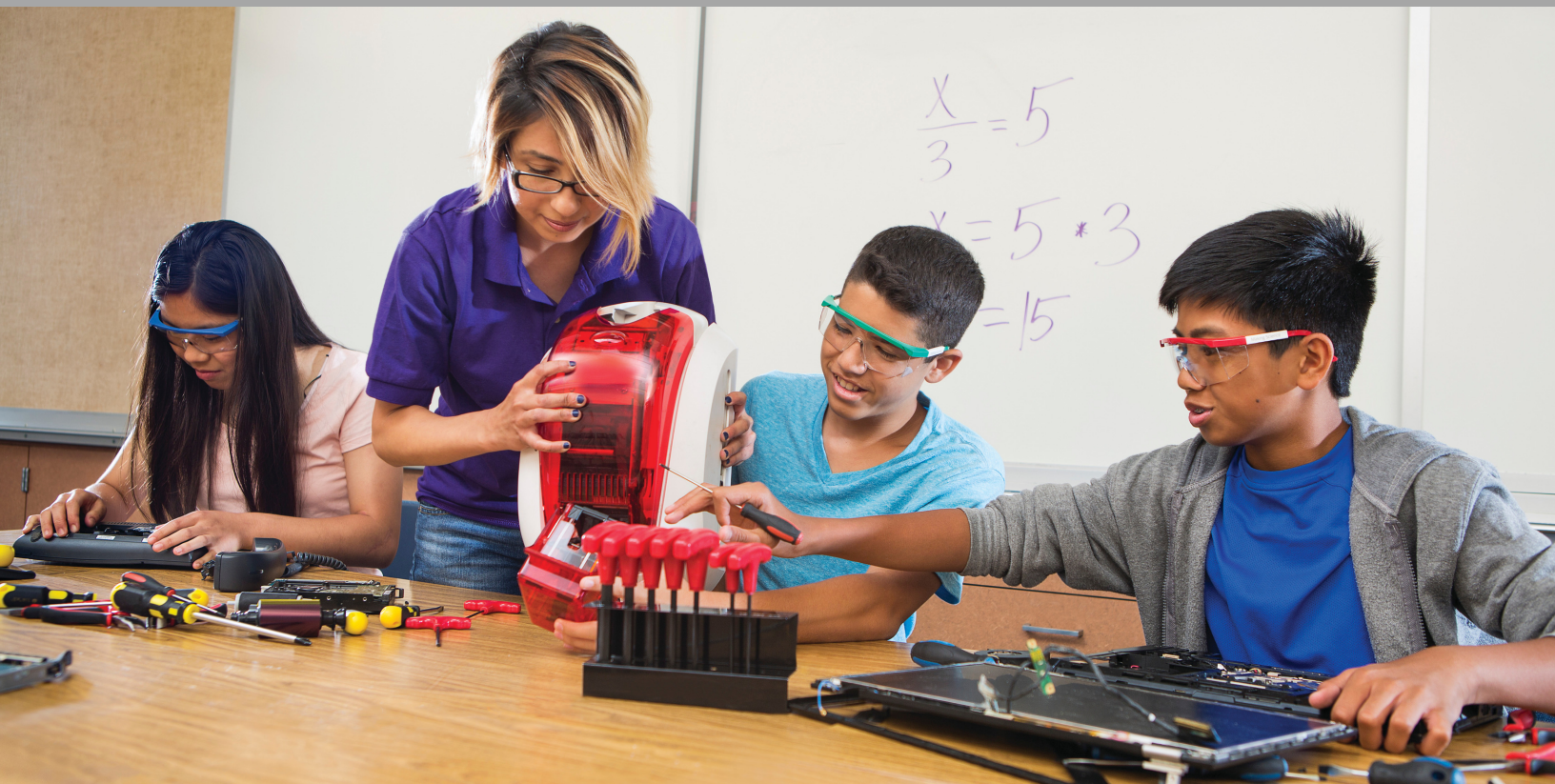NOVEMBER 2018

IMPLEMENTING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Lessons from Three National Organizations

the Y. YMCA

WYMAN
Transforming Teens. Changing Communities.

DAVID P. WEIKART
CENTER FOR YOUTH PROGRAM QUALITY

THREE CASE STUDIES EXPLORE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION IN YOUTH-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

Preface by Haviland Rummel, Executive Director, Susan Crown Exchange

We have learned from a large and growing body of evidence about what youth need to thrive. Social and emotional skills have come into sharp focus as key competencies for success in school, work, relationships and life. In addition to math, science, language and history, kids need to learn, practice and put into use skills like problem solving, empathy, emotion management, resilience and teamwork. Together, these skills set the stage for success. We have based our work on evidence that links social and emotional learning (SEL) to positive life outcomes and supports the value of incorporating SEL into all learning environments.

At SCE, our work in social and emotional learning focuses on programs that take place after school and on weekends, where kids participate in activities based on their passions and interests. We have selected top out-of-school programs as exemplars to understand and unpack the practices that help equip youth with social and emotional skills essential to lifelong success. Most recently, our attention has been focused on practical assessment of the challenges in bringing social and emotional learning into common practice. To that end, we are excited to share the following series of case studies that highlight how youth-serving organizations are successfully integrating SEL.

One year ago, we launched exciting partnerships with YMCA of the USA (Y-USA), Wyman, and the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality to explore how each organization is effectively remixing and embedding SEL practices, curricula and evaluation tools into their work and culture.

This first case study, from the Y-USA, highlights the development and launch of the Character Development Learning Institute. This effort is Y-USA's collaborative, program-agnostic and deliberate process of verifying, adapting, scaling and sharing best practices that advance youth character development.

The second case study, from Wyman, illustrates how the organization approached a curriculum redesign and implemented new staff practice supports to optimize how practitioners intentionally work to build social and emotional skills.

The third case study demonstrates how the David P. Weikart Center for Program Quality worked with four top out-of-school time networks and intermediary organizations in St. Paul, MN, Los Angeles, CA, Seattle, WA, and Milwaukee, WI to support sites in building capacity to deliver high-quality SEL practices. At the same time, The Weikart Center supported the networks to intentionally implement an SEL-aligned continuous quality improvement system.

By sharing what we've learned, we hope to stimulate new conversations on the importance of SEL and to help organizations identify and scale the most effective approaches. We are extremely grateful to all our partners, and even more grateful that this issue is rapidly surfacing as a topic widely known, understood, and explored.

Character Development Learning Institute (CDLI)

2018 CASE STUDY

YMCA OF THE USA

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Introduction

Character is a key element of the Y's approach to working with youth, and since its beginnings the Y has helped youth develop into ethical, caring, and successful adults. Today, the emerging field of youth character development is documenting, with greater rigor, the social and academic benefits of building youth character. However, it has yet to develop a full body of learning that demonstrates how adult practitioners can effectively apply evidence-based, character development practices in out-of-school-time (OST) settings. YMCA of the USA (Y-USA) seeks to fill this gap through the Character Development Learning Institute (CDLI).

The CDLI aims to advance youth character development through a collaborative, program-agnostic, and deliberate process of verifying, adapting, scaling, and sharing best practices. It plans to discover, test, and disseminate best practices to positively impact millions of youth. Throughout the process, the CDLI integrates evaluation into each step to verify the impact of interventions, the Y's ability to expand the use of those interventions in diverse settings, and the effectiveness of the Y's structure in carrying out the effort.

This case study describes the background and history of YMCA and the CDLI, the discovery process for developing and advancing youth character development, as well as the comprehensive framework and built-in functional evaluation of the CDLI. We hope this document will help other youth-serving organizations, as they explore how to integrate social-emotional learning (SEL) and character development within their organization.

Background and History

For nearly 170 years, YMCA of the USA (Y-USA) has been listening and responding to the needs of its communities. Founded in the United States in 1851, Ys serve all people — regardless of age, income, or background. The Y's mission is to put Christian principles into practice through programs that build healthy spirit, mind, and body for all.

Y-USA is the national resource office for 2,700 Ys across the country. A highly-regarded anchor **institution serving 10,000 communities across the nation**, the Y serves 22 million adults and youth annually. As a leading national non-profit, Y-USA strengthens communities and acts as a catalyst for meaningful, enduring change in: youth development - nurturing the potential of every child and teen; healthy living - improving the nation's health and well-being; and social responsibility - giving back and supporting our neighbors.

In the early 1990s, Ys across the country began placing intentional emphasis on four core values: **caring**, **honesty**, **respect**, and **responsibility**. This focus on the moral aspects of character began to guide how Ys hire, train, evaluate staff and volunteers, as well as design and implement programs. The focus on the four core values came at a time when Ys recognized the need to do more for the youth they served and respond to families who wanted their children grounded in good values that would carry them forward in life. Today, people come to the Y expecting character to be embedded, modeled, and nurtured. Most Ys have integrated the four core values into their organizations, but the degree of application varies greatly from Y to Y.

In the mid-2000s, the importance of developing character among youth reemerged as a national priority. Highly publicized incidents of youth conflict created urgency among local and national YMCA leaders to find and scale effective solutions. This urgency included a renewed commitment to character development as a foundational element of youth development initiatives.

Y-USA recognizes that character development can only be successful when the adults in youths' lives play an active role in supporting and fostering skills that help youth to realize their full potential. The Y's core values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility provide a natural medium to elevate adult practices that support and enhance these values.

Evidence demonstrates that youth character is most deeply influenced by interaction with adults, and OST practitioners are best able to effect positive youth outcomes when they are supported in implementing what is known to work. Hence, Y-USA embarked on a journey to conceptualize and develop the Character Development Learning Institute (CDLI). This institute aims to support the staff and volunteers of the Y because it leads to stronger development of character in youth.

How the CDLI Was Developed

First, need was established.

Character development is foundational to how youth develop and navigate in the larger world. It speaks to the core of successful social and emotional development, and research has consistently demonstrated that when there is a concerted effort made to support this domain of development, it can result in positive youth outcomes. While we know that youth character development comprises a mix of cognitive and social-emotional learning, there is little data about how to support these characteristics in youth. Concurrently, academic research has led to multiple theories, practices, and frameworks around character development. Terminology, such as social-emotional learning (SEL), moral intelligence, skills-building, character-building, grit, soft-skills, resilience, and cognitive competence are often used interchangeably — leading to confusion on when and how to use these tools.

For the OST field to mature, critical work must be done to translate research about social-emotional learning, and character development into practice. Hence, **Y-USA gathered information and held interviews with researchers and practitioners in the field to determine existing gaps and opportunities.**

Next, a discovery process was completed.

Y-USA engaged in a discovery process to learn more about the current state of character development and to identify promising practices currently employed in youth programs in Ys across the country. In an August 2015 report commissioned as part of that effort, Hanover Research shared several findings that supported the need for a project like the CDLI and informed its design.[1]

- Adult practice, both in practitioners' own display of character and their ability to teach character, is critical to the success of youth character development programs.
- Almost as important, is the influence of environment, both in its relational and material aspects.
- Effective initiatives use evaluation to clearly identify desired outcomes and measure impact on these outcomes; they provide opportunities to differentiate for diverse youth abilities, skills, and interests.
- Most development and dissemination of best practices have focused on the school classroom setting, indicating a gap in knowledge specific to OST practice — a gap that the CDLI is explicitly designed to address.

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[1] *Supporting Character Development in Youth and Children*, Prepared for YMCA of the USA by Hanover Research (August 2015)

Then, concept testing was performed.

Y-USA went through a concept validation process that focused on developing clear criteria upon which to base its decision whether to engage in business planning. It included surveying the youth development field to identify the potential for CDLI to fill a gap and identified basic parameters of the concept design to be further refined through business planning.

Three primary decision-making criteria were identified:

- **Need** – a) the identification of a gap in the field bridging research and practice, and b) the level of interest or demand among youth/ character development practitioners for information coming out of such a project.

- **Partners** – identifying potential researchers and practitioners with whom Y-USA might partner to pursue the project vision.

- **Structure** – designing an organizational structure that would further Y-USA's goals for the project (this factor will influence the decision but is less central than the first two items).

After numerous interviews with leading researchers and national youth development representatives, the following key takeaways confirmed there was a sufficient need for a Character Development Learning Institute (CDLI).

- Although there are numerous character initiatives underway, they are all independent of one another. What is missing is a **systematic effort to test and validate** a broad range of promising practices and share them with the field.

- Most research to date has focused on studies of youth character development as applied through a specific program or curriculum. What is less understood is what practices are effective in a more universal, **program-agnostic** context that the adults in the environment support and promote.

- One of the greatest areas of potential for a project like the CDLI is the development of **practical tools, effective training, and other resources** for practitioners, organizational leaders, and decision makers to effectively adapt, apply, and sustain existing character development concepts and approaches.

- There is an unfilled gap in, and a significant practitioner desire for, research around diversity (i.e., what works for different youth populations, not only in terms of cultural and ethnic diversity, but different ages, socioeconomic status, and other demographic variables) and how to adapt and apply best practices in different settings.
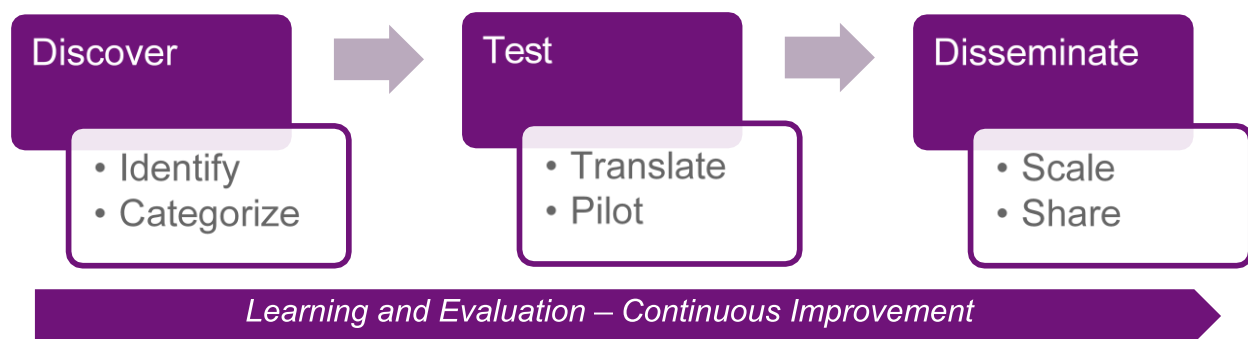
Finally, a business plan was developed and the CDLI infrastructure was established in 2016.

Character Development Learning Institute

CDLI aims to advance positive youth development in OST programs serving youth ages 5-18. This process of advancing adult practices in OST settings includes assessing, verifying, adapting, scaling, and sharing best practices within the Y network. It also aims to embed learning from practitioner and research partners to build a base of knowledge and practices across the broader OST field. Evaluation is integrated into each step of the process to assess the impact of interventions, to verify the Y's capacity to replicate the interventions in diverse settings, and to gauge the effectiveness of the Y's structure in carrying out the effort.

In this context, "practice" refers to a specific intervention and activity, or grouping of inter-related interventions and activities, that OST practitioners may adopt to influence youth character development. Practices also refer to the attitudes, skills and behaviors that inform the strategies and tactics for supporting youth development. This can include methods of training the staff and volunteers, caregiver and partner engagement, and policy planning and implementation.

CDLI Development Cycle Overview

Discover	Test	Disseminate
• Identify • Categorize	• Translate • Pilot	• Scale • Share

Learning and Evaluation – Continuous Improvement

Using the CDLI process model (see above), an identified practice is selected to be validated, categorized as appropriate interventions for organizations or programs at different levels of development, translated to understand if/how it is practical and replicable, piloted to learn how to bring it to a broader audience, then scaled/shared. Each practice is advanced through the Y's process model that has three major phases of activity, each with two distinct sub-phases, which together comprise a progressive path to impact. At each phase, the CDLI examines programs and practices, their potential for replication, and the possibility of bringing them to a broader audience.

Discovery Phase

In 2016, the CDLI conducted a broad-scale **discovery phase** to identify, assess, and document the best practices that underlie quality character development across four critical domains. These domains include adult practice, environments, evaluation, and delivery.

See detailed description of the four domains on the following page.

Domains
Adult Practice (hiring, professional development, pedagogical approach);
Environments (organizational and physical conditions necessary to deliver quality practices);
Evaluation (use of data to measure impact, inform decision making, and support continuous improvement);
Delivery (existing youth programs where we can infuse character development practices).

Y-USA believed that best practices across these four domains would result in a powerful formula to positively impact character development among youth — both within and outside of the Y Movement.

Through this process, several evidence-informed and research-based, promising adult practices were identified through a review of the literature as well as a consideration of their scalability and relevance to the Y's youth-serving programs.

Five adult practice areas were proposed for translation in the test phase:

Adult Practice Areas
Empathy – Adults work with youth to relate to others with acceptance, understanding, and a sensitivity to diverse perspectives and experiences.
Emotion management – Adults support youth in becoming aware of and constructively handling both positive and challenging emotions.
Relationship building – Adults foster experiences where youth plan, collaborate, and coordinate actions with others.
Responsibility – Adults develop youth to be reliable and to fulfill obligations and challenging roles.
Personal development – Adults encourage youth to act, persist, and initiate goals and outcomes even through the ups and downs of difficult situations and challenges.

These practice areas were selected because:

1. **They have a strong research foundation.** Several frameworks adopted in the OST field were applicable and easily adaptable to the common but varied settings served by the youth development practitioner in the YMCA movement. In particular, the following sources offered many examples, best practices, and lessons learned in both character development and social-emotional learning. Research examples include:

- Preparing Youth to Thrive: Promising Practices for Social and Emotional Learning by Smith, McGovern, Larson, Hillaker, & Peck. This resource (particularly the case studies) allowed us to understand how different programs, working with older youth supported and implemented social-emotional learning in diverse settings.
- Forum for Youth Investment, 2016.
- 2015 CASEL Guide: Effective social and emotional learning programs – middle and high school edition, by Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015.
- 2013 CASEL guide: Effective social and emotional learning programs – preschool and elementary school edition, by Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2013.

2. **They provided opportunities to scale.** It was a priority that the CDLI promoted promising practices that would be accessible, scalable in a local Y, while closing the gap between research and practice.

3. **They were measurable.** The five practice areas aligned with the Weikart Center's Youth Program Quality Assessment® (PQA), an evidence-based tool already used by Y-USA in evaluating evidence-based youth development interventions. Later in the process, Y-USA provided a "crosswalk" between the areas of practice and the above research as a means of assisting local Ys in translating these practice areas to other frameworks, programs, and initiatives. The crosswalk identifies the CDLI's adult practice areas (e.g., empathy, emotion management, relationship building, responsibility, and personal responsibility), and cross-references those practices with other well-known character development frameworks such as the Weikart Social-Emotional Program Quality Assessment (SEL PQA), CASEL's integrated framework, and the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA). This crosswalk allows local Ys to understand how our adult practices mesh with other evidence-based frameworks. A copy of the CDLI crosswalk is available, upon request.

4. **They were accepted and affirmed by experts in the field.** For example, the CDLI Advisory Council, external researchers, and other experts in youth development, confirmed the five adult practice areas were a stable, research-informed foundation upon which to build and test.

Throughout its development, the CDLI has been co-constructed for Ys and by Ys. In other words, the relevance, need and expertise of the YMCA movement has been integrated into the selection of the five areas of practice, the development of the tools and professional development experiences, and the elevation of local Ys as thought leaders in the creation, critique, and adjustments of the Institute.

Test Phase

In the **test phase**, the primary question to be answered was: "Can the identified adult practices be implemented within different kinds (size, location, program type) of Ys?" To answer this question, 32 local Y sites were selected in 2017 to *translate* the practices from working definitions to active strategies in their nominated programs and then *pilot* those practices more broadly in the Y Movement, for further development. Each selected Y nominated a youth development program to take part in the CDLI. Nominated programs ranged from OST academic, camp, mentoring, health, and well-being, as well as sports and recreation programs.

To promote implementation of youth character development strategies in the five practice areas, the CDLI provided five major supports to participating Ys: training and professional development, technical assistance, self-directed resources, peer-learning, and data.

- **Training and Professional Development**. Each site participated in extensive training and professional development. They included (but were not limited to): webinars and peer learning sessions provided in small learning communities. In the Pilot Phase, Y-USA transitioned from all-site webinars to small-group webinar professional learning communities, hosted monthly by Technical Advisors. In these calls, Ys had a greater chance to interact and learn from one another.

- **Technical Assistance.** Y-USA Technical Advisors coach, train, encourage, challenge, and troubleshoot with local Ys as they support character development.

- **Y Site Self-Directed Resources**. At the Y, we strive for cause-driven leaders. To develop our stakeholders, we created a CDLI Pilot Guide, a CDLI Placemat (concept map of strategies and tactics), a CDLI Toolkit, and CDLI Crosswalk of SEL terms to encourage learning. We also inventoried existing youth development resources and looked for opportunities to align and embed our five adult practices within them. These resources offered stakeholders — from C-suite to program practitioners — the strategies, tactics, and best/promising practices for each adult practice area. Learning solutions were designed to help stakeholders identify a starting point in his/her respective development, access reflection tools and scenarios that influenced his/her practice and offered a roadmap or guide to a continuum of learning from ok to good, good to great, and great to exemplary. The resource, *Preparing Youth to Thrive,* was a key tool for developing these materials. It provided the scholarly framework evidenced by similar youth-serving organizations who understood social-emotional learning (SEL) in the out-of-school time space from a youth-centric, youth development perspective.

- **Annual Participant Meetings**. To encourage sites to learn from each other, CDLI fostered opportunities for local Ys to directly communicate with one another. A key opportunity was the annual meeting. The three primary objectives for this meeting were for Ys to exchange promising strategies and tactics in the five practice areas, to network with other Ys, and to develop Ys knowledge in youth character development.

- **Data**. We provided data to Ys so that they could measure progress towards goals and then use that data to support continuous improvement. CDLI data collection measured at four key levels of local Y sites: organization, program, adult practitioner, and youth. Each level had its own set of measurement tools to help local Ys assess where they were starting (baseline) and the progress being made by participating in the CDLI. These tools allowed us to assess progress toward the CDLI goal and long-term objectives that drive the initiative's focus.

  - **Organization (Capacity Assessment):** In December 2017, CDLI evaluation staff finalized and sent out the CDLI Capacity Assessment to Pilot Ys. This tool assessed the pilot Y's organizational infrastructure to deliver evidence-based programs and practices and allowed us to measure progress in organizational infrastructure that enabled high quality youth programming.

  - **Program:** To document and assess evidence of adult practice delivery and program quality, external assessors used the Weikart Center's "Social and Emotional Learning Program Quality Assessment" (SEL-PQA). The SEL PQA

measures the quality of youth programs, the implementation of SEL standards, and identifies staff training needs.

o **Practitioner**: To gauge the progress being made in developing character in youth, CDLI selected Algorhythm to create a one-time, post-survey for pilot Y practitioners to complete. The post-survey is expected to be administered at the end of each program.

o **Youth:** To assess youth outcomes, CDLI contracted with Algorhythm and The PEAR Institute to implement youth surveys, at the beginning and end of the different programs.

Where We Are Now

Pilot Phase

In 2018, we began the **pilot phase** of the CDLI process, which includes 64 Y associations comprised of 32 new Ys and 32 translation Ys. It also includes eight "hub" Ys, which are a sub-set of translation Ys. Hub Ys serve as regional hubs to support other Ys in carrying out their identified character development practices. The "Hub and Hive" structure engages a small number of lead associations as regional Hubs to help guide and support Hives, or groups of other Y associations, as they are added. This Hub and Hive model will ensure appropriate supports for participating associations while simultaneously building local commitment to the effort.

The pilot phase has been informed by many of the initial lessons learned during the Translate phase. Below are a few of the key take-aways to date:

- **Buy-In and Engagement.** While the Y's ability to scale is an advantage and opportunity, it can also be a challenge due to the size, complexity, and decision-making practices at local Ys. To gain a foothold and sustain character development, we engaged local Y leadership from the outset. The importance of gaining buy-in from local Y leadership who influence programmatic and cultural decisions cannot be understated.

- **Staffing and Workforce.** Local Y CEOs and other Y leaders vary greatly in terms of experience, education, priorities, tenure with the organization, and more. The same is true of frontline staff. From the leadership level down, staff may be new to character development while others may already have ideas or practices around character development. To succeed, the CDLI is working at every level in each Y association, taking top-down and bottom-up approaches to integration.

- **Data and Measurement.** CDLI consistently and rigorously collects and evaluates data from local Ys. Collecting that data, however, can present challenges. Some local Ys struggle with adequate staffing to collect and submit data; some do not see the value; and some are inundated with the data-collection requirements of other programs. The CDLI communicates the value of data and measurement, assisting local Ys through proper training, along with reminders and follow-up. The CDLI also shares data (local and national) with local Ys which directly benefits their work.

- **Family and Youth Must Be Involved:** Local Ys continue to address the challenges of including the voice of families and youth. Often, family members are the adult practitioners that coach and encourage youth to become thriving adults. We know

that families play a significant role in how youth develop character, and we know anecdotally that families look to the Y to help support and foster SEL and character. But, we need to better understand and appreciate what this means for our families, where there is already alignment, and where we can improve.

- **Character Development Must Be Embedded in a Broader Youth Development Strategy:** Currently, there is a gap between how Ys operate their youth development programs and how they view character development. To address this need, we convened a group of 15-20 C-suite staff from local YMCAs to discuss character development as a pillar of youth development across a Y's OST programs.

- **Shared Learning:** Shared learning provides frequent, ongoing, accessible, and flexible support as well as resources to Ys. Peer-to-peer, or local Y-to-local Y, learning is an effective vehicle to help Ys learn about CDLI work and integrate character development within existing youth programs. Local Ys appreciate hearing from each other about how to understand and apply each of the areas of practice. As a result, more opportunities for Ys to inquire, critique, and provide feedback to each other are now in place.

Dissemination Phase

Going forward (2019-2020), after sufficient testing, the CDLI will enter the **dissemination phase**. In this two-year phase (comprised of scaling and sharing), Y-USA will address how to share effective adult practices across the Y Movement, and the broader youth development field. Specifically, Y-USA will recruit additional local Ys to join in CDLI training and implementation. Plus, the training materials and CDLI resources will be accessible to a select group of Ys via its proprietary resource exchange.

As the Institute continues to mature, we aim to learn and build on the research and evidence of applied practices of adult learning. Rigor, relevance, and relatedness are key elements to this approach. Our next steps, as we scale, are to continue to create mechanisms for breakthroughs, clarifications, and recommitments about character development and social-emotional learning.

Conclusion

As one of the largest, most experienced, and recognized OST youth-serving organizations in the nation, Y-USA and the Y network of associations are uniquely positioned to implement this project. The Y's long-time commitment to practical program development has established both a proven methodology for testing and scaling effective practice and an extensive national network of associations well-suited to serve as learning laboratories for applying these practices in the field. This alone has the potential to change the face of youth character development at more than 800 Y associations nationwide, involving more than 800,000 staff and volunteers in serving nine million youth.

We believe the CDLI is positioned to create even broader impact. Y-USA is working with researcher and practitioner partners to enhance its own learning, share CDLI learnings and activities with partner organizations, and close the gap between theory and practice. The CDLI offers local Ys and Y-USA an opportunity to study character development with youth and youth leaders at the nexus of learning. We look forward to sharing our results with the broader youth development field.

W Y M A N

Transforming Teens. Changing Communities.

Deepening the Teen Outreach Program® (TOP®) Focus on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL):
A Case Study of Curriculum and Training Revision and Early Impact

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About Wyman

Wyman's mission is to empower teens from disadvantaged circumstances to lead successful lives and build strong communities. Since 1898, Wyman has provided engaging, experiential, and empowering programs to youth from the St. Louis region. Our current strategy takes a unique approach to achieving positive youth impact– we deliver high impact services directly to youth; we train and build capacity in others effectively support youth; and we partner to improve youth-serving systems. Wyman is the national replicator of the Teen Outreach Program® (TOP®), and also directly delivers TOP it its home community of St. Louis, Missouri.

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Introduction

THE PAST DECADE HAS SEEN the field of youth development coalesce around the understanding that social and emotional skills, such as emotion management, problem solving, empathy, and self-awareness, are critical for life success. Numerous studies have demonstrated that building social and emotional skills has a positive effect on a wide range of outcomes, including improved academic performance, higher earnings, better mental and physical health, more positive relationships, and increased civic engagement.[1] Importantly, evidence shows that social and emotional skills develop throughout our lives -- during childhood, adolescence, and into adulthood.

As with all learning, the context within which skills are taught is critical. Social and emotional learning (SEL) requires the adults with whom youth interact to understand, model, and encourage the development of social and emotional skills, and to also create a positive and safe environment within which the skills can be practiced. However, most SEL materials focus only on the skills needed by youth and do not address the staff practices and the development of safe space that are also critical to creating the appropriate environment where SEL can occur. In order to impact the maximum number of youth, it is essential that the youth development field effectively scale high quality SEL content and staff practices throughout youth-serving organizations and systems, including education, child welfare, and juvenile justice. This is particularly important for those serving youth from high poverty communities and who have been exposed to trauma.

In an effort to inform the broader youth development field and similar youth-serving organizations, this case study describes Wyman's efforts to deepen the SEL focus of Wyman's Teen Outreach Program®(TOP®). The case study first describes the strategy used to enhance SEL within program materials, including curriculum and training content, staff practices, and implementation supports. Using interviews with early adopters, the case study then explores how TOP's revised program materials are impacting the youth, adults and organizations engaged with TOP. Lastly, implications are considered for scaling the revised program materials across Wyman's National Network of programs and for the broader field of youth development. This case study is an opportunity for Wyman to share what's been learned and to contribute to a dialogue in the field about how the field of youth development can sharpen our focus on SEL – for youth and the adults that work with them.

Wyman's Teen Outreach Program and the SEL Challenge

WYMAN'S TEEN OUTREACH PROGRAM, known as TOP, is a nationally-replicated, evidence-based program that promotes the positive development of adolescents through an engaging curriculum and community service learning projects, supported by trained TOP facilitators. The program takes a strengths-based approach that provides teens with opportunities to learn and practice skills, make decisions, and engage in their communities.

Rigorous research has shown that TOP results in lower likelihood of pregnancy, risky sexual behavior, course failure, school suspension and skipping school.[2] Numerous federal agencies and organizations have conducted independent research reviews and recognized TOP for its evidence-base, including the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Teen Pregnancy Prevention Evidence Review, and the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

In 2014, eight exemplary youth-serving organizations, including Wyman, were selected to participate in the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Challenge.[3] The SEL Challenge was a partnership between the Susan Crown Exchange, the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, technical consultants, and the eight programs, designed to identify promising practices for working with adolescents in out-of-school programs. Through the collaborative work in the SEL Challenge, six areas of social and emotional skills were identified: emotion management, empathy, teamwork, initiative, responsibility, and problem solving. In addition, key youth experiences and staff practices that support SEL were identified and described.

While participating in the SEL Challenge, Wyman began an already-planned curriculum revision for TOP. In addition to incorporating feedback from the field and making needed updates, the revision intended to strengthen and expand the program's existing focus on social and emotional skills. In the end, Wyman's involvement in the SEL Challenge and in the development of the related publication, Preparing Youth to Thrive: Promising Practices for Social & Emotional Learning,[4] deeply informed how TOP curriculum and training materials and implementation supports were revised.

THE TOP APPROACH

TOP achieves positive outcomes for youth by providing them with opportunities to learn new skills and practice them in an emotionally safe and supportive setting with caring, trained adult facilitators. The program's primary goals are to:

- **Improve social and emotional learning, and life skills**

- **Support development of a positive sense of self**

- **Strengthen connections with others**

- **Improve academic outcomes and decrease risky behavior**

TOP has been implemented successfully with diverse communities and in both urban and rural environments. The program is designed to meet the needs of middle and high school teens in a variety of settings, including both in-school and out-of-school. TOP also has resources to help adapt implementation for special populations, such as youth in foster care or juvenile justice settings.

TOP was originally developed in 1978 with the goal of reducing teen pregnancy and increasing high school graduation rates. In 2005, Wyman became the national replicator of the program. Wyman's National Network team provides training, support and technical assistance to replication partners, and supports the National Network community of practice. Funding for TOP flows through health departments, community organizations, and school districts, among others. Wyman's National Network serves over 22,000 youth annually through 59 partners in 30 states.

Deepening the Focus on SEL: Curriculum and Training Revision

THE REVISION PROCESS AND OBJECTIVES

Historically, TOP focused on building social and emotional skills, commonly known as "life skills," including problem solving, teamwork and responsibility. However, with an increasing research base linking social and emotional skills to life-long success, Wyman knew that TOP was capable of doing more to promote SEL for young people engaged in the program.

As Wyman staff began the revision process, the foremost goal was to maintain TOP's long-standing evidence-based status and positive youth development approach. To that end, Wyman reviewed the findings of multiple rigorous studies of TOP and identified critical aspects of the program to retain, such as content, structure, dosage, and timeframe. Wyman staff also conducted an in-depth review of the most recent research and best practice literature in the areas of positive youth development, social and emotional learning and adolescent development. As a result, Wyman developed their Framework for Thriving Youth that depicts the organization's overall approach to working with teens.

This framework was then used to guide the revisions to TOP.

In addition to the research base, revisions to TOP were informed by input from TOP program partners and youth. In focus groups and interviews, participants provided feedback on topics and skills that needed to be included or strengthened in the curriculum, as well as how to increase the relevance for today's teens. TOP facilitators also weighed in on how the curriculum and facilitator training could be improved upon in order for them to more effectively support youth learning and skill building.

From the research base and input from the field, Wyman identified three main objectives for deepening the SEL focus of TOP: 1) explicitly address SEL in program materials, 2) support staff practices that are critical to building social and emotional skills in youth, and 3) design the curriculum to optimize high quality facilitation and SEL. The chart *(on page 7)* depicts the objectives and the associated revision activities Wyman took to meet these objectives.

REVISION ACTIVITIES

The overall goal of the revision was to maintain TOP's long-standing evidence-based status and use of a positive youth development approach, while deepening the program's focus on building social and emotional learning skills.

OBJECTIVE	REVISION ACTIVITIES
Explicitly address SEL in program content & materials	• Created Wyman's Framework for Thriving Youth highlighting 3 critical domains: skill building; positive sense of self; connections with others • Revised TOP Logic Model to align with Framework and included specific social and emotional skills as short-term outcomes • Enhanced existing SEL curriculum content and added curriculum content on problem-solving, emotion management, and empathy • Ensured all curriculum content reflected current research or best practices in SEL
Support staff practices that are critical to building SEL in youth	• Developed TOP Facilitation Guide with a focus on supporting positive teen/adult relationships, creating a safe space, healthy boundaries, cultural and human diversity, and trauma awareness • Revised TOP Facilitator Training to align with Guide and to focus on effective facilitator behaviors and techniques • Created new facilitator observation tool to align with high quality facilitation features and to support quality monitoring
Design curriculum to optimize high quality facilitation and the development of social and emotional skills	• Organized curriculum content around the 3 critical domains highlighted in Framework and Logic Model • Created lessons within each topic across three developmental levels: Foundational, Intermediate, Advanced • Used the Experiential Learning Cycle as the format for lessons • Incorporated activities that address a variety of learning styles • Added "Knowing Your Teens" reflection questions to the existing "Knowing Yourself" section in lesson plans to prompt facilitators to reflect and prepare for how they and teens may experience a lesson • Incorporated trauma awareness into "Knowing Yourself and Your Teens" questions

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking an intentional approach to incorporate SEL into both the "what" (program content) and the "how" (staff practices and program design) had broader implications for the TOP program revisions than first imagined. In the end, in order to achieve the objectives, Wyman revised the TOP curriculum, training, and logic model, and developed a new Facilitation Guide and observation tool. After undertaking this comprehensive revision process to strengthen TOP's SEL focus, Wyman staff identified lessons learned that may be relevant to other youth programs planning to take on a similar revision:

Start with a research base. The development of Wyman's Framework for Thriving Youth provided a strong research foundation, helping to guide decisions about what revisions should be made. As can be seen in the table on page 9, the TOP Curriculum is now organized around three themes (Building My Skills, Connecting With Others, and Learning About Myself) which align with the Framework for Thriving Youth, in addition to the Preparing Youth to Thrive Domains and the CASEL Core SEL Competencies.[5] In addition, research on the importance of responsive staff practices and safe inclusive spaces for youth led to an emphasis on high quality facilitation.

Define your SEL focus. Input from TOP partners was critical to determining what social and emotional skills were important to incorporate and deepen in the revised TOP curriculum. Their feedback helped to narrow the focus to the skills that most closely aligned with TOP. Even TOP, with its comprehensive 140-lesson curriculum could not explicitly address every aspect of SEL.

Allocate sufficient time and resources to learn and adjust during the revision process. Wyman approached the TOP revisions with a "plan, do, learn, adjust" cycle of improvement. As an example, during the revision process, Wyman released a subset of the revised lessons and asked partners to test them and provide feedback through a web survey. This feedback was then incorporated as lessons were refined. Although this iterative process took more time and resources than originally planned, it provided an opportunity for the field to weigh in with feedback at a critical juncture.

Engage in an ongoing learning process as new materials are rolled out. Wyman knew it would take time for TOP's National Network of partners to fully implement all the revised materials, training, and staff supports. In the first year of release, Wyman allowed flexible adoption of the revised materials so that partners could adjust their timeline for adoption to best suit their organization. This provided an opportunity for reflection and learning based on the experiences of the early adopters, including those interviewed for this case study.

SEL ALIGNMENT: TOP, PREPARING YOUTH TO THRIVE DOMAINS, AND CASEL CORE COMPETENCIES

WYMAN'S TEEN OUTREACH PROGRAM			PREPARING YOUTH TO THRIVE DOMAINS	CASEL CORE SEL COMPETENCIES
THE WHAT	**Building My Skills** *Curriculum Lessons*	Emotion Management	Emotion Management	Self-Awareness Self-Management
		Decision Making		Responsible Decision-Making
		Problem Solving	Initiative Problem Solving Teamwork	Responsible Decision-Making
		Goal Setting	Initiative	Self-Management
	Connecting With Others *Curriculum Lessons*	Community	Responsibility Teamwork	Social Awareness
		Empathy	Empathy	Social Awareness
		Communication	Teamwork	Relationship Skills Self-Awareness
		Relationships	Teamwork	Relationship Skills Social Awareness
	Learning About Myself *Curriculum Lessons*	Self-Understanding		Self-Awareness
		Social Identity	Empathy	Self-Awareness Social Awareness
		Health & Wellness		Responsible Decision-Making
THE HOW	**Facilitation Guide and Training**	High Quality Facilitation (HQF)	Safe Space Responsive Practices	Practices supportive of positive relationships among teachers and students

Perspectives from the Field: Impact on Teens, Adults, and Systems

THROUGH ITS STRATEGY FOR ACTION, Wyman seeks to improve youth outcomes by empowering teens, equipping adults, and strengthening systems. Guided by this focus, three TOP partners were asked to share their perceptions of how TOP's enhanced focus on SEL had impacted 1) the experience of teens in the program, 2) the ability of TOP facilitators to promote SEL, and 3) their organization's knowledge and understanding of SEL.

Each participating organization fully implemented the revised TOP materials during the 2017-2018 program year. The organizations are located in different states (Florida, Missouri, and North Carolina), serve different populations of youth, deliver the program in different settings, and have different funders. Each also had varying amounts of experience with social and emotional learning prior to implementing the revised TOP materials.

Representatives from the three participating TOP partner organizations were interviewed in order to understand their organization's previous experience with social and emotional learning and to gather their initial reactions to the revised program materials. Following those interviews, the agencies or schools implementing TOP were contacted and program staff were identified and interviewed. In all, 26 TOP coordinators and facilitators, serving more than 2,000 youth across eight implementing agencies or schools, were interviewed. Common themes were then identified related to the revised materials' perceived impact on teens, adults, and systems.

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Children's Services Council (CSC) of Palm Beach County – CSC is a special taxing district which funds prevention and early intervention services. CSC contracts with three provider agencies to deliver TOP in Palm Beach County communities with high rates of teen pregnancy: Urban League of Palm Beach County, Community Partners, and Children's Home Society. TOP is delivered in middle and high schools, after-school programs, and public housing developments. The racial makeup of program participants is 54% Black or African-American, 31% Hispanic or Latinx, 6% Multi-ethnic, and 9% Other.

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health, Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiatives (DHHS) – North Carolina DHHS uses Federal Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) funding to support TOP delivery through two provider agencies: Martin Tyrrell Washington District Health Department and Coalition for Families in Lee County. The programs serve students in several middle schools and one high school. The communities served are mostly rural, and include many transient families. The racial makeup of the students served is 37% Black or African-American, 32% White, 22% Hispanic or Latinx, and 9% Other.

Wyman – Wyman staff directly deliver TOP in three St. Louis County school districts: Ferguson-Florissant, Normandy, and University City. The St. Louis County Children's Service Fund (CSF) supports TOP in two of these school districts. CSF is funded through a special taxing district dedicated to providing behavioral health services for children and youth throughout St. Louis County. In the third district, TOP is funded by a local funder, The Collective Impact Network. In 2017-2018, TOP was delivered to entire grade levels within middle school social studies classrooms. The racial makeup of program participants is 69% Black or African-American, 14% Multi-Ethnic, 8% White, and 9% Other.

EMPOWERING TEENS

Youth are more engaged. Facilitators perceived that youth were more engaged with the revised curriculum due to both the new SEL topics and the integration of the experiential learning cycle into every lesson plan. Facilitators shared that the SEL topics made the material more engaging because of their relevance to teens' lives, and that youth were especially interested in lessons related to emotion management, relationships, empathy and stereotypes. One facilitator explained that,

"*Even when kids want to disengage, they can't. They can't help but get engaged in these topics.***"**

Facilitators shared that the SEL topics sometimes pushed youth to think differently and could be challenging at times, but also felt the youth were being challenged in a good way. Facilitators described how the experiential learning cycle helped engage youth by creating learning opportunities throughout the lesson. One facilitator remarked, "The experiences and reflections help to create 'a-ha' moments throughout [the lesson]. It keeps [youth] thinking and engaging with the material."

Youth are experiencing a safe space. TOP facilitators often used the term "safe space" when referring to how the revised curriculum has impacted youth experiences. They felt that the curriculum topics, coupled with the high quality facilitation and the experiential learning cycle, guided adults and youth towards deeper, more emotionally open, and healthier conversations. Facilitators also shared that the inclusive language used in the revised curriculum helps establish a safe space for youth to express themselves and learn. One supervisor felt the revised curriculum naturally created

"*more moments for connection, and the moments are not avoided due to fear. It seems to be a safe place to have those conversations.***"**

Youth and facilitators are using and applying SEL language. TOP facilitators observed that teens and facilitators are using SEL language more often and applying it in different settings, such as during Community Service Learning (CSL). The SEL language provides youth with the vocabulary and definitions they need, and it's language that youth can relate to and understand. One TOP facilitator explained,

"*We explicitly name what we're doing more – the skills we are learning. That gives youth a way to express what they've learned, and more deeply understand the purpose***.**"**

TOP staff feel that the intentional naming of social and emotional skills also makes it easier to apply and observe those skills within CSL projects. One facilitator shared that "the SEL skills are easy to integrate organically into CSL projects…the lessons align more easily." Several shared that reflections by youth, and feedback to youth, after a CSL project are richer now. Youth are able to name skills demonstrated in themselves and others. For example, after a CSL project at a homeless shelter, youth were able to talk concretely about empathy, initiative and resilience.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE (ELC)

The revised TOP curriculum uses the ELC as the format for every lesson. The ELC outlines a step-by-step process to transform activities and experiences into meaningful opportunities for growth, learning and skill-building, based on the work of educator and experiential learning theorist John Dewey. In the TOP curriculum, the ELC is divided into 5 different stages for each lesson (BERDA):

BRIEFING: Group is given information needed to be successful

EXPERIENCE: Activities create a focal point for discussion

REFLECTION: Group answers key question "What happened?"

DEBRIEFING: Group answers key question "So what?"

APPLICATION: Group answers key question "Now what?"

EQUIPPING ADULTS

Facilitators are mastering new skills and building stronger relationships with teens. Facilitators self-reported, and were observed by supervisors, incorporating new skills and approaches into their facilitation. They noted that once they were trained in high quality facilitation, they realized they could do more to support youth to learn and internalize social and emotional skills. One TOP facilitator shared that "I had a sense of pride once I mastered [high quality facilitation]. I feel I know how to do my job. I know how to meet the kids where they are." Another facilitator noted that the revised curriculum

> **"** *lends itself more to meaningful conversations with teens…We have the opportunity to develop deeper relationships and know the teens on a more personal level.* **"**

A supervisor reported that, following the facilitator training, one facilitator became more supportive of the youth and less directive, and also seemed to open up more emotionally while another facilitator who had been more tentative with the youth in the past became much more engaged. Several facilitators shared that they refer to the TOP Facilitation Guide and their training when they work with youth outside of TOP. They felt that the facilitation skills are transferable and can improve their support to, and relationships with, youth in other settings.

Facilitators are more self-aware about SEL. Several TOP facilitators felt that, following the training, they became more aware of their own SEL skills and life experiences, and how those affect their interactions with youth. They shared that high quality facilitation, which includes modeling of skills such as healthy emotion management strategies, requires them to assess and work on their own skills. Many facilitators described the "Knowing Yourself" reflection questions as being valuable and supporting increased self-awareness. Several shared that the questions helped them to address their own emotional baggage and to be more open to listening to youth, while being less judgmental. One facilitator reported that she skipped a lesson after reviewing the "Knowing Yourself" questions and realizing the content could trigger a trauma that she experienced. She was able to pick another lesson that addressed the same topic and skill. While increasing one's self-awareness can be

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HIGH QUALITY FACILITATION (HQF)

Caring, responsive, and knowledgeable TOP staff work to build strong, supportive relationships with teens and create engaging, and empowering TOP Club experiences. HQF techniques include **Facilitating**, **Scaffolding**, **Modeling,** and **Coaching**.[6] For example, staff:

- Cultivate a safe, caring, and inclusive space
- Provide structure to keep the group focused and on topic
- Encourage teens to persist through challenge
- Model empathy and healthy emotion management
- Coach teens in managing their emotions

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challenging, facilitators found it to be professionally and personally rewarding. Another facilitator commented that this section of each lesson plan

> **"** *makes sure you're always mindful of your personal experience. You have to assess your own biases.* **"**

Facilitators can tailor content to meet teens' needs. TOP facilitators consistently shared that the revised curriculum is more easily tailored to meet teen needs, including youth with different backgrounds and experiences. Facilitators described being able to identify a skill to be worked on with the youth, and then having a variety of lesson plans from which to select. This included using materials and activities from the different developmental levels: foundational, intermediate, and advanced. Facilitators shared that the appropriate developmental level can vary from group to group, but also by topic. A group of youth may be at a foundational level on one topic and an intermediate level for another. Many facilitators also shared that the new "Knowing Your Teens" reflection questions and tips helped them to think about the content from the teen perspective, which improved their ability to align the lessons with their teens' needs and developmental level. Facilitators also feel better equipped to address related issues that the lessons may bring up. As one facilitator stated, "I can anticipate what the teens may face. It makes me prepare to have what they may need, including a referral."

STRENGTHENING SYSTEMS

TOP partners intend to align hiring, supervision and professional development practices more closely with SEL. TOP partners believe the enhanced focus on SEL will influence hiring practices. For example, one supervisor shared that they will prioritize hiring staff who can self-reflect and are connected with their emotions. She explained,

> **"***If someone is disconnected from their own emotions, how can they ask youth to get connected? It's something that we'll need to think about when we hire people.***"**

Several also felt that the focus on SEL has changed how staff are supervised and supported. TOP partners shared that with the previous curriculum, supervisors focused mostly on ensuring facilitators were doing the required number of meetings and CSL hours. Supervision and support are now more focused on how the facilitators are interacting with youth. Supervisors also highlighted the value of the new facilitator observation tool – supervisors use it to observe and provide constructive feedback to facilitators, and facilitators said they regularly used it for self-assessment after a lesson. One supervisor now asks each facilitator to identify one or two aspects of high quality facilitation for which they want more support. During the year, she then engages in reflective supervision with each facilitator related to their highest area of need.

TOP partners can better communicate the program's value. TOP partners shared that the more intentional focus on social and emotional learning throughout the TOP curriculum, and in the revised logic model, helps to better communicate and demonstrate the value of the program. TOP partners described the revised logic model as an important communication tool because it clearly depicts the relationship between the TOP approach (including the importance of high quality facilitation), the development of social and emotional skills, and longer-term youth outcomes. In North Carolina, where TOP had primarily been identified as a teen pregnancy prevention program, TOP partners and facilitators now talk differently about TOP. They are able to more easily explain how SEL can reduce engagement in risky behaviors that lead to unplanned pregnancy. One facilitator shared that,

> **"***TOP is so much bigger than preventing teen pregnancy. It's bigger than just risk. The lovely thing about TOP is that it's not just avoidance. We're thinking of the bigger picture – about what we want to see these young people do with their lives and what skills they can build.***"**

The SEL focus also helps communicate across different SEL-related programs being implemented in schools (e.g., Restorative Justice), and is being used to describe the skills each program is working on and how the programs reinforce and complement one another. One partner shared that "the language of SEL is easily understood by a wide variety of people."

TOP is advancing SEL at the broader organizational level. The TOP partner organizations and service providers interviewed had varying knowledge, training, and exposure to social and emotional learning prior to implementing the revised TOP curriculum. It was notable, however, that regardless of where organizations started, TOP's increased SEL emphasis is positively influencing the broader organization's focus on SEL.

> **One supervisor summed up the influence of TOP's deepened SEL approach by saying,**
>
> **"***It has impacted the way I engage with facilitators and I think that will impact our outcomes. Our performance is now based on how these teens develop their SEL skills…This has informed not only the way in which we supervise, but as an agency, what we are looking for in behavioral changes within our youth.***"**

In Palm Beach County, the Children's Services Council has extensive background with SEL and prioritizes supporting SEL programs such as TOP. Nonetheless, the implementing agencies had varying levels of familiarity with SEL. In one agency, TOP staff conducted mock lessons with non-TOP staff to provide a consistent understanding across the organization. The adults found the lessons to be as engaging and fun for them as they are for youth. TOP staff now feel that their colleagues have a better understanding of how TOP works and hope they will be able to better identify and refer youth that may benefit from the program.

The North Carolina Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiatives had minimal exposure to SEL prior to implementing the revised TOP curriculum. Following the introduction of the revised materials, they feel like the heightened SEL focus is strengthening the program and the impact it will have. As a result, Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiatives has requested that Wyman train staff across all their PREP programs, so other staff can benefit from TOP's holistic approach and can understand how SEL is connected to health outcomes.

In Wyman's St. Louis partner schools, TOP programs were already identified as the "go to" SEL programming in middle schools. Across all implementation sites, staff reported that TOP draws additional attention to – and appreciation of – SEL. For example, this past year, the district-wide staff orientation in one school district highlighted SEL. Using the revised curriculum, TOP staff presented on how their program supported social and emotional learning. TOP facilitators have noted that the program, especially with heightened focus on SEL, models how to build an intrinsic approach to promoting positive behavior. One facilitator explained that,

"*People like what they see. Teachers are intrigued by our approach because it's so different from what they do in class. They want to learn more.*"

Next Steps: Moving from Early Adoption to Full Implementation

FULLY IMPLEMENTING THE REVISED TOP curriculum and training was optional for TOP partners in the first year of roll out. Allowing partners to self-select the pace of implementation over the course of 12 months provided the necessary time for Wyman to learn from early adopters, including those interviewed for this case study. This year also allowed Wyman to thoughtfully consider how to scale the revised program materials, and TOP's deepened focus on SEL, throughout their National Network of partners. To that end, the TOP partners were asked to identify what additional supports would help them to further develop youth SEL. The following themes arose:

Continue to build and reinforce high quality facilitation skills. TOP facilitators felt that learning high quality facilitation skills significantly improved their ability to support the development of youth social and emotional skills. While deeply valued, several facilitators commented that practicing and fully adopting high quality facilitation skills takes time. One facilitator shared that it took several months before he could easily facilitate a lesson plan from the revised curriculum. Supervisors and facilitators found the facilitation observation tool very helpful, and said that they would benefit from additional materials that support reflective supervision and peer learning. Several TOP facilitators suggested that brief online videos depicting the more complex activities could help reinforce high quality facilitation skills and more clearly demonstrate the activities' intended purpose.

Expand measurement of youth SEL. TOP partners and providers are interested in new evaluation tools that closely align with the skills in the curriculum and the revised logic model. Recognizing that Wyman is in the process of developing a revised version of the current pre/post-test for this purpose, several facilitators also wondered if a supplemental SEL assessment tool could be developed to be used throughout the program year. They also suggested creating a tool to observe youth demonstrating social and emotional skills during Community Service Learning projects. Such tools would help facilitators assess how much progress is being made over the course of a program year and help them make needed adjustments.

Ensure that highly vulnerable youth are fully engaged. While the consensus of those interviewed was that the revised curriculum allowed facilitators to tailor content to student needs, there were some indications that,

particularly for those serving the most highly vulnerable youth, there may be a need for additional coaching and implementation supports. For example, not all youth connected with activities in the empathy lessons. Some youth expressed that their lives were just as hard or harder than those people they were being asked to empathize with, and they didn't feel they experienced empathy from others about their hardships. One facilitator recommended including more perspectives from high poverty, disenfranchised communities and adding content on social justice and self-advocacy which could help facilitators better engage and empower highly disadvantaged youth.

Support connections to needed resources. TOP's enhanced focus on SEL is leading to deeper and more meaningful conversations among youth and adults and, consequently, youth are revealing more about their personal experiences, including instances of violence, abuse, parental loss, and more. Several facilitators shared that the adults should be prepared to identify when youth need additional support and be able to refer them to the appropriate services, including trauma-informed services. Facilitators are also gaining a greater understanding of their own life history and how that impacts their interactions with others. Based on facilitators sharing how TOP impacted them personally, supervisors may also need to be prepared to connect their staff to resources when challenging issues or past traumas arise.

Conclusion: Implications for the Youth Development Field

THE CHALLENGE FOR THE YOUTH development field is how to effectively scale high quality SEL content and staff practices throughout youth serving organizations and systems. Wyman knew that TOP, a nationally replicated, evidence-based program, could do more to promote youth SEL. Wyman's involvement in the SEL Challenge, which coincided with an already-planned curriculum revision, created an opportunity moment that broadened Wyman's understanding of how to maximize their impact on the lives of youth by enhancing SEL supports throughout all aspects of TOP.

Wyman's experience sheds light on opportunities and challenges for taking effective SEL practices to scale in organizations and systems. TOP partners shared that the focus on high quality facilitation, specific social and emotional skills, creating safe spaces, and using an experiential learning cycle increased the opportunities for youth to fully engage and enhance SEL. TOP staff felt empowered and believe that the program will have a greater impact on the lives of the youth they serve. TOP partners are better able to communicate about the program, the skills that youth are learning, and how those skills are linked to longer term outcomes. TOP's increased emphasis on SEL has also helped partner organizations more broadly advance their organizational focus on SEL. However, Wyman's experience demonstrates that in order to be effective, organizations and systems must do more than add SEL content to what they are currently doing. They should carefully consider how adults are being trained and supported so they can understand and model social and emotional skills, knowledge and behaviors for youth, and how adults can create safe spaces where youth can learn and practice those skills.

This raises implications for the broader youth development field. Moving forward, the field must continue to promote learning among youth-serving organizations that are working to foster SEL. We need to share concrete examples of how to create that right combination of content, staff practices, and safe space that truly promotes social and emotional learning. In order to reach those youth most in need, youth-serving systems such as education, child welfare, and juvenile justice, will need to take quality SEL approaches and practices to scale. We must continue to learn and explore how to integrate high quality staff practices across our systems that interact and engage with vulnerable youth. Only then will all youth develop the skills they need in order to thrive and be successful in life.

END NOTES

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PREPARING YOUTH TO THRIVE

SEL Demonstration Initiative: Measuring Social Emotional Learning in Out-of-School Time

Katherine Plog Martinez, Kiley Bednar, Karen Pittman, Poonam Borah

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About

The Forum for Youth Investment

The Forum for Youth Investment is a national nonprofit, nonpartisan "action tank" committed to changing the odds that all children and youth are ready for college, work, and life. It provides ideas, services, and networks that leaders need in order to make more intentional decisions that are good for young people. For more information, visit www.forumfyi.org.

The David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality

In 2008, the Forum created the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality to build the capacity of public and private agencies to implement quality improvement and performance systems that simultaneously foster professional learning and whole-child development with the purpose of improving social-sector outcomes. The Weikart Center's research-based core products and services are currently used in over 4,700 out-of-school time settings nationally and form the basis for quality improvement systems in over 140 publicly and privately funded systems. For more information, visit www.cypq.org.

Susan Crown Exchange

The following case study is part of a series commissioned by Susan Crown Exchange (SCE) that explores how youth-serving organizations are integrating social and emotional learning into strategy and programming. SCE is invested in shaping an ecosystem of anytime, anywhere learning to prepare youth to adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing and highly-connected world. Through grantmaking programs in digital learning and social and emotional learning, SCE helps identify, codify, and promote high-quality opportunities for young people to learn and grow in out-of-school time. For more information, visit www.scefdn.org.

SEL Challenge and *Preparing Youth to Thrive*

The Social and Emotional Learning Challenge was designed to identify promising practices for building skills in six domains: emotion management, empathy, teamwork, initiative, responsibility, and problem solving. A collaboration between Susan Crown Exchange (SCE), staff teams from eight exemplary youth programs, the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, and technical consultants, the SEL Challenge set out to identify promising practices for building SEL skills with vulnerable adolescents and develop a method for taking these practices to scale in out-of-school time settings. An extensive research process included interviews, evaluations, convenings, and surveys. The SEL Challenge produced the SEL Field Guide, *Preparing Youth to Thrive: Promising Practices for Social and Emotional Learning*. The guide, along with related tools, case studies, and resources can be found at www.SELpractices.org.

SEL Demonstration Initiative Partners

After-School All-Stars

Founded in 1992 by Arnold Schwarzenegger in Los Angeles, After-School All-Stars is a national nonprofit organization that partners with schools across the United States to expand the learning day for low-income children. For more than 25 years, After-School All-Stars has carried out its mission, to provide comprehensive after-school programs that keep children safe and help them achieve in school and in life. Currently, After-School All-Stars serves over 90,000 youth in over 450 school sites in 19 regions across 13 states. www.afterschoolallstars.org

Beyond the Bell Milwaukee

Beyond the Bell Milwaukee is a collaborative effort driven by service providers, funders, youth, policy makers, and public institutions all committed to ensuring that youth have access to coordinated and quality programs and services. This initiative is currently focused on programs and services for youth ages 12-18. This is a critical age group that is significantly under-served in Milwaukee and cities across the country. www.beyondthebellmke.org

School's Out Washington

School's Out Washington (SOWA) provides services and guidance for organizations to ensure all young people have safe places to learn and grow when not in school. SOWA is dedicated to building community systems to support quality afterschool, youth development, and summer programs for Washington's children and youth ages 5 through young adulthood. www.schoolsoutwashington.org

Sprockets

Sprockets, launched in 2011, is a collaboration of community organizations, the City of Saint Paul, and Saint Paul Public Schools that works to ensure all of Saint Paul's youth will develop their abilities as learners, contributors, and navigators so they can recognize and achieve their greatest potential. Sprockets works to improve the quality, availability, and effectiveness of out-of-school time learning through the committed, collaborative, and innovative efforts of community organizations, government, schools, and other partners. Sprockets was founded with commitment to reducing racial and other disparities for Saint Paul's youth. www.sprockets.org

Introduction

Social and emotional skills, such as emotion management, empathy, teamwork, responsibility, initiative, and problem solving, are critical to a young person's success in school, work, and life. In fact, these skills are potentially more of a predictor of life success than IQ or academic achievement (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015). We have seen an ever-increasing focus on these skills throughout the youth development fields, building on the lessons learned from psychology, neurobiology, education, and positive youth development (PYD) theory and practice. As youth development providers aim to provide more explicit social and emotional learning (SEL) supports and infuse SEL in to their current program activities and curricula, there is a call for measurement: measurement of SEL skills in children and youth and measurement of the practices that support SEL. Our case study focuses on lessons learned from four out-of-school time (OST) networks who piloted a system of infusing SEL measurements in a program quality improvement process in the 2017-2018 program year.

What Conditions Promote Social and Emotional Skills?

We know that some contexts and conditions impact social and emotional skills more than others, as highlighted in the field guide, *Preparing Youth to Thrive* (Smith, McGovern, Larson, et al., 2016). The field guide was intended to highlight staff practices and key youth experiences that help adults teach youth how to encounter, understand, and surmount challenges and experience success within the context of strong positive relationships. According to the guide, social and emotional skills emerge as "youth work through challenges and experience successes:

- Facing fear;
- Accepting anger;
- Recognizing assumptions one has made about others that may be unfair;
- Recognizing deeply entrenched differences in power;
- Coming to terms with disadvantage and unequal treatment without succumbing to helplessness;
- Learning that errors and failures are necessary and useful; and
- Learning to tough things out, endure setbacks, and persevere through tedious work" (Smith, McGovern, Larson, et. al., 2016).

In general, the field of positive youth development has historically provided a context in which children and youth can build social and emotional skills; however, the scale and scope of opportunities provided has varied. While practitioners may aim to teach social and emotional skills, their knowledge of what works may be limited. As funders, decision makers, and policymakers aim to move the needle on social and emotional skills in children and youth, they want to support the conditions that promote the growth of these skills. To that end, focusing on the context of program quality through measurement and assessment provides actionable information to program providers, highlighting specific activities and approaches that they can incorporate into their programming.

Using a reliable and valid program quality measurement that includes specific, research-based SEL practices more intentionally links program quality with the SEL outcomes that we envision for children and youth. Additionally, in order to elevate the SEL work of OST providers, we need measures that capture this data accurately and reliably. And ultimately, if we want to help practitioners grow in this developing body of knowledge around best practices for SEL, we need measures that can be used to support the improvement and growth of youth development practitioners themselves.

How Can SEL Skill Measurement Inform a Continuous Quality Improvement Process?

Social and emotional skill data can provide program providers and policymakers with a better understanding of where children and youth are developmentally. Essentially, if we want to improve child and youth social and emotional skills, we need a better understanding of SEL behaviors that we want to see and we need reliable and effective ways of measuring them. However, measuring youth skills is inherently tricky, especially in light of the various ways that data can be used. Measuring individual youth skills poses questions: who will have access to the data and what are the implications for that individual child? Rather than measure child and youth skills, what we care most about is child and youth skill growth:

- Are we seeing change over time?
- Where are we seeing change and to what magnitude?
- Under what conditions is this growth occurring?

With that in mind, it becomes an easy jump to focus on aggregate data of child and youth behaviors rather than individual youth data in order to enhance our understanding of skill growth over time and under various conditions. In addition to tracking change in skill growth over time, aggregate data can provide an understanding of the range of skills that are present in children and youth in an OST program, which is data that can inform practitioners' continuous quality improvement process. Specifically, this data can help OST practitioners tailor their improvements to best support the skill growth of the young people in their programs.

Why Use a Lower Stakes Approach to Practice Improvement?

As we target SEL practices and skill growth, we recognize that there are many aspects of SEL that have long been reflected in PYD work, while some practices may be new or challenging. Program quality has always existed on a continuum. With an increase in focus on SEL, organizational leaders and policymakers are asking youth development providers to move further along this continuum as they deepen their attunement to themselves and their children and youth, to hone their ability to respond in the moment, and to create program activities that intentionally scaffold their children and youth on a pathway to social and emotional skill-building. This is hard work and it is not done overnight, as much as we all wish it could be! Therefore, OST providers also need to be supported and scaffolded in their skill growth. These practices can be taught and they can be learned. But as with any learning trajectory, it takes time, patience, teaching, and coaching.

A lower-stakes continuous quality improvement process provides staff with a process to learn a new set of SEL practices. By lower-stakes, we mean that the outcomes of the assessment will not have an influence on job standing, funding, salary, or any other 'high-stakes' consequence. Instead, the goal of the assessment is to inform practice and improvement. The continuous quality improvement process becomes a learning environment where OST providers can test out new ways of doing things and learn from their successes and from their mistakes, all alongside their peers who are also on that learning journey. Done right, a continuous quality improvement process sets OST providers up for opportunities to build their self-awareness; to work with their team to make improvements; to build their empathy for each other and for their children and youth; to take initiative and responsibility for their learning and areas of growth; and to problem solve in the face of challenge and set-backs.

How Can SEL Measurement and Continuous Quality Improvement be Scaled?

Measuring SEL at the child and youth level and at the program quality level takes dedicated time and staff. For example, staff are needed to communicate timelines and procedures, to ensure that data is collected with the proper protocols, and to set up systems for data sharing and access. Beyond that, using the data to inform program practice requires staff time to support practitioners in an intentional process of improvement planning and implementation.

While some programs may have the capacity to collect this data on their own, or be connected with a larger national body that supports this work, many programs have neither. This is where the role of an out-of-school time network can play a very important part in SEL measurement. A network has the ability to set up a quality improvement system serving a range of providers and organizations focused on quality improvement. Aligning the assessment and quality improvement process under the umbrella of a network provides an economy of scale that helps individual programs partake in a comprehensive approach to data collection and usage that potentially would be beyond their capacity on their own. Further, a network provides a learning community that allows providers to not just learn from colleagues within their own organization, but to connect with a broader range of OST providers. Coordinating the process through a network also builds regional information on program quality and youth outcomes that can shape policy and decision-making, as well as link to other regional data on children and youth. Not only do networks support 'horizontal' communication, but they also support 'vertical' communication, channeling information up to leaders, policymakers, and funders, and sharing information across the range of provider organizations and programs.

The SEL Demonstration Initiative

SCE and the Weikart Center identified four exemplary OST networks and intermediary organizations in St. Paul, MN, Los Angeles, CA, Seattle, WA, and Milwaukee, WI. They were selected based upon their readiness to expand and deepen current quality improvement efforts as part of the SEL Demonstration Initiative.

Across the four networks, thirty-nine participating sites had a strong foundation in positive youth development and were already providing SEL supports for middle school and high school aged youth. Yet, the programs were not necessarily explicit in naming the social and emotional standards they were building with students, nor did they have a process for explicitly supporting adults in honing their skills to create environments conducive to SEL. Further, most programs did not exclusively focus on SEL; rather, they varied by type and included programs focused on academic enrichment, physical fitness, service learning, and the arts. This design allowed for measurement of how a site, regardless of primary program focus, can become more intentional and intensive with their SEL supports. For more information on the networks and their background in SEL and continuous quality improvement, please see the SEL Demonstration Partner Spotlights.

The SEL Demonstration Initiative study was designed to support sites in building their capacity to deliver high quality SEL practices while simultaneously supporting the four networks to intentionally implement an SEL aligned continuous quality improvement system. Each network led a continuous quality improvement process, namely, the Youth Program Quality Intervention (YPQI), using an observation based measure of SEL staff practices, the SEL Youth Program Quality Assessment (SEL PQA), as well as youth SEL behavior measure based on staff observation, the Staff Rating of Youth Behavior (SRYB). Both data sets were collected at two points in time during the year. The SEL PQA included external assessment with a reliable rater as well as self-assessment, a peer observation method with scoring based on group consensus. Additionally, staff completed a survey and participated in focus groups and interviews to provide feedback on the experience.

As networks and sites engaged in an assess-plan-improve process, sites were provided with:

- Introductions to the data collection process for both staff SEL practices data and child and youth social and emotional behavior data, including a focus on reducing rater bias;
- Training to help sites review the data and create an improvement plan; and
- Aligned professional development and coaching to help them implement their plan.

For more information about the SEL Challenge and YPQI, please see Appendix A. For a sample of the data that sites used to inform their improvement planning, please see Appendix B.

In the SEL Demonstration Initiative, we sought to understand how SEL measures administered as part of a continuous quality improvement process impacted learning and staff practices. Research questions included:

- What supports are necessary to integrate new, explicit SEL supports into a continuous quality improvement system?
- What are the staff experiences with these supports?
- What recommendations do providers have for other networks or organizations that want to measure SEL in relation to both youth outcomes and youth program quality?

Although this paper focuses primarily on the SEL measurement and continuous quality improvement at the site and program level, our supports and intervention were targeted at the network level.

Feasibility and Implementation Findings

The Weikart Center conducted a combination of focus groups and individual phone interviews with 30 direct-service staff or managers from across all four networks. Participants provided reflection on integrating the SEL measures into their continuous quality improvement processes, as well as leading and managing the data collection process in their networks. Participants were also asked about the extent to which the process impacted their staff practices, program culture, and youth skill growth, as well as recommendations for others embarking on a similar process. The information was examined to code recurring thematic patterns and then further filtered to identify meaningful patterns that were relatively consistent across transcripts. The following themes emerged from the data.

KEY FINDINGS
Establishing common language served as a logical first step for improving SEL practices.
A lower-stakes approach to quality improvement fostered staff buy-in and accountability.
A focus on adults' own social emotional learning helped staff support SEL in OST settings.
Engaging in an SEL focused quality improvement process produced shifts in how staff understood and responded to youth behavior.
Staff perceived and were motivated by changes in youth behavior.

Establishing common language served as a logical first step for improving SEL practices.

From new staff to more experienced site coordinators, participants stated that the continuous quality improvement process increased their awareness of SEL and prompted them to start thinking more specifically about how to facilitate SEL for their youth participants. This sentiment was touched on in each focus group, with nearly ten comments overall. With this increased awareness and focus, development of a common language became both a critical success factor and a benefit for sites, networks, and, in some cases, their community partners. As awareness grew, having a consistent descriptor or message for practices—such as warm welcome, emotion coaching, or reflection—allowed for alignment across all roles within a program team. This level of messaging and understanding of how to improve practice came in part through SEL Methods workshops: Empathy and Emotion Management, Teamwork and Responsibility, and Initiative and Problem Solving.

For one site, the common language of warm welcome helped them enhance their practice of relationship building:

> "We didn't think about the warm welcome. We were just saying make sure you say 'hi' to your students every day. And it helps when we say warm welcome. We know what we're talking about. We know that staff knows. The program coordinator knows. … I think that because now there is language attached to it that is going to create culture."

Being able to name the nature of their interactions with participants increased focus on day-to-day work and encouraged shared reflection and change.

A lower-stakes approach to quality improvement fostered staff buy-in and accountability.

Participants asserted that a lower-stakes approach succeeded in cultivating accountability among teams for both SEL practices and continuous improvement, as evidenced by approximately fifteen comments on this theme. Program self-assessments prompted staff to look at multiple aspects of programing and to prioritize setting aside time to process and reflect. Participants noted that this time allowed teams to prioritize improvement and raise expectations without external pressure. One team member expressed value in "being able to measure when we're doing [SEL practice] well … and for us to know ways in which we can improve it."

One program coordinator described how the lower-stakes approach facilitated greater buy-in from their team. Although this team initially had reservations because they were not used to externally created parameters of behavior and interaction, the process allowed the site team to focus on areas that were most important to their site and youth and to build from strengths. This allowed the team to "make sure that we excel in the areas that are most important and then not prioritize as much the things we might not be doing but might not be a part of our program." This was echoed by other sites who shared that they focused on areas they could "really grow in" or "move the needle on."

A focus on adults' own social emotional learning helped staff support SEL in OST settings.

Network and program staff alike identified a need to focus on their own social and emotional skills and ensure that organizational culture promotes SEL. Indeed, we tallied at least thirteen comments to this effect. For afterschool program staff to successfully support youth, one site team member noted "there is a set of skills that adults need to be aware of in addition to just teaching youth SEL." As staff worked to implement the SEL Methods (Empathy and Emotion Management, Teamwork and Responsibility, Initiative and Problem Solving), they came together as teams to build their own skills in areas such as self-awareness and mindfulness. Through this, staff reported that they were better able to work together, understand each other, and were more equipped to engage effectively with participants. Further, leadership saw the need to directly model engagement in SEL practices. As one leader put it:

> "We as supervisors need to encourage our staff to identify their emotions. … In our staff meetings, we need to have time for reflection, give people chances to lead and have choice."

Building from a focus amongst leadership, all members of an organization can work to imbed and incorporate SEL into their culture. Small steps can make a big difference; as one participant noted: "We try to practice it ourselves and just like, 'What can I do to support you?' You know, just letting people kind of have faith to do what they need to do and being appreciative." These shifts in practices within organizations led to a change in the atmosphere and work relationships: "People joking, smiling, laughing with students, I felt was a marked difference from the beginning of the year."

> "If we expect our staff to go in and … engage with young people, we have to engage our staff and help them strengthen their own social emotional learning as well. I just can't see it working otherwise."

This practice of adults focusing on their own SEL is important for network teams as well as within organizations. One network team member recognized this didn't just mean modeling for site staff, but with the network team itself – for her team they focused on "using the same SEL practices with each other and making sure we're modeling that in our communication as we also supervise staff." By walking their talk, network staff demonstrated to staff that the SEL work was not just good for youth, but for people and organizations.

Engaging in an SEL focused quality improvement process produced shifts in how staff understood and responded to youth behavior.

Staff were able to develop skills that allowed them to more nimbly respond to youth's social emotional needs, pushing them to look at student behavior through a new lens. This led staff to move away from black-and-white thinking about consequences. We noted nine comments directly related to this shift. For example, a traditional view might be that a student who hits another student should be suspended. With a focus on SEL, staff instead might take an opportunity to understand why the young person took the action they did and determine a combination of supports and consequences accordingly. One network shared an example in which emotions were soaring during programming one day—to the point that chairs were thrown. To process the situation, the team focused on the SEL PQA. One member of the team shared:

> "I said, 'We've got to go back to the tool. What does the tool tell us to do?' And so using that, we crafted the next session together. … I was there to observe the particular session. And so really walking the kids through that emotional coaching, but also building in some activities that we learned, but they were able to really talk about emotions. … We totally went back to the tool and used that as a guide to help us be strategic about the conversation we were going to have with the young people, and it worked."

This adjusted understanding of behavior also allowed for a more preventative approach—before youth behavior became disruptive—through the use of tools such as mindfulness and emotion coaching. As an example, a quick mindfulness reminder—*"Breathe in, breathe out. And then, are you ready to get out?"*—can help youth prepare for transition times, which are often hectic for programs.

Staff perceived and were motivated by changes in youth behavior.

Over fifteen comments spoke to a recognition that staff noticed and felt responsive to changes in their youth over the program period. At many sites, staff worked to design programs to be safe places where youth could share and process the stress in other areas of their life. Put another way, a staff member identified that "students now feel more comfortable speaking up and being themselves." Although this sharing of emotions felt like an extension outside the norm for youth programs or "scary to administrators, educators, and even parents to realize that youth are processing and speaking about emotions," a staff member notes that participants process emotions with or without support. By facilitating and normalizing emotions within programming, sites created a sense of safety and belonging for youth participants—a key indicator of a positive developmental setting.

In addition to this increased sharing, staff observed additional changes in youth skills. Through the youth measure (SRYB), staff were able to go beyond a hunch they are impacting youth's social emotional skills and determine through measurement when and where they had impact and how it connected to student need. In just a ten-week period, sites were able to see immediate impact. One staff noted, "This isn't a waste of my time; it really makes a difference."

This sense of impact was reinforced for staff through the response of students. Staff indicated seeing the value of SEL integration when the youth participants requested the SEL rituals. Whether reminding them they forgot a high five, or asking when circles would be held, staff began to notice that the youth valued and benefited from the new practices. Staff shared one example:

> "Friday is fun day, and we do not usually have our academic time. One kid actually ran over to the education specialist to say, "Hey, are we doing that emotion thing today?" And she dropped what she was doing and did it with him. ... He was dealing with something ... and felt comfortable enough to ask. I think that was really powerful that what we are doing is really important for our kids."

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES FOR NETWORKS

Although the findings amongst sites and organizations have important implications for OST networks, some concrete findings are unique to the network level.

An exceptional level of professional learning and coaching was critical to guiding sites through implementing a new process.

For sites new to continuous quality improvement, learning SEL concepts and SEL measurement was a large undertaking. Support for adult learning is of utmost importance during the first year of an SEL aligned quality improvement process, as staff not only work to increase their content knowledge, but are simultaneously learning new timelines and requirements for data collection and data-driven improvement practices. Also, during the first year, it can be easy for sites to question the data, so networks must help frame the first year as baseline and support sites in an early focus on growth.

Collecting youth outcome data created challenges networks had not anticipated.

The parental consent form for the youth outcome measure (SRYB) was noted by both networks and sites to be cumbersome. Parents struggled with "legalese," making it difficult for sites to get forms back in a timely fashion. On the staffing side, the SRYB required a knowledge base from staff before they could collect data for individual students. While some of this is accomplished through front end training, for one network, staffing and program structures led to timing challenges, as staff needed more time to build relationships before the rating window.

Networks needed to support their own data collectors in becoming reliable assessors.

Establishing reliability with SEL measures can be more challenging than traditional program quality measures. To ensure that external assessors were able to score the tool reliably, they participated in a rigorous, two-day training process and one to two scoring tests. One network lead shared that the "assessor training was a hit to ego and enthusiasm—folks didn't fully know what they were getting into." Scaffolding assessors' learning is an important area of improvement for networks and for the Weikart Center.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Taken together, the findings from SEL Demonstration Initiative outline a need for clear focus on awareness and language, the importance of starting with adults first, and the value of a lower-stakes approach. Based upon these findings, organizations pursuing an SEL aligned quality improvement system should consider how the findings might apply uniquely in their context while also considering the following recommendations:

Garner buy-in at all levels. A lower-stakes approach leads to and requires greater buy-in from participants. An aligned approach to buy-in will require support from the network and organizations.

- Ensuring buy-in from senior staff within participating organizations requires targeted knowledge building. Since executive directors/CEOs have ultimate say on whether or not sites engage in the work, they should be the first audience for understanding SEL assessments. Similarly, senior leaders must model and explain the work in a way that inspires action and demonstrates the serious nature of SEL.
- Program managers provide leadership for continuous quality improvement both through direct intervention support and through the modeling outlined above. Networks found that they needed a clear plan and timeline for onboarding managers to better garner buy-in from site staff.
- The more members of a staff team that can become comfortable with the framework, training, and tools being utilized, the better—"We're all going to the same trainings, we're all on the same page, and we're all doing the same stuff." This also signals to staff a strong managerial commitment to an SEL aligned quality improvement process.

Be patient and embrace the process. Undertaking both SEL and continuous quality improvement can be overwhelming for sites, particularly during the first year. Everything—both process and data—are new. Therefore, it can take teams longer to process and move to improvement.

- To get through the intensity of the first year, networks should have a mapped out, year-long timeline to allow for the ramp-up time needed to increase staff understanding, while making sure that tools and data are being utilized in the best manner possible.
- Demonstration Initiative leaders recommend that new networks "embrace that process and learning and come to it with an open mind." Take it slow and be willing to narrow and focus on one impactful area at a time. When rushed, the process can feel more like a chore, which can reduce the impact.
- Managers must lead their staff with patience as they get used to a new process and must provide support to staff along the way so they do not dismiss a process before it has a chance to take hold. "The magnification on the lens is at its most intense because everyone is learning it. ... Every stone is being unturned. ... There is more paperwork and process involved. It almost gives the thing not a fair shake."

Narrow the focus and emphasize learning. "You don't get on a ladder and go from the first rung to the top rung; you go to the next rung."

- While programs can undertake integration of SEL into a quality improvement process on their own, having a network already in place allows organizations to support sites in a focused approach to improvement. A learning community connects sites to new resources and ideas from within and across organizations. Having colleagues to discuss the work with further enhances the outcomes.
- Once site teams learn about SEL, they can be eager to change everything at once. Yet, there is a need to not focus too much on scores; rather, there was understanding that the value of continuous quality improvement was a focus on growth. "We could look at the data and say, 'All right. Our data is telling us this; let's try to focus on one or two things that we can really do different and do better.'"

CONTINUED GROWTH FOR ESTABLISHED OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME NETWORKS

The networks and programs that engaged in this work are eager to continue their own continuous improvement. As such, the following recommendations are offered for these four networks as well as other established networks who have already begun this work:

Continue to increase training offerings for site and managerial staff.

Networks identified a need for more training content, including training to foster their own experiences with the practices, along with specific skill-building opportunities to better deliver emotion coaching and empathy practices.

Expand SEL work to include parents.

Now that networks have successfully begun SEL work with their teams and organizational leadership, expanding the work to additional parent support will further strengthen impact for youth. For some parents, the notion of an OST program venturing into a focus on emotions is new. Engaging parents might include both an educational component—sharing what is being taught in programming—and a measurement component—parent survey or rating connected to the quality improvement process.

Develop tools for engaging with schools.

Similarly, some networks faced resistance from school administration. Administrators feared the programs were "opening up a can of worms." If SEL can be done in alignment with school day, rather than in opposition to, youth will benefit from the consistency and reinforcement of the practices.

These recommendations and the learnings of the SEL Demonstration Initiative are not only offered to sites, but are being deeply considered by the Weikart Center in the continued development and validation of an SEL aligned version of their continuous quality intervention. The Weikart Center is continuing to validate the SEL program quality measures, based on statistical performance and user feedback. Just as networks must consider how to adjust their supports to sites, the Weikart Center is determining how to continue to provide support in facilitating improvement based upon multiple data sources; in helping youth development providers express the connection between PYD, SEL, and program quality; and in helping providers to focus on building the skills and practices they will need to successfully support youth. To that end, the Weikart Center is expanding the SEL Methods to incorporate a focus on youth workers' self-awareness, as well as building on the work of *Preparing Youth to Thrive* to identify the organizational and management practices that best create the conditions for SEL program quality.

Closing Reflections

Out-of-school time providers have a deep commitment to supporting the success of the youth they serve. Through a lens of positive youth development or SEL, youth programs have been designed to be positive developmental settings where young people can develop their talents, build relationships, and connect with caring adults. As out-of-school time organizations and networks continue to seek to achieve this objective, an SEL aligned quality improvement process is a clear asset. Program quality measures provide staff with a common understanding of best practices while simultaneously providing actionable data to help them improve their practice. Coupled with data about the SEL skills of their children and youth, staff are more equipped to tailor their improvements to the needs of their children and youth and to continue creating positive developmental settings.

After-School All-Stars - Los Angeles

Founded in 1992 by Arnold Schwarzenegger in Los Angeles, After-School All-Stars is a national nonprofit organization that partners with schools across the United States to expand the learning day for low-income children. For more than 25 years, After-School All-Stars has carried out its mission, to provide comprehensive after-school programs that keep children safe and help them achieve in school and in life. Currently, After-School All-Stars serves over 90,000 youth in over 450 school sites in 19 regions across 13 states. Throughout its evolution, After-School All-Stars has served schools that are in low-income areas, as indicated by Title I status.

After-School All-Stars is dedicated to providing comprehensive after-school programs that keep children safe and help them succeed in school and in life. Their vision is for their youth, who are called All-Stars, to be safe and healthy, to graduate high school and go to college, to find careers they love and then give back to their communities. In 2015, After-School All-Stars piloted the YPQI in three chapters: Las Vegas, NV, New York, NY, and Newark, NJ. By 2018, they expanded to 17 chapters throughout the country, building the capacity of the chapter leadership to training and implement regionally.

SEL at All Levels of the Organization

Since its inception, After-School All-Stars recognized the power of SEL as an undercurrent in sports, health, academics, and youth development. That vision has grown and, with the completion of a new strategic plan, SEL is identified as a key impact area. Additionally, chapter and national efforts have emphasized professional learning communities that focus on uniform SEL language, assessment, coaching, and trainings. These efforts enhance staff readiness and retention, bolster youth participation and persistence in the program, and improve youth behavior and social emotional and academic engagement outcomes.

After-School All-Stars' focus on SEL can be seen in the interactions between staff and All-Stars. Staff members encourage All-Stars to make positive decisions; to foster meaningful relationships; to find self-motivation to succeed academically and in the real world; and to lead, serve, and advocate. "Safe and healthy," a key component of the vision for their All-Stars, is defined as not just physically safe, but emotionally supported and equipped to thrive.

Recommendation

"I would recommend that networks or sites seeking to integrate SEL into their continuous quality improvement should determine the capacity of their staff and their leadership's bandwidth to support a deep SEL shift. Small, incremental change could be advisable—this is meaningful, but challenging work and it is more than ok to start small and look to deepen your efforts over time."

—Jason Spector
*National Sr. Director,
Strategy & Evaluation*
After-School All-Stars

To ensure their ability to meet this vision, social emotional needs of All-Stars are identified through a national student pre-post survey, which includes validated SEL scales (e.g., self-control, growth mindset). Through program planning and implementation, chapters respond to this survey data. Research-based practices are shared with chapter leadership and front-line staff through a combination of in-person trainings, webinars, 1:1 coaching sessions, site visits, and professional development, allowing chapters to adapt their SEL approach to fit the unique needs of their community.

The SEL Demonstration Initiative was implemented in After-School All-Stars L.A. Chapter. After-School All-Stars-LA is one of After-School All-Stars' longest-running, storied chapters, and they have an extensive focus on evaluation and SEL. With Claremont Graduate University, they have implemented a comprehensive evaluation examining the relationship among program dosage, program quality, and socioemotional and academic outcomes for youth. They use the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) for intervention planning and progress tracking around SEL.

Beyond the Bell Milwaukee

In 2013, more than 75 youth-serving agency leaders and funders in Milwaukee gathered to discuss the results of a survey designed to uncover challenges facing the youth development sector in Milwaukee—98% of youth-serving agencies and 62% of funders supported the establishment of a "city-wide intermediary" to coordinate capacity building and coordination among youth service providers, policy makers, and funders. The launch of five working groups to address issues in the areas of access, quality, data, policy, and funding led to the establishment of what is now known as Beyond the Bell Milwaukee. Launched by the Center for Youth Engagement, Beyond the Bell is a collaborative effort driven by service providers, funders, youth, policy makers, and public institutions all committed to ensuring that youth ages 12 to 18 have access to coordinated and quality programs and services. Beyond the Bell and its partners now work to explore best practice for out-of-school time coordination, engaged local youth to gather their input, and address the unique needs and opportunities of programs in Milwaukee.

In 2016 Beyond the Bell became part of the Milwaukee Health Department's Office of Violence Prevention (MHDOVP). This move allowed for robust alignment of Beyond the Bell's supports with The Blueprint for Peace, a community-driven call to action for a public health approach to violence prevention that engages community residents and multiple sectors.

Beyond the Bell began supporting organizations in utilizing the YPQI in 2014, with 21 organizations now utilizing YPQI. In rolling out the YPQI-SEL, Beyond the Bell was able to connect with their experienced cohort of youth programs to ensure continuous quality improvement practices were rooted in SEL and to further align their quality work with The Blueprint for Peace.

SEL at a Holistic Approach to Violence Prevention

The Blueprint for Peace was developed through a framework that prioritized the voices of Milwaukee residents who are typically left out of planning processes – youth, parents, and community members in the most affected areas of the city. The Blueprint for Peace emphasizes an overall holistic approach to violence prevention that calls for supports to heal trauma, address structural oppression, and provide positive frameworks for conflict resolution, all of which can be supported by programs that address youth SEL skills. Additionally, the Blueprint for Peace explicitly names SEL focused initiatives as an important strategy for their goal of supporting children, youth and families.

With this foundation, integrating SEL supports is a natural next step for Beyond the Bell. Organizations are realizing that intentional SEL supports, for youth and for staff, are necessary to sustain quality. Much of Beyond the Bell's work with provider organizations has focused on the Interaction and Engagement quality domains. Enhancing staff practices in these areas most closely aligns with developing SEL skills in youth, and Beyond the Bell has taken on this charge through the YPQI-SEL.

> **Recommendation**
>
> *"A youth program is only as good as the impact that it has on the growth and development of the youth it serves. The YPQA SEL is a tool that builds upon the original YPQA that measures everything from environment to engagement to actually assessing the facilitation of SEL awareness and skill-building. It is important that communities are prepared to embrace new practices that could greatly enhance the development of SEL skills among youth."*
>
> —Reggie Moore
> *Founder & Executive Director*
> Center for Youth Engagement

Organizations not participating in the YPQI have also called on Beyond the Bell to provide SEL learning opportunities. This year Beyond the Bell's Quality Workgroup launched a professional development pilot to provide high-quality, relevant training around Core Competencies for Youth Development Practitioners. During the winter of 2017-2018, 14 trainings were offered on topics partners selected, including: trauma-informed care, conflict management, culturally relevant leadership, stress response/emotional resiliency, and Ask-Listen-Encourage. SEL is woven throughout each of these. Registration was almost at capacity, and partners are asking for more explicit SEL trainings.

SEL Demonstration Initiative:
Measuring Social and Emotional Learning in Out-of-School Time

School's Out Washington

Schools' Out Washington (SOWA) started in 1987 as a pilot of the city of Seattle and has grown into a statewide intermediary that provides services and guidance for organizations to ensure all young people have safe places to learn and grow when not in school. SOWA works to ensure high-quality afterschool, youth development, and summer programs are available so all of Washington's youth ages five through young adult can have the opportunities they deserve to thrive. SOWA employs a four-pronged approach to support out-of-school time programs: quality and training, policy and advocacy, grants to programs, and racial equity. Driven by a guiding belief that access to high-quality out-of-school time opportunities are essential to closing the opportunity gap and combating inequity, SOWA continually works to address racial disparities among youth and strives to increase access to quality programs for youth of color.

Since 2008, SOWA has worked with the Weikart Center to use the YPQI in expanded learning settings, growing from 10 to more than 400 sites statewide. SOWA closely supports programs through the entire YPQI assess-plan-improve cycle through training and technical assistance, including workshops delivered by an experienced and extensive network of Weikart Center endorsed trainers, and advanced online and in-person networking tools. SOWA places an emphasis on customized one-on-one coaching for sites through each step of the process.

Aligning SEL, Quality, and Equity

SOWA has been a long-time advocate for the importance of SEL as a key component in high quality programming. As part of their mission to define and support access to high quality programs, SOWA and partners throughout the state developed the Washington State Quality Standards for Afterschool and Youth Development Programs in 2013. The quality standards are rooted in SEL practices and include reference to supporting components of social and emotional skill growth in areas including cultural competency, relationships, and youth leadership. With a definition of high quality that fosters SEL skill-building for young people, SOWA is committed to growing a systematic and aligned assessment, goal-setting, and improvement approach for SEL skills in programs. In alignment with their commitment to equity, SOWA has worked to ensure that all quality and SEL frameworks reflect that quality programs respect and are responsive to the diversity of participants.

In rolling-out the SEL PQA statewide, SOWA has deployed their network of trainers, external assessors, and coaches and utilized their existing capacity, strategy, and management structure. As an already strong network in supporting YPQI at scale, they were able to increase the resources and supports they provide to programs by introducing and supporting the transition the SEL PQA; a welcome addition to a statewide network already committed to growth of social emotional skills in young people.

> **Recommendation**
>
> *"Implementation around the SEL work can be a heavier lift for programs than previous quality improvement efforts due to new content and higher standards of quality. Assist sites by scaffolding your supports to help programs implement effectively (i.e., a kickoff to build buy-in) and by providing additional resources to make it easier for sites to implement new practices (i.e. learning community meetings, SEL curricula/activities)."*
>
> —Porter Eichenlaub
>   *Social Emotional Program Manager*
>   School's Out Washington

SEL Demonstration Partner Spotlight:

Sprockets

Sprockets, launched in 2011, is a collaboration of community organizations, the City of Saint Paul, and Saint Paul Public Schools that works to ensure all of Saint Paul's youth will develop their abilities as learners, contributors, and navigators so they can recognize and achieve their greatest potential. Sprockets works to improve the quality, availability, and effectiveness of out-of-school time learning through the committed, collaborative, and innovative efforts of community organizations, government, schools, and other partners. Sprockets was founded with commitment to reducing racial and other disparities for Saint Paul's youth.

A Unique Approach to Continuous Quality Improvement

In Sprockets' first year, the network engaged 158 youth workers in skill building workshops and trained staff to use the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) and collect Survey of Afterschool Youth Outcomes (SAYO) data. Building from there, Sprockets was among the first out-of-school time networks in the nation to combine participation, quality, and youth outcome data for programs to have a more complete understanding of their organization's strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. In 2013, Sprockets launched the first Activator continuous improvement cycle where partners collect a variety of data sets to inform annual improvement. This tool-neutral process allows programs to collect data in four areas and includes information such as YPQA self and/or external assessment, youth participation data, youth experience data, and youth outcome data. During 2017-2018, 35 organizations were engaged in the Activator improvement cycle.

Recommendation

"The current work that deepens our understanding of how to best support SEL growth in young people is more than just content knowledge, it must include processes that allow staff to experience, reflect and apply their knowledge. It starts with how we model and support our staff in understanding their own SEL development and engagement in the continuous improvement process. Experiencing how key practices impact young people first hand and recognizing the environment they create amplifies the impact of their activities."

—Jocelyn Wiedow
Network and Quality Coordinator
Sprockets

Organizations bring multiple forms of data to a workshop called Making Meaning of Multiple Data Sets (M3). During the session, organizations use the various types of data to see where there are common themes and standalone areas to improve the day-to-day work in the program and the program model in order to draft improvement plans they work to implement. This model allows for easy integration of SEL data and for staff to engage with that data at the level that fits their organizations—from early introductions to intentional use of data in improvement planning.

Advancing SEL Through Multiple Approaches

From 2015 to 2017 Sprockets partnered with the PEAR Institute to offer a professional development pilot focused on social emotional learning. The pilot targeted youth-serving professionals and school-based educators or administrators working with middle and high school-age youth. Participants were trained to identify key social and emotional assets and challenges and strategies to strengthen the assets and offset the challenges young people experience using PEAR's Holistic Student Assessment (HSA) survey. Participants increased their SEL knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs as they learned how to use these research-based tools to address individuals and group social emotional needs. As a result, they were able to support SEL in programming.

Additionally, Sprockets—with support from Every Hour Counts and in partnership with Carlson Family Foundation and the Greater Twin Cities United Way—led an initiative called Propel SEL which aimed to increase understanding among out-of-school time practitioners, systems stakeholders, and funders around key social and emotional

skills and outcomes for children and youth as well as to foster program and practice improvement in the field. Sprockets sought to assess and identify system-level strategies to support Saint Paul-based youth programs in addressing their SEL needs. During the Fall 2016 and Winter 2017, 22 community engagement meetings were held with 300 participants, including youth, youth workers, and stakeholders in the field, to learn how programs were building SEL and understand what systems-level supports they needed to continue this work. The results of this community engagement directly informed Sprockets' current strategic plan, which is framed around building youth worker expertise, supporting program intentionality, addressing program environment, and assessment of outcomes.

Appendix A

The goal of the SEL Challenge—a partnership between the Susan Crown Exchange (SCE), the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality (the Weikart Center), the University of Illinois, and eight exemplary SEL programs—was to develop standards for SEL practice and curate descriptive examples of the actions that staff and youth actually see in OST settings. The SEL standards were designed to be measurable and to fit with an evidence-based continuous quality improvement system, such as the Youth Program Quality Intervention (YPQI).

The YPQI is a set of continuous improvement practices that include assessment tools, protocols for improvement planning, and training and supports to help carry out improvement plans. The YPQI is grounded in research by the Weikart Center in youth development, program quality, and social emotional learning. Over the last 10 years the Weikart Center has provided the YPQI and a suite of products including a construct of quality, a set of measures and staff practices, and guidance on designing quality improvement systems. Through the SEL Demonstration Initiative, we sought to more deeply understand the needs of providers in taking the content developed from the SEL Challenge and actively integrating it in to their own continuous quality improvement systems.

Intervention

Each network was responsible for recruitment of sites, coordination with the Weikart Center, coordination of external assessors trained in the Program Quality Assessment (PQA), and direct site supports including trainings, logistics, and data collection at two points in time throughout the Initiative. Each network followed the trajectory of the YPQI: Assess-Plan-Improve.

ELEMENTS	Network Lead	Site Lead	Site Staff
Site Recruitment & MOU finalization	X		
Learning Community Webinars	X		
In-Person Planning Day/Kick Off	X	X	X
SEL PQA Item Review	X	X	X
Conduct PQA Self-Assessment (Observations and Consensus Meeting)	X	X	X
Planning with Data & Finalize Program Improvement Plan	X	X	X
SEL Methods	X	X	X
SEL Coaching	X	X	X

Measures

The following data were collected during the initiative and utilized in the analysis of staff experience and determination of recommendations for the field.

SEL Program Quality Assessment (PQA)
The SEL PQA is a set of observational rubrics designed to assess the quality of staff's positive youth development and SEL practices when interacting with youth during program offerings. Like its predecessor, the Youth PQA,

the SEL PQA is organized into four domains—safe space, supportive environment, interaction, and engagement. The SEL PQA draws on items found in the Youth PQA, School-Age PQA, and Academic Skill Building PQA and incorporates research from *Preparing Youth to Thrive*, the initial study of the SEL Challenge, specifically in the areas of Empathy and Emotion Management.

Staff Survey
A staff survey assessed staff and program managers' perceptions of engagement in the intervention, intervention fidelity, program model, and impact of the intervention.

Program Improvement Plans (PIP)
Each site completed and submitted an improvement plan based upon both their SEL PQA and Staff Rating of Youth SEL Behaviors data.

Staff Rating of Youth SEL Behavior (SRYB)
The SRYB is a survey instrument in which staff rate students' skill level in managing their emotions, expressing emotion knowledge, displaying social role mastery, and displaying goal striving mastery. This tool is based on an assessment that was piloted and empirically tested in the SEL Challenge.

Assessor Survey
External Assessors completed a survey to capture both their experience with the observational items unique to the SEL PQA and their perception of validity of this tool.

Focus Groups and Interviews
Staff and managers were brought together in focus groups or individual interviews centering on their experience with new PQA measures, their evaluation of training supports, and recommendations for future coaching supports.

| INSTRUMENT	COLLECTED BY	Nov/Dec	Feb/Mar	Feb/Mar
SEL PQA	External Assessor and Self-Assessment Team* *Nov only	X		X
Staff Survey	Online Survey			X
PIP	Self-Assessment Team		X	
SRYB	Lead Instructional Staff - Online Survey	X	X	X
Assessor Survey	Online Survey			X
Focus Groups & Interviews	CYPQ Staff			X

Appendix B

The following is an overview of the aggregate performance findings for all four networks. The first section is SEL PQA External Assessments gathered in each network at two time points (Note that the time points were different for each network). Next, the youth behavior results highlight the Staff Rating of Youth Behavior average scores for youth across all three networks who had ratings for two time points (N=112). While an in-depth analysis of quality and outcomes was beyond the scope of this study, we present the following data in order to provide a glimpse of the type of data that informed the improvement planning process and the end-of-year reflection. Planning with Data reports included T1 SEL PQA and SRYB data. The end of year site report included all SEL PQA and SRYB data over time for that site, as well as the staff survey data for that site.

Program Quality

Across all four networks the PQA trends mirrored the national trends for both the traditional PQA and the SEL PQA. Scores were highest in the safe space domain and progressively lower through supportive environment, interaction, and engagement. These data allow the reader to identify areas of strength in program quality and begin to narrow focus for targeted areas of improvement.

Of the 39 participating sites, 25 completed assessments at two time points during the SEL Demonstration Initiative. These 25 sites saw growth in all four domains.

SEL PQA Scores at Time 1 & Time 2
(Aggregate for all Demonstration Partner sites)
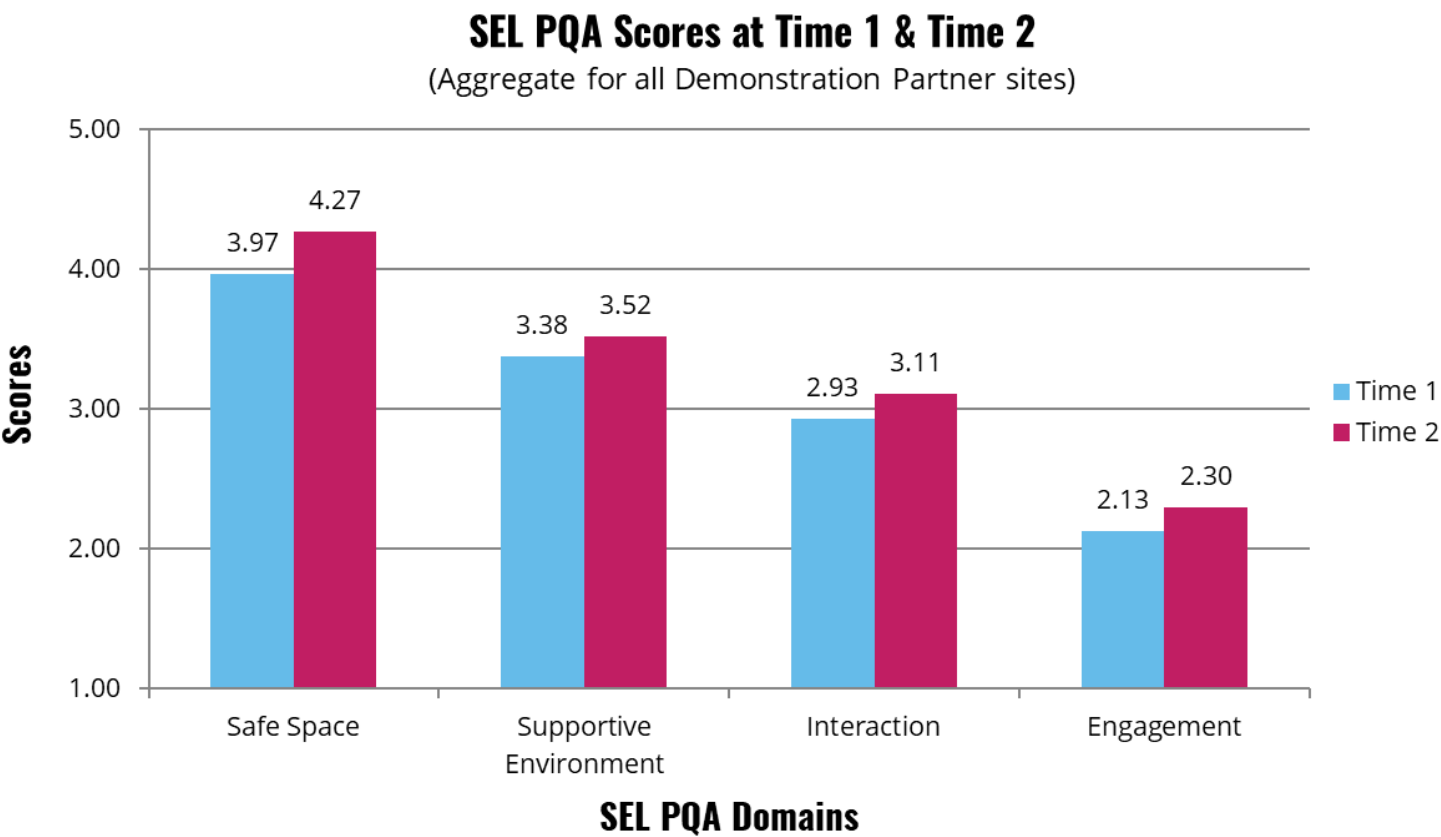
Youth SEL Skill Results

The youth skills measure reflected data on the staff's rating of youth SEL skills at two points in time over the year. The results are similar to early trends, with the highest scores being in "expresses emotion knowledge" and "behaviorally manages emotions," with lower ratings for "social role mastery" and "goal striving mastery." This also aligns with the "growth and mastery" scores. Across the four networks, data for 200 youth were submitted during Time 1 and data for 112 youth were submitted for T2. Of those submissions, 112 youth were consistent between the two time points. SEL skills increased across the four domains, as rated by the staff.

SEL Skill Domain Scores for Time 1 & Time 2
(Aggregate for all SEL Demonstration Partner sites)
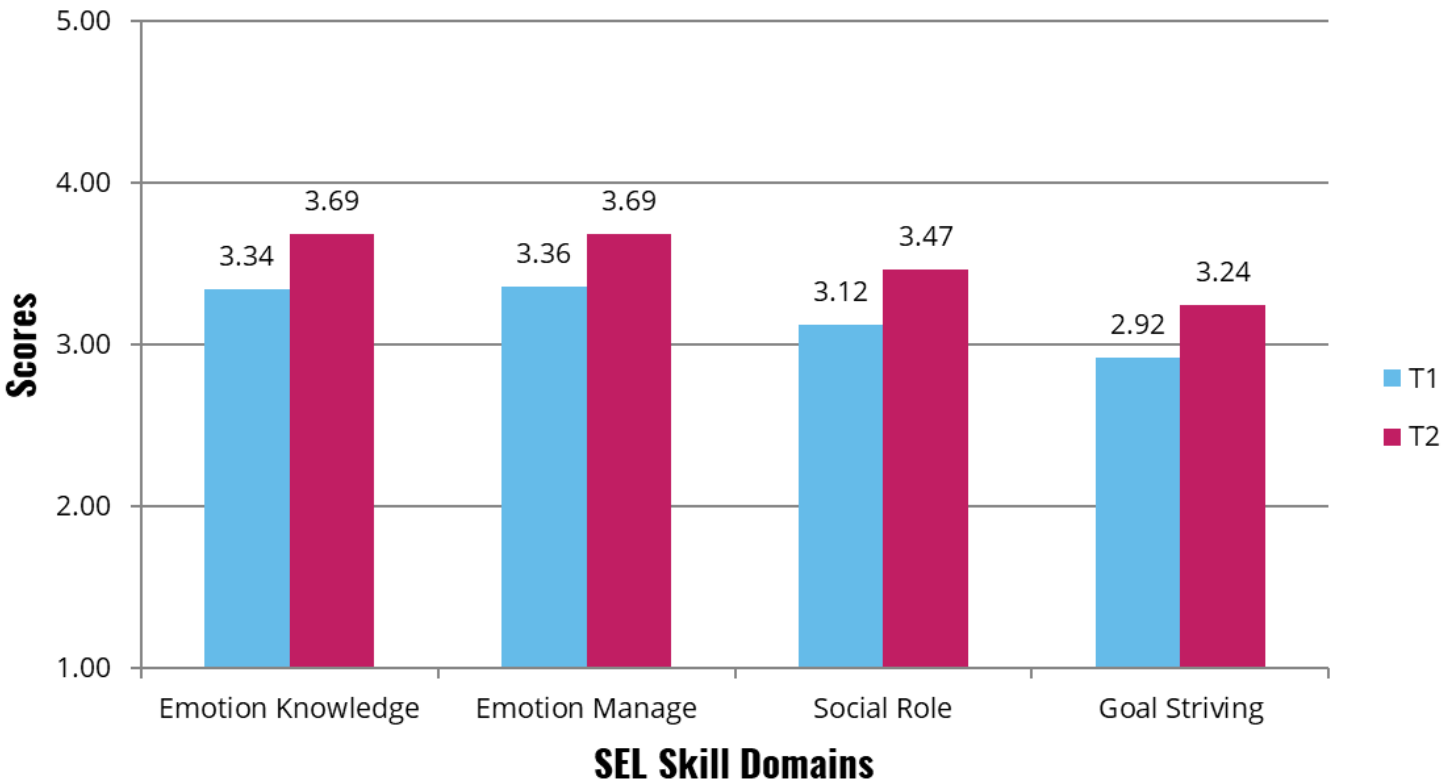
End Notes

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