

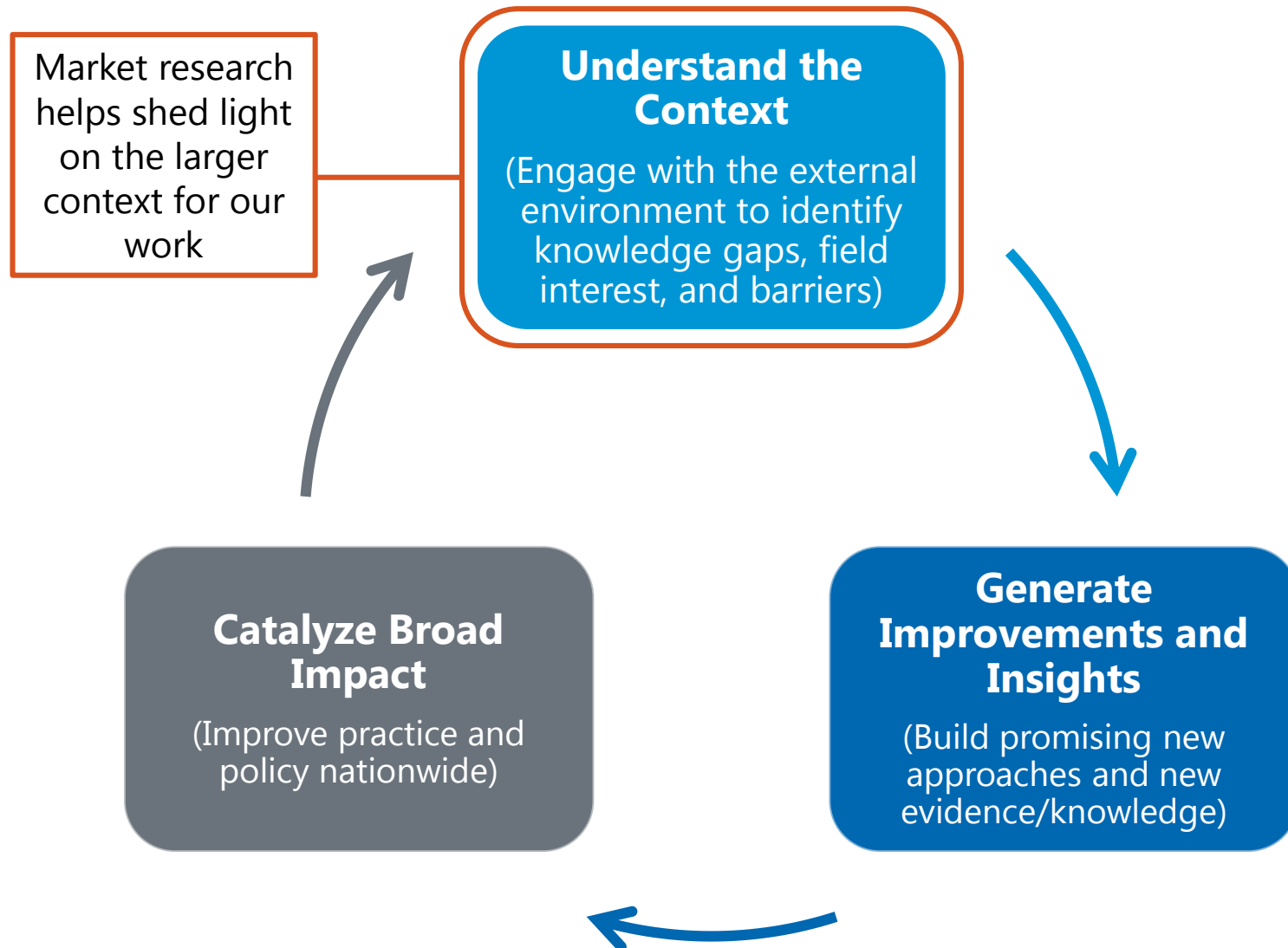


Social and Emotional Learning: Feedback and Communications Insights from the Field

Highlights from market research and a media
audit commissioned by
The Wallace Foundation

August 17, 2017

Wallace's Approach



Goal: To Better Understand

- **Terminology:** How is it used – and heard – among key audiences for our work?
 - To help us use terms that are clear
 - And help us avoid terms that communicate unintended messages or associations
- **Framing:** What underlying perspectives on the issue motivate – or discourage – interest?

Note: While we think the findings have broad relevance, Wallace is not suggesting any particular term or frame is ideal for all groups or purposes, as this will depend on the particular context.

Key Audiences: Views to Understand

- Leaders in K-12 education
- Leaders in afterschool
- Policymakers in education
- Afterschool intermediaries
- Funders
- Parents (qualitative only)



Wallace's new Partnerships for Social and Emotional Learning Initiative will bridge these two sectors; we sought to find terms acceptable to professionals involved in managing or guiding SEL initiatives in both settings.

Market Research Approach

Phase I: Desktop Research (Summer 2015)

Edge synthesized background materials provided by Wallace, web searches, text analytics and trends data. This led to an inventory of terms and initial hypotheses. Findings informed a working session with Wallace and a short list of terms for further study.



Phase II: Qualitative Research Among Professionals (Fall 2015)

Edge completed 45 in-depth interviews among K-12, Afterschool and Policy leaders. Discussions explored perceptions of terms and the topic in more detail. Findings informed a messaging session with Wallace, where the team started to draft content for the survey phase.



Phase III: Quantitative Research Among Professionals (Winter 2016)

Online survey of n=1,600 Professionals (192 Policymakers; 331 K-12 Leaders; 620 Afterschool Leaders). Wallace designated 5 terms of interest, and Edge designed a survey to test the strengths and weaknesses of those terms. The survey also explored potential message frames.



Follow Up: Focus Groups with Parents (Spring 2016)

As follow up to marketing research among professional audiences, Wallace asked Edge to gather parent feedback. Conversations with low income parents helped the team understand SEL mindset, gut-check terminology, and continue the learning on framing and messaging.



Key Findings

1 There is no “silver bullet” term, but across the research phases, “social and emotional learning” emerges as one that is familiar and clear for Policy, K-12 and Afterschool leaders. It also tests well in parent focus groups.

2 Over the course of research, we moved away from terms that had strong, ancillary or even negative connotations (21st Century Skills, Whole Child Development, Soft Skills, Character). We also eliminated familiar terms deemed too generic for this topic (Youth Development, Success Factors).

3 In framing this issue, a concept that speaks to “Gains” for children has traction. Specifics about SEL skills (i.e. building positive relationships, navigating social environments), plus positively asserting that all children benefit, make this frame popular across stakeholder and parent audiences.

4 Other frames include language that resonates. Consider the right time to weave in themes and ideas about: all adults having a role, the learning equation, children realizing their potential, future citizens and the opportunity gap.

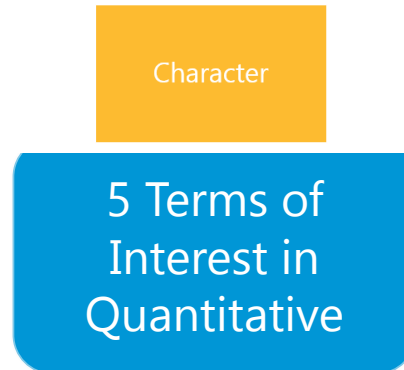
5 Despite agreement that SEL should be a priority, challenges exist for the future. The field identifies training and professional development as much-needed. Parents are wary of school and afterschool overstepping their bounds.

Learning Path on Terminology



**2 Finalist
Terms: SEL
and SEAL**

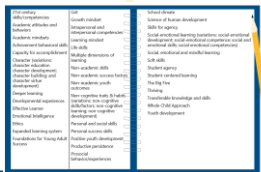
Parent focus groups revisited the landscape of terms and vetted these two terms



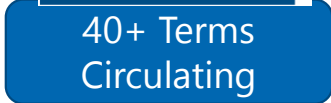
All with merit; all received the same treatment in the survey



Identified by working session; led to terms for survey testing



Term	Definition
Academic achievement	Level of success in school
Academic success	Level of success in school
Academic performance	Level of success in school
Academic proficiency	Level of success in school
Academic excellence	Level of success in school
Academic achievement gap	Difference in academic achievement between groups
Academic success gap	Difference in academic success between groups
Academic performance gap	Difference in academic performance between groups
Academic proficiency gap	Difference in academic proficiency between groups
Academic excellence gap	Difference in academic excellence between groups
Academic achievement gap	Difference in academic achievement between groups
Academic success gap	Difference in academic success between groups
Academic performance gap	Difference in academic performance between groups
Academic proficiency gap	Difference in academic proficiency between groups
Academic excellence gap	Difference in academic excellence between groups
Academic achievement gap	Difference in academic achievement between groups
Academic success gap	Difference in academic success between groups
Academic performance gap	Difference in academic performance between groups
Academic proficiency gap	Difference in academic proficiency between groups
Academic excellence gap	Difference in academic excellence between groups



Assessed in desktop research

Quantitative: Findings on Terms

- The survey confirms there is no “silver bullet” term for this topic.
- But across the research phases, “social and emotional learning” emerges as one that is familiar and clear for all 3 professional audiences.

Character

Of the terms tested, this got the weakest scores on most dimensions, and the largest number say to “avoid it.”

Success factors

Falls short as an overarching term. But neutrality and urgency of the language suggest could be useful in messaging.

Youth development

This term means something to Afterschool, and Policymakers find it appealing, but it’s unlikely to catch on in K-12, and thus not a strong contender.

Social-emotional and academic learning

A close rival to SEL. Quantitative testing shows this term has similar qualities, plus the advantage of resonating with K-12.

Social and emotional learning

Familiar language that achieves the objective to communicate clearly. Pitfalls are it lacks urgency and is seen as more liberal, though fewest number say to “avoid it.”

SEL vs. SEAL



Social and Emotional Learning

Positive Feelings
(top 2 box)

Policy	K12	Afterschool
77%	82%	88%

Most Descriptive
(pick 1)

Policy	K12	Afterschool
33%	32%	35%

Most Urgent
(pick 1)

Policy	K12	Afterschool
17%	16%	21%

Preference
(pick 1)

Policy	K12	Afterschool
24%	24%	33%

Term Viewed as
Liberal, Neutral,
Conservative

Policy	K12	Afterschool
53% , 39%, 8%	54%, 37%, 9%	56% , 39%, 5%

vs.



Social-Emotional and Academic Learning

Policy	K12	Afterschool
70%	81%	82%

Policy	K12	Afterschool
27%	40%	27%

Policy	K12	Afterschool
24%	36%	22%

Policy	K12	Afterschool
28%	39%	24%

Policy	K12	Afterschool
43%, 42%, 15%	49%, 39%, 12%	40%, 44% , 16%

bold=statistically significant head 2 head
★ = top choice in category

Parents: Feedback on Terms

- Terms preferred by professionals do well in these focus groups – SEAL & SEL.
- “Life,” “skills” and “success” figure prominently when parents speak in their own language.
- Parent feedback reinforces that it is critical to have “academics” reflected and offer a cautionary note on the word “emotional.”

Term	Assessment	Direct Feedback
Social-emotional & academic learning (SEAL)	Top term in most groups, viewed as all-encompassing, emphasizes the connection between emotional well-being and academic success; can happen in and out of school.	<i>“Academic’ makes it part of the class. I expect my son to learn social, emotional and academic learning combined.”</i> Oakland
Social & emotional learning (SEL)	Same as SEAL for some, but for others the lack of “academic” means this is more of the parents’ responsibility. SEAL & SEL connote and denote the topic.	<i>“Children need this guidance. In order to get the academic learning they need to have the social and emotional.”</i> Boston
Life skills	Professionals did not favor this term, but it was natural language for parents. Taught at home and at school, covers everything from hygiene to respect for others.	<i>“Like an infant needs to learn the basic life skills of the world. When they go to school, these are the basic skills of school: respect the teacher, show up, do the work, etc. It’s a foundation.”</i> Boston
Character	An interesting difference between the parent & professional findings. In these groups, many parents knew the term and perceive it as an essential quality to develop.	<i>“If you have good character, the other stuff will follow. It’s the foundation created for a child. It comes from home before school, then school has a role in supporting it.”</i> Dallas

Frames Tested

Children will benefit.

Making social and emotional skills part of the learning equation will help children succeed in school and life. With social and emotional skills, children can manage emotion, build positive relationships and navigate social environments. When adults focus on helping children develop these skills and are supported by good policies and training, children are better prepared for the world and able to fulfill their potential.

GAIN



We can make a real difference.

Leaders in education and youth development can have a profound effect on the next generation by prioritizing social and emotional support. When students feel loved, nurtured and safe -- those students are willing to take risks for learning in school, afterschool and at home. All adults have a role to play in developing the social and emotional skills children need for success in school and life.

EMPOWERMENT



This will help us achieve a larger goal.

By prioritizing the development of social and emotional skills, we can improve future prospects for our children, develop good citizens and support the country's workforce. Equipping children with crucial social and emotional skills can also play an important role in closing the stubborn achievement gap. For too long social and emotional skills have been pushed out of daily learning experiences for many children. Fostering these skills is a job for everybody, especially those leading our public schools and afterschool programs.

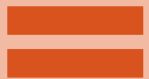
SOLUTIONS



This helps address the problem of inequity.

Children from high-poverty, at-risk neighborhoods have less access to the kinds of enriching experiences that build social and emotional skills crucial for success in school and life. That's an opportunity gap that we must close in the system, by ensuring that schools and afterschool programs are equipped to help children develop social and emotional skills as well as academic skills.

EQUITY



Not doing this will cost us later.

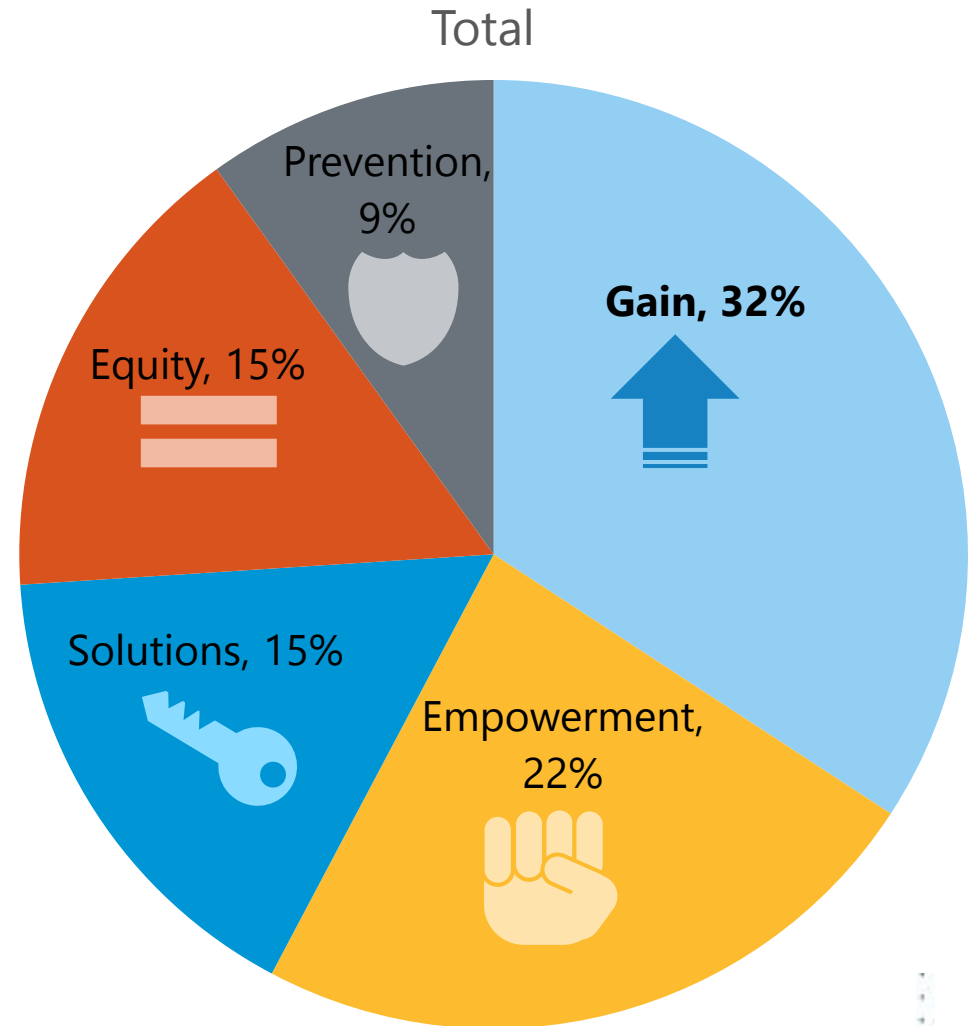
Unless schools and afterschool programs prioritize social and emotional learning, disadvantaged children will continue to lag behind their wealthier peers in both academic achievement and life success. If we do prioritize both social and emotional learning along with academics, we can help level the playing field.

PREVENTION



Quantitative: Frame Preference

- When forced to choose the most convincing frame, the **Gain Frame** came out on top with Policy, K-12 and Afterschool leaders.



Gain Frame Feedback

Highlighter Tool: 30-39% liked 40% or more liked

Children will benefit.

Making social and emotional skills part of the **learning equation** will help children **succeed** in school and **life**. With social and emotional skills, children can **manage emotion, build positive relationships** and **navigate social environments**. When adults focus on helping children develop these skills and are supported by good policies and training, children are **better prepared** for the **world** and able to **fulfill their potential**.

Respondent feedback:

"This strikes me as a positive statement. The phrase 'learning equation' captures the complexity and interface of SEL and academic learning." Policymaker

"I liked the 'children can manage emotion...' giving them ownership of their own future success." K-12

Pitfalls to avoid:

- "Learning equation" was a new term for some.
- Some found the wording bland and wanted to see more impactful language (i.e. "good policies").

Equity Frame Feedback

Highlighter Tool: 30-39% liked 40% or more liked

This helps address the problem of inequity.

Children from high-poverty, at-risk neighborhoods have **less access** to the kinds of **enriching experiences** that build social and emotional skills crucial for success in school and life. That's an **opportunity gap** that we must close in the system, by ensuring that schools and afterschool programs are **equipped** to help children develop **social** and **emotional** skills as well as academic skills.

Respondent feedback:

"This gets to the heart of the issue, kids from poor neighborhoods don't get access to the same rich experiences. I found this very strong." Policymaker

"The terms 'high-poverty' and 'at-risk' get a lot of attention. I like the term 'gap' because it denotes a disparity without the negative connotation." K-12

Pitfalls to avoid:

- Most of the negative feedback here is because "inequity" was a turn-off as the theme.
- Nearly a quarter of this sample emphasized that these skills are important to all children.
- Some worry that this puts the blame on low-income families.

Lessons for Framing

What motivates audiences to be involved or supportive of SEL efforts?



Gain frame and benefits to children.
Professionals and Parents respond positively to children being “prepared” and ready to meet their “potential.”

How do we talk about this when there is no generally accepted vocabulary?



Specifics and program examples: “manage emotion, build positive relationships, navigate social environments;” and **always in tandem with academic learning.**

What are ways to customize the message by audience?



***All adults** have a role (K-12, Afterschool, Parents)
***Learning** equation (for all)
*Good **citizens** (for Policy)
*Closing the **opportunity gap** (for some)

How far can we go in communicating the problem or potential benefit?



Be careful. Across audiences, push back on “prevention” and “solutions” frames gives reason to temper communication.

What are we really asking for?



For leaders to make SEL a “**priority.**”
For parents to support SEL for “**all children.**”
These messages build awareness and urgency.

Parent Response to Definition

- With the definition on paper, parents started to push back on the topic.
- For some parents the emphasis on “emotional” and personal development went too far -- “emotional intelligence,” “self-management,” were terms that elicited mixed feedback.
- Parents repeatedly questioned the need for teacher training or shifting resources in this direction.
- Many objected to assessment (it’s too vague, subjective).

The topic:

- **Helping students** develop **emotional intelligence**, **positive attitudes**, **persistence**, **self-management** and **relationship skills**.
- Students learn and develop these skills in **many settings: at home, in school, and during afterschool** activities.
- Communities can support children’s social and emotional learning with programs in schools and in afterschool programs, and by **training** teachers and afterschool staff to develop these skills. We need to make social and emotional learning **a priority**.

For example:

- A teacher might choose a project or curriculum focused on **teamwork** and empathy.
- A district or school might incorporate social and emotional skills **into its annual assessment** of how well it’s educating students.
- An **afterschool program might do activities** to build persistence, help children **set goals**, and **prepare them to be successful adults**.

Blue=Positive

Aqua=Questions/mixed

Red=Negative

More on Communicating with Parents

- Focus groups suggest ways to tune the SEL message for parents.



Dos

- Stress the complement to academics:
"the learning equation"
"beyond academics"
"in addition to"
"for school, for life"
- Frame the big picture:
"helping students"
"succeed"
"all students" benefit
"fulfill potential"
"life lessons"
- Acknowledge all roles:
adults, home, school,
afterschool
- Start with familiar skills to build up the case

- Leave parents out (directly or indirectly)
- Stress "emotional" over social and academic
- Try to create "a priority" over academics
- Fast-forward too quickly to individual assessment or school evaluation
- Lead with inequity (or suggest family insufficiencies)
- Overlook the how-to and practical application



Don'ts

SEL In Media

Analysis:

- Reviewed 80 stories in Q4 2016 and 79 stories in Q2 2017 in these outlets:
 - Boston Globe; Breitbart; Dallas Morning News; Denver Post; East Bay Times (Oakland, Calif.); Education Week; New York Times; News Tribune (Tacoma, Wash.); NPR; Sun-Sentinel (Broward County, Fla.); The 74 Million; The Federalist; Townhall; Tulsa World; and the Washington Post.
- Terms searched: “social and emotional learning,” “social-emotional learning,” “socio-emotional learning,” and “social, emotional and academic learning.”

SEL In Media

Q4 2016

Positive & neutral stories (87%)

- Many bylines of education leaders, teachers, administrators
- Benefits cited: school climate; academic gains; evidence-based; appeals to teachers

Negative stories (13%)

- Confined (at this point) to conservative media outlets
- Criticism included concerns about government overreach, student privacy and data collection, using school time for non-academics
- Claim to represent parents' interests; rarely quote parents

Q2 2017

Positive & neutral stories (97%)

- Relatively fewer positive, more neutral pieces
- Similar authors and benefits as last scan
- Five of the six local/regional outlets ran at least one positive story
- Bulk of coverage in EdWeek (SEL series)

Negative stories (3%)

- Two negative stories: Breitbart, EdWeek (C. Finn)
 - Could signal broadening interest and shift into more mainstream conservative space
 - Attracted many responses
 - Op-ed and reaction demonstrate level of interest and passion about the topic

SEL On Twitter

Q4 2016

Positive & neutral tweets

- Diverse cross-section of education influencers
- Reach boosted by mainstream news engagement

Negative tweets

- Influencers not in education
- Rarely use SEL terms/hashtags on Twitter, though #NoSEL exists
 - Often paired with anti-Common Core language (#KillCommonCore, #StopCommonCore, #EndFedEd)

Q2 2017

Positive & neutral tweets

- Most influential users continue to be education-specific news handles (e.g. Education Week (@educationweek), Edutopia (@edutopia), EdWeek Teacher (@EdWeekTeacher), and EdSurge (@EdSurge))

Negative tweets

- EdWeek/Finn piece had limited traction online, particularly when compared with tweets sharing positive SEL coverage
 - Followers nearly six times more likely to retweet positive than negative content
 - Average RT rate for the five EdWeek tweets about the negative article was 4 retweets.
 - For EdWeek's tweets sharing positive SEL stories, the average retweet rate was 23

Implications

- Extent of concerns remains unclear – Wallace is continuing to monitor them
- EdWeek Finn piece (and responses) signaled conversation broadening, shifting into a more moderate space
- We think the results of the market research survey remain highly relevant – and are using its conclusions to guide our thinking

- Which frame or frames are most effective in your community?
- What is a new idea for your work and communications?
- What are challenging questions to anticipate from parents or stakeholders?

Thank you!

The full market research presentation can be found @ www.wallacefoundation.org

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