

# Understanding the Impact of Poetry Out Loud—Findings from a National Study

Social Policy Research Associates

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# Presentation Overview

Contextual Overview: What is Poetry Out Loud?

Evaluation Overview: Research Questions and Methodology

Key Findings: Academic Engagement

Key Findings: Social-Emotional Development

Key Findings: Poetry Appreciation & Engagement

Considerations: Implications for Key Stakeholders

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# About Poetry Out Loud

# What is Poetry Out Loud (POL)?

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS  
AND POETRY FOUNDATION PRESENT



- National arts education program sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts (Arts Endowment) and the Poetry Foundation
- Encourages high school students across the country to learn about great poetry through memorization and recitation

# Implementing POL



**CLASSROOM  
AND  
SCHOOLWIDE  
CONTEST**



**REGIONAL/  
STATE  
LEVEL  
COMPETITION**



**NATIONAL  
FINALS**

## **STATE AWARDS:**

Each winner at the state level will receive \$200 and an all-expenses-paid trip (with an adult chaperone) to Washington, DC, to compete at the National Finals. The state winner's school will receive \$500 for poetry materials. One runner-up in each state will receive \$100; his or her school will receive \$200 for the purchase of poetry materials.

## **NATIONAL AWARDS:**

A total of \$50,000 in awards and school stipends will be given at the Poetry Out Loud National Finals, including a \$20,000 award for the National Champion.



# POL Logic Model

The Poetry Foundation and the NEA believe that, when implemented effectively, the POL program can have a positive impact in four key domains:

- student academic performance
- the social and emotional health of students
- teacher knowledge and confidence in teaching poetry
- awareness and appreciation of poetry and arts programming.

Tied to these domains are specific hypothesized outcomes (e.g. increased analytical skills and proficiency in English Language Arts, increased confidence, and increased poetry exposure) that serve as indicators of progress towards the program's desired impacts.

**Mission Statement:** A national recitation contest supported by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), Poetry Foundation, and State and Jurisdictional Arts Agencies (SAAs), **Poetry Out Loud** encourages the nation's youth to learn about great poetry through memorization and recitation, helping students master public speaking skills, build self-confidence, and learn about literary history.

Inputs	Strategies	Anticipated Outcomes	Impact
<p>POL leverages <b>strong partnerships</b> to ensure consistent, high quality programming:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The <b>NEA</b> provides funding for SAAs to implement the program and to run the National Finals as well as support and resources for state and local-level partners, teachers, and students.</li> <li>The <b>Poetry Foundation</b> provides funding for the program's prizes, travel, permissions, website, materials, and distribution of materials in addition to support and resources for state and local level partners, teachers, and students.</li> <li><b>State Arts Agencies</b> publicize the program, recruit teachers and schools to participate, and develop and conduct the state-level finals program.<sup>1</sup></li> </ul>	<p>POL seeks to elevate poetry and harness its power to support student development by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing and providing easy access to a robust, diverse, and growing anthology of poetry</li> <li>Engaging students in thoughtful, complex curricula that encourages deep engagement with and analysis of poetry</li> <li>Providing educators with easy access to strong, tested poetry curriculum</li> <li>Providing a comprehensive package of teaching tools and resources to support effective instruction</li> <li>Nurturing and promoting the expressive and performative aspect of poetry</li> <li>Creating a highly visible, national performance venue to challenge students and celebrate their accomplishments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students' capacity to analyze poetry grows</li> <li>Students' engagement in learning increases</li> <li>Students' knowledge of literary history increases</li> <li>Students' language arts proficiency grows</li> <li>Students' confidence increases</li> <li>Students' sense of self/identity grows</li> <li>Students' engagement in the larger school community grows</li> <li>More teachers exposed to arts education programming</li> <li>Teachers' knowledge and appreciation of poetry increases</li> <li>Teachers strengthen their ability to effectively teach poetry</li> <li>Teachers' enthusiasm for teaching poetry increases</li> <li>Students and community experience increased exposure to poetry</li> <li>Students and community express appreciation for arts programming and poetry</li> <li>Students and community are exposed to the work of State Arts Agencies, NEA, &amp; the Poetry Foundation</li> <li>Students and community members increase their participation in arts programming</li> </ul>	<p><b>Students' Academic Skills &amp; Performance are Strengthened</b></p> <p><b>Students' Social and Emotional Health Improves</b></p> <p><b>Teacher Knowledge of &amp; Confidence in Teaching Poetry Increases</b></p> <p><b>Awareness and Appreciation of Poetry and Arts Programming Increases</b></p>
<p><b>Contextual Factors</b></p> <p>There are a number of external factors that can affect POL implementation and outcomes, including (but not limited to):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prior experience with POL</li> <li>Years of teaching experience and efficacy in teaching poetry</li> <li>Socioeconomic factors that can impact learning (e.g. poverty rates)</li> <li>School social/cultural context</li> </ul>			

<sup>1</sup> Some SAAs supplement NEA funds with additional state funds and/or private donations, or establish organizational partnerships, that enable special trainings and workshops for participating students and teachers or add to the prize amounts.



# About the Evaluation Study

# POL Evaluation Purpose



*To better understand student-level outcomes associated with the Poetry Out Loud program implemented under optimal conditions.*

# Research Domains

Research Domain	Logic Model Impact Area
Student Academic Engagement and Performance	Students' Academic Skills and Performance are Strengthened
Student Social and Emotional Development	Students' Social and Emotional Health Increases
Student Poetry Appreciation and Engagement	Awareness and Appreciation of Poetry and Arts Programming Increases
	Teacher Knowledge of and Confidence in Teaching Poetry Increases

# Research Questions

## Academic engagement and performance

- Does student participation in POL correlate with increased academic engagement in English classes and/or in school more generally?
- Are there other types of skill development correlated with POL participation?

## Social and emotional development

- Do students experience increased self-confidence in their public speaking abilities, social skills, intellectual abilities or, in general, after participating in POL?
- Do students feel more secure, empowered, and/or articulate in expressing themselves after participating in POL?
- Are students more likely to engage in civic activities during or after participation in POL?
- Are students more likely to engage in extracurricular activities during or after participation in POL?

## Poetry appreciation and engagement

- Does participating in POL correlate with students' increasing their likelihood of reading or writing poetry for pleasure?
- Does POL promote the sharing of poems among students and, if so, by what means?
- Do students talk about poetry or POL on social media networks after the participation versus before?
- Does POL participation correlate with any attitudinal changes toward poetry, academics, public speaking/performing, or post-high school aspirations?

# Sample Selection Criteria

## States

- 'Optimally implementing' according to NEA standards
- Limited to 18 states

## Schools

- Mandatory POL participation in some but not all classrooms
- At least 360 POL participants and 360 non-participants

# Qualitative Data Collection



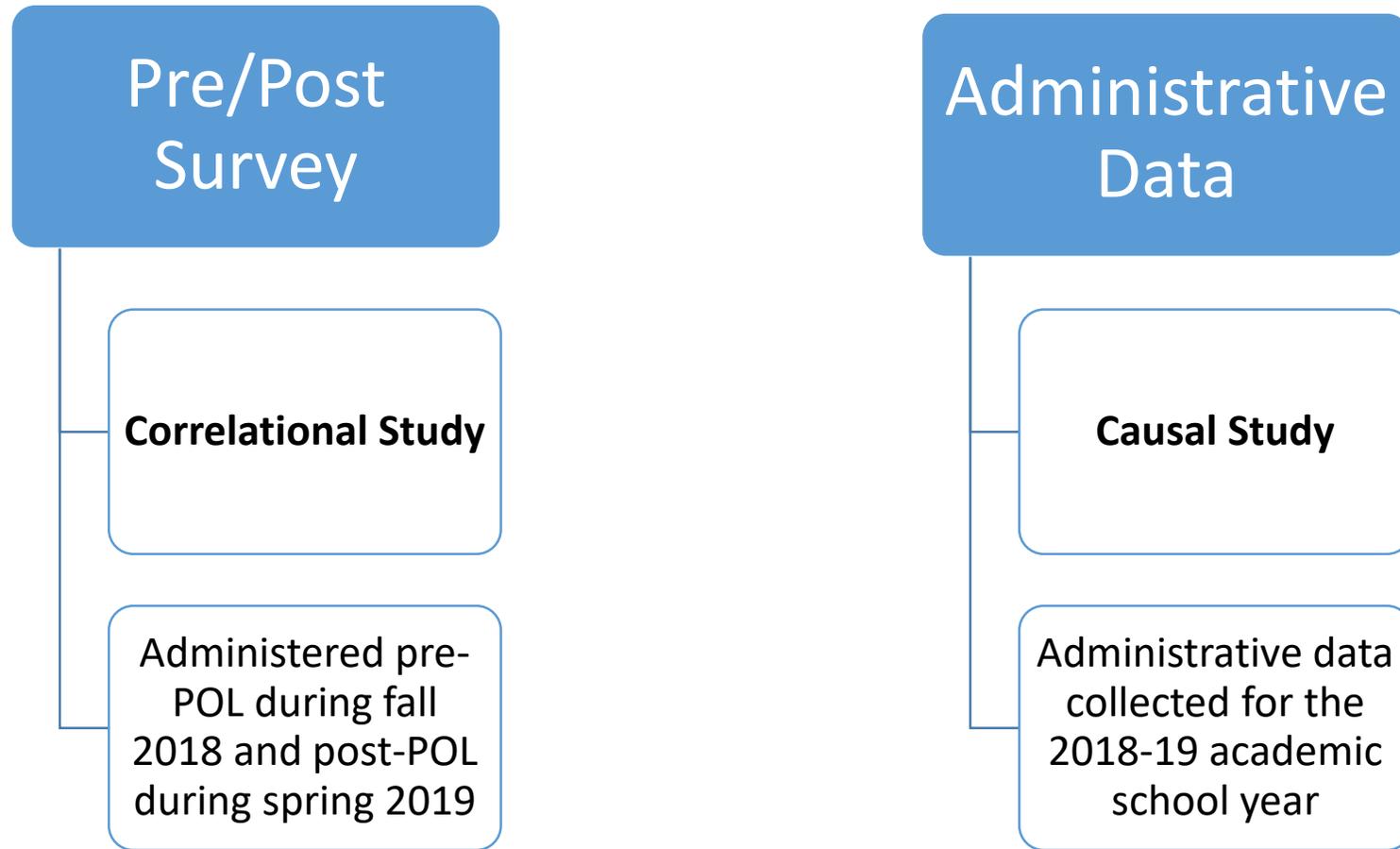
- In-person site visits to all ten study schools
- Site visits included:
  - Administrator interview
  - Two POL teacher interviews
  - Up to four student interviews
  - Student focus group

# Qualitative Data Analysis Process



- Post-site visit field notes to capture fresh observations and reflections
- All data were transcribed and coded for key themes
- Two rounds of analysis
- Team check-ins for shared meaning-making

# Quantitative Methodology



# Survey Items & Dimensions

## 145 Items with 11 Dimensions





# Survey Methodology

**Goal:** Compare survey responses between POL participants and POL non-participants for each dimension and key individual questions.

**Method:** Multiple regression analyses to explore differences in the change from pre to post-survey responses between participants and non-participants, controlling for schools, grade level, and select background characteristics when appropriate (e.g., mother's education, advanced/honors course enrollment).

# Administrative Data Variables

## Demographics

Gender  
Grade  
Race/Ethnicity  
Free/Reduced Priced Lunch  
Special Education Status  
English Language Learner Status  
Highest Parent Education Level

## Academic Engagement

Suspensions  
Expulsions  
Attendance rate  
Enrollment in Honors/AP course

## Academic Achievement

English Language Arts Course Grades  
Grade Point Average  
ELA Standardized Test Scores  
Math Standardized Test Scores  
History Standardized Test Scores  
Science Standardized Test Scores



# Administrative Data Methodology

**Goal:** Understand the causal impact of POL participation on student academic achievement.

**Method:** Propensity score matching to simulate “randomized” participant/non-participant groups, controlling enrollment in advanced placement or honors courses.

# **Key Findings: Academic Engagement & Achievement**

# Academic Engagement and Achievement: Key Findings

## English Language Arts

- **Analysis:** depth and density
- **Vocabulary:** importance of each word
- **Writing:** new methods to convey meaning
  - Development of writing identity/voice

## Other subjects

- Adds dimensions to learning about other subjects
  - Math
  - History
  - Science
  - Foreign language
  - Performing arts

## General academic skills & engagement

- Serves as a “hook” for increased **engagement** in ELA and school overall
- Provides opportunity to explore **multiple meanings**, multiple truths
- Builds broadly-applicable academic and “real life” skills:
  - memorization,
  - communication,
  - analysis, and
  - critical thinking

# Academic Engagement and Achievement: Key Findings

## English Language Arts

- Analysis: depth and density
- Vocabulary: importance of each word
- Writing: new methods to convey meaning
  - Development of writing identity/voice

*"I feel like when you start writing poetry yourself, you can write any other form. I feel like even as simple as poetry may seem, it's so complex too. And all of a sudden when you learn a new style of writing, all those skills that you have from poetry, can flip right back into that style that you just learned and all the sudden you become a master at it. And it's like, I don't remember the last time I've had a bad grade in English. Because like, all of that just integrates, I'm just writing my heart out because it's so easy for me to do that now."*

*"I've seen it in their writing. They've been taking risks, I call it. And maybe they didn't always work but I could see the attempt of oh, you're using that repetition or you're trying to use this short with long sentence structures to create a rhythm."*

# Key Survey Findings for Change from Pre to Post

*All multiple linear regressions shown below control for school, grade, and enrollment in an advanced/honors course*

	Difference in Pre/Post Change between All Participants and Non-Participants	Difference in Pre/Post Change between 1-year Participants and Non-Participants	Difference in Pre/Post Change between 2+ years Participants and Non-Participants
Affective Learning	0.02	0.02	0.02
Engagement in School	0.004	0.02	0.02
Engagement in English Language Arts	0.06 ▲	0.08 ▲	-0.0003
School Climate	-0.005	-0.001	-0.01

**These numbers represent the average difference in pre/post change between POL participants and non-participants for dimensions means on a scale of 1-5.**

**▲Denotes a statistically significant difference between participants and non-participants at 95% confidence level.**

# Administrative Data Findings

	POL 2018-19 Participants	POL 2018-19 Non - Participants	ATT
2018-19 ELA Standardized Test Percentile Rank	34.88	28.66	2.82*
2018-19 Math Standardized Test Percentile Rank	38.58	25.10	10.90*
2018-19 GPA	3.29	3.01	0.13*

*\* denotes statistically significant impact at 95% confidence level*

*Note: Percentile ranks were used for standardized tests as a way to create a common metric across different standardized tests. The rank represents the percentage of students that an individual student scored higher than (within specific schools).*

# Administrative Data Findings

	ATT
2018-19 ELA Standardized Test Percentile Rank	2.82*
2018-19 Math Standardized Test Percentile Rank	10.90*
2018-19 GPA	0.13*

\* denotes statistically significant impact at 95% confidence level

- Because of POL participation, the percentile rank for students who participated in POL was **2.82 percentile points higher for their respective 2018-19 ELA standardized assessments**, had they not participated in POL ( $p < 0.01$ )
- Because of POL participation, the percentile rank for students who participated in POL was **10.90 percentile points higher for their respective 2018-19 math standardized assessments**, had they not participated in POL ( $p < 0.001$ )
- Because of POL participation, students who participated in POL experienced a **0.13-point boost to their un-weighted GPA**, had they not participated in POL ( $p < 0.001$ )

# Key Findings: Social and Emotional Development

# Social and Emotional Development: Key Findings

## Develop self-awareness

- Reading, studying, and performing poetry helps students **identify and explore their own emotions, thoughts, and values.**
- Develop **confidence** to express who they are to the world.

## Discover multiple intelligences

- Students **discover and tap into** multiple intelligences (*e.g. memorization, public speaking, performance, critical thinking, etc.*).

## Strengthen social awareness

- POL helps students **practice empathy,** and **connect** with different types of thinking, perspectives, and lived experiences.

## Foster community and support communication

- Shared experience in POL fosters a **sense of community** among participants and opens up a line of **communication** between students who may not otherwise interact.

# Socioemotional Development: Key Findings

## Strengthen social awareness

- Studying poetry helps POL participants practice empathy and understand other people's feelings, experiences, and point of view.
- Hearing other people read poems they selected gives POL students more insight into who the individual is, which helps strengthen their ability to understand the world from different perspectives and learn to appreciate diversity.

*"I think it's helped me realize that I'm more of an empathetic person, that I can understand other people's experiences, even if I haven't experienced that in my own life. One of my poems, losing a family member or somebody close to me, that hasn't happened, but I've been able to relate better to those experiences through the poetry."*

*"It's like a way to express yourself and so obviously different poets have different ways of doing that, that connect with different people because everybody has different personalities. It's cool to see how other personalities analyze stuff or how they express themselves and what they relate to and connect with 'cause it's not necessarily gonna be the same way that you look at the world but you kinda get to know them better."*

# Key Survey Findings for Change from Pre to Post

*All multiple linear regressions shown below control for school, grade, and enrollment in an advanced/honors course*

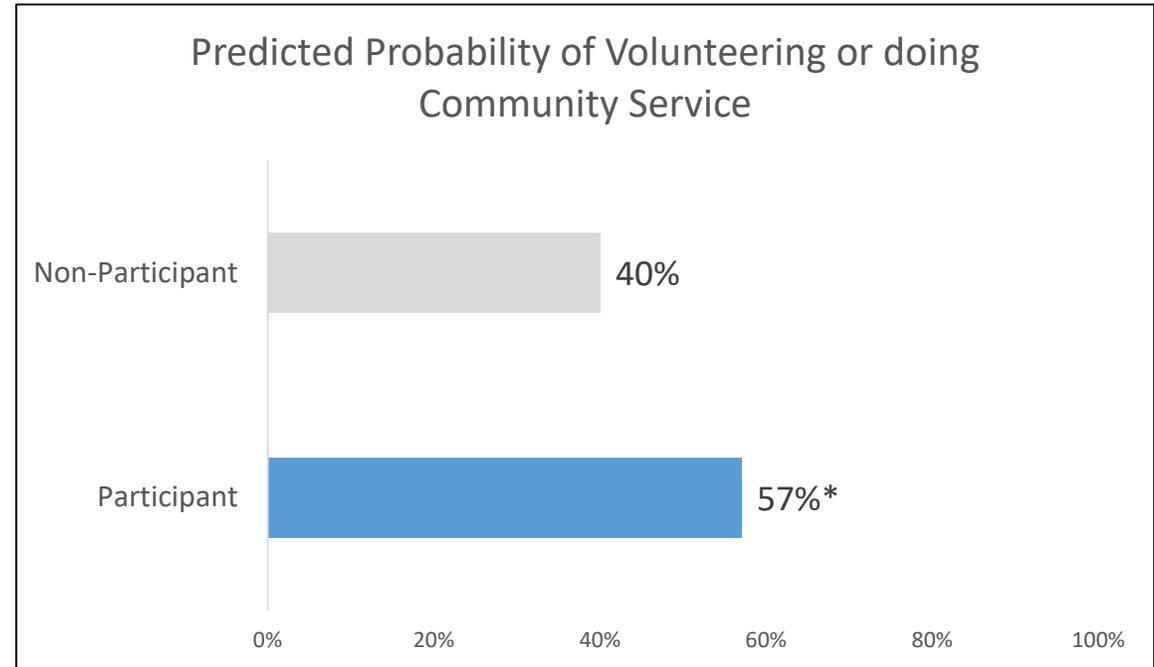
	Difference in Pre/Post Change between All Participants and Non-Participants	Difference in Pre/Post Change between 1-year Participants and Non-Participants	Difference in Pre/Post Change between 2+ years Participants and Non-Participants
Group Discussions	0.07 ▲	0.09 ▲	0.04
Speech	0.002	0.02	-0.05
Public Speaking	0.02	0.03	0.002
Reliance	0.01	0.01	0.02
Leadership Development	-.10	-.14 ▼	-0.004

**These numbers represent the average difference in pre/post change between POL participants and non-participants for dimensions means on a scale of 1-5.**

**▲ ▼ Denote a statistically significant difference between participants and non-participants at 95% confidence level.**

# Social and Emotional Development – Survey Data

The estimated odds of **participating in volunteer work or community service** are **1.5 times higher for participants** than non-participants, controlling for mother's education and college aspirations, this was statistically significant at a 0.05 alpha level.



The After-School Activities survey question is a yes/no question asking about participation in community service.

# Key Findings: Poetry Appreciation

# Poetry Appreciation and Engagement: Key Findings

## Increased student engagement

- Participation in POL, especially memorizing and reciting poems was strongly correlated with **increased student pleasure and engagement with poetry.**
- Students had strong diverse feelings about poetry, which indicated engagement.

## Appreciation of poetry's uniqueness

- Students came to **appreciate poetry's special capacity among the language arts** to express complex experience

## Increased teacher engagement

- POL is a way for teachers to **connect with students in a new way.**
- Teachers' **enjoyment of and comfort with poetry** increased substantially with POL participation.

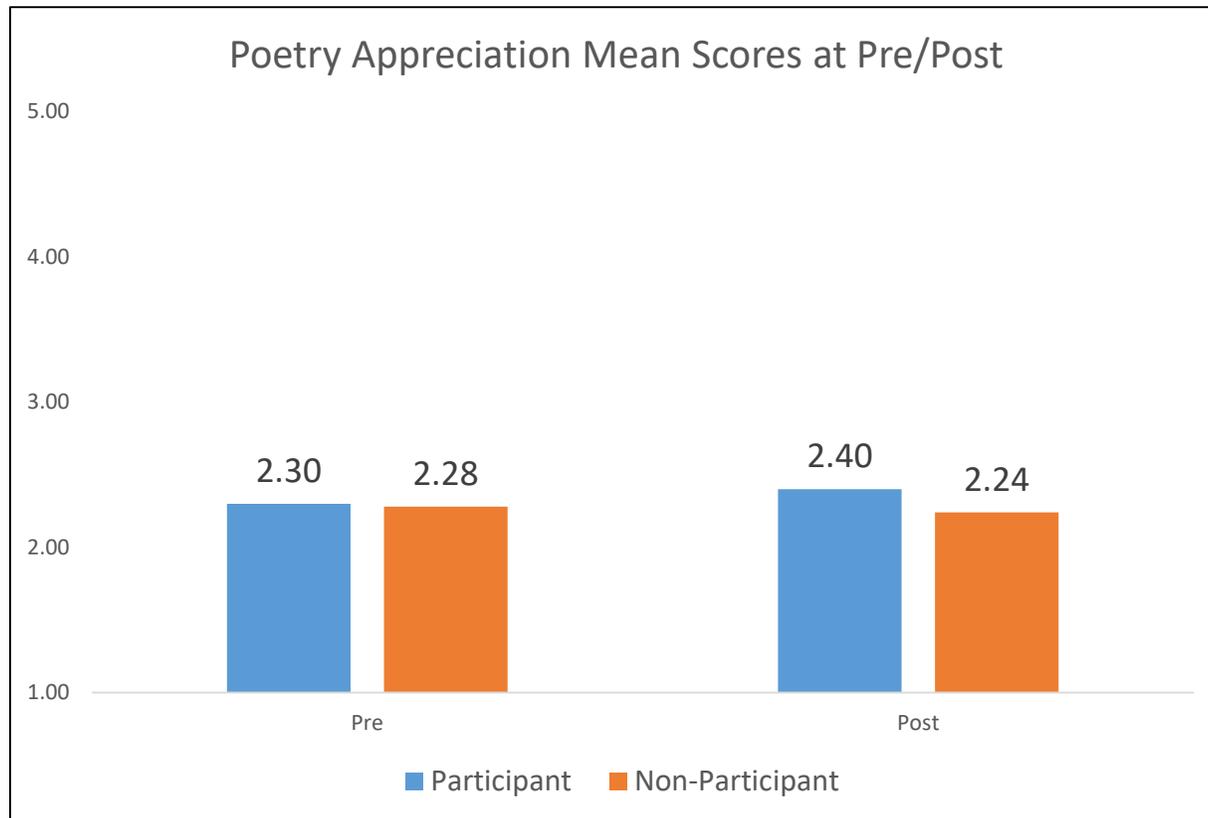
# Poetry Appreciation and Engagement: Key Findings

## Appreciation of poetry's uniqueness

- Students found poetry to be exciting because it is uniquely open to interpretation
- Poems can come alive in different ways depending on how (and by whom) they are performed
- Poems can provoke emotional experience

*“I definitely feel like [my feelings about poetry] have changed because I've grown to appreciate poetry a lot more because I feel like in the past, I thought it was really static and there was only one way to do it, and it was pretty boring. But now I feel like poetry can be a lot of different things and a lot of different poets do [it] different ways, so it feels more accessible to write and to read it.”*

# Differences from Pre to Post in Key Domains – Survey Data



The Poetry Appreciation Scale survey dimension contains 18 items and reflects a scale of 1-5: (1) Strongly Disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Neither Disagree nor Agree; (4) Agree; (5) Strongly Agree

# Key Survey Findings for Change from Pre to Post

*All multiple linear regressions shown below control for school, grade, and enrollment in an advanced/honors course*

	Difference in Pre/Post Growth between All Participants and Non-Participants	Difference in Pre/Post Growth between 1-year Participants and Non-Participants	Difference in Pre/Post Growth between 2+ years Participants and Non-Participants
Poetry Appreciation	0.04	0.01	0.09 <sup>▲</sup>
Poetry Use in Social Media	-0.01	-0.02	-0.04

**These numbers represent the average difference in pre/post change between POL participants and non-participants for dimensions means on a scale of 1-5.**

**▲Denotes a statistically significant difference between participants and non-participants at 95% confidence level.**

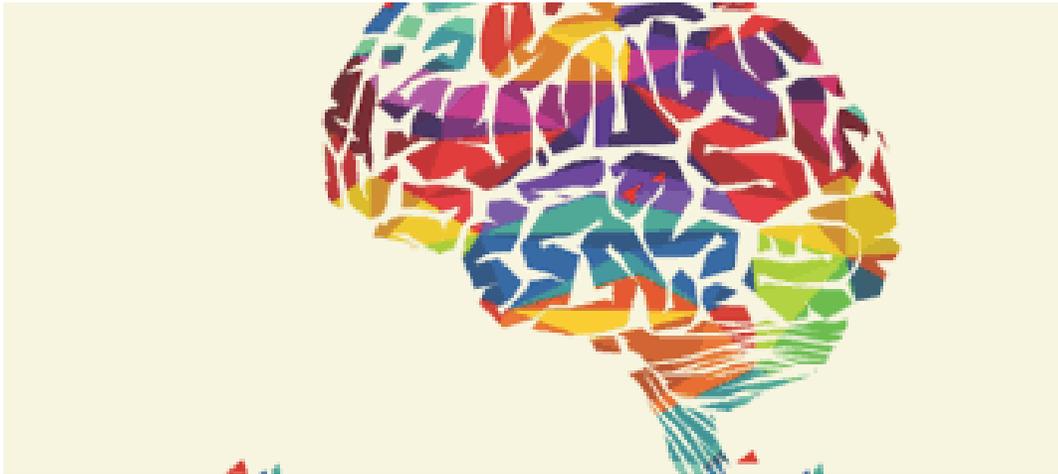
# Considerations

# Considerations for School Administrators & Teachers



- **Creating a culture of support for POL is critical to the success of the program and its participants.**
- **Teacher interest and enthusiasm is a key ingredient for successful implementation.**
- **Being flexible and willing to adapt program components to meet student needs can help ensure inclusivity**
- **The range of teaching tools offered through POL provide useful pedagogical supports to help teachers teach poetry confidently and effectively.**

# Considerations for the Arts Endowment and Poetry Foundation



- **Implementing ongoing data collection systems for participating schools.**
- **Creating access to poetry relevant to diverse communities.**
- **Offering resources that make teaching poetry and POL appropriate for and accessible to every student.**
- **Making the case for poetry at a national level.**

# Considerations for the Research Field



- **Understanding impacts at different levels of implementation.**
- **Understanding impacts across a range of school and teacher contexts.**
- **Considering the burden on schools that may feel “over-researched .”**
- **Understanding longitudinal impacts.**
- **Developing arts education-specific measures.**
- **Addressing the multiple purposes of arts-based research.**

# Concluding Thoughts



*Promoting the power of poetry and advocating for greater inclusion of poetry into the curriculum can feel like an uphill battle, particularly given the context of schooling, wherein certain subject areas are consistently framed as more “important” or “valuable” (e.g. STEM), and “success” is too often framed and measured within such narrow parameters (i.e. high grade point averages and test scores). Yet teachers and students in our sample schools taught us that one of the core benefits of studying poetry is that it encourages students to approach learning in ways that are in direct contrast to our fast-paced, testing-oriented achievement culture. They spoke of the value of being able to slow down, to focus, to analyze something in-depth, and to find joy in the process of discovery.*



# Questions?

- Feel free to reach out to the SPR team with any additional questions or comments:
  - Dr. Rachel Estrella, Principal Investigator:  
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