

Closing the Achievement Gap with Screen Smart® SEL SPRINTS Data Feb. 2026 – May 2026

Background

Young children ages 3-9 spend 1400-1600 hours a year with screens, including television, tablets, phones, movies, and other media. Teachers know that screen-time in early childhood can curb creative play, stunt vocabulary and suppress the development of neural pathways. We see the distressing results in dull-eyed students who lack focus, resist self-regulation, avoid reading and indulge in frequent outbursts.

As well, much of the time children spend with screens is: (1) sedentary, leading to obesity and under-utilized muscle groups, (2) passive, leading to 'unconscious' absorption of ideas and the inability to think about media or understand how it is affecting them, and (3) addictive, contributing to limited self-control, lack of interest in other activities, and sleep disorders

Research at the Harvard Graduate School of Education involving 100,000 children from 132 countries further demonstrates that students who cannot pay attention, communicate effectively with peers, or solve problems have an increased likelihood of failing school, becoming excessively violent, and falling into lifelong poverty.

Program Description

The Screen Smart® SEL Sprint is an accelerative, interdisciplinary learning program that uses the Screen Smart Learning Framework to close the equitable education gap, build social and emotional skills, and teach healthy tech habits in early childhood classrooms. The data and outcomes included in this report detail the evidence-based means by which the Framework boosts academic outcomes and shrinks the achievement gap for underserved and at-risk children. As well, this report concludes that children who participate in the Screen Smart® program have internalized the concepts for durable outcomes, as evidenced by increased literacy and critical thinking skills reported by teachers starting in Screen Smart Year Two.

While engaging the whole body and mind of each child, the Screen Smart® Learning Framework uses neuroscience-based cues to make screen engagement an active, intentional and intellectual process, thereby reversing the habits of sedentary and passive viewing. The Framework's neuro-linguistic curriculum provides early childhood students with vital auditory, visual and kinesthetic stimulation while engaging them in close analysis of media texts.

Screen Smart® Learning Framework teaches students healthy digital habits and augments human capabilities by:

- (1) using embodied cognition to elevate children's energy and focus as a means of improving classroom learning, self-regulation and executive function;
- (2) including core literacy/narrative concepts & vocabulary in all lessons,
- (3) modeling extended response and intellectual rigor around screen use while creating the expectation that students pay close attention to detail and then discuss and write about what they watch.

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The educational outcomes of the Screen Smart Framework are further enhanced by creating opportunities for children apply their “screen smart skills” both in the classroom and at home, diminishing situational learning and contributing to increased parent involvement during screen time.

Outcomes Measured by ICMC

-Interest and student engagement. Recognized as vital for student learning, retention, and application of ideas to other classroom topics.

-Participation. Although teachers do not grade for participation, it is an essential part of the behavioral mortar that cements the bricks of learning. Early childhood experts including Bredekamp, Piaget, and Montessori emphasize the importance of student participation in effective early childhood teaching.

-Evaluations chart student progress in:

- Understanding and use of literacy-related vocabulary and constructs;
- Comprehension skills;
- Attention to/retention of detail **and** the ability to use those details to think about, analyze texts and infer meaning;
- Discussion and writing about media texts;
- Social-emotional learning and self-regulation.

2026 Program Reach

Twenty-eight early childhood classrooms in five schools participated in 2026 Screen Smart® SEL Sprint residencies. Two schools received only Screen Smart Year 1 instruction and three schools also received Screen Smart Year 2. Students who received Year 1 instruction include six PreK, five Kindergarten, three 1st grade, four 2nd grade, two PreK-K diverse learner cluster, and one 1st-3rd diverse learner cluster classrooms. Students who received Year 2 include one Kindergarten, three 1st grade, two 2nd grade, and one 3rd grade classrooms. Screen Smart students received weekly on-site instruction (30-40 minutes) in their classrooms. Total number of students reached across schools: 508.

Chalmers STEAM Elementary School: 5 session residency – Five Year 1 classrooms: Two PreK, one K, one 1st, and one 2nd grade classrooms.

Bret Harte Elementary School: 5 session residency – Five Year 1 classrooms: Two PreK, one Kindergarten, one 1st grade, and one 2nd grade classrooms.

Thomas A. Hendricks Community School: 5 session residency – Four Year 1 classrooms - Two PreK, one PK-K Diverse Learners Cluster, and one 1st-3rd grade Diverse Learners Cluster classrooms. Three Year 2 classrooms – One K, one 1st, and one 2nd grade classrooms.

John C. Haines School: 5 session residency – Two Year 1 classrooms, both K. Four Year 2 classrooms - Two 1st grade, and two 2nd grade classrooms.

Turner Drew World Language Academy: 5 session residency – Three Year 1 classrooms – One Diverse Learners Cluster, one K, one 1st grade classrooms. Two Year 2 classrooms – One 2nd grade, and one 3rd grade classrooms.

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Curriculum Design & Customization

Based on the Screen Smart Learning Framework, the interdisciplinary curriculum is designed to support a broad range of early childhood academic and developmental domains:

-Critical thinking:

Children state why they did or did not like visual texts seen in the classroom and/or at home. They are also asked to compare visual texts and contrast their differences.

-Meta-cognition:

Students are instructed to notice, then think and talk about what they are thinking and feeling.

-Inference:

Discussions during and after screenings continually challenge students to notice and reflect on ideas that they had inferred. E.G. How do we know that what we think about a specific detail in the story is true?

-Social-emotional learning:

Students relate self to text, text to world and participate in discussions evoking empathy for others. The curriculum incorporates social-emotional learning by focusing on identifying what the character feels, how students feel while watching, and how the film affects them.

-Literacy skills & vocabulary building:

Daily emphasis on narrative structure develops students' ability to discuss a story in terms of plot, character, setting, beginning/middle/end, main idea, theme, problem and solution, etc. Curriculum design for Screen Smart residencies is closely aligned with ELA Common Core frameworks and CPS Scope & Sequence for each grade level.

-Reading Support:

- Students read, review, and identify letters and words appearing in the titles and credits of all films.
- Poems are read aloud by students individually, in small and large groups prior to viewing films based on those poems.
- Fundamental literacy frameworks and vocabulary are used in each session, including characters, plot, setting, fiction, and non-fiction.

-Math Learning:

Children use addition and math logic to count identifying objects, characters, and sound effects during the viewing of films. Students also identify multiple shapes (circles, squares, and octagons) during one of the films.

- Focusing and Self-Regulation:

Using short, high-energy movements led by instructors, teachers, and students, children practice focusing and learning to control their bodies.

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-Fine Motor Skills:

The Screen Smart Learning Framework incorporates kinesthetic rubrics that support the development of fine motor skills in early childhood. According to the Journal of Developmental Psychology, mastery of hand gestures can enhance children's ability to follow verbal instructions.

-Speech Coaching:

Articulation/enunciation and focusing rubrics are given greater emphasis in classrooms with high numbers of ELL students. Students practice exercises focusing on strengthening consonants and are encouraged to use articulation and diction exercises when answering questions during class.

-Extended Response Inclusive of Individual Communication & Peer-to-Peer Dialog:

Throughout each session, scaffolding supports extended response and self-regulation. Students are led in discussions about character motivation, alternatives to character decisions, and the difference between reality and dream sequences in films.

- ELL Support with Anchor Charts and Translation:

Classrooms in which the majority of students spoke a language other than English are given anchor charts, providing the classroom teacher with a resource to connect English terms with images for greater comprehension. Screen Smart instructors also learn key phrases in the dominant classroom language. They also develop a rhythm for "real time translation" with each classroom teacher, allowing them to translate instructors' teaching and student responses if needed.

Teacher and Parent Resources

At the start of the program, all teachers receive the award-winning book, *The Upside of Digital Devices*, which details the Screen Smart Learning Framework. In Session Two, teachers at all schools receive ICMC resources for teachers, including videos with in-depth instructions for plosives and physical exercises. Prior to each session, all teachers receive a comprehensive Teacher's Guide including vocabulary, key Screen Smart phrases, questions used for the film pause-and-question, and student "job" for the coming week. Teachers also receive five anchor charts for their classrooms during the course of the program. Parent resources included session 4 "Funwork."

Diverse Learners Cluster Classroom Support:

In CPS "cluster" classrooms, 100% of students have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for diverse learners with developmental, intellectual, emotional, verbal delays, or physical disabilities. During each Sprint, ICMC instructors customize the Screen Smart curriculum to accommodate student needs. In these classrooms, instructors place greater emphasis on techniques for embodied cognition in the Screen Smart Learning Framework and offer many options for non-verbal responses, such as allowing students to point to objects on the screen to demonstrate understanding.

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Quantified Outcomes

The outcomes cited below are based on evaluation of the following assessment instruments and outcomes:

1. Written teacher evaluations (pre-program, midpoint, and final)
2. One parent feedback document
3. Video footage evaluations by an ICMC evaluator.

Inferential Reasoning & Higher Order Thinking

- At the start of the program, teachers reported that 58% of students could volunteer inferences during discussions. By the end of Screen Smart, teachers of year 1 students reported 74% of students offered inferences during discussions, while Year 2 teachers reported an increase to 91% of students could volunteer inferences during discussions.

- At the beginning of the program, teachers reported that approximately 52% of students could apply critical thinking to narrative based media. At the end of the program, teachers of year 1 students reported 76%, and teachers of year 2 students reported 86% of students demonstrated improved critical thinking. Teachers of diverse learners reported only 3% of students applied critical thinking, increasing to 11% at the end of the program.

- At the beginning of the program, 65% of students could notice and talk about details in a story. By the end of the program, teachers of students in Screen Smart year 1 reported and increase to 85%, and teachers of students in Year 2 reported 93% of students were able to notice and talk about details in a story during Screen Smart and regular class time.

Self-to-text and text-to-world connections

-In their pre-program evaluation surveys, teachers across all grades and Screen Smart Years reported that an average of 62% of students regularly made text-to-self connections in classroom discussions. By the end of the program, 81% of year 1 and 91% of year 2 students were able to relate what they see in media texts to their own lives and talk about those connections.

Social Emotional Learning

-Teachers reported 71% of students demonstrated empathy towards others at the start of the program. At the end of the program, teachers reported 85% of year 1 students and 91% of year 2 students demonstrated improved social-emotional learning and empathy for others as a result of the Screen Smart program.

Metacognition

-At the start of the program, teachers reported that 32% of students in Screen Smart year 1, and 58% of year 2 students had an awareness of how they are affected by screen use. By the end of the program, teachers reported that 84% of year 1 and 91% of year 2 students were aware of how they are affected by viewing screens.

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-By the end of the program, most students could explain that it is important to keep our mind awake when watching screens “so we notice how we’re feeling; because we might see something traumatizing and we can turn it off; so we notice what’s happening in the movie; we can notice details; so we can talk about what we watch.”

-In the first few sessions with a screening, most students across grade levels and Screen Smart could identify parts they liked or did not like. As the program progressed, students across grade levels and Screen Smart years were able to more concisely describe parts they liked or did not like and explain why.

-During the course of the program, some students across grade levels and Screen Smart years could categorize parts of movies seen in Screen Smart and at home as fun, bad, sad, or scary. By the end of the program, the majority of students across grade levels and Screen Smart years could categorize specific parts of videos as fun, bad, sad, scary and 85% could give alternatives to watching something scary or upsetting, including, but not limited to: “turn it off, watch something fun, go to your room and play a game, play with siblings/pets/friends, go outside and play, read a book, draw/paint/color, clean your room.”

-In the first few sessions, most students across grade levels and Screen Smart years stated they watched screens without talking about it with others. As the program progressed, the majority of students claimed they were talking to others about what they watch, and could be specific about what they said, with many telling parents that what they were watching was bad or scary and asking them to turn it off.

Vocabulary and Communication

-At the start of the program, teachers reported that 53% of Screen Smart year 1 students and 68% of year 2 students were able to understand, and 46% of Screen Smart year 1 and 61% of year 2 students used the fundamental vocabulary (character/plot/setting) of storytelling.

At the conclusion of the program, teachers reported that 79% of Screen Smart year 1, and 91% of Screen Smart year 2 students recognize the words, respond with correct answers to questions about character/plot/setting, and 76% of year 1, and 85% of year 2 students use terms accurately during discussions.

-At the start of the program, teachers across grade levels and Screen Smart years stated that 66% of students eagerly participated in verbal discussions and 78% used full sentences. At the end of the program, teachers claimed that 83% of students across Screen Smart years and grade levels participated in verbal discussions and 85% demonstrated improved sentence and communication skills.

Focusing and Self-Regulation Skills

-At the start of the program, teachers across grade levels and Screen Smart years reported 63% of students demonstrated self-regulation of behavior, emotions, and focus. This number increased to 82% of students across all grade levels and Screen

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Smart years who demonstrated improved self-regulation during Screen Smart. In each session, students showed that they had mastered and could independently use the ICMC energy and concentration exercises to enhance their focus during screen time.

Motor Skills

- Children over all grade levels demonstrated improved fine motor skills in handplay movements (taught as part of supporting kinesthetic rubrics) by the mid-point of the program. By the end of Screen Smart, students across grade levels and Screen Smart years developed a regular routine of volunteering to lead gross and fine motor exercises as a transition into and out of Screen Smart sessions. Several teachers reported continued use of the motor skills exercises by students, both prompted and unprompted, during classroom time outside of the Screen Smart program.

Parent Feedback

-Outcomes from “funwork” returned by 11% of parents indicated that 72% of students across all grades engaged in the “energy and concentration” rubric before watching screens at home. Some teachers reported getting feedback from parents, stating;

Following the Funwork, many parents reported learning how to talk with their child during and after the videos. *Ms. Lei, 1st grade, Haines Elementary School.*

A parent mentioned their child’s use of language such as ‘story’ and ‘characters’ while watching videos. *Ms. Wrice, PreK teacher, Hendricks Elementary School.*

Select Teacher Feedback:

Focus and Self-Regulation

Screen Smart helped my diverse learner cluster students improve focus, self-regulation, communication, and participation. *Ms. Ridgner, 2nd-4th grade Cluster, Thomas A. Hendricks Elementary School.*

Students like to repeat the phrases taught in Screen Smart, like ‘concentration helps us keep our minds awake’ and we use shake/stop often as a refocusing technique. *Ms. Aiona-Martin, 1st grade, Chalmers School of Excellence.*

My students became more focused in their daily activities while at their desk or on the carpet while doing whole group activities. *Ms. Clemons, 2nd grade, Thomas A. Hendricks Elementary School.*

The program helped students become more intentional with screen time, and helped with self-regulation. *Ms. Campbell, 1st grade, Bret Harte Elementary School.*

Screen Smart helped students become more focused and better behaved. *Ms. Mui, Kindergarten, Thomas A. Hendricks Elementary School.*

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Elevated Online Safety

Teaching students how to realize what is or is not safe online was an important outcome of the Screen Smart Sprint program. *Ms. Singleton, 2nd grade, Bret Harte Elementary School.*

Students have become mindful of things they watch on screens, and know they're able to turn it off and talk with someone about how it made them feel. *Ms. Edwards, 1st grade, Thomas A. Hendricks Elementary School.*

My students know what they are watching and discern what is healthy to watch/not to watch. And what to do if it is not healthy. *Ms. Dai Lee, 1st grade, Thomas C. Haines Elementary School.*

Children have become more aware of what they are watching and they understand that they can learn from what they watch and are able to talk about it with someone. *Ms. Lavin, 2nd grade, Turner Drew Language Academy.*

The most important learning outcome was keeping children safe from things that could possibly affect their minds negatively. *Ms. Clemons, 2nd grade, Thomas A Hendricks Elementary School.*

Improved Communication

Students are more comfortable talking with each other daily about good and bad things they are seeing, and they talk about what they watch and see outside of school, even if it's not related to screens. *Ms. Chen, 2nd grade, Thomas C. Haines Elementary School.*

Students practiced staying alert, listening and talking about their ideas and feelings during class discussions. These activities benefited my students by improving attention, participation and communication skills. *Ms. Ridgner, 2nd-4th grade Cluster, Thomas A. Hendricks Elementary School.*

The program encouraged students to talk about what they watch, and they had more conversations around movies that are "bad, fun, and scary." *Ms. Wrice, PreK, Thomas A. Hendricks Elementary School.*

Social Emotional Learning

I definitely saw more empathy being displayed in our classroom. *Ms. Dai Lee, 1st grade, Thomas C. Haines Elementary School.*

Students truly understand what they are watching now and the emotional effects it has. *Ms. Bingham, 2nd grade, Chalmers School of Excellence.*

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We were also able to discuss letting things go and just walking away, if you don't like what you are watching on a screen. *Ms. Chan, Kindergarten, Thomas C Haines Elementary School.*

Viewing and talking about the films in the program opened children to regular discussions about feelings and how we should pay attention to body language to see how a person truly feels. *Ms. Bingham, 2nd grade, Chalmers School of Excellence.*

Students are able to understand that different types of media invoke different feelings, and students now talk to someone about what they see. *Ms. Ruan, 2nd grade, Thomas C. Haines Elementary School.*

Literacy, Vocabulary & Comprehension

We discussed plot and main idea of films after the Screen Smart workshops. Many students showed great improvement on i-ready assessment in reading comprehension. *Ms. Lei, 1st grade, Thomas C. Haines Elementary School.*

Students are much more aware of the elements of a story, including themes. *Ms. Lavin, 2nd grade, Turner Drew World Language Academy.*

Screen Smart covered important topics, like story elements and key details, which helped Kindergarten students with opinion writing. We have utilized skills we've learned from Screen Smart in our reading curriculum. *Ms. Mei, Kindergarten, Thomas C. Haines Elementary School.*

Students were able to use screen smart skills in reading comprehension. I liked the way the instructor provided anchor charts for students to refer to. *Ms. Lampley, Kindergarten, Turner Drew Language Academy.*

Higher Order Thinking

I like the concept of "when we keep our mind awake, we notice details and what is going on," especially for younger students. Teaching them to be consistently aware is so important and vital considering the growing impact technology has on our community. *Ms. Behan, Kindergarten, Chalmers School of Excellence.*

My students are more attuned to what they are watching and are able to notice details amidst what is going on with whatever program they are watching. This allows them to remember more of what they see, and their ability to summarize and comprehend has increased. *Ms. Rouse, 3rd grade, Turner Drew Language Academy.*

Screen Smart helped students look closely at all aspects of videos and books, increasing their ability to notice minor details they may not have paid attention to previously. *Ms. Carlisle, 1st grade, Turner Drew Language Academy.*

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The students really got a lot out of the active listening part of the program. They learned to watch with purpose and keep their minds active. *Ms. Grib, Kindergarten, Bret Harte*

Participation

My students demonstrated increased participation, improved ability to follow directions and better engagement during academic activities. *Ms. Ridgner, 2nd-4th grade Cluster, Thomas A. Hendricks Elementary School.*

More students are willing to share their thoughts and opinions and engage in discussions. *Ms. Mei, Kindergarten, Thomas C. Haines Elementary School.*

I noticed my PreK students becoming more engaged each week. *Ms. Wrice, PreK, Thomas A. Hendricks Elementary School.*

Integration into Classroom Learning

I loved reminding students to control their energy, and we had continued discussions about characters, setting, plot. *Ms. Behan, Kindergarten, Chalmers School of Excellence.*

Screen Smart helped my students be more aware of the content on their computers while completing their work, as well as talking to their peers about what they see on screens. *Ms. Ruan, 2nd grade, Thomas C. Haines Elementary School.*

Outside of the Screen Smart workshops, we regularly included talking about watching things that are appropriate for children, as well as referencing using energy that allows students to stay focused and it greatly benefited them. *Ms. Clemons, 2nd grade, Thomas A. Hendricks Elementary School.*

We often tied the stories we watched in Screen Smart to stories we read in our ELA and Social Studies classes. *Ms. Lavin, 2nd grade, Turner Drew World Language Academy.*

The students and I discussed the exercises after the workshops. We talked about ways to keep our energy positive, keep our minds awake and focused and how movement and participation help us learn. *Ms. Ridgner, 2nd-4th grade Cluster, Thomas A. Hendricks Elementary School.*

While discussing topics using the Smartboard, we now pause to talk about what we see and what the characters are doing. *Ms. Tucker, PreK, Thomas A. Hendricks Elementary School.*