



THE NORA PROJECT

Evaluation Report

2021-2022



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Introduction & Executive Summary

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on children are ongoing. According to reports from the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) in which they surveyed 2,862 teachers about their experiences during the 2020-2021 school year, over half (52%) of teachers reported that their students came into the school year behind compared to a pre-pandemic year¹. For the 2020-2021 school year, 64% of teachers reported that they had more students who made less academic progress than a typical year and 45% of teachers reported they had at least half their students end the year behind academically. Teachers in all three of TNP's programs echoed the surveyed teachers' experiences with student learning loss not only academically, but also socially.

In late fall 2021, the Omicron variant hit the U.S., which produced the largest wave of COVID-19 cases since the start of the pandemic from November 2021 to the end of February 2022. In fact, in January 2022, one quarter of U.S. children missed more than a week of in-person learning due to school staff shortages and student absences². Children also made up approximately 5% of COVID-19 hospitalizations, which compared to other coronavirus waves was up to four times higher³. School children continue to need effective ways to process their emotions and their experiences as they live through a pandemic. Social-emotional learning programs, like The Nora Project, provide important lessons on empathy and inclusion and opportunities to practice SEL skills through experiential learning. Findings from the 2021-2022 impact evaluation show that while children have had to deal with academic and social learning losses, TNP provides a protective effect to help students cope with the stressors of the pandemic and build community in classrooms.



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1. U.S. Government Accountability Office WatchBlog, *The Three Rs of the Pandemic Learning: Roadblocks, Resilience, and Resources*, Posted June 14, 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.gao.gov/blog/three-rs-pandemic-learning-roadblocks-resilience-and-resources>
 2. Author, *School is Back in Person, but the Five-Day School Week Often Isn't*, (February 28, 2022) New York Times. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/28/upshot/schools-covid-closings.html>
 3. Koslov, M, *Does Omicron hit kids harder? Scientists are trying to find out*, (February 4, 2022) Nature. Retrieved from: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-00309-x>

Introduction & Executive Summary Cont.

Key Findings: Primer

Research shows that children are more vulnerable to the emotional impact of traumatic events such as the COVID-19 pandemic⁴. Identifying and talking about emotions helps children to understand their mental health and how to manage stress. Children in the Primer program not only learn about empathy, but also how to identify and talk about their emotions and manage conflict.

From pre to post, teachers in Primer classrooms reported positive changes in student behavior and learning of key Primer concepts. Specifically, findings show:

- Students made the most gains in understanding diversity (72% increase), the word 'disability' (63% increase), and disability as a form of human diversity (68% increase).
- Teachers noticed positive changes in students resolving conflict without intervention (65% increase) and collaborating on tasks (27% increase).
- Teachers also noted changes in students identifying emotions (16% increase), emotional management (16% increase), and demonstrating empathy (16% increase).

Key Findings: Storyteller

Research suggests that a way to combat loneliness, depression, anxiety and an inward focus is to engage in ways that demonstrate care and concern for others. The Storyteller Program is designed to do just that, bringing students together and allowing them to safely share their stories with one another.

Student empathy scores did not follow trends from previous years in aggregate or when broken out by gender, yet students in TNP Storyteller classrooms scored significantly higher in affective empathy and inclusive beliefs and behaviors than peers in non-TNP classrooms using other SEL programs. Students also increased their comfort with and knowledge of how to facilitate diverse relationships and inclusive academic and social experiences. Students also reported increases in identity pride.⁶

4. The National Children's Traumatic Stress Network. *How Early Childhood Trauma is Unique*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/early-childhood-trauma/effects>

5. Boudreau, E. (2020) Cultivating Empathy in the Coronavirus Crisis, [Blog post] Usable Knowledge, Harvard Graduate School of Education. Retrieved from: <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/20/03/cultivating-empathy-coronavirus-crisis>

6. McAuliff, K., Doll, M., & Crum, K. (2022) An Evaluation of The Nora Project's Storyteller Project. Retrieved from: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-DR24YsAshMOLrfl4BhZ--vDsTATl85L/view?usp=sharing>



Introduction & Executive Summary Cont.

Educators reporting on classroom and individual student behavior changes indicated increases in empathy, collaboration, and inclusion among their students and a decrease in conflict and disruptive behavior. Specifically:

- Teachers overwhelmingly agreed that the Storyteller Project had a positive impact on students' ability to show empathy towards their peers in the classroom, to accept others for who they are, to include their peers in activities at recess, and to work together.
- When asked to rate changes in individual student behavior, teachers saw an increased ability to socialize with peers without adult support, an increase in kindness toward all classmates, and an increase in confidence. Over half of teachers also noted a decrease in conflict with other students and disruptive behavior.

Key Findings: STEMpathy

Research and best practices in education show that giving children choice in their learning and ways to demonstrate their understanding, such as through student-driven, problem-based learning, helps children feel in control of their learning⁷.

The STEMpathy Club is designed to give students control over their learning to make positive, inclusive changes to their environment and to optimize belonging for all.

- All teachers responded that STEMpathy Club members identified problems and generated solutions to create a more inclusive environment for people of all abilities for the school community.
- Almost half of students (44%) responding to the STEMpathy survey reported that the club affected how they think of themselves. Students went on to describe that the club helped them to think of themselves in a more positive light and as important community members.

More in-depth findings are included in the full evaluation report below.

7. Draiger, C. and Wilson, D. (2016) How to Give Children More Control Over their Learning, [Blog post] Education Week Teacher. Retrieved from: <https://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2016/03/08/give-students-more-control-over-their-learning.html>

Program Background

Since the death of George Floyd in the summer of 2020, school districts throughout the country have been grappling with how to bring Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion curriculum into their schools. Of course, this challenge coincides with the COVID-19 pandemic, which has resulted in widespread trauma for children. Schools are therefore dealing simultaneously with how to address two major societal issues--social justice for marginalized people and emotional wellness for all students. In Illinois, as in other states, these priorities have been set forth in guidelines published by the State Board of Education. These guidelines encourage educator self-reflection, anti-bias training, and provide educators with a checklist of tools and strategies for supporting students of all identities equitably and with empathy.

The Nora Project is ideally situated to meet the current moment. An education-based nonprofit founded in 2016, The Nora Project's mission is to promote disability inclusion by empowering educators and engaging students and communities. To that end, they developed a program suite for students from preschool to high school, advancing what they call the Ability Inclusive Mindset, AIM, which is grounded in three core values and encourages the cultivation of three key behaviors:

Values:

- (1) Accessible spaces are better spaces;
- (2) Inclusive activities are richer activities; and
- (3) All human lives have equal value.

Behaviors:

- (1) Approach relationships with empathy;
- (2) Plan thoughtfully and creatively; and
- (3) Take risks.

Three programs make up The Nora Project Lifecycle Program Suite: the Primer Pack, for grades preschool through third, which “primes” kids to think and act like includers; the Storyteller Project, for fourth through eighth grade and high school, which centers around knowing and sharing our stories to forge connections; and the STEMpathy Club (for middle and high school students), which allows students to design more inclusive school and community spaces. More detail on these programs is set forth later in this report. Each of the three programs is designed for students of all abilities, with carefully differentiated lesson plans including visual, audio, and other supports so all learners can access the entire curriculum. Nora Project programs take a deep dive into the concepts of empathy and inclusion, teach about disability as a part of human diversity, and position the disability rights movement as a powerful force for social change that benefits all. The programs connect what students are learning to the real world, offering them authentic opportunities to practice the skills they learn during direct instruction. The Program Suite is written by teachers, for teachers, and every participating classroom or club has a dedicated, on-demand Nora Project program coach.

Evaluation Design and Methodology

A mixed-methods approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data, was taken to evaluate The Nora Project on participating students' knowledge, attitude, and behavior change, as well as acquisition of new skills. The evaluation presented here utilized survey data collected from students and teachers from August 2021 to June 2022 to inform the outcome evaluation. In order to explore areas of program impact and individual outcomes that the closed-question surveys did not cover, open-ended survey questions were utilized, and a qualitative study was conducted. The mixed-method study aimed to answer the following evaluation questions:

1. How have participating students' knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs changed because of their participation in The Nora Project?
2. How have these changes influenced student behaviors?
3. Has participation in The Nora Project improved classroom culture and the way students relate to and interact with one another?
4. How are the program materials, curricula, program training, and coaching on The Nora Project programs received by teachers?

Evaluation Measures and Program Participants

Survey Name	Respondent Type	Number of Respondents	Data Collection Timeframe
Primer Teacher Student Observation Assessment	Pre-K-3rd Grade Teachers	16 (matched pairs)	8/21-6/22
Storyteller Student Assessment	4-5th Grade Students	741 (pre) 620 (post)	8/21-6/22
STEMpathy Student Survey	5-6th Grade Students	16	5/22-6/22
Teacher Surveys for each program	Pre-K-3rd Grade Teachers	45	5/22-6/22

Descriptions of how the survey data were analyzed and findings are included in the sections that follow.

Evaluation Design and Methodology Cont.

Data Analysis

As mentioned previously, a mixed-methods approach was employed for this evaluation. Students and teachers completed surveys via Survey Monkey. The Evaluation Consultant downloaded and cleaned each dataset (i.e. checked for and removed any errors in data entry, such as duplicate responses), and conducted descriptive analyses (e.g. frequencies, percentages, mean responses) of individual survey items pertinent to the evaluation questions.

The Evaluation Consultant developed an iterative process for coding open-ended survey questions from each of the three survey types, which resulted in two cycles of analyses: (1) pattern, and (2) conceptual model building. A categorized inventory of the open-ended survey questions' content was conducted and set the groundwork for thematic analysis. Pattern coding was used to organize thematic patterns that describe phenomena in the qualitative data that relate to specific evaluation questions. Following pattern coding, the Evaluation Consultant developed conceptual models by linking themes and emergent codes generated from the first cycle of analysis to create a higher-level understanding about the impact of The Nora Project.

Evaluation Findings

Analyses of survey data from teachers more so than students this year show that teaching empathy and inclusion directly affects students' knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about empathy, kindness, being a self-advocate and peer ally and advocating for an inclusive environment. Teachers reported positive behavior changes attributed to The Nora Project such as an increase in empathic behavior, capacity to manage emotions and resolve conflict, and being more inclusive inside and outside the classroom. Teachers also reported a more positive classroom culture or school environment attributed to The Nora Project due to students using problem-solving skills, being kind to one another, and advocating for a more inclusive school environment. Student survey data show that empathy scores demonstrated less gains than previous years, but continued to show a trend in increased understanding of inclusion, especially compared to students not receiving TNP instruction.

Evaluation Findings: Primer Pack

With regard to implementing the Nora Project curricula, teachers in the Primer Pack Program and Storyteller Program reported teaching lessons more often than the recommended minimum amount. Teachers were also asked to what extent they implemented each part of the curriculum. There seems to be some variability in implementation in all three curricula. This variability may impact student outcomes due to the intervention (a Nora Project Program) not being implemented to fidelity. Since we are relying on teacher self-reports rather than a fidelity measure, it is not known how not implementing or partially implementing a portion of a curriculum affects student learning and outcomes. Please see the recommendation section for more information on next steps. The sections below cover evaluation findings from the 2021-2022 school year organized by program.

Primer Pack Program

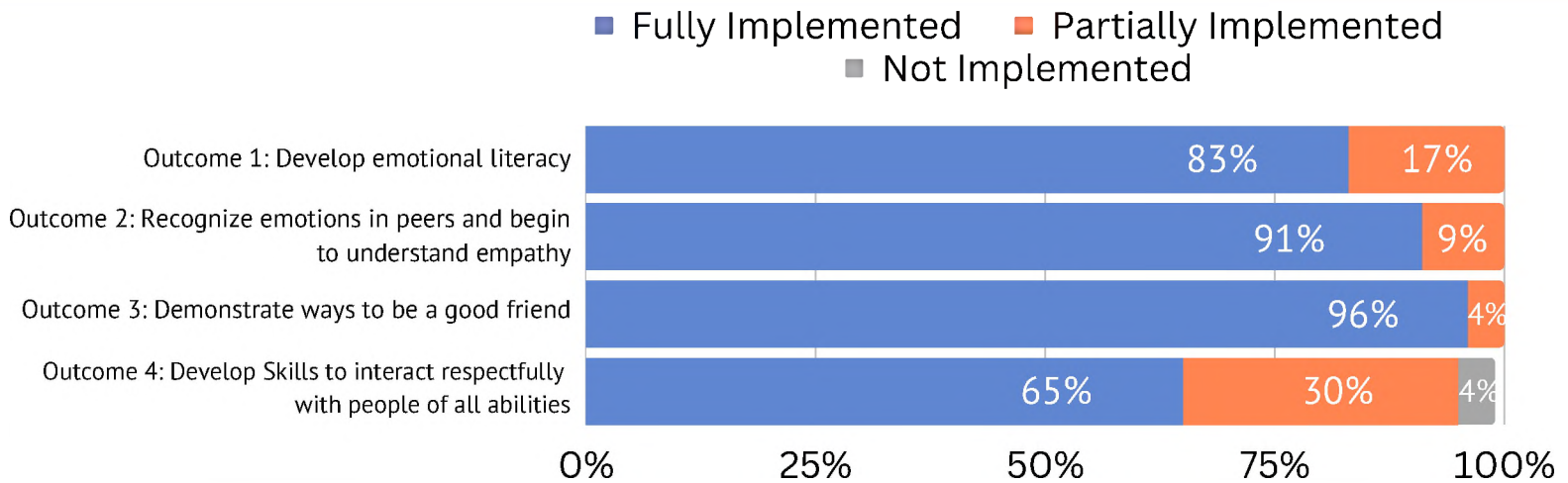
The Primer Pack is a classroom curricular program that teaches a variety of social emotional learning concepts and skills including emotional literacy, emotional regulation, empathy, friendship, inclusion, disability awareness, how to ask respectful questions, and how to adapt activities so that all can participate. The materials are designed for students in preschool through third grade. Because the Primer Program is focused on young learners, the evaluation does not rely on individual student self-reports, but rather teacher observations of individual students and reflections on their class as a whole.

Almost all (70%) of teachers reported teaching the Primer Pack curriculum once a week (61%) or more (9%). Most Primer teachers reported that they implemented outcomes 1, 2, and 3 fully, with a third of teachers reporting that they either did not implement outcome 4 or only partially.

Most Primer teachers **implemented the curriculum fully.**

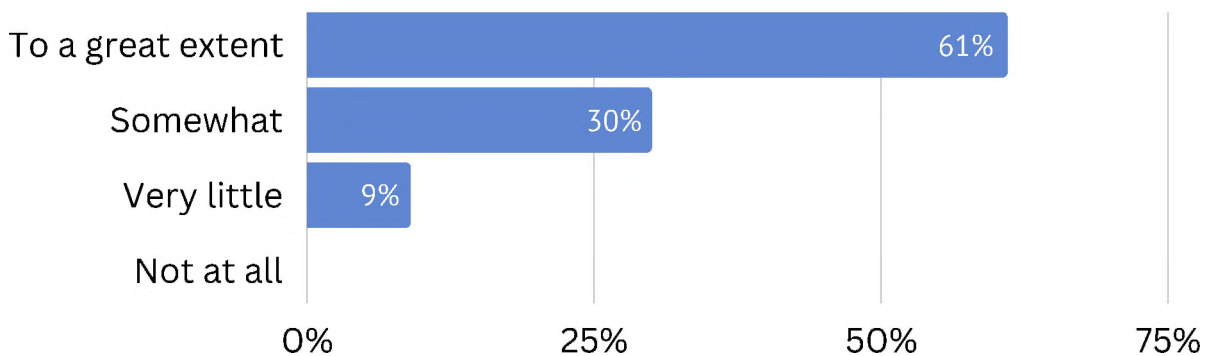


Evaluation Findings: Primer Pack Cont.



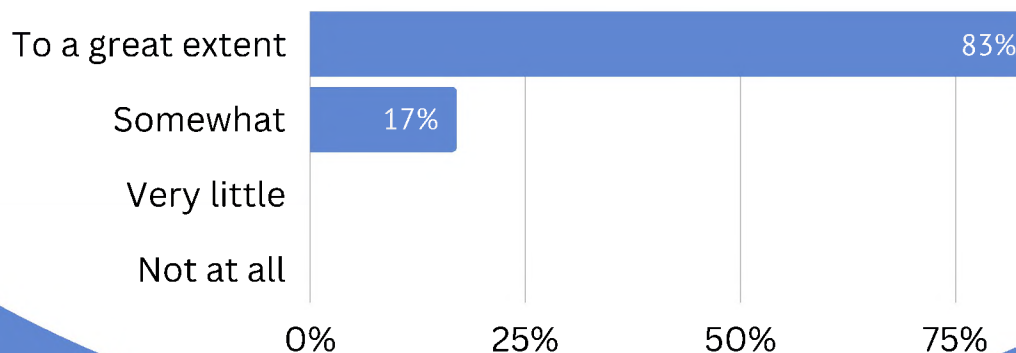
Primer teachers were asked to what extent the Primer Program helped their students cope with the stressors of the pandemic. An overwhelming majority of teachers shared that Primer Pack lessons made a difference as shown in the graph below.

Most teachers reported (91%) that the **lessons** in the Primer Program **helped students cope with the stressors of the pandemic**.



Teachers were also asked to what extent TNP helped build community with their students. All Primer teachers reported that the program helped to foster community in their classrooms.

All Primer teachers reported that **TNP helped to build community with their students**.



Evaluation Findings: Primer Pack Cont.

“I think this year more than ever we needed a strong SEL program. The effects of the pandemic on our kids are immense. Students came to my classroom with little to no problem-solving skills, unable to follow simple directions and have consistently struggled to regulate their bodies and emotions. Directly teaching the outcomes in the Nora Project have helped with all of these things.”

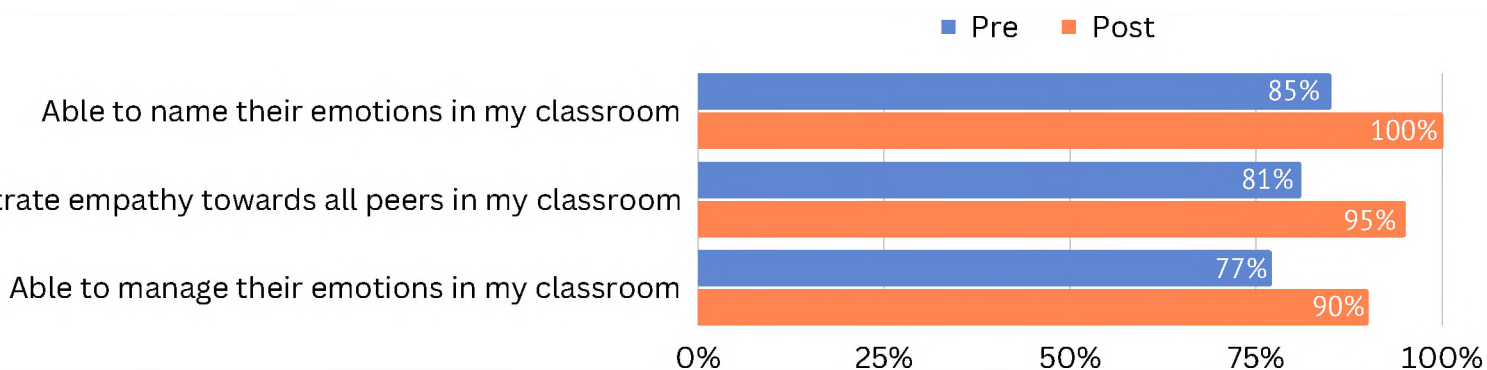
- Jennifer Garza, Joseph Sears Elementary School, Primer Program Teacher

“I think TNP is a great program to help build relationships in classrooms. I think the progression of the outcomes was very intentional and it flows nicely as the year progresses. When kids learn about their feelings, how they affect others, friendship and diversity, they are better equipped to build and maintain relationships. There was a common understanding created.”

- Julie Garcia, Pioneer School, Primer Program Teacher

Primer teachers were asked to rate students at the beginning and end of the school year on aspects of key learning objectives for the Primer program concerning identifying emotions, emotional management, and demonstrating empathy. A comparison of pre/post survey data show students made gains in naming their emotions, managing their emotions and demonstrating empathy as the graphs below show. Responses are grouped by positive responses (agreed or strongly agreed) and compared pre to post.

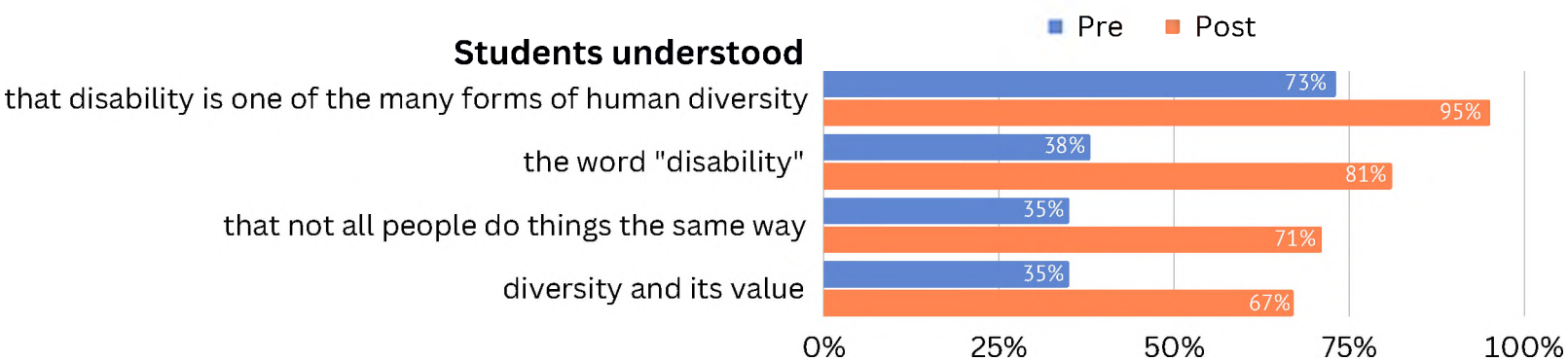
Primer students **made gains in their understanding** of and **managing their emotions** and **demonstrating empathy** towards their peers.



Evaluation Findings: Primer Pack Cont.

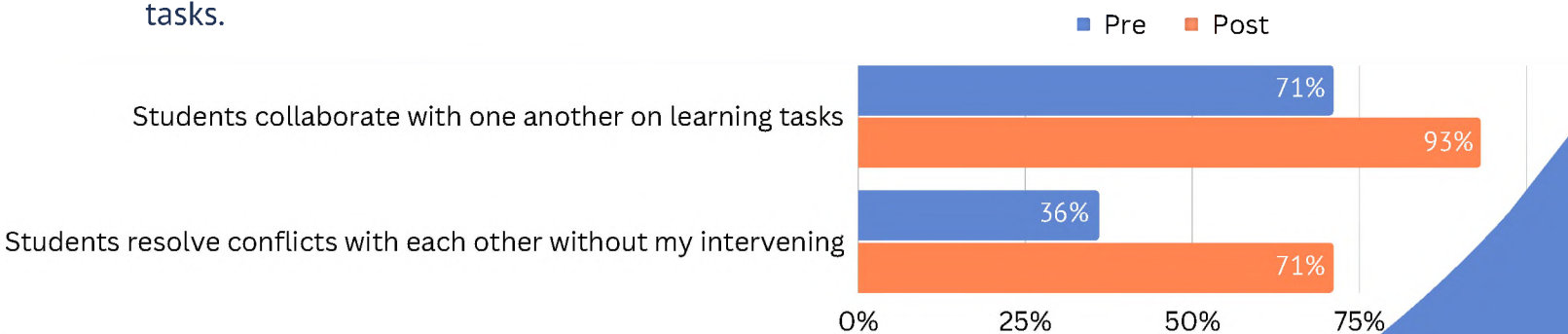
Teachers were also asked to rate students' understanding of key concepts of the Primer curriculum at the beginning and end of the school year. When comparing teachers' ratings pre and post, students made the most gains in understanding not all people do things the same way, understanding diversity, the word 'disability,' and disability as a form of human diversity as shown in the graphs below. Responses are grouped by positive responses (agreed or strongly agreed) and compare pre to post.

Primer students made **substantial gains in understanding disability and diversity.**



Teachers also rated items regarding classroom climate. Two items that pertained to key learning objectives of the Primer curriculum were student collaboration and conflict resolution without the teacher intervening. According to teacher ratings, students made gains in collaboration and resolving conflict as the graphs below show. Responses are grouped by positive responses (agreed or strongly agreed) and compare pre to post.

Primer students made **gains in resolving conflict** and **collaborating with their peers** on tasks.



Evaluation Findings: Storyteller Project

Storyteller Project

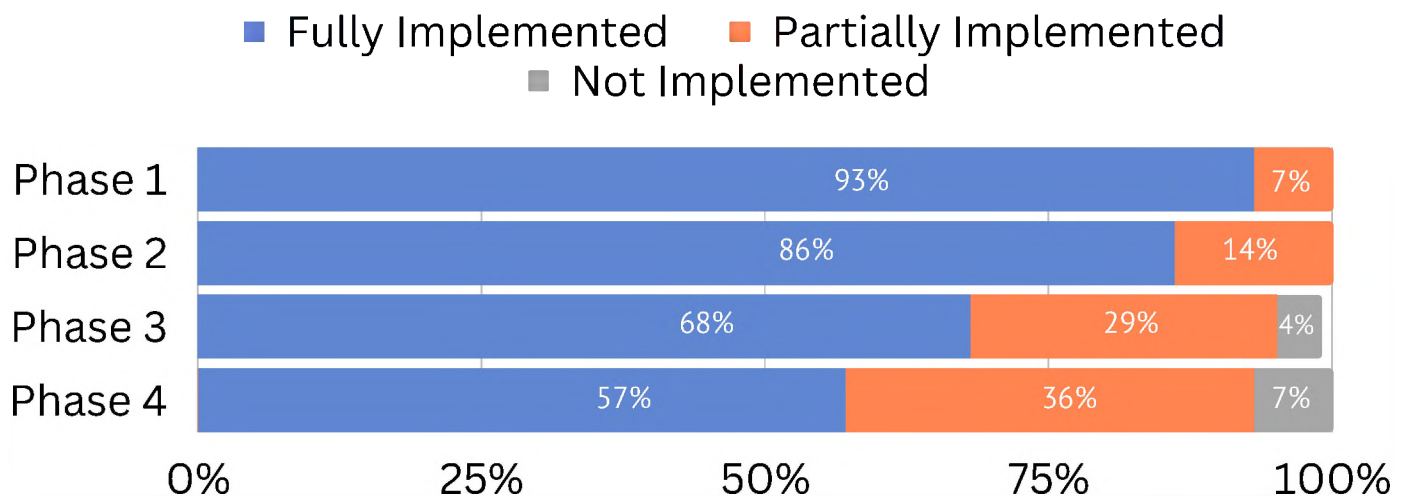
Since 2016, The Nora Project has implemented its flagship program, the Storyteller Project, for 4th-8th grade and high school students of all abilities. Over time, and due to feedback and data analysis, the program has evolved. In its current state, students of all abilities learn about empathy, disability rights, inclusion, storytelling and advocacy. Students work in mixed-ability groups to examine their own identities, get to know each other's stories, develop friendships based



on what they have in common, and create documentaries that share what the project has taught them about the importance of inclusion.

Almost all teachers reported teaching the Storyteller program once a week (43%) or 2 or more times per week (46%). Storyteller teachers reported fully implementing most of the curriculum, yet 43% reported either partially implementing phase 4 (36%) or not at all (7%).

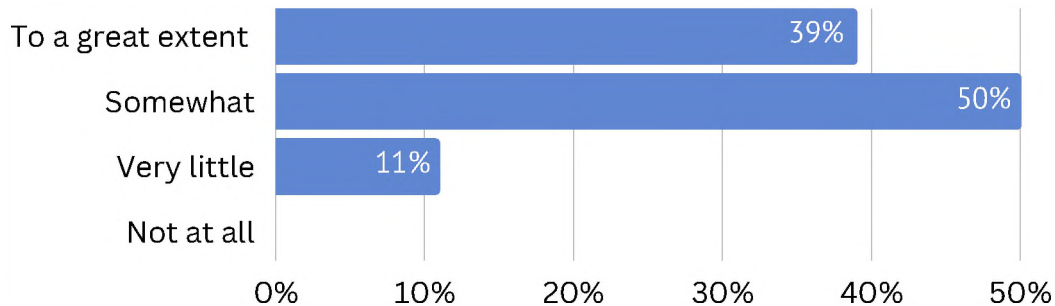
Most Storyteller Program teachers **fully implemented phases 1-3** of the curriculum.



Evaluation Findings: Storyteller Project Cont.

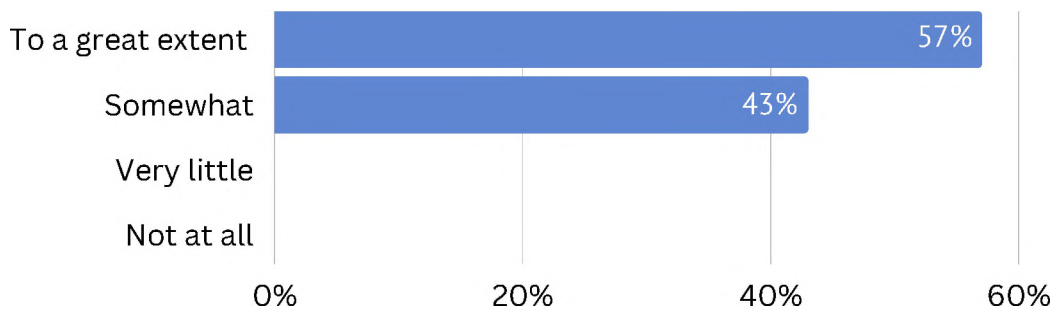
Teachers in Storyteller classrooms were asked to report to what extent program lessons helped students cope with the stressors of the pandemic. Nearly all (89%) of teachers reported that Storyteller lessons helped students as shown in the graph below.

Most Storyteller teachers reported that **the program lessons helped students cope with the stressors of the pandemic.**



When asked to what extent the Storyteller program helped to build community in their classrooms, all teachers replied to a great extent or somewhat as shown below.

All Storyteller teachers reported that **the program helped to build community in their classrooms.**



Teachers were also asked “Have you noticed a difference in your students due to COVID regarding social skills, peer interactions, and/or classroom management?” All teachers who answered the question (79% of survey respondents) shared that COVID-19 has impacted their students negatively. The quotes below describe examples in which students struggled and how the Storyteller Program provided ways to address these struggles.

Evaluation Findings: Storyteller Project Cont.

“Absolutely, students are engaging in a lot more conflicts with one another and are really struggling with basic social skills. TNP has given us a common language to discuss conflicts as they arise and to look at our differences as valuable vs. problematic.”

- Courtney Daily, Pioneer School, Storyteller Teacher

“My students were far less mature this year and struggled initially socially. Very early on, they talked quite openly about struggling with anxiety and other invisible disabilities. I believe that TNP lessons gave them the space to discuss those topics. In doing so, they discovered that many students were feeling similarly and struggling post Covid. We talked regularly about coping strategies.”

- Kerry Duffey, Indian Knoll, Storyteller Teacher

Students in participating Storyteller classrooms are given a survey that measures key project outcomes two times during the school year: (1) at the beginning of the program before any instruction had taken place, and (2) at the end of the program, after students had screened their documentaries at the conclusion of the school year. The survey data below shows promising signs of program impact on participating students with regards to inclusion-based questions about being comfortable approaching a child with a disability and knowing how to include children of all abilities in play and a departure from trends established in previous years regarding empathy scores.

In order to measure empathy, a research-validated questionnaire called EmQue-CA is included in the Storyteller Student Impact Surveys. The EmQue-CA contains 18 statements and students select from 3 responses – Not True, Sometimes True, or Always True about how they feel for each statement. The EmQue-CA has three domains that measure three kinds of empathy:

- Affective Empathy - A scale that measures the extent to which the child/adolescent feels for the emotional state of the suffering person,
- Cognitive Empathy - A scale that measures the extent to which the child/adolescent understands why the other person is in distress,
- Prosocial Motivation - A scale that measures the extent to which the child/adolescent is inclined to actually help or support the suffering person.⁸

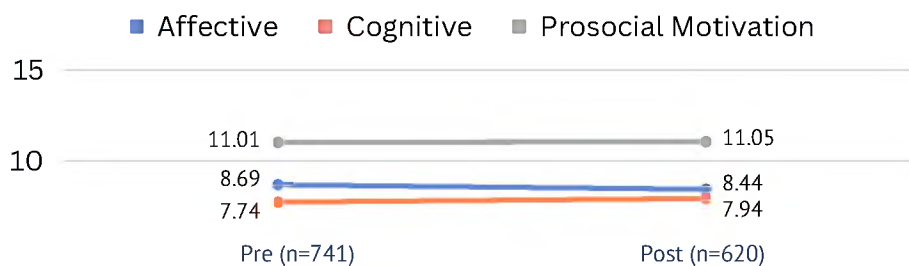
8. Overgaauw, S., Rieffe, C., Broekhof, E., Crone, E. A., & Güroğlu, B. (2017). Assessing Empathy across Childhood and Adolescence: Validation of the Empathy Questionnaire for Children and Adolescents (EmQue-CA). *Frontiers in psychology*, 8, 870.

Evaluation Findings: Storyteller Project Cont.

Research has shown that children and adolescents who score high on Affective Empathy bully less and have better friendship qualities.^{9,10} Research also shows that as boys move from childhood into middle adolescence, their Affective Empathy scores decrease, while girls' scores increase.^{11,12}

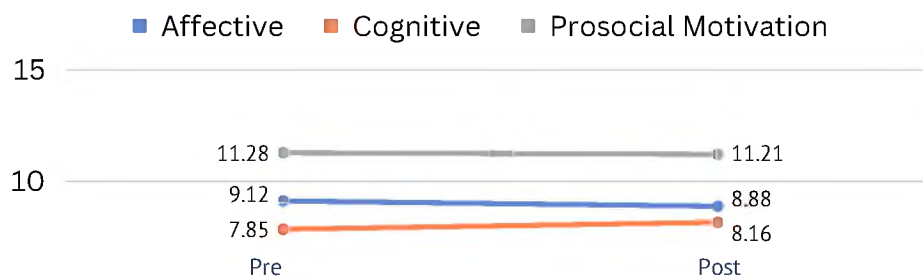
This year's Storyteller student empathy data did not follow trends from previous years. In the last three years, Storyteller students have increased their empathy scores from pre to post. This year, empathy scores tended to remain level with students making slight gains in Cognitive Empathy and Prosocial Motivation domains as shown in the graph below.

Storyteller students made the most **gains** in **Cognitive Empathy**.



Like the overall trend shown above, girls made gains in Cognitive Empathy. This is a departure from previous years' trends where girls' Prosocial Motivation scores increased most from pre to post.

Storyteller girls made the most **gains** in **Cognitive Empathy**.



9. Stavrinides P., Georgiou S., Theofanous V. (2010). Bullying and empathy: a short-term longitudinal investigation. *Educ. Psychol.* 30 793–802. 10.

10. Berndt T. J. (2002). Friendship quality and social development. *Curr. Dir. Psychol. Sci.* 11 7–10.

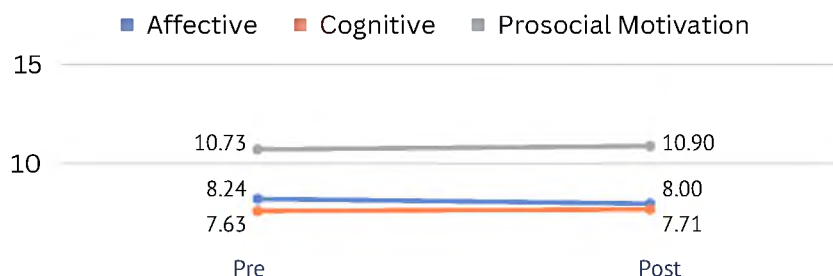
11. Van der Graaff J., Branje S., De Wied M., Hawk S., Van Lier P., Meeus W. (2014). Perspective taking and empathic concern in adolescence: gender differences in developmental changes. *Dev. Psychol.* 50 881–888.

12. Taylor S. J., Barker L. A., Heavey L., McHale S. (2013). The typical developmental trajectory of social and executive functions in late adolescence and early adulthood. *Dev. Psychol.* 49 1253–1265.

Evaluation Findings: Storyteller Project Cont.

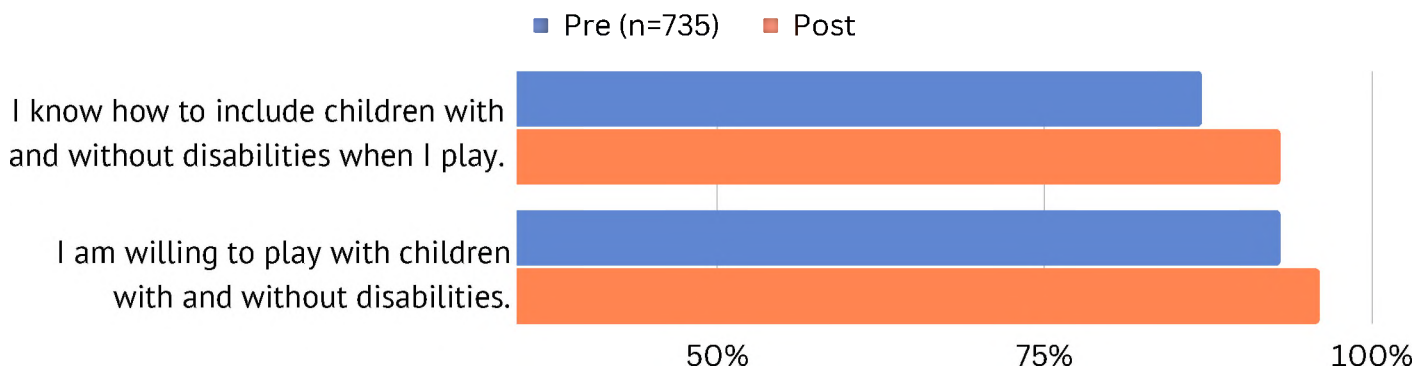
Boys made slight gains in Cognitive and Prosocial Motivation. This is also a departure from previous years' trends where boys' Affective Empathy scores increased most from pre to post.

Storyteller boys made the most **gains** in **Prosocial Motivation**.



Following previous years' trends, students reported an increase in their comfort playing in mixed ability groups and knowledge of how to include all children of all abilities in their play.

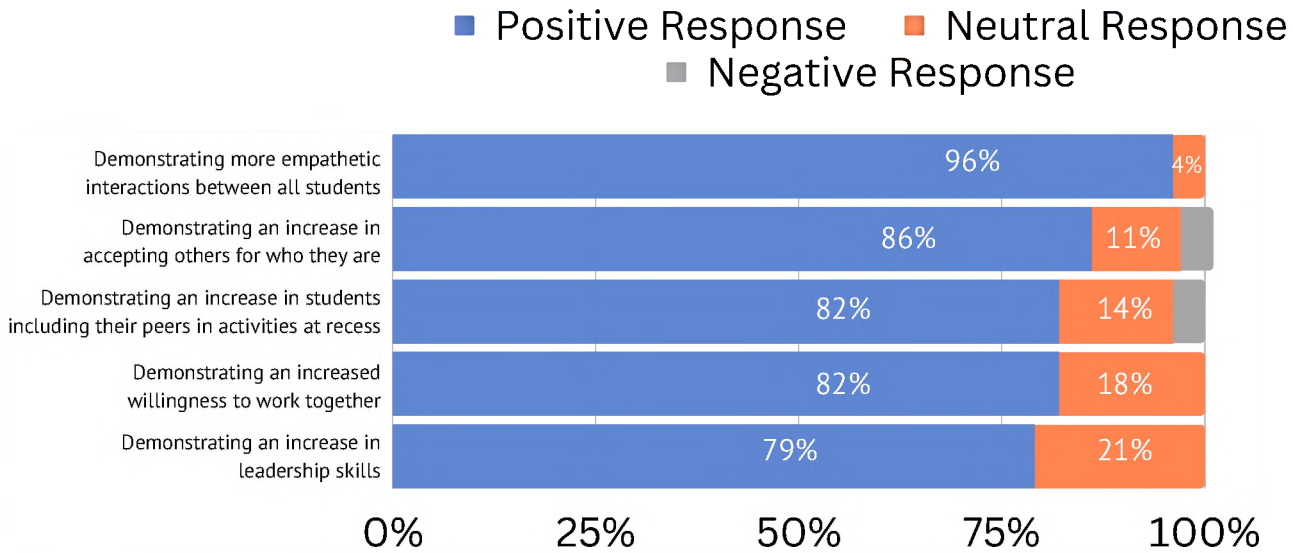
Storyteller students reported an **increase** in their **comfort playing with children with and without disabilities** and **knowledge of how to include** all children in their play.



Like Primer teachers, Storyteller teachers were asked to rate to what extent they agreed with statements describing their students' behavior in the classroom, during recess and outside of the classroom as a result of participating in the program. Teachers overwhelmingly agreed that the Storyteller Project had a positive impact on students' ability to show empathy towards their peers in the classroom, accept others for who they are, include peers in recess activities, work together and demonstrate leadership skills. The following graph shows teacher responses grouped by positive (agreed or strongly agreed), neutral (neither agreed or disagreed), or negative (disagree or strongly disagree).

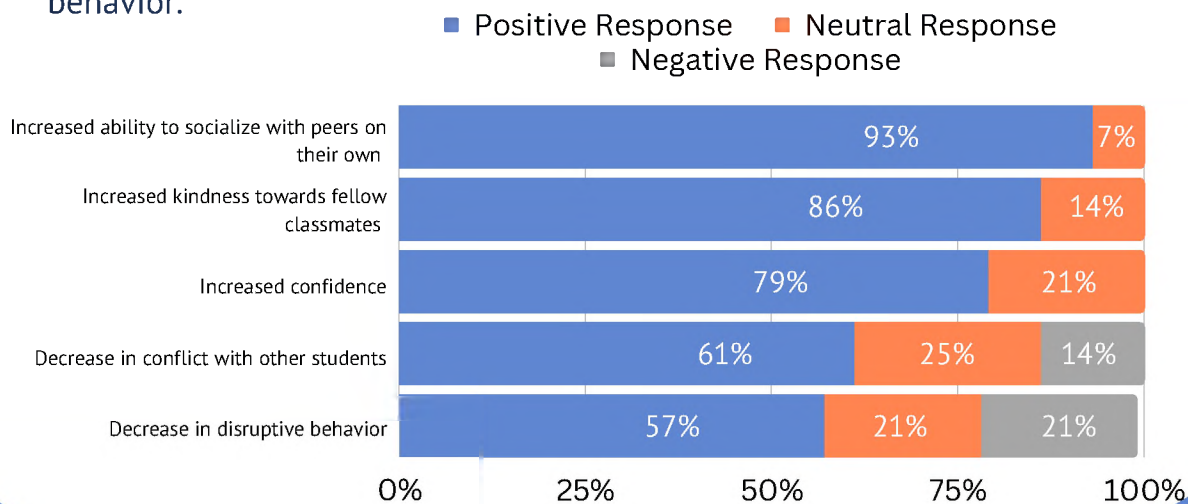
Evaluation Findings: Storyteller Project Cont.

Teachers **agree** the Storyteller Program had a **positive impact** on classroom culture.



Teachers were also asked to rate individual student behavior changes. Teachers rated statements that described aspects of individual student behavior. Ratings were grouped into positive (agree or strongly agree), neutral (neither agree or disagree), or negative (disagree or strongly disagree). The graph below shows teachers saw an increase in kindness toward classmates, ability to social with peers on their own, and an increase in confidence. Teachers also noted a decrease in conflict with other students and disruptive behavior.

Teachers **agree** the Storyteller Program had a **positive impact** on students' individual behavior.



Evaluation Findings: STEMpathy Program

“Not one discipline referral for students involved in the Nora Project this year. Even kids that were never behavioral issues were not immune to it this year, so for the group of TNP kids to avoid this has been a big deal.”

-Brian Doolin, Westchester Intermediate School, Storyteller Teacher

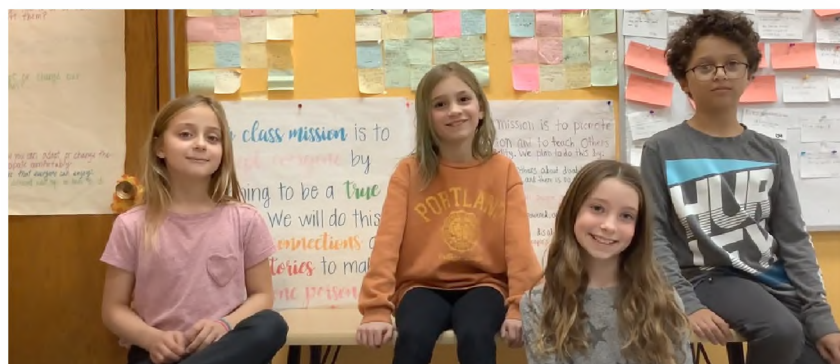
“I see my students being able to identify and transcribe the concepts learned through The Nora Project into other areas of their learning. I saw an increase in their ability to reflect and relate to stories and novels read in class that I feel they would not have been able to do without The Nora Project.”

- Sophie Van Doormaal, JPPS Elementary, Storyteller Teacher

STEMpathy Program

The STEMpathy Club creates space and time for students to foster friendships with their peers and to apply engineering design principles to create a more physically, culturally, and socially inclusive school environment. Students take a hard look at their school community through a variety of lenses and consider whether it is ability inclusive. They identify potential problems and solutions, pitch their ideas to school officials, and ultimately carry out their vision for how to improve the inclusiveness of their school community. The STEMpathy club curriculum is broken into four phases that are completed over the course of a school year: understanding inclusion, setting a purpose and understanding the work, identifying problems and generating solutions, executing a plan, and sharing and reflecting. Research and best practices in education show that

giving children choice in their learning and ways to demonstrate their understanding, such as through student-driven, problem-based learning, helps children to feel in control of their learning.¹³

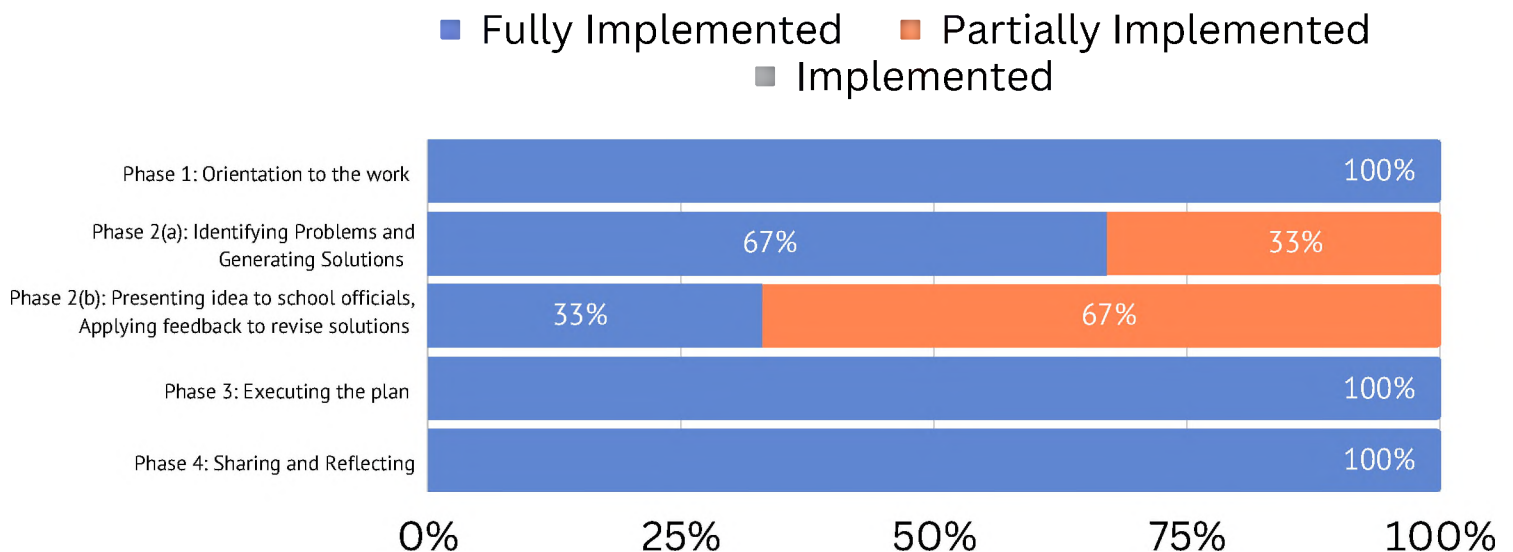


13. Draiger, C. and Wilson, D. (2016) How to Give Children More Control Over their Learning, [Blog post] Education Week Teacher. Retrieved from: <https://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2016/03/08/give-students-more-control-over-their-learning.html>

Evaluation Findings: STEMpathy Program Cont.

Teachers implementing the STEMpathy Program reported that they fully implemented most of the curriculum. Over half (67%) of teachers reported that they only partially implemented phase 2b which covered presenting ideas for promoting a more inclusive environment to school officials. STEMpathy teachers were not asked how often they teach the curriculum in their classrooms because this is an extracurricular program that meets once a week.

All STEMpathy teachers fully implemented phases 1, 3, and 4



For the 2021-2022 school year, seven STEMpathy clubs were held throughout the year. Teachers who completed the STEMpathy Teacher Survey were asked to share projects that their students completed in their club. Several examples of projects that clubs worked on were:

- Hosted first International Persons with Disabilities Day at school
- Club members facilitated an empathy and inclusion reading club with younger students
- Hosted the school's first Autism Awareness Day
- Planned and held a schoolwide "Be an Includer" Week
- Built an Inclusive Kindness library and made posters and bookmarks with kindness and inclusion messages

Evaluation Findings: STEMpathy Program

Teachers were asked to what extent STEMpathy lessons helped students cope with the pandemic. All teachers responding to the survey felt the lessons helped students cope. All teachers who completed the STEMpathy teacher survey reported that the STEMpathy Club helped to build community in their schools. Teachers described the benefits of the STEMpathy club and how it created a sense of community among the club members as illustrated in the quotes below.

“Our team became very close throughout the year and friendships that would have not been created if not for this group were made. It was a highlight of my week to meet with all of these students together.”

-Samantha Kyme, Nathan Hale Elementary, STEMpathy Teacher

“Our group of students really got to know each other and share their ideas and experiences. This helped them build a great community between themselves and us as teachers.”

-Rhianna Stringer, Greenbrook Elementary, STEMpathy Teacher



Over half (63%) of students reported they participated in STEMpathy Club before. All students (n=16) reported that they made friendships in STEMpathy club. Almost half of students that responded to the survey (44%) reported STEMpathy club affected how they think of themselves as illustrated in the quotes below.

“It made me feel better about myself and I have many new friends now.”

“It made me see that my smile is beautiful!”

Limitations, Next Steps, and Recommendations

Limitations

While student findings from several sources show that the programs are making an impact on students of all abilities, this evaluation relied heavily on self-reported surveys from students and qualitative methods to confirm trends in quantitative data. It is not known to what extent these outcomes impacted classroom behavior since student behavior data or individual student assessment data for students with IEPs were not collected for the evaluation.

Evaluation Design Recommendations

While TNP has an evaluation system in place to assist with continuous quality improvements, more processes should be added to ensure that the evaluation is sustainable. Recommendations presented here cover steps to ensure that evaluation continues to be embedded in the organization.

1. *Ensure that all evaluation tools are meeting accessibility best practices.* While TNP has adapted all student evaluation tools, it is good practice to continuously review current accessibility research and best practices to ensure that evaluation tools are accessible to all students.
2. *Develop data dashboards to review teacher and student data with TNP staff and school personnel.* To further embed the evaluation system into TNP day-to-day operations, data dashboards should be developed in order to periodically review program data to identify any areas for improvement in the programs. It is also good practice to develop a practice of sharing evaluation data with the wider TNP community such as teachers and school administrators so that they can see their individual school's evaluation results.
3. *Develop and/or pilot a fidelity measure.* In order to fully assess student impact, TNP should adopt or develop a measurement to assess teachers' fidelity of implementation for each of the TNP curricula. Implementation fidelity data will not only inform student impact data, but also strengthen teacher training and program materials delivery.

Conclusion

This year's evaluation findings highlight the first full year of in-person instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was marked with the largest wave of COVID-19 cases and lost instructional time from November 2021 to February 2022. Several themes from the evaluation findings are reflected across all programs and continue a trend seen during the pandemic. One theme is that teachers felt that the Nora Project Programs help students cope with the stressors of the pandemic and TNP programs help to build community among school children. Teachers continue to report that students from preschool to high school have been observed using vocabulary and problem-solving skills to manage their emotions and resolve conflict. Another theme from the evaluation findings is that students understand empathy, show kindness, identify and behave as includers, and recognize the need for an inclusive school environment. Despite the constraints that the pandemic imposed, students with disabilities fully participated in The Nora Project programs - learning and working side-by-side with their peers and completing the same evaluation tools.

Overall, The Nora Project continues to make a unique contribution to social emotional learning programs aiming to address a decline in empathy by using thoughtful lesson plans and classroom or afterschool activities along with experiential learning rooted in inclusive practices and play. The Nora Project experience, taken as a whole, teaches skills, values, and beliefs about our common humanity and what it means to live in community.

