

# CRASEL at Work:

## *A Framework, Field, and Data Report*

FRAMEWORK DEVELOPER Dr. Dawn Brooks-DeCosta	GRANT SURVEY CONDUCTED BY NYU Metro Center, Center for Policy, Research & Evaluation	GRANT PERIOD SY 2023–2024 & SY 2024–2025	REPORT PERIOD SY 2022–2025
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23 SCHOOLS	6,000+ STUDENTS	ELA +16 POINTS	MATH +25 POINTS	SUSPENSIONS ↓ 14%	ATTENDANCE ↑ 5 POINTS	FEDERALLY FUNDED
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*“CRASEL is not a program. It is a framework for how we lead, how we teach, and how we show up for every child.”*

This report brings together two complementary sources of evidence about the three-year impact of the Culturally Responsive and Affirming Social-Emotional Leadership (CRASEL) framework in Harlem’s Community School District 5. The first source is **District 5’s own reported outcomes** — academic, attendance, suspension, and reach data gathered across school years 2022 through 2025. The second is the **NYU Metro Center Grant Survey and Program Evaluation**, a mixed-methods survey of 130 CRASEL participants conducted during the federal grant period covering SY 2023–2024 and SY 2024–2025. Each source is clearly labeled throughout this report to distinguish district-reported data from grant survey findings.

- **District 5 Reported Outcomes** — Data reported by Harlem Community School District 5 leadership, SY 2022–2025
- **NYU Metro Center Grant Survey** — Independent survey conducted by NYU Metro Center, SY 2023–2025

### FEDERAL GRANT FUNDING

## How This Work Was Made Possible

The CRASEL Expansion Project in Harlem’s Community School District 5 was made possible through a federal grant secured with the leadership of **U.S. Senator Charles Schumer, U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, and U.S. Congressman Adriano Espaillat**. The **Harlem Renaissance Education Pipeline, Inc. (HREP)** served as the fiscal conduit and community anchor for the federal funding, partnering with the Abyssinian Development Corporation (ADC) to bring the CRASEL framework to scale across all 23 District 5 schools.

### FEDERAL GRANT PARTNERS

This federally funded initiative reflects the commitment of elected officials and community organizations to investing in culturally responsive, healing-centered education for Harlem's children and families. The Harlem Renaissance Education Pipeline, Inc. provided the structural foundation that allowed CRASEL to expand from its origins as a doctoral framework into a districtwide model serving more than 7,000 students and training hundreds of educators, leaders, and family members across three years.

**Funding champions:** U.S. Senator Charles Schumer | U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand | U.S. Congressman Adriano Espaillat

**Community partners:** Harlem Renaissance Education Pipeline, Inc. (HREP) | Abyssinian Development Corporation (ADC)

### ABOUT THE FRAMEWORK

## What Is CRASEL?

Culturally Responsive and Affirming Social-Emotional Leadership (CRASEL) was developed by **Dr. Dawn Brooks-DeCosta**, Deputy Superintendent of Harlem Community School District 5, through her doctoral dissertation at Teachers College, Columbia University. The framework draws on her dissertation research on Black principals' perspectives on culturally responsive social-emotional leadership, her eleven years of experience as a principal at Thurgood Marshall Academy Lower School, and foundational scholarship including *Culturally Responsive School Leadership* (Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis, 2016) and *Ready for Rigor* (Hammond, 2014).

CRASEL was developed in response to persistent inequities in schooling environments that disproportionately affect racially, culturally, and linguistically marginalized students and families. It positions social-emotional learning not as a neutral or technical intervention, but as a **relational, cultural, and justice-oriented practice** that must attend to the lived realities of students, educators, and families. Guided by a framework of radical hope and healing-centered engagement, CRASEL emphasizes adult self-awareness and care, collective responsibility, and the cultivation of school environments where **belonging, dignity, and student voice** are central.

## The Seven Domains of CRASEL

<p><b>DOMAIN 1</b></p> <p><b>Self-Awareness, Self-Care &amp; Self-Management</b></p> <p>Leaders and educators develop the capacity to recognize and regulate their own emotions, manage stress, and engage in reflective practice. This domain positions adult well-being as foundational — when adults prioritize their own emotional health and self-awareness, including racial autobiography and mindfulness, they are better equipped to model regulation and care for the students and communities they serve.</p>	<p><b>DOMAIN 2</b></p> <p><b>School &amp; Community Relationship Building</b></p> <p>Schools are strengthened when relationships among adults, students, and families are warm, affirming, and built on empathy and trust. This domain emphasizes servant leadership — connecting with students, staff, and families not as a transactional function, but as a moral commitment to seeing, knowing, and honoring the whole person and the broader community in which the school resides.</p>
<p><b>DOMAIN 3</b></p> <p><b>Advocacy</b></p> <p>CRASEL-aligned leaders and educators actively challenge deficit narratives and exclusionary practices, both within and beyond the school building. This domain calls on educators to value students' social</p>	<p><b>DOMAIN 4</b></p> <p><b>Nurturing Through High Expectations</b></p> <p>Excellence and emotional safety are not opposing forces — they are inseparable. This domain supports leaders and teachers in creating environments where every learner is challenged, student voice is elevated,</p>

<p>and cultural capital, serve as advocates for equitable schooling and community well-being, and cultivate an asset-based approach schoolwide — centering the strengths, voices, and humanity of students and families as the foundation of all school practices.</p>	<p>and mistakes are treated as learning opportunities. Rigorous, culturally responsive instruction, restorative discipline, data-informed decision making, and a culture of peer learning all reflect the belief that high expectations are most powerful when grounded in care and belonging.</p>
<p><b>DOMAIN 5</b> <b>Culturally Responsive Sustaining Leadership</b></p> <p>School leaders are responsible for creating and sustaining environments where students’ racial, cultural, and linguistic identities are not merely acknowledged but celebrated and centered. This domain calls for developing culturally responsive staff, embedding the perspectives of historically marginalized communities into the curriculum, conducting equity audits, and advancing a schoolwide vision for racial equity — ensuring every student sees themselves reflected in their learning experience.</p>	<p><b>DOMAIN 6</b> <b>Building &amp; Sustaining School Culture</b></p> <p>A thriving school culture is intentionally co-created, continuously monitored, and collectively owned. This domain guides leaders in articulating and aligning practices, rituals, and routines to a shared vision; cultivating distributed leadership through professional learning communities; and maintaining transparency and vulnerability as leadership virtues. School culture is not accidental — it is the product of sustained, values-driven leadership at every level of the organization.</p>
<p><b>DOMAIN 7</b> <b>Maximizing High-Quality Partnerships</b></p> <p>Strategic, mission-aligned partnerships extend the school’s capacity to serve students, families, and communities. This domain supports leaders in selecting and cultivating high-quality partnerships that are visibly connected to the school’s goals, celebrated broadly, and designed with teacher voice and family engagement at the center. Partnerships are not add-ons — they are integral expressions of a school’s commitment to the whole child and the whole community.</p>	

**IMPACT ACROSS THREE YEARS**

## What the Data Shows

**■ District 5 Reported Outcomes | SY 2022–2025**

The following data reflects outcomes reported by Harlem Community School District 5 leadership across three years of CRASEL implementation, spanning school years 2022 through 2025. These figures represent districtwide trends aligned with the period of CRASEL expansion.

**ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT**

Measure	2022 Baseline	2025 Result	Change
ELA Proficiency (Grades 3–8)	30%	46.2%	<b>+16.2 pts</b>
Math Proficiency (Grades 3–8)	17%	42%	<b>+25 pts</b>
SWD Proficiency	9%	24%	<b>+15 pts</b>
MLLs Making Adequate Yearly Progress	2%	6%	<b>+4 pts</b>

## ATTENDANCE & CLIMATE

Measure	2022	2023	2024	2025
Attendance Rate	83.0%	87.0%	87.0%	88.0%
Chronic Absenteeism Rate	57.6%	—	—	45.0% (↓ 12.6 pts)

## LEARNING ENVIRONMENT SURVEY ('24-'25)

Measure	2024	2025	Change
Cultural Awareness & Inclusion	82	84	+2
Student–Student Trust	63	68	+5
Safety	75	83	+8

## SUSPENSION DATA (SY 2023–2024)

Suspension Type	Change
Overall Suspensions	↓ -14.4%
Serious Suspensions	↓ -21.6%
Racial Suspension Disparity	↓ -3.1%
Perceived Suspensions (students' reported experience of disciplinary climate)	↓ -11.1%

## ADULT CAPACITY & STUDENT REACH

<b>23</b> Principals trained in CRASEL	<b>30</b> Assistant Principals trained	<b>17</b> Schools fully implementing RULER	<b>27</b> Student SEL leaders developed	<b>3,800</b> + Students reached directly	<b>7,000</b> + District-wide student impact
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## CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICES

Over three years, District 5 implemented a robust suite of culturally affirming practices alongside CRASEL, including: the Black Studies curriculum across all 23 schools; culturally responsive texts in classrooms districtwide; a Culturally Responsive Book Giveaway at the annual CRASEL Fair; student and teacher participation in the Black Education Research Center (BERC) Showcase at Teachers College; and ongoing partnerships with Columbia University and the Studio Museum in Harlem.

*“District 5 has pioneered the nation’s first districtwide CRASEL model – one that is scalable, replicable, and rooted in equity.”*

— District 5 Three-Year CRASEL Impact Report

The following findings are drawn from a grant-funded survey and program evaluation conducted by the Center for Policy, Research, and Evaluation at NYU Metro Center. The survey included school observations at four District 5 schools, interviews with 29 participants across multiple roles, and a district-wide survey of 130 CRASEL participants from 16 schools. These findings reflect the perceptions and experiences of participating school community members during the federal grant period and should be understood as qualitative and survey-based in nature.

*Note: Survey findings are based on 130 voluntary respondents from schools participating in the grant-funded CRASEL expansion during SY 2023–2024 and SY 2024–2025. Results reflect participant perceptions and are not intended as a comprehensive districtwide outcome study.*

## 01 Shifts in Individual Adult Participants

Educators reported significant growth in self-awareness, emotional regulation, and well-being. The use of mindfulness tools, mood meters, and emotional check-ins became embedded in professional practice. Staff described CRASEL as reinvigorating their sense of purpose and connection to their work. Many reported a renewed motivation to attend to their own mental health as a foundation for supporting students — directly reflecting the CRASEL commitment to adult SEL as the prerequisite for student flourishing.

## 02 Shifts in Relationships Within Schools

CRASEL implementation was associated with stronger empathy, trust, and collaboration among staff and between adults and students. Schools reported increased use of restorative practices including circles, role-playing, and facilitated dialogue to address conflict and repair harm. Staff came to understand behavior as communication and responded with curiosity, support, and accountability. Educators described the culture as shifting from defensiveness to openness and shared purpose.

## 03 Shifts in School Culture and Student Outcomes

At the school level, CRASEL contributed to cultural transformation centering belonging, representation, and student agency. Students were observed leading emotional check-ins, naming their feelings, and advocating for their needs. Survey participants also reported meaningful improvement in student outcomes: stronger student SEL skills and self-awareness, improved relationships between students and adults, stronger peer relationships, and growing student social justice awareness — with 87% to 90% of respondents reporting these areas as improved as a result of CRASEL participation.

## Grant Survey: Satisfaction and Impact

**69%**  
Very satisfied with CRASEL overall

**4.32**  
Average star rating (out of 5)

**4.80**  
Family and community star rating (out of 5)

**0%**  
Participants reporting “no impact” from Multitasking Yogi — programming delivered to all 23 schools

# Perceived Impacts on School Environment

Area of School Environment	Rating
SEL practices incorporated throughout the school day	69% Very Improved
School leadership empowers students to build emotional intelligence	66% Very Improved
School leadership elevates and values student voice	65% Very Improved
School leadership elevates and values family voice	62% Very Improved
School leaders value and support staff	55% Very Improved
Teachers incorporate diverse identities in classroom practices	46% Very Improved

*“Overall, CRASEL has helped me grow both personally and professionally, equipping me with strategies to create a more inclusive, supportive, and emotionally intelligent environment.”*  
 — School Staff Participant, NYU Metro Center Grant Survey

**Grant Survey Citation:** Perry, D.M. & DeSouza, L.M. (2026). *The Culturally Responsive and Affirming Social-Emotional Leadership (CRASEL) Expansion Project: Shifting Mindsets, Strengthening Connections, and Shaping School Culture.* Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools at New York University.

## IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS

# Organizations Bringing CRASEL to Life

The CRASEL Expansion Project was delivered through five professional development providers, each contributing specialized expertise aligned to the framework’s domains, funded through the federal grant administered by HREP, Inc.

<p><b>Yale RULER</b></p> <p>Evidence-based training in recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing, and regulating emotion, serving school leaders, educators, students, and families. All 23 schools trained; 17 schools fully implementing.</p>	<p><b>Morningside Center</b></p> <p>Facilitation of restorative practices, community circles, and trust-rebuilding to repair harm and strengthen relationships across school communities.</p>
<p><b>Pure Edge, Inc.</b></p> <p>Professional development in self-care and mindfulness to manage stress and support social, emotional, and academic learning competencies for educators and students.</p>	<p><b>Multitasking Yogi</b></p> <p>Movement-based programming delivered to all 23 District 5 schools, empowering students, educators, families, and community members to develop habits of physical self-care and body-based regulation. Physical education teachers participated districtwide, and several staff members completed certification as yoga instructors through the program.</p>
<p><b>Executive Leadership Institute</b></p> <p>Emotional intelligence professional development and training for school leaders, building capacity for compassionate, clarity-driven leadership for principals and assistant principals.</p>	

## IMPLICATIONS

# Key Recommendations

Drawing from both District 5 outcomes and the NYU Metro Center grant survey, the following recommendations reflect what the evidence shows is most essential to sustaining and scaling CRASEL-aligned work.

### FOR EDUCATORS

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- Embed SEL as a daily practice rather than an add-on, integrating mood meters, mindfulness routines, restorative circles, and calming corners into everyday classroom life.
- Engage in reflective, healing-centered practice to build self-awareness, emotional regulation, and self-care, addressing burnout and emotional exhaustion.
- Create opportunities for students to lead SEL check-ins, articulate emotions, and practice advocacy as foundational to belonging and academic engagement.

### FOR SCHOOL AND DISTRICT LEADERS

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- Invest in sustained, high-quality adult professional development addressing emotional intelligence, mindfulness, restorative practices, and leadership self-care.
- Protect time for implementation and collaboration by embedding SEL planning into the school day with coaching and cross-role learning opportunities.
- Move beyond pilot programs by embedding CRASEL principles into school norms, language, routines, and leadership expectations districtwide.

### FOR FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS

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- Partner with schools around shared SEL language and practices, grounding emotional tools in children's identities, histories, and lived experiences.
- Engage in community-based SEL and healing spaces that support caregiver well-being and parenting confidence.
- Elevate family voice in school culture by sharing histories, naming practices, and cultural traditions that can be affirmatively integrated into classrooms.

### FOR POLICYMAKERS AND FUNDERS

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- Expand definitions of SEL to include healing justice and cultural affirmation, addressing structural inequities and recognizing schools as sites of belonging and civic development.
- Fund comprehensive, multi-level SEL initiatives including adult SEL, family engagement, and community partnerships alongside student programming.
- Support ongoing, participatory program assessment that captures shifts in school culture, relationships, and belonging, not solely academic outcomes.

### About the Framework Developer

Dr. Dawn Brooks-DeCosta is Deputy Superintendent of Harlem Community School District 5 (NYC Public Schools), serving 6,000+ students across 23 schools in Central Harlem. She is the developer of the CRASEL framework, created through her doctoral dissertation at Teachers College, Columbia University, and implemented across all 23 District 5 schools over three years.

She is co-author of *The Change You Want to See: A Culturally Responsive and Affirming Approach to School Leadership* (Solution Tree, December 2024) with Dr. Mark A. Gooden, an adjunct lecturer at Lehman College, CUNY, and a Trustee of the Anyone Can Fly Foundation.

## FRAMEWORK FOUNDATIONS

# CRASEL Framework Citations

The CRASEL framework is grounded in the following foundational scholarship. These works collectively inform its seven domains, theoretical orientation, and commitment to culturally responsive, healing-centered, and equity-driven school leadership.

### PRIMARY FRAMEWORK SOURCES

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