



Teacher Perspectives on Implementing the Second Step Program in 2018-19

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Key Findings

- 82 survey respondents indicated they taught Second Step every week but scored in the middle to low range on other fidelity items.
- Survey respondents understood the implementation plan for Second Step and felt trained and supported.
- Survey respondents shared examples of students using Second Step skills outside of lessons.
- While respondents said they have time scheduled for lessons, protecting that time is still a challenge.
- Schools may benefit from implementing Second Step as a whole-school model.

About Second Step

The Second Step curriculum is a social-emotional learning (SEL) program developed by the Committee for Children, a non-profit organization based in Seattle¹. The program is designed for students in grades K-8 with a focus on promoting students' self-regulation skills. The middle school program (i.e., grades 6-8) also emphasizes the development of skills for decreasing aggression and preventing both bullying and substance abuse. These skills are taught by school staff with the use of Second Step kits, which provide the resources needed to deliver the lessons. The K-5 kits include lesson cards, posters, a CD and DVD; the middle school lessons are online. Once a school district purchases the kits, they have ongoing access to Second Step's online resources, including training for teachers and other school staff, parent home links, reading materials, recommendations for books that reinforce the Second Step lessons, and an online community forum.

Program developers suggest that schools schedule a "Second Step" day every week for teaching lessons. K-5 lessons are 20-40 minutes long and follow a script printed on the back of the provided lesson cards. Examples of skills include using an "attent-o-scope," where students pretend to form binoculars with their hands to focus on an item or activity and continue that focus after placing their hands back in their laps, and the

Listening Rules used in the beginning of each lesson to direct focus: "Eyes Watching. Ears Listening. Voice Quiet. Body Still." Lessons in 6th-8th grade are 50 minutes long, divided into two 25-minute sessions. Example lessons include "Setting Goals," "Calming Down," and "Resolving Serious

¹ <https://www.secondstep.org/what-is-second-step>

Conflicts.” On the remaining days of the week, teachers are expected to reinforce the lessons by using scripted five-minute “mini-lessons.”

Research Questions and Methods

In the 2018-19 school year, the Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) surveyed teachers about implementing Second Step. We had four primary research questions:

1. Do teachers report implementing Second Step with fidelity?
2. Do teachers feel adequately trained, prepared, and supported to implement Second Step?
3. What benefits and challenges have teachers experienced with Second Step?
4. What additional supports do teachers feel they need to implement Second Step successfully?

According to District records, there were 20 schools in the 2018-19 school year that planned to implement the program. We emailed all classroom teachers at these schools and asked for feedback on implementing Second Step (with the exception of Cook-Wissahickon, where the Dean of Students delivered lessons). We invited 351 teachers to take the survey and received 82 responses. Some schools may have chosen to implement Second Step only in certain grades or classrooms, so the list of teachers we emailed was likely too large. For this reason, we are unable to calculate a response rate for the survey.

The first survey question asked teachers if they delivered Second Step lessons to their students. Out of the 82 responses we received, 16 teachers said they did not (this exited them out of the survey). Three schools either did not have any teachers say they delivered Second Step or did not respond, so the findings in this brief are based on responses from 17 schools. Most of those schools had fewer than five teachers respond, so we do not present any school-level findings.

Within the survey, teachers responded to questions about the extent to which they taught lessons and implemented components of the program. Possible answers to implementation fidelity questions were Never, Occasionally, Often, and Always or Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree. ORE coded these responses with scores from 0 to 3, respectively, and calculated the mean response for each question. Mean scores were reverse coded where appropriate; for example, when asked how often they leave out or skip parts of the lesson, a “Never” response indicates higher fidelity than an “Often” response. When assessing the level of fidelity, a score of 2.6 to 3.0 indicates high fidelity, a score of 2.0 to 2.4 indicates moderate fidelity, and a score below 2.0 indicates low fidelity.

Findings

Respondents indicated that they taught Second Step every week but were less consistent on other fidelity items.

Most respondents (74%) said they teach Second Step lessons every week (as recommended by the developers). However, teacher responses to the other fidelity survey items show that when implementing Second Step, teachers leave out or skip parts of the lessons, often did not use the Daily Practice activities, and often did not reinforce lesson skills and concepts with the Using Skills Every Day sections (Table 1). The highest fidelity item was whether teachers change the lesson significantly from the way it was written (2.4) and the lowest items were reinforcing lesson skills and concepts (1.6) and using the Daily Practice activities (1.2).

Table 1. None of the fidelity items were in the high range

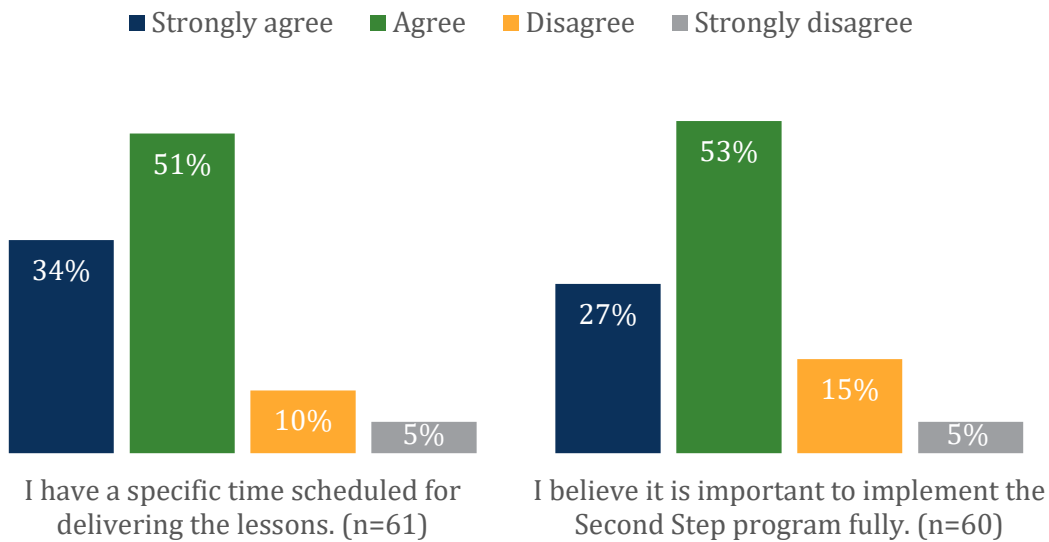
Item	Fidelity Score (Mean)
Teachers do not leave out or skip parts of the lesson (n=62)	2.1
Teachers do not change the lesson significantly from the way it was written (n=62)	2.4
Teachers do not add new material to the lessons ¹ (n=62)	2.3
Teachers complete the Daily Practice activities (found on the Following Through card) with the class (n=62)	1.2
Teachers reinforce lesson skills and concepts as explained in the Using Skills Every Day sections (n=62)	1.6
Teachers teach the lessons in order (n=61)	2.3

Scores range from 0 (lowest) to 3 (highest) where 2.6 to 3.0 = High; 2.0 to 2.4 = Moderate; below 2.0 = Low.

¹While adding new material might not be detrimental to the lesson, ORE considered fidelity to be teaching the lesson as written fidelity of implementation.

Most respondents (85%) said they set a specific, scheduled time for delivering the lessons, as recommended by the program developers (Figure 1). Additionally, 80% of respondents said they believe it is important to implement the Second Step program fully.

Figure 1. Most respondents had a specific lesson time scheduled and believe it is important to implement the program fully



Respondents said they understood the Second Step implementation plan and felt trained and supported.

Almost all respondents said they understand the goals and objectives of the Second Step program, are committed to helping their students achieve the goals of the program, and they know which implementation tasks they are responsible for and how to carry them out (Figure 2). Most (90%) also said they are aware of the overall implementation plan for their school. Most respondents (87%) said they feel adequately trained to deliver Second Step lessons, and slightly smaller percentages said they feel confident in their ability to reinforce lesson concepts and skills (78%), know where and how to get resources to improve their practice (77%), and have adequate implementation support (75%; see Figure 3).

Figure 2. Respondents understand the program’s goals and implementation plan

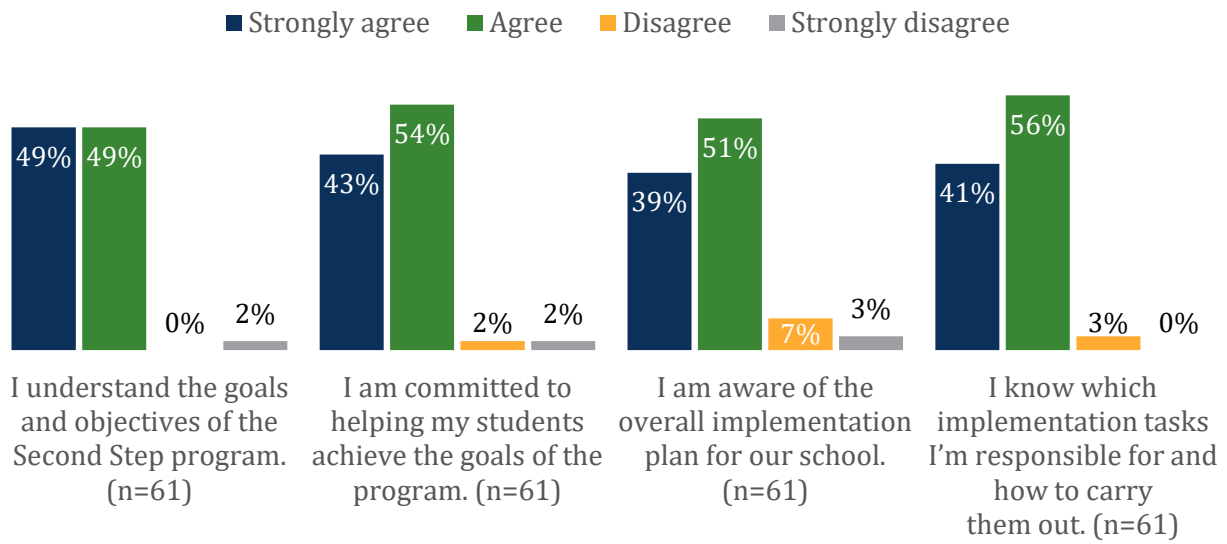


Figure 3. Respondents felt adequately trained and supported to implement Second Step



Respondents shared examples of students using Second Step skills outside of lessons.

Respondents (84%) said they believe their students benefit from Second Step. When we asked teachers for examples of Second Step improving student behavior or outcomes, several teachers shared instances of students using Second Step skills in other situations. One teacher said, “My kindergarten children use the language throughout their own interactions. I often hear ‘self-

control... I can handle this' and other such self-talk statements." Another said, "Younger-grade students have shared experiences of using alternative measures to fighting, such as talking to students, when engaging in conflicts. Still other students have said that belly breathing exercises actually do help in calming them down while facing difficult situations." A third teacher said, "I had one student who was having a verbal altercation with another student say, 'I'm gonna walk away like in Second Step' and he removed himself from the situation."

The specific program pieces that teachers mentioned included the Four Rules, the Brain Builder activities, calming-down strategies, and belly breathing. One teacher also liked the "explanation for students about the difference between their thinking brain and feeling brain. The lid flipping analogy was really helpful for students to understand their own behavior and their classmates' behavior." Another teacher mentioned hearing her students use specific brain terms (such as amygdala and cortex) when discussing their reactions.

While respondents said they scheduled time for lessons, they still found it challenging to prioritize that time.

The most frequently-cited challenge was having time to prepare for and teach the lessons. However, earlier in the survey, the majority of respondents said they have adequate time to prepare, teach, and reinforce lessons (Figure 4). This may reflect a difference between how a teacher's day is scheduled and how it actually happens. For example, one teacher said, "Sometimes something comes up, or a change in schedule occurs, and Second Step can't be fully implemented." Another said, "Having adequate time to teach a lesson is important. If I am asked to cover a class due to the absence of a teacher, this makes it difficult to teach Second Step concepts on a continuous basis to intended classes." Additionally, 67% of respondents said they occasionally or often skipped a Second Step lesson to focus on other responsibilities (Figure 5). These teachers may feel pressure to prioritize other responsibilities over Second Step, making it challenging to implement the curriculum with fidelity even when time is scheduled for lessons.

Figure 4. The majority of respondents say they have adequate time to prepare, teach, and reinforce lessons

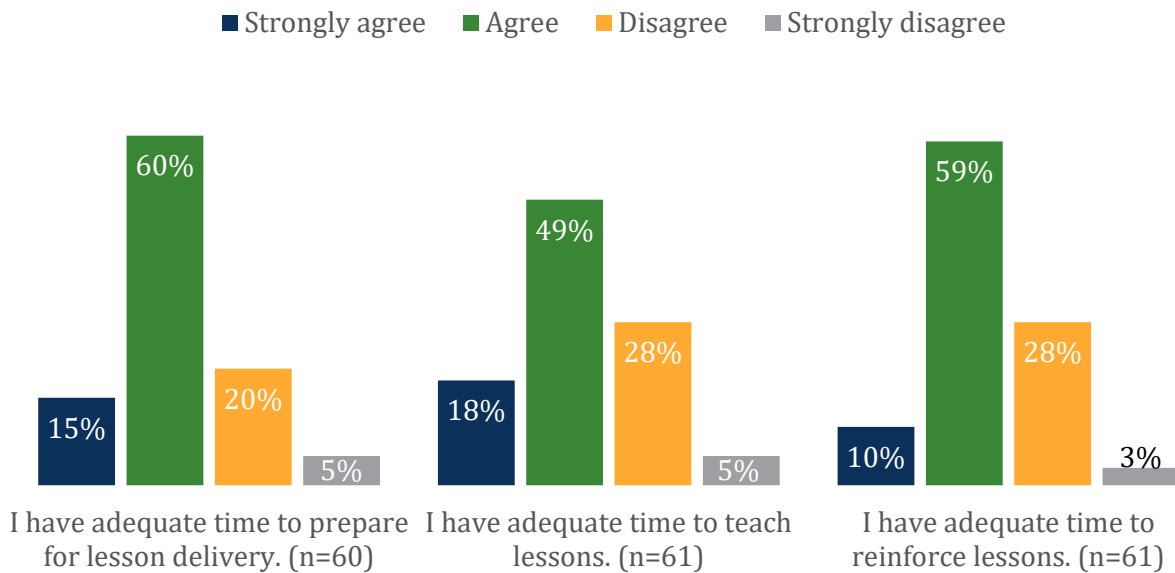
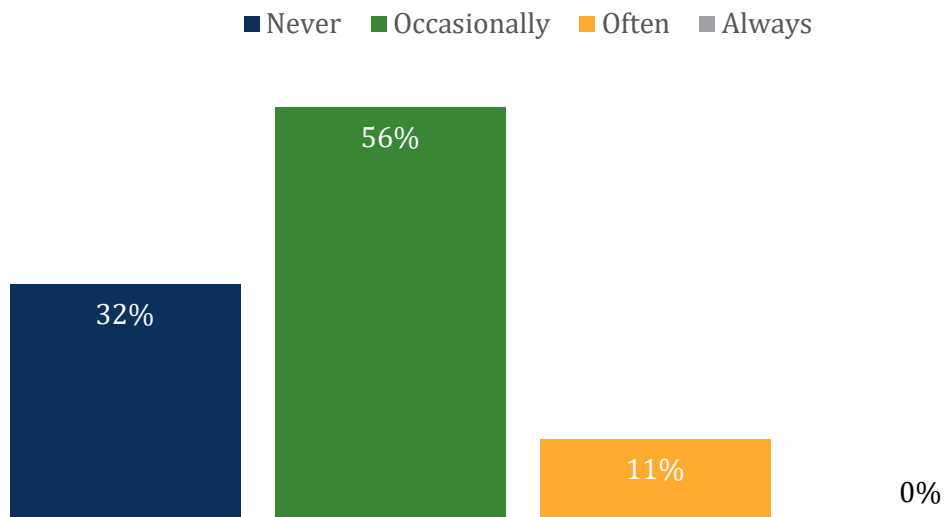


Figure 5. 67% of respondents have skipped a Second Step lesson to focus on other responsibilities



To what extent do you skip teaching a Second Step lesson to focus on other responsibilities?

A few teachers said it could be challenging to reinforce the skills taught during lessons, either because time is not allotted for this or because they are struggling to get students to use Second Step skills outside of lesson time. A few also mentioned problems with student engagement. One teacher said, “My students aren't totally ‘buying in.’ They seem to laugh at the videos and feel they are immature. I often need to redirect and request undivided attention to the lesson.”

Schools may benefit from implementing Second Step as a whole-school model.

When asked what supports would help them successfully implement Second Step, the most often requested support was using the Second Step program or tactics across the whole school, in classrooms and by other administrative and support staff. One teacher said, “Just support teachers by following up using the same techniques.” Another requested “thoughtful inclusion of Second Step within and across school climate [and] including Second Step in the reward incentives given to students for behavior.” Another teacher explained why it would be helpful to involve the whole school:

Not all teachers are familiar with Second Step. For example, we build a shared vocabulary in our room and within our grade team based on Second Step language. Our specialist teachers and climate support staff do not experience the program the same way we do, so the kids are not receiving that cohesive vocabulary all through the day. Additionally, not all the teachers in other grades are following through with the curriculum, so when students come to third grade there are varying levels of experience with Second Step.

Conclusions

Most of the 82 respondents said they teach Second Step lessons every week (74%) at a specific time (85%). Respondents also said they know the Second Step implementation plan and feel adequately trained and supported to implement the program. However, the other survey items that asked about fidelity of implementation did not score as highly. While respondents said they do have time scheduled for the lessons, schedule changes often affect intended lesson delivery, and the top challenge cited by teachers was prioritizing time for lessons. When we asked teachers to share benefits from Second Step, several provided examples of students using Second Step skills outside of lessons. A few teachers also suggested that whole-school Second Step implementation would be beneficial (and should include administrators and other staff members) to help reinforce concepts for students.