

TRINITY BOSTON CONNECTS



Trinity@McCormack

A Healing & Inclusive Educational Community

2021-2022 REPORT



ANALYSIS AND REPORT BY SEED IMPACT

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youth • community • equity

2022 Reflections on the Transition Back to “Normalcy”

One week after the Uvalde school shooting our school had a containment drill – lights off, doors locked, hide and don't move. As a program we “circled-up” with students to reflect on the experience. We expected them to express emotions like fear, confusion and anger. What students actually expressed was *acceptance*. Acceptance that as young people they were on their own - to keep themselves safe, to adjust back to in-person learning, and to make sense of the confusion and pain all around them.

If there is one through-line to the many challenges of the 2021-22 academic year, it is this: school systems are not caring for, protecting, or listening to young people, and students know it.

When Trinity@McCormack clinicians asked students, they were clear about their needs:

- Help with managing life stress
- Trusting relationships
- Support with challenges throughout the school day
- Time to adjust to learning expectations and the in-person school setting.

Indeed, **students need healing**. As school systems obsess over learning loss, students must try to make sense of so much more: the loss of friends and family to homicide, incarceration and deportation, the stress of social interactions, unstable housing and homelessness, lack of food, and the continuation of society in civil unrest.

For students in the Trinity@McCormack program, the collective trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic has been just one more stop on a long and complicated journey. From community violence to economic injustice to the constant de-humanizing of brown and black people, the students in our program have lived their lives under the assault of trauma.

Their trauma only escalated during the 18 months they spent in virtual school, and again, as they returned to an unequipped school system that was ill-prepared to listen to and address their academic and social needs.

Trinity@McCormack is an embedded clinical youth development program at the BCLA-McCormack Middle School, supporting students through direct clinical care; students and staff through trauma-inclusive and restorative justice practices; and families through a collection of community resources to meet basic health needs. The program's mission is to create an educational environment that understands, embraces, and supports the holistic needs of each student. Through intensive individual and community support, students increase social-emotional skills (such as self-regulation and relational skills), critical to school engagement and well-being.



To truly address learning loss, we must create communities of healing that allow students to transcend isolation and learn together.

*-Sophia Brion-Meisels, LICSW ||
Director, Trinity@McCormack*

Trinity@McCormack Is All About Student Healing

This year our dedicated team of caring clinicians:

- worked to re-build trusting relationships
- accepted that “a return to normalcy” was an unattainable goal for our students
- affirmed students’ experiences by listening and giving them agency over what they needed in school and our program
- made sure every student felt a sense of belonging
- hosted weekly circles for students to share their experiences, feel connected to one another, and understand that they are not alone in their struggles
- established restorative practices for young people to come together, find strength in community, and learn what they and others need to feel a deep sense of belonging
- created fun, collaborative and empowering experiences for youth, at a time when the school could not make them feel successful nor welcome
- offered individual therapy for students to safely process traumas, explore positive motivations in their lives and learn how to live with their experiences without being overpowered by fear, anger, shame or hopelessness.



I most appreciated talking about [what’s] real; getting advice about my boyfriend, and getting the highest grade in my class in math.

-Trinity student



We met students where they were and encouraged them to lead their own healing. Trauma-informed supports gave students a **home base** in the Trinity room and beyond—in the classroom or in the hallway.

We assured students they were loved and supported even on their most challenging days. We reminded students that they were not alone and showed them that they have people who believe in their beauty and ability to thrive.

Our embedded-school model allowed us to offer targeted interventions for youth and to walk with them, supporting them daily as they worked to find stability and strength in a school system not adequately designed to meet their needs.

Our clinicians welcomed young people’s stories and affirmed their truths, letting students explore and define what they needed to heal. In addition, we created safe spaces where they could focus on learning, which helped them regain and build upon their academic and social/emotional skills post COVID-19 pandemic.



Trinity is an important piece to our school puzzle!

-McCormack Instructional Coach

A Parallel Focus on School-Based Healing

In addition to the interventions provided by Trinity@McCormack for students, teachers also needed a school focused on healing. Eighty-one percent of McCormack teachers rated their stress level above an 8 (on a 1-10 scale). As a result, many decided to leave teaching this year after decades of service.

The Trinity@McCormack School Culture Team worked to support teachers' wellness throughout the year. In a system that doubled its expectations while cutting support, we created spaces for educators to:

- learn from one another,
- engage in healing activities with students, and
- feel empowered to take care of themselves.

Our training and coaching with teachers, administrators, and other school staff helped create a healing ecosystem for everyone in the building. Trinity@McCormack fostered a school culture that acknowledges, understands, and responds to the impact of trauma on developing minds. A student attests:



I had to deal with a lot of new ... students and teachers. I also struggled with school academically because I didn't learn much over COVID virtual learning. [A Trinity intern] would come into classes with me, and that helped me a lot. Not only with the material but with some language barriers, and she encouraged me to keep trying. Teachers helped me be more confident in asking questions when I was confused and asking for help when I needed it.

-Trinity student

The Difference We Make

RESULTS, 2019-2022

WHO:

Six middle school students participated for their 3rd year in our 2021-22 program.

GROWTH IN SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) COMPETENCIES:

This year: **13 percent increase**

Past three years combined: **37 percent increase**

THE BENEFITS OF SEL:

Youth with stronger SEL are more likely to gain academic and career success, foster positive relationships, and attain better physical and mental health, leading to more meaningful societal contributions.⁽¹⁾



Trinity breaks helped me get in trouble less, which made school easier and more fun. They supported me when I didn't want to come, and we laughed a lot. I'm proud of my attendance and being on time.

-Trinity student

⁽¹⁾ Council of Distinguished Scientists National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development. The Aspen Institute, September 2017.

How We Measure & Accelerate Social Emotional Learning

“ Getting my attendance up was my proudest and most useful experience with Trinity because I saw my progress in school increase dramatically.

-Trinity student

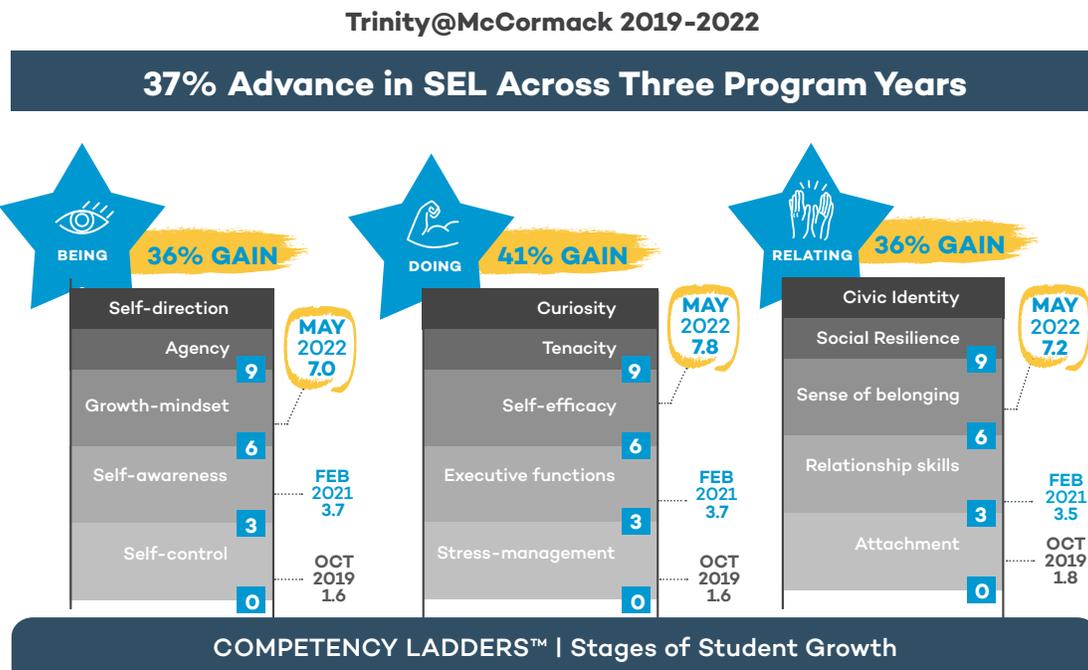
For the past five years, Trinity@McCormack has been using the SEED Impact Competency Ladders™ to assess and accelerate SEL for our middle school participants, resulting in actionable findings.

We measure and nudge growth across three domains to support whole-child development:

- 1) **Being** (comfort with self),
- 2) **Doing** (aptitude with new skills), and
- 3) **Relating** (interpersonal relationships).

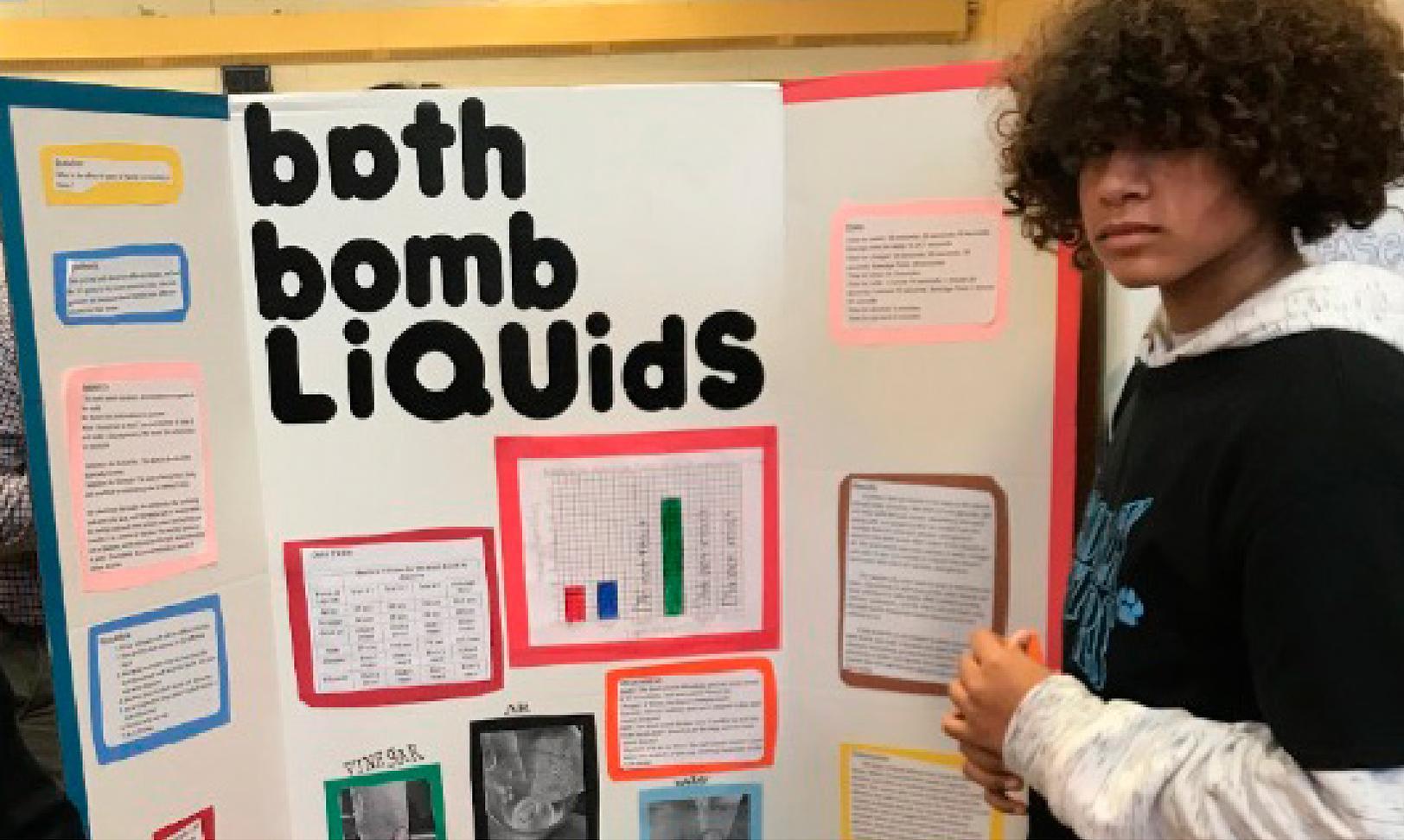
Significant gains were achieved on each of the three SEL competency ladders, year-by-year and over all three years, as shown:

Student SEL Gains



Student SEL gains from February 2021 to May 2022 doubled those observed from October 2019 to February 2021. This is especially noteworthy since students nationwide were experiencing significant social and emotional setbacks linked to the pandemic.

The intentional care of Trinity@McCormack clinicians clearly makes a difference. Students seem to have benefited from their virtual experiences and returned to in-person learning with more mature perspectives.



Select Student Journeys

We believe our model of clinical care, trauma-inclusive and restorative justice training, and community support creates safe, healing spaces that can uplift and empower young people experiencing trauma, as they learn and grow both individually and in community.

Below are three student journeys that emphasize the **increasing resilience and maturity** of Trinity@McCormack students:

Anthony joined the Trinity program a few weeks before school closed in March of 2020. At that time, he was missing 25 percent of school days, and failing most of his classes. When school closed down, Anthony disappeared. He rarely attended virtual school and his teachers felt they had lost him. However, Anthony continued to engage weekly in Trinity community times, and we were able to see him at home and understand some of the challenges the family was facing. Financial stress meant that the home phone and internet were inconsistent. His mom's work schedule left Anthony alone at home to attend classes virtually without support. Anthony wanted to show up to virtual school, but there was a lot he needed to overcome each morning to do so. When Anthony returned in person in 2021, the mental health impacts of quarantine were evident. He struggled with depression and anxiety throughout the year, at times raising concerns about suicidality. In addition to Anthony's depression, the pandemic also impacted his mom, who was struggling with her own mental health challenges. For Anthony, the transition back to school was too fast and too intense. He avoided school more than in previous years because the time away had made the school experience harder. Although his grades and attendance did not improve, his SEL ladders did show growth over the three years. Trinity provided a very needed community that could support his mental health and overall humanity amidst the challenges of returning to school after 18 months of being alone.

2021-2022 SEL reduction: **4 percent** | 2019-2022 growth: **20 percent**

Select Student Journeys (continued)

When **Jasmine** entered the program in 6th grade, she had a lot of energy and wisdom about people. She was moving into another new foster home. Jasmine's time in the foster care system taught her how to read adults quickly and well. However, her ability to understand adults only supported her distrust of them. She was slow to trust the program and her clinicians, and struggled to name her emotions and manage her feelings in positive ways. Although Jasmine's behaviors at school often got her in trouble, school was the one consistent environment in her life and she very much wanted to feel connected in school.

As her time in the program progressed, Jasmine improved her ability to express her feelings through language instead of physical outbursts. She was able to transfer to virtual programming well and attended daily Virtual Trinity Room sessions and therapy with us. However, she struggled to manage some of her excitement, and teachers became quickly frustrated with her speaking out of turn or wanting to be social with other students during virtual learning.

As she entered this academic year with the promise of a permanent, stable family, she could follow expectations without sacrificing her needs. Towards year's end, she exhibited leadership, supporting other students and staff, managing conflicts with maturity, and applying skills learned to advance her goals in other communities.

Jasmine's classroom teachers could not believe her academic progress this year. Having failed most of her classes since 4th grade, people wondered if she needed to be moved into a special education program. As Jasmine learned the skills to manage the impacts of traumatic stress, her academic skills could shine. Jasmine graduated 8th grade with a B average.

2021-2022 SEL growth: **37 percent** | 2019-2022 growth: **53 percent**



When me and [my friends] were all here, just laughing. It was my favorite time- being on the beanbag together- just us. Also, when I won the science award.

-Trinity student

When we first met **John**, he struggled to manage his energy and behaviors. He often got sent out of class and had been removed from an after-school program for inappropriate social behavior and lack of impulse control.

There were limited opportunities to demonstrate growth during his first year with us, as school soon shut down, especially since John could not participate in individual sessions during virtual school due to internet access.

John regularly attended the Virtual Trinity Room and shared his experiences and stressors in this group format.

Additionally, his caregiver reported his being more open with her about his feelings and experiences.

When school re-opened, John and his clinician developed a strong relationship. Through individual therapy, John was able to get support in self-regulation, self-reflection, positive communication skills and goal setting.

By the end of this academic year, John was showing growth in his abilities to follow most school expectations, recognize his emotions and thoughts and how they impacted his behavior, and identify and use resources and supports as needed.

2021-2022 SEL growth: **15 percent** | 2019-2022 growth: **38 percent**

Middle School Student Voices

In May 2022, students shared their thoughts about how the Trinity@McCormack program impacted them:

“ Because of the goal-setting work I did with [Trinity counselor], I have learned that I can accomplish my goals. I just have to stay committed and understand why the goal I am trying to achieve is important to me.

“ I feel more confident around people, and my relationship with teachers and friends has grown stronger.

“ I have better relationships with teachers. I am more engaged in class, and this year, teachers really care about me, so we have better relationships, and I can talk with them more.

“ I have been really good this year about not falling too far behind and doing my work even if I miss class. I have more goals now, and I follow through on things now. Thinking about what I do before I do it has helped me achieve more goals.





Caregiver Voices

In May 2022, caregivers shared their thoughts about how the program impacted their children:

JASMINE'S MOTHER

Changes you have seen?

Jasmine is more focused. She has gained more organization skills and can take feedback and apply it to school. I'm not getting any phone calls from the admin. She is staying in class more, taking fewer breaks, and using breaks purposefully and not just to avoid class. She hasn't been lashing out at school or getting into fights with staff or students. She has always acted well at home, but her behavior at school has always been different than at home. Still, school being better has helped home be better.

Impact on her school work?

Her academic identity has developed; she sees herself as someone who can do school and be successful. She won the science award for her grade.

RAYLEN'S MOTHER

Changes you have seen?

She is more thoughtful, and we communicate better. Ever since she has been in the program, I have seen a lot of growth in her, and she seems to overcome many of her challenges.

Impact on her school work?

She was very focused this year and worked hard to do well in school. She is learning more and is more dedicated to school. She is doing well in school, and I have gotten good reports from her teachers.

MICHAELA'S MOTHER

Changes you have seen?

She seems more responsible and more inclined to go to school. Before, she used to be less interested in school. She is more engaged with me in a positive manner, and I have not been redirecting her as much as I used to at home. Instead, she is more motivated to get up in the morning to go to school and get good grades. This was not so true during virtual learning.

Impact on her school work?

She used to make up excuses about not going to school and doing school work. Now she seems more motivated and more willing to do things, and more responsible than before.

SEL Competencies Correlate with School Success

Social Emotional Learning continued to build, and this was reflected in students' classroom grades, despite major disruptions and unusual circumstances throughout the three years.

End-of-year grades in English Arts, Mathematics, Science, and History were averaged to reveal a solid correlation (0.68) with SEL.

REALIZED GAINS IN SEL TRANSLATE ALMOST IMMEDIATELY TO IMPROVED ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE.



Trinity has put in so much time and attention to my daughter. Trinity does the plans and all the communication to help families connect with the school and the teachers, making sure parents are involved in things. Trinity knows the kids; you get to know who they really are and advocate for them and support them. The personal relationships Jasmine has built with [Trinity@McCormack director] have been really meaningful. The times we talked about what I knew about my kid, she always took my advice and information and put it to use to help Jasmine. I really felt we were in collaboration. Even when she would get upset about boundaries or rules, Jasmine felt connected, and she used the program to help herself at school.

-McCormack Parent

McCormack Middle School Climate Survey

A yearend survey was completed by 16 members of the McCormack Middle School teaching staff. Highlights:

TEACHER STRUGGLES:

- Not enough staff/support in the building (especially considering pandemic shifts)
- Holding students accountable/outlining student expectations
- Admin bureaucracy and lack of understanding needs of students, educators, and staff
 - Inability of systems to respond to what kids are clearly showing that they need
- Resuming in-person studies: getting students to hold attention OFF their phones and to have the stamina to compete in classwork
- Students lack independence and their attitude toward each other (constantly hitting and name calling even when they are friends)

STUDENT STRESS & CHALLENGES:

- Taking multiple perspectives and solving complex problems
- Managing difficult experiences outside of school
- Persisting through difficulty or challenges
- Staying organized
- Managing their behavior and energy
- Connecting to adults
- Asking for help when they need it
- Treating our community with respect

Trinity@McCormack INTEGRATION: The teachers were in agreement that Trinity:

- supports goals and mission of the school
- maintains strong presence in the school
- attends relevant school meetings
- benefits both teachers and students
- helps the school implement restorative justice practices

Trinity@McCormack INTERVENTIONS: There was also universal agreement that Trinity:

- brought needed resources to the school
- helped create a positive and welcoming school climate
- provided practical training and coaching for school staff
- supported staff self-care and self-reflection
- supported students in returning from the re-regulation room more able to engage in class positively
- helped students and staff practice restorative values



**Trinity is one
of our most
treasured assets
at the McCormack.**

-McCormack Inclusion Teacher



Looking Forward

The Boston Community Leadership Academy (BCLA) in the process of a merger with The McCormack School to meet the needs of diverse students through high school. The merger was initiated in 2018 by Boston Public Schools to reduce student transitions.

Trinity will continue its primary service to students grade 7 through 9, now with greater opportunity to support students as they negotiate the added challenges of high school.

“ **Students need time to be heard before they are able to problem-solve.** ”

-Trinity@McCormack Clinician

Before/After Results

Trinity@McCormack

Trinity Boston Connects