



Executive Summary

New PoM Schools Pilot Study Results 2018

Background. The Peace of Mind Program (PoM) was implemented in four new schools during the 2017-18 school year, including 3 public elementary schools participating in a PoM pilot program in Washington DC and one K-12 college preparatory independent school in Maryland implementing PoM for the first time. As an organization, Peace of Mind sought to gather pilot data to learn more about how PoM works in these schools in their initial year of implementation. This study also included students receiving PoM for the first time at Lafayette Elementary, PoM's home school, where PoM has been implemented as a whole school model for over 8 years. Peace of Mind, Inc. hired Dr. Laura Feagans Gould, a researcher who specializes in school-based mindfulness programs, to provide guidance and analytic support and to write this report for a small pilot study of the PoM Early Childhood and Grades 3-5 program in 2017-2018.

Purpose. This pilot study was designed with the following guiding questions in mind.

- To what extent do students and teachers find PoM helpful and relevant?
- Do we see students new to the PoM program improve in several core social-emotional competencies PoM targets?
 - Does the degree of improvement vary by school or level of student need?
 - Does the degree to which pilot schools engage with and use PoM resources and training matter?
- How can PoM improve programming to schools, teachers, and students in the future?
- What types of measures are effective and which are not? What can we learn to strengthen future studies?

Methods. To answer these guiding questions, school and Peace of Mind staff collected data from teachers of seven Pre-K and Kindergarten classrooms delivering the PoM Early Childhood curriculum and one control classroom. School and Peace of Mind staff also collected data from teachers and students in one third grade classroom in a pilot elementary school as well as students new to Lafayette Elementary school in Grades 3-5. Student and teacher responses were collected at the beginning and the end of the school year using measures of core social-emotional competencies as well as questions about their experiences of the PoM program.

Key Findings.

Helpfulness and Relevance

- Teacher data indicate that teachers were very enthusiastic about the usefulness of the PoM program to themselves and children in the classroom, particularly relative to other SEL curricula. One-hundred percent of teachers reported they were *very likely* to use PoM the following year.
- The vast majority of students in Grades 3-5 found the skills they learned in PoM helped them “a lot” or “a whole lot,” reported using the skills they learned outside of PoM class, and felt it was important for their school to have the PoM program.

“Thank you for teaching me how to be mindful and stop and think about what is happening around me and inside my brain. Mindfulness has shown me things that are incredible it has helped me through hard things. My anger issues used to be a lot worse and I wasn't the nicest. I was rude! BUT MINDFULNESS helped me.”

Student

“Peace of Mind has opened up my eyes to how to calm myself and for the students. I have learned a lot from each lesson we have taught.”

Teacher



Impact on Core Social and Emotional Competencies

Early Childhood:

- Students receiving their first year of the Early Childhood PoM program improved significantly in overall classroom behavioral regulation – almost a full point on the scale - such that students improved from regulating their behavior “*some of the time*” prior to PoM to “*most of the time*” after PoM.
- The level of improvement in behavioral regulation for Early Childhood PoM students varied by the particular school, the level of engagement and support by teachers, and by student need. Specifically,
 - Students at Lafayette Elementary, PoM’s home school with a whole school model, consistently showed the most significant increases in SEL outcomes.
 - Students with teachers and schools that had high levels of engagement and support with the PoM program and staff demonstrated more gains than those with teachers engaged and supported at more moderate levels.
 - Early Childhood students who were less regulated at the beginning of the school year (that is, those students with the greatest need of SEL skills) were the ones who increased the most in behavioral regulation from pre to post PoM.
- When we look at the pilot school with a control classroom (our most rigorous test of impact, though with a small number of students), although the Early Childhood PoM students improved slightly more than students in the control classroom, that relatively greater increase in behavioral regulation did not reach statistical significance. Despite the lack of statistical significance, the pattern of this finding is encouraging for a small pilot study. In addition, descriptive analysis indicates that for students who were less regulated at the beginning of the school year, those in the PoM classroom increased more than those in the control classroom.

Grades 3-5:

- SEL results of PoM for Grades 3-5 should be taken with a grain of salt because many of the self-report measures of core SEL outcomes were not reliable in this small sample of students. Results for this group of students showed that Lafayette students significantly increased in emotion regulation, but not mindful attention from pre to post PoM. Although we could not test statistical significance due to “un-linked data,” students receiving the PoM program in the Pilot Elementary School descriptively remained relatively the same in emotion regulation and mindful attention while decreasing in perceptions of school kindness.
- Students at both schools greatly increased in knowledge of corresponding neuroscience.

Improving Programming

- While teachers in pilot schools were satisfied with the level of support PoM provided, teachers indicated that they would value various forms of support and training in the future. These included training videos, in-person workshops, full-day conferences, email consultation with trainers, community of practice gathering and having a



mentor teacher. A few teachers commented on how they felt the curriculum would be more impactful in subsequent years as they get more comfortable with the curriculum.

Effectiveness of Measures

- Teacher-completed behavioral rubrics in Early Childhood classrooms worked well - they were reliable and not overly burdensome on teachers to complete. Future studies might increase the variation at the upper end of the scale to capture nuances in more regulated behavior as well as use more established measures of behavioral regulation in the classroom (although these will be more demanding of teacher's time).
- Self-report measures in grades 3-5 did not work as well as hoped in this pilot study. Further studies might pay careful attention to the framing of the question (e.g. children can be more accurate at reporting frequency of behaviors versus agreement) as well capture the paradox of self-awareness. That is, as students become more mindful of their own emotional states or lack of focus they may report feeling these states more often, even though they are occurring at relatively the same frequency. Administering teacher or parent completed measures of student competencies can help offer different lenses into students' social and emotional development as well as help triangulate on what is objectively occurring.

Conclusions.

- Overall, these pilot data show promising results for students and teachers experiencing their first year of PoM and show fairly meaningful levels of impact, particularly for PoM's Early Childhood program. Teachers and students overwhelmingly endorse PoM and find it relevant and useful.
- Results are fairly consistent with the level of impact we might expect in schools finishing their first year of implementation. As with most SEL programs, the degree of potential impact depends on many factors including how much buy-in and training support there is on the part of new teachers and schools, as well as student characteristics, like level of need.
- These data also support the robustness of a comprehensive whole school model (like what is being implemented at Lafayette) in which the material is being reinforced across context and years of development.
- Unfortunately, pilot results from grades 3-5 are not as informative as we hoped because measures were not as precise as intended and the number of students and schools is relatively small. We can use the lessons learned in this study and improve on future study designs and measures to yield more conclusive results.

Recommendations.

- Continue to interview and collect data from principals, teachers, and students on their needs and how best to support them in implementing PoM, particularly around how to build a comprehensive, whole school model.
- Partner with a research team to apply for a grant to support a more in-depth and scientifically sound study of possible PoM impacts over multiple years (consistent with PoM theoretical framework). Such an endeavor will allow better and more objective measures, more classrooms (and control classrooms), and longer time frames to learn with greater certainty the potential impacts and moderators of the PoM program.



- In preparation for a larger study, continue articulating PoM's theory of action and core program components to gain clarity and precision in what and how PoM changes student, teacher, and school-wide behaviors. In addition, identify (through informal data collection) what factors are associated with greater fidelity of implementation.