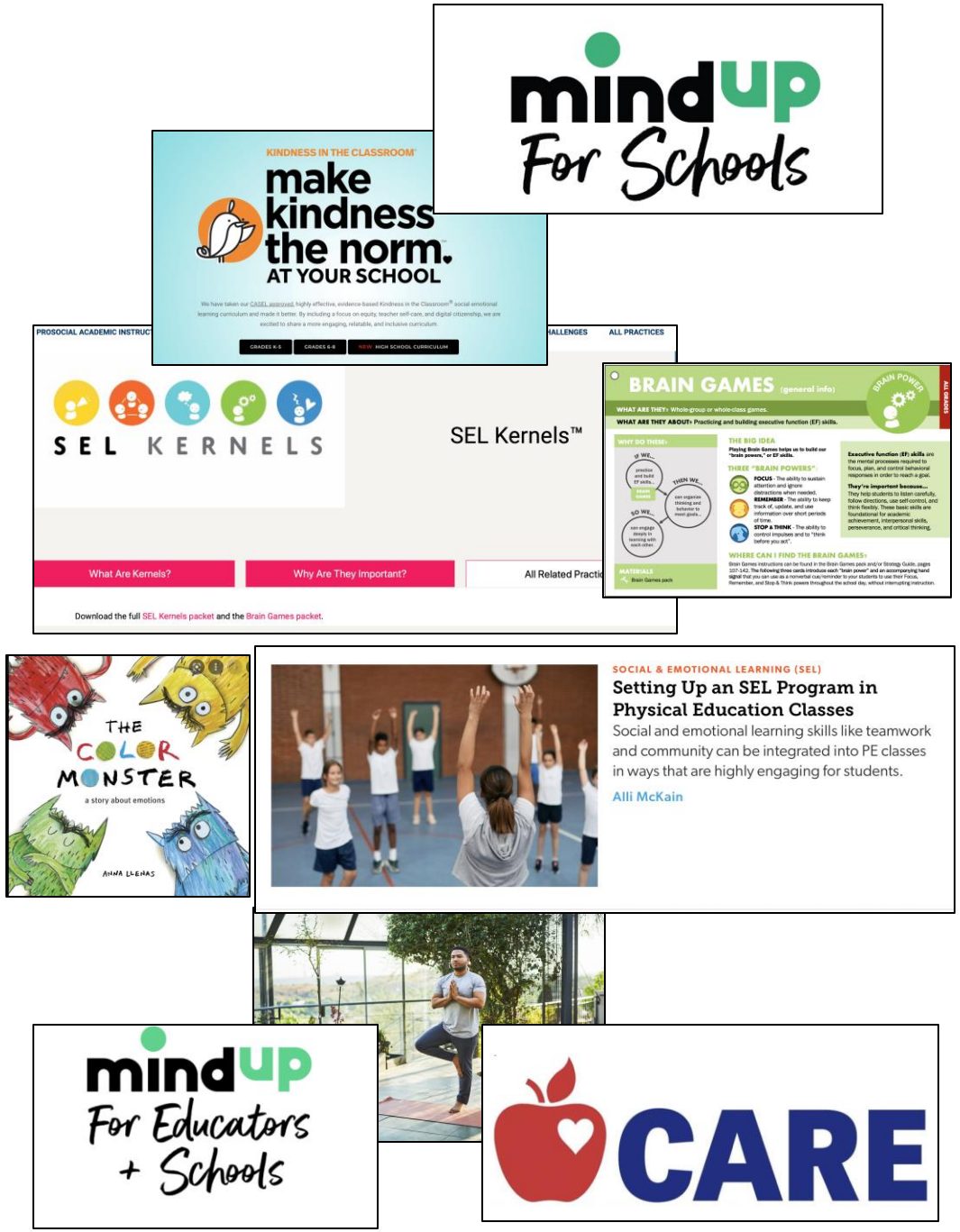
TransformingEd.org

"**Small changes** to address students' social and emotional needs can make a **big difference**."

(www.acsd.ord)

Supporting Systemic SEL

- **Direct social and emotional skill instruction** (SEL programs, lessons)
- **Routines and practices** (morning meetings, circles, greeting students by name)
- **Instructional practice** (embedding SEL across disciplines through approach to instruction or academic content; e.g., teaching empathy through literature)
- And…through **educators/practitioners** fostering their own social and emotional competencies



Importance of evidence-based or evidence-informed programs and strategies

- One size doesn't fit all. Important to consider programs that would align and work with your context.
- Ensure the program won't have contraindications for your population
- **Search by demographic, desired outcomes, grade level, etc.**

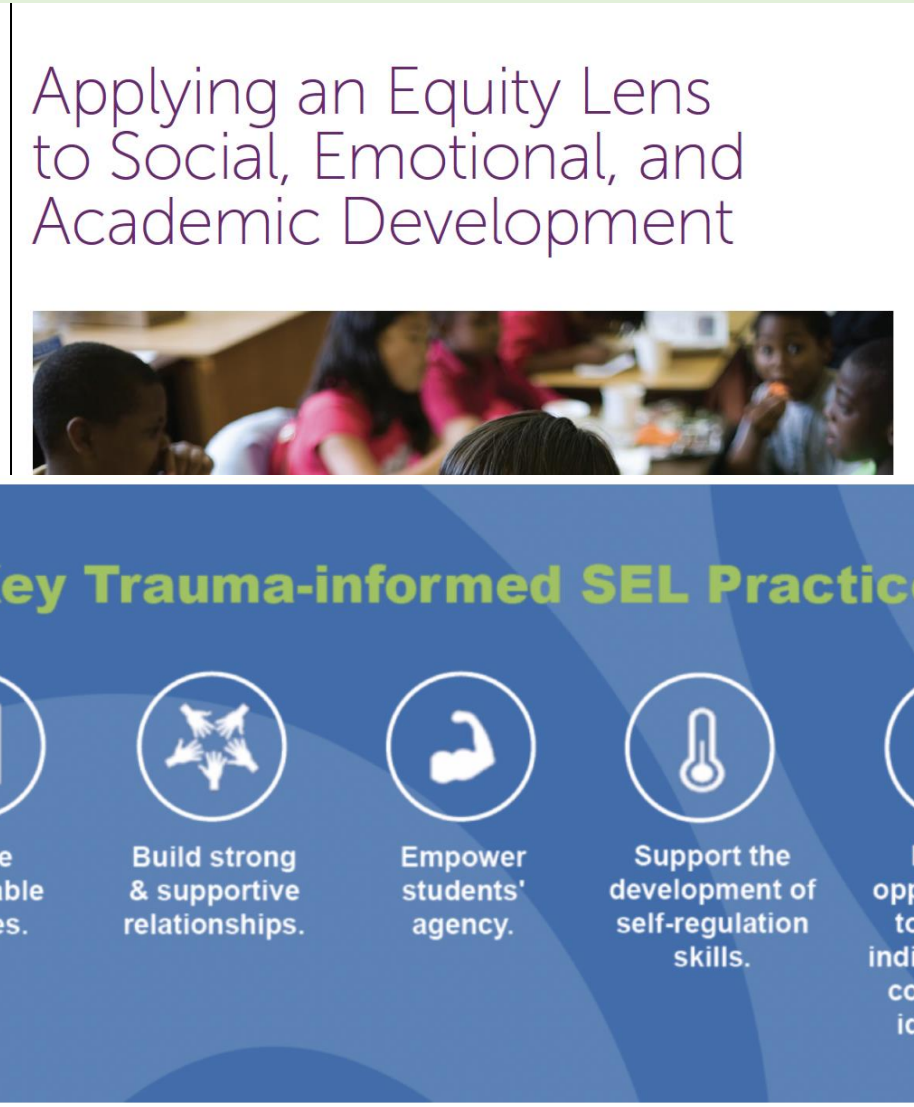
https://pg.casel.org/?_gl=1%2A1yl3ppe%2A_ga%2AMjc1NzQ5NjA5LjE2ODAwMjA2MzE.%2A_ga_WV5CMTF83E%2AMTY4MDAyMDYzMC4xLjEuMTY4MDAyMTY4Ny4wLjAuMA

Important considerations for SEL interventions: *Current directions in the field*

- Systemic SEL
- **Transformative & Trauma-informed SEL**

✓ *Do no harm*

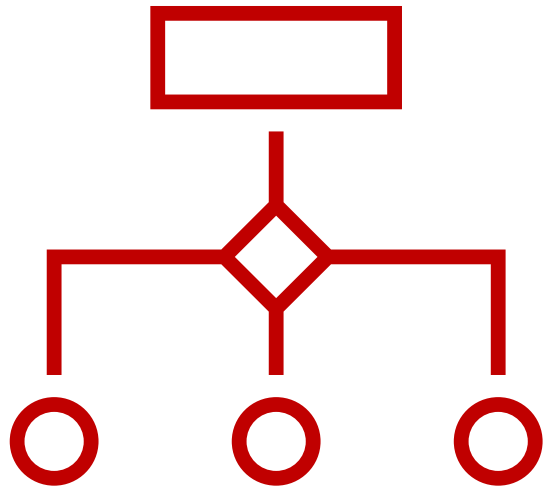
✓ Especially, in light of the global, collective *trauma* of past few years



Important considerations for SEL interventions: *Current directions in the field*

- Systemic SEL
- Transformative & Trauma-informed SEL
- **Implementation Matters**

Well-implemented, high quality SEL programs lead to…



Positive change

Durlak, 2015

Zooming in on Implementation

Important to consider when *evaluating* and *adopting* programs

Quality

-Fidelity to program
-Facilitator competence
-Program adaptations

Amount

-How much of program was delivered and how much was received?

Fit

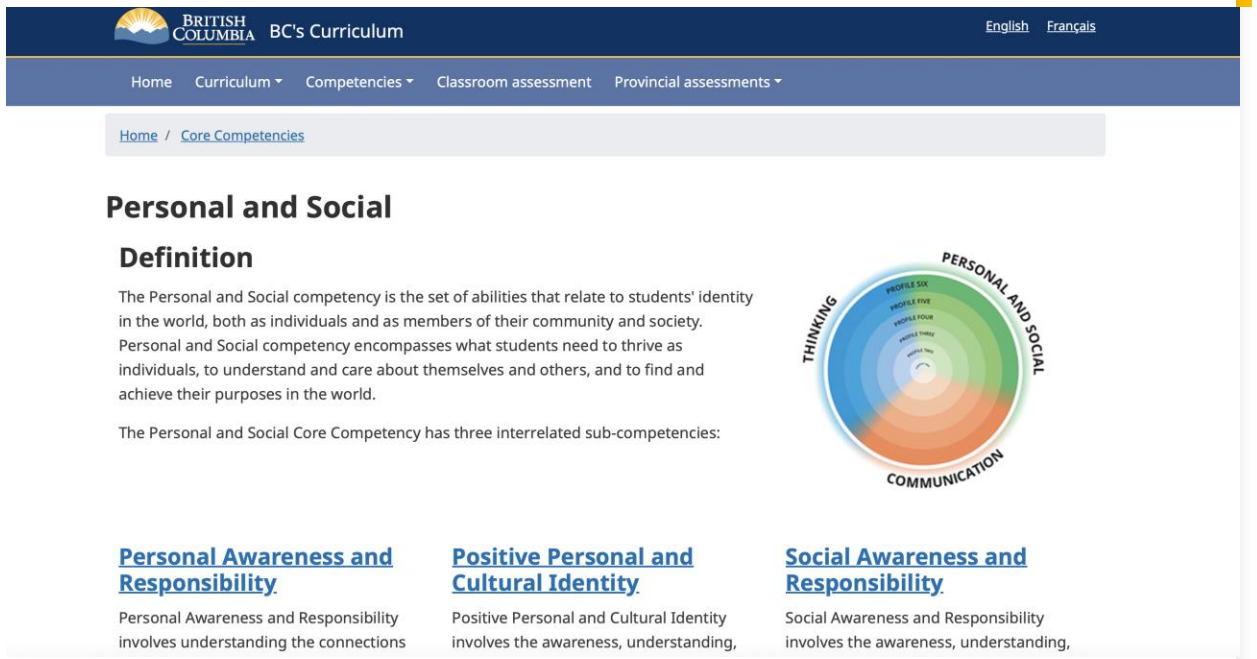
-Feasibility (*buy-in, relevance, sustainability*)
-Acceptability
-Engagement

Baelen et al., 2022; Durlak et al., 2015

BC Context & Recent Research

BC is already doing a lot of SEL in schools

- K – 12, SEL integrated into the school curriculum
- Opportunity to leverage & support what is already going on in schools



An example from 2022

Examples of SEL Activities/Programs Implemented by "*Comparison*" Teachers in recent 2022 MindUP Middle school Study	
SEL Programs	**SEL Activities**
• RULER • Second Step • Kindness in the Classroom • Zones of Regulation • My Strong Mind	• Habits of the Mind • Mindful breathing practices • Gratitude practices • First Nations Art Journaling

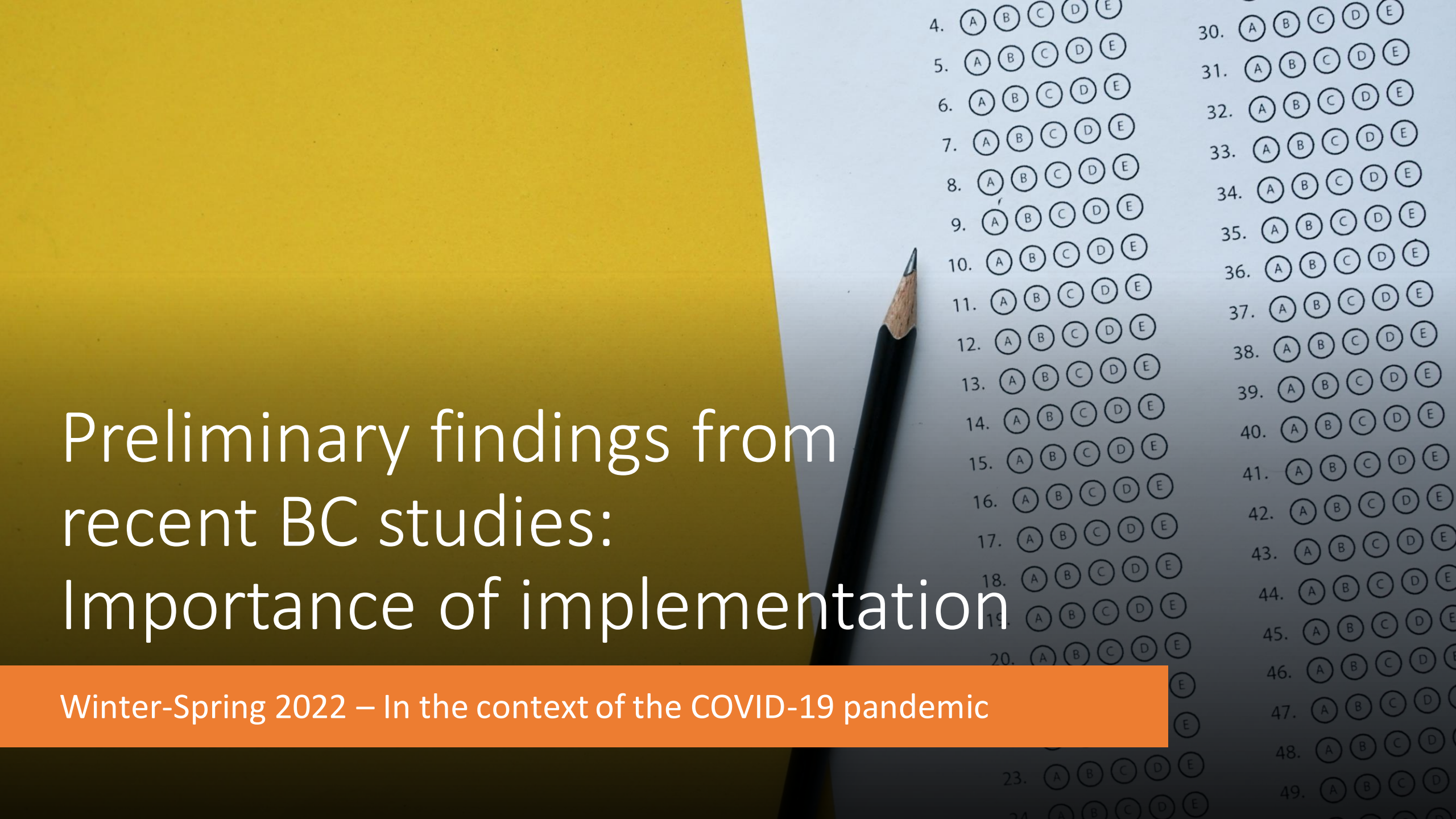
Prior Experience with Mindfulness

75% of students* reported prior experience with mindfulness practices/programs

*Out of 327 students

Preliminary findings from recent BC studies: Importance of implementation

Winter-Spring 2022 – In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic



Assessing Implementation in our studies

Quality

-Fidelity to program
-Facilitator competence
-Program adaptations

Amount

-How much of program was delivered and how much was received?

Fit

-Feasibility (*buy-in, relevance, sustainability*)
-Acceptability
-Engagement

METHOD

- Weekly implementation diaries (Program & business-as-usual [BAU] groups)
- Post-test "consumer satisfaction" surveys
- Teacher interviews

Baelen et al., 2022; Durlak et al., 2015

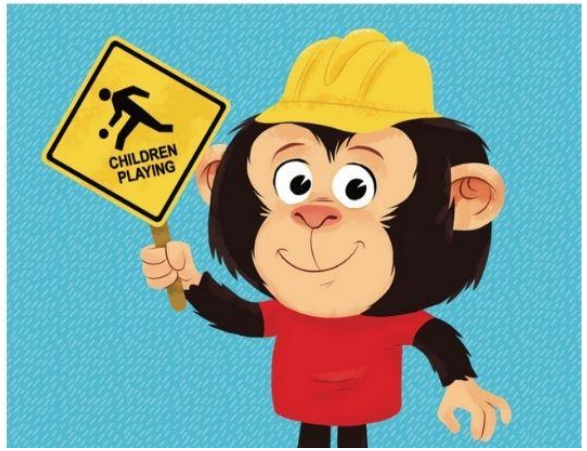
The CALM Curriculum Pilot Study

- A play-based SEL program designed for the BC context by the Fraser Valley Child Development Centre (Pre-K to Grade 2)

Note: We only saw significant changes to mental well-being in classes with **high implementation quality***

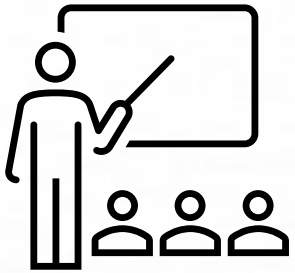
(*Index using multiple components of implementation)

- Compared to the control group, kindergarteners in the CALM program demonstrated **significantly greater improvements** in
  - social and emotional competencies
  - self-regulation
  - executive functioning
  - peer acceptance
  - student-teacher relationship quality
  - mental well-being



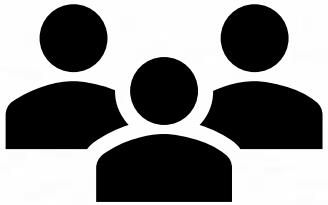
Maloney, Whitehead, & Schonert-Reichl (2023)

MindUP Middle School Study 2022



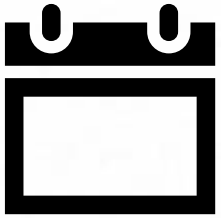
14 teachers

7 Randomized to MindUP; 7 to *Business-as-usual (BAU)*



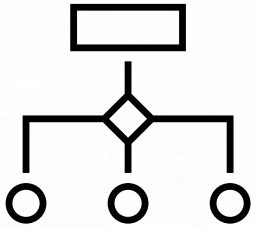
327
Grade 6 -7 Students

91% participation rate



Winter-Spring 2022

BC's 5th COVID wave



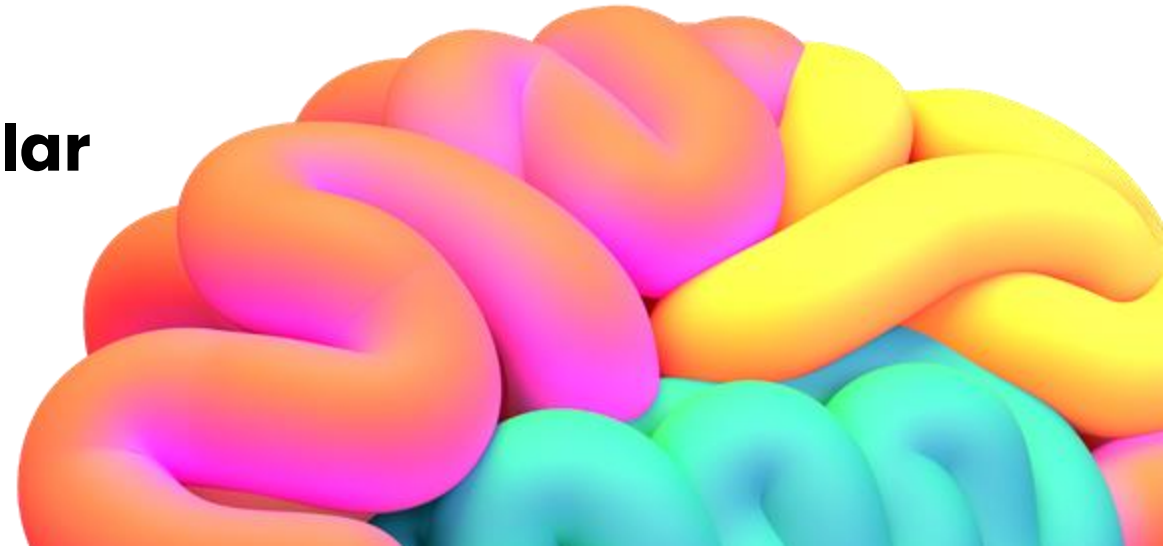
Focus on Implementation & Feasibility

(Schonert-Reichl, Whitehead, & Baelen, manuscript in preparation)

mindup For Schools | The Goldie Hawn Foundation

Mindfulness-based SEL program with grade level specific curricula:

- **Early Years (Ages 3-5),**
- **Primary (Grades K-2),**
- **Intermediate (Grades 3-5),**
- **Middle School (Grades 6-8),**
- **Out of School Time/Extra Curricular**



MindUP teachers varied in implementation quality

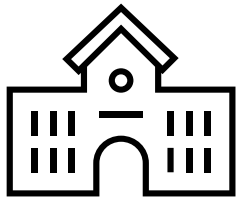
- **Dosage**: From 9 – 13 lessons implemented (out of 15)
- **Fidelity**: Low to high fidelity across lessons (adhering to the lesson as written)

STUDENT ACCEPTABILITY

WHAT DID YOU LIKE BEST ABOUT THE MINDUP MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAM?

Theme	Comment	Grade & Gender
Mindfulness activities	"When we focused how this piece of candy tasted and felt."	Grade 6 girl
	"I liked the chime because it was a time where I could relax."	Grade 6 boy
Contribution to well-being	"It was calming."	Grade 7 boy
Learning something new	"I liked learning about the way people can be mindless and not mindful, then they make mistakes and learn."	Grade 6 boy
Neuroscience	"It helped me learn more about my brain and how I can develop it."	Grade 6 girl
Program format	"Hands on."	Grade 6 girl
Prosocial activities	"The concept of empathy, I most enjoyed."	Grade 7 girl
Gratitude	"I didn't realize objects I used every day and how lucky we are and how significant it is."	Grade 7 girl

92% of students said they could use what they learned in their lives at school



Some examples from students were:

"Breathing practice when I have strong emotions."

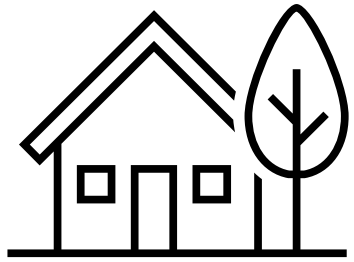
"I used breathing to focus on my homework."

"I used some things to help me fall asleep at night."

"I used it when my friends started arguing with me, I listened to why they were mad instead of getting mad back instantly."

*Based on 113/145 students who responded to the question.

91% of students said they could use what they learned in MindUP at home



Some examples from students were:

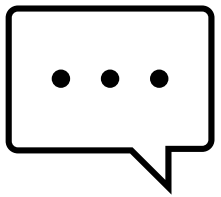
"Comforting my family when they feel sad"

"I used being mindful of my surroundings when I went outside with my dog"

"I use the breathing strategy when I get an unpleasant text from my friend"

*Based on 118/145 students who responded to the question

Key finding: Teachers reported professional & personal benefits from MindUP

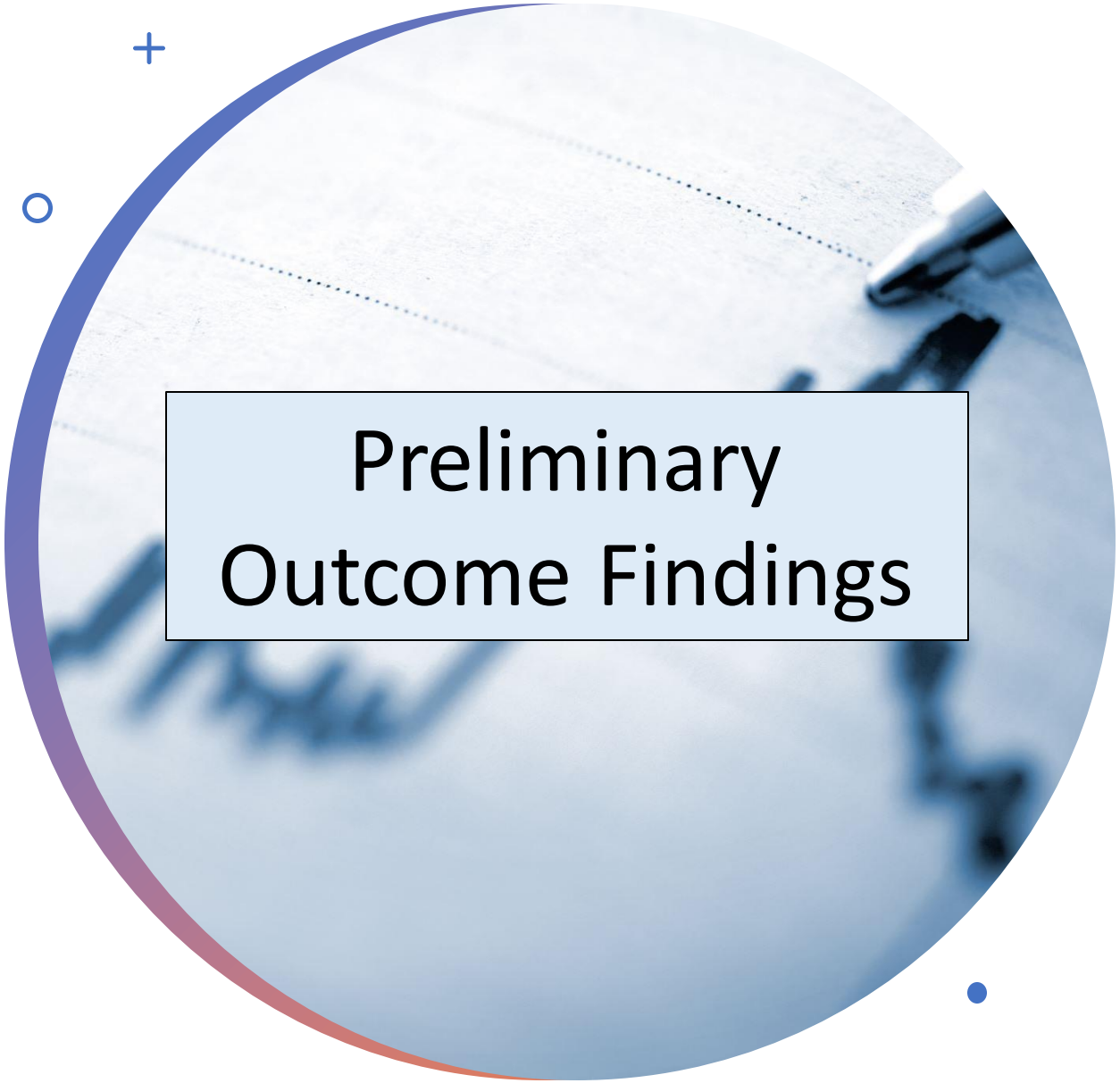


"I am finding myself pausing and noticing my emotions more, especially in times of frustration. I think this makes me a better educator!"

"I liked having a framework for introducing mindfulness, gratitude, etc. to my students that worked to extend some of the things we'd been doing in community circles since September"

"I think about the lessons more and find myself using the techniques!"

"It helped me be more mindful at school while we did the breathing exercises."



Preliminary Outcome Findings

Implementation Index

- Created an *index of implementation*
  - Dosage + Fidelity

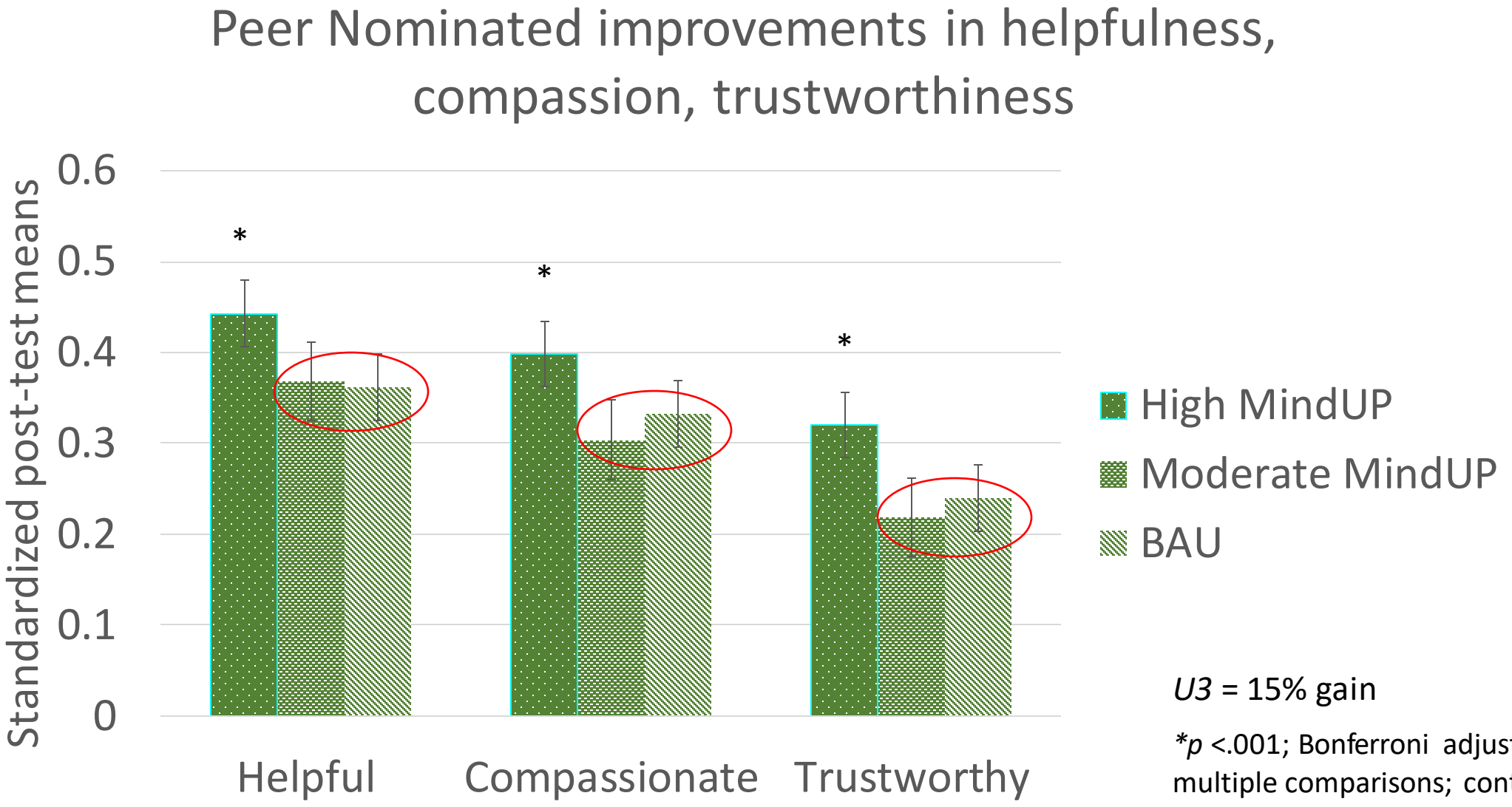
- K-means cluster analysis – 2 groups:
  - **High quality implementation** = High dosage (>73% of program) & High fidelity
  - **Moderate implementation** = Fewer lessons (9 – 11) & low to moderate fidelity

- Analyzed data between 3 groups:
  1. High MindUP
  2. Mod MindUP
  3. BAU Group

RECALL: *High SEL implementation in BAU groups*

Examples of SEL Activities/Programs Implemented by "*Comparison*" Teachers in recent 2022 MindUP Middle school Study	
SEL Programs	**SEL Activities**
• RULER • Second Step • Kindness in the Classroom • Zones of Regulation • My Strong Mind	• Habits of the Mind • Mindful breathing practices • Gratitude practices • First Nations Art Journaling

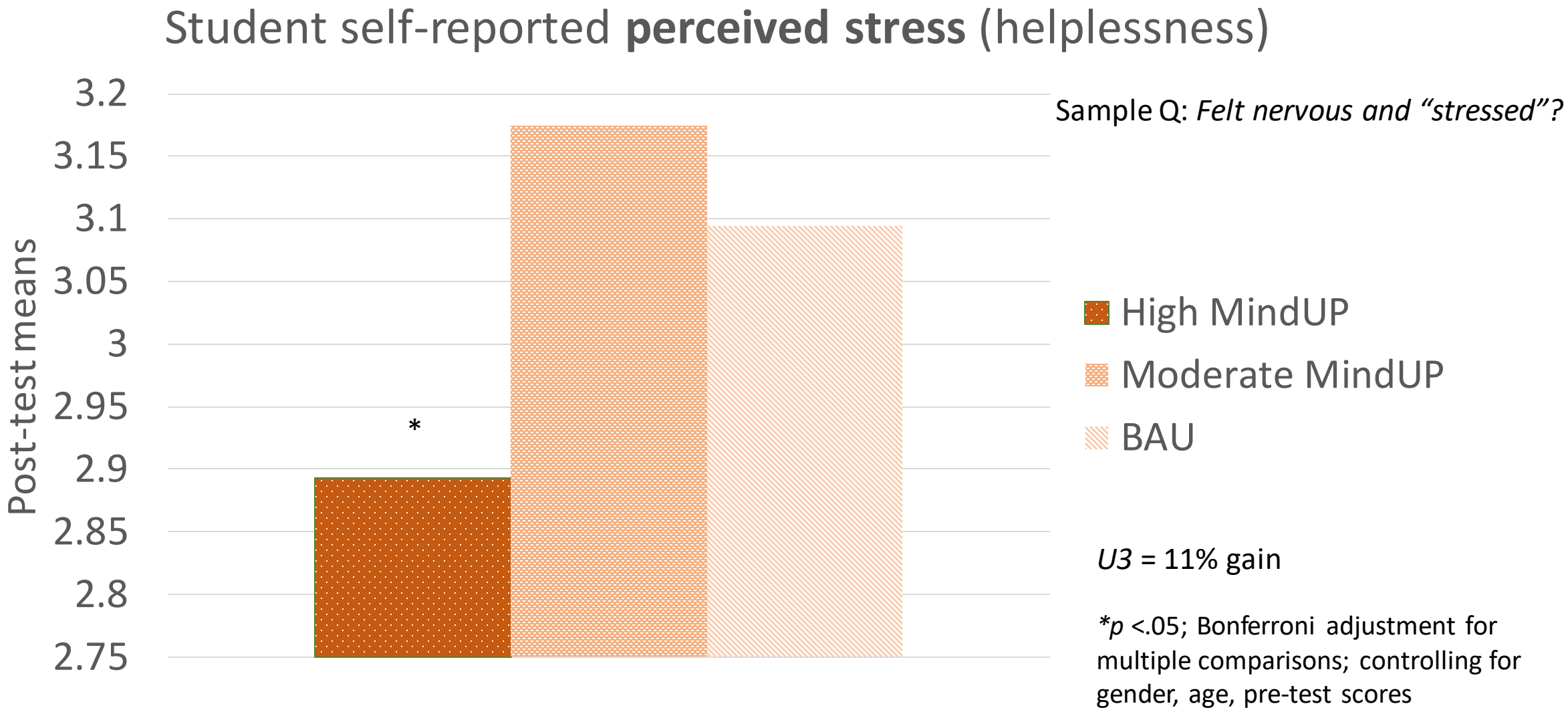
Students who received **high quality implementation** of MindUP significantly increased in helpfulness, compassion, & trustworthiness compared to students in **low quality implementation** and **BAU** classrooms.



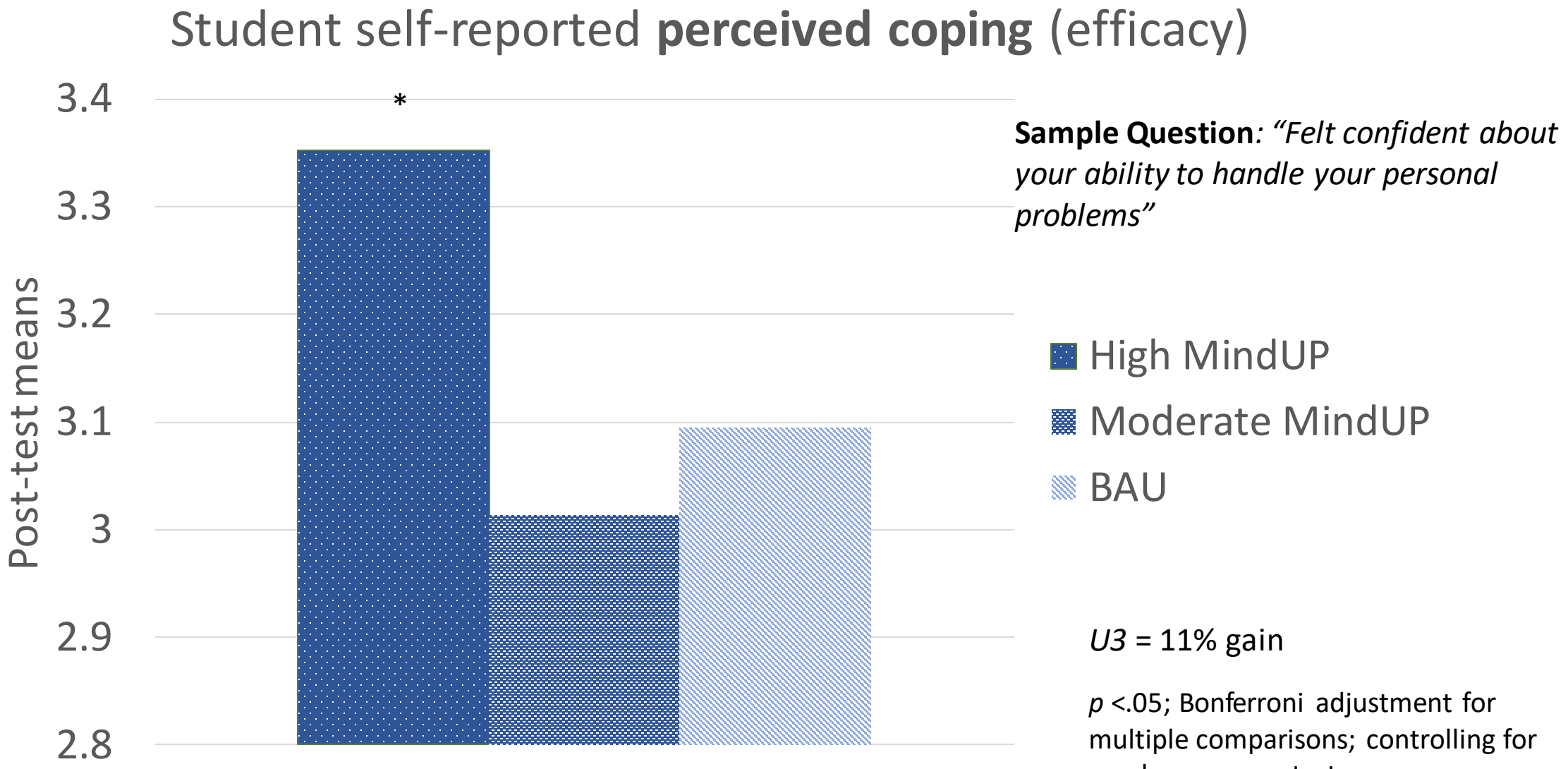
U3 = 15% gain

**p* <.001; Bonferroni adjustment for multiple comparisons; controlling for gender, age, pre-test scores

Students who received **high quality implementation** of MindUP reported **significantly lower perceived stress** at post-test compared to students in **low quality implementation** and **BAU** classrooms.



Students who received **high quality implementation** of MindUP reported **significantly higher coping** at post-test compared to students in **low quality implementation** and **BAU** classrooms.



Key Take-aways

- **SEL programs/practices can (& should) support both children and adults**
- **Importance of context-relevant & well-implemented SEL program/practices**
  - Participant & implementer buy-in & acceptability are key
- **Importance of evaluating implementation**
  - Failing to take this into account in evaluations leads to inaccurate assessments of efficacy
  - Closely monitoring what control/BAU groups are doing
- **Value of school – public health (& research) partnerships***

Thank you!

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