

# PILOT LEARNING ARC: BARD

## DESIGN FELLOWSHIP

This document summarizes some of the key moments in the Design Fellowship learning journey for the team at **Bard Early College High School**. The purpose is to illustrate how a team can learn about a specific challenge and use equity design tools to craft new solutions.

**At the start of Fellowship**, the team at Bard was focused on the challenge of building connections between faculty and students who were constrained by virtual learning. The design team wanted to understand what was preventing students, particularly those new to high school, from feeling included at the school. The team reflected at the time on survey data: “In the Fall of 2020, only 27% of our students felt like they were known and understood as an individual. One student even suggested that while some returning teachers know some returning students, most teachers are simply checking work and not building relationships.”

**When the team set out to build empathy with students through interviews**, here is some of what they heard:

- “Old teachers might know our personality; the new teachers don’t know us because they just check on work and not build relationships.”
- “You can tell what students they know and what students are new. The teacher engages only people they know.”
- “Build a relationship with students and check in on them personally.”
- “Teachers only look at the best students and they are not looking at all the students. Teachers aren’t giving the feedback that people are doing good, that means more to students than falcon points. I know you’re trying your best.”

Based on the insights developed from these empathy interviews, the team **redefined the problem they were trying to solve** like this:

Stakeholders need a way to build meaningful connections and relationships so that the classrooms feel supportive and everyone, students and adults, is encouraged and welcomed to share.

**The team developed a “theory of change”** that articulated the connections between several different structures designed to provide support for students. This included tools for communicating in virtual learning environments, SEL check-ins during class time, teacher office hours outside of class, and communication between teachers and parents. The theory of change helped them identify which structure to focus on.

**For their first pilot, the team narrowed their focus to building relationships in the classroom.** Here is how they described the first version of this pilot test:

Teachers will implement at least one check-in touchpoint or brain break into their daily class routine. The touchpoint can vary day to day and class by class. We want to allow teacher flexibility to reach the room and needs of their students in what is needed at that time.

**The scale of Pilot 1 was narrow:**

- 6 teachers implemented between 1 and 3 SEL check-ins / brain breaks in every lesson
- 3 week pilot timeframe
- Goal: help teachers and students to relationships, increase sense of belonging
- Design team created the activities for the “brain breaks” to take the lift off of teachers.

**The team crafted specific questions about what they wanted to learn from Pilot 1:**

Feasibility: To what extent are teachers able to consistently implement the social-emotional learning check-ins during class time?	<i>Emerging answers, based on team reflection:</i> Yes. 86% based on teacher tracker. Need more flexibility to allow for 1-, 2-, and 3- check-in lessons, rather than always doing 3.
Attitudes: To what extent do students feel that the SEL check-ins are purposeful and a good use of class time?	91% of participating students said “yes.” In focus groups, multiple students said the pilot created more opportunities for students to show up as their full selves. Small # of students consistently opted out.
Attitudes: To what extent do teachers feel that the SEL check-ins are purposeful and a good use of class time?	100% of teachers felt they were purposeful. All three pilot teachers could name multiple students with whom they developed deeper relationships.
Outcomes: To what extent do the check-ins support increases in student engagement, attendance, or academic perseverance?	Attendance was up significantly. Engagement was also up based on informal observations. Not enough evidence to determine impact on academic work.

**Based on what they learned from three classrooms in Pilot 1, they developed a Pilot 2 that kept many structures, with some key adjustments.**

The SEL check-ins they co-designed now happen in all classes across all grade levels in the school.

- Codify: Design team worked with pilot teachers to codify tools and processes.
- Cede power to students: The design team partnered with students to design and lead the “brain breaks” in class, and to determine the most effective breaks. Students also introduced the “brain breaks” to new classes.
- Leverage funding: Bought books, materials, tools for students to use during breaks.
- Expand: Scaled up from 9th grade to all four grades.
- Validated Theory of Change: Teachers felt the deeper connections with the students, and saw it as an investment of the time.