The background of the cover features a close-up photograph of several hands reaching into a cardboard box filled with a variety of colorful crayons. The hands are of different skin tones, suggesting a diverse group of children. The lighting is soft, and the overall tone is warm and collaborative. The text is overlaid on this image, with a semi-transparent dark blue diagonal band running across it.

PREPARING CHILDREN TO THRIVE

Standards for Social and Emotional Learning Practices in School-Age Settings

Poonam Borah
Michael Conn
Karen Pittman

Supplement to Preparing Youth to Thrive

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All inquiries regarding the content of this supplement should be directed to SEL@cypq.org.

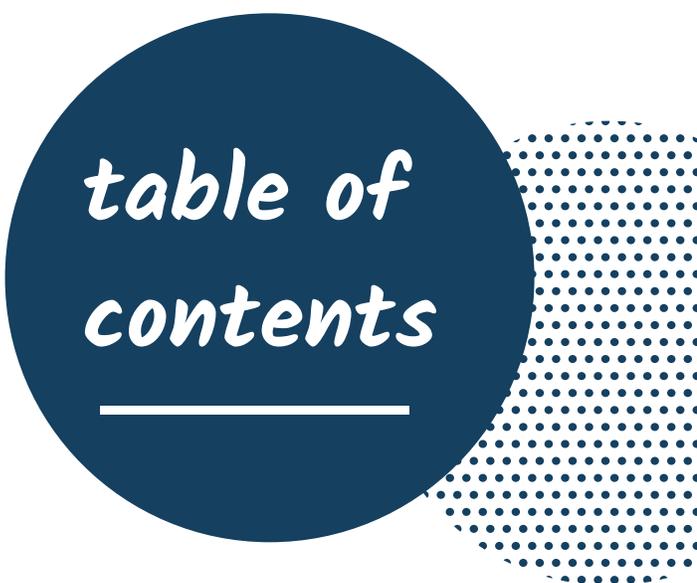
Visit SELpractices.org for more information and resources.



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PROGRAM QUALITY



March 2019



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
Figure 1: How all the elements of Social and Emotional Learning fit together	3
PART I. OVERVIEW	4
Why Focus on Social and Emotional Skills for Children?	5
Participants	7
Findings	9
Using this Supplement	10
PART II. SEL STANDARDS FOR PRE-ADOLESCENT, SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN	11
Emotion Management	14
Table 1. Standards and Indicators for SEL practice under Emotion Management	15
Empathy	17
Table 2. Standards and Indicators for SEL practice under Empathy	18
Teamwork	20
Table 3. Standards and Indicators for SEL practice under Teamwork	21
Responsibility	23
Table 4. Standards and Indicators for SEL practice under Responsibility	24
Initiative	26
Table 5. Standards and Indicators for SEL practice under Initiative	27

Problem Solving	29
Table 6. Standards and Indicators for SEL practice under Problem Solving	30
Curriculum Features	32
Table 7. SEL Curriculum Features	33

PART III. CASE NARRATIVES: BRIGHT FUTURES EXPERT PRACTITIONERS 34

Bright Futures at Perry Early Learning Center -	36
--	----

Ypsilanti Community Schools

Bright Futures at Hicks Elementary School -	38
--	----

Wayne Westland Community Schools

Bright Futures at Holmes Elementary School -	40
---	----

Ypsilanti Community Schools

PART IV: NEXT STEPS 42

References	44
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Preparing Children to Thrive: Standards for Social and Emotional Learning Practices in School-Age Settings is designed to help organizational and program leaders see clearly what social and emotional learning (SEL) among children (ages 5-13) would look like and feel like in real program settings, and to draw attention to promising adult practices for building SEL skills among children, along with curriculum features at an organizational level that support implementation of SEL programs.

This guide, and the study that led to it, were designed to complement a previous effort, ***Preparing Youth to Thrive*** (2016), which focused on developing SEL standards and indicators for adolescents from the ground up with the help of eight exemplary programs around the country.¹ We developed SEL concepts in six broad domains: Emotion Management, Empathy, Teamwork, Initiative, Responsibility, and Problem Solving.

The release of ***Preparing Youth to Thrive*** prompted a critical question: can the standards and indicators that were developed for adolescents be used in work with younger children? The answer was “yes,” with one important caveat and two adaptations:

- Caveat: Program staff need to understand the developmental differences between children and adolescents, the needs of the children involved, and the resources available locally to most effectively apply the standards and indicators skillfully;
- Adaptations: We added an indicator under Teamwork for “play time,” to underscore the importance of unstructured play among younger children. We also adapted the wording of one of the curriculum features to better mesh with the developmental stage of childhood (vs. adolescence).

Overall, the feedback from staff in the seventeen sites associated with Bright Futures, a 21st Century Community Learning Center housed within Eastern Michigan University’s Institute for the Study of Children, Families, and Communities, affirmed that the standards and indicators developed in the previous work are broadly relevant to both children and adolescents, with specific applications during different developmental stages and across varying settings.

¹ This work was generously supported, financially and conceptually, by the Susan Crown Exchange. We then received funding from The Wallace Foundation to examine the adaptability of those standards and indicators for school-age children (5-13 years old), which led to the creation of this document.

With those answers, we created this guide for you to use:

First, you will be introduced to the original SEL Challenge focused on adolescents, and to the current work with children and staff from the Eastern Michigan University – Bright Futures programs examining the relevance of SEL standards and indicators for school-age children.

Second, you will learn about the 34 standards and 61 indicators of social and emotional learning, as well as the five curriculum features, that provide structure to quality programs for children.

You will be invited to think about how what you are learning applies to your organization and program settings. To help with that, we have provided quotes and anecdotes from program leaders and from external observers to bring the standards and indicators to life.

These quotes and anecdotes were drawn from program settings in which we also further validated the applicability of the standards for use with school-age children by surveying expert practitioners.

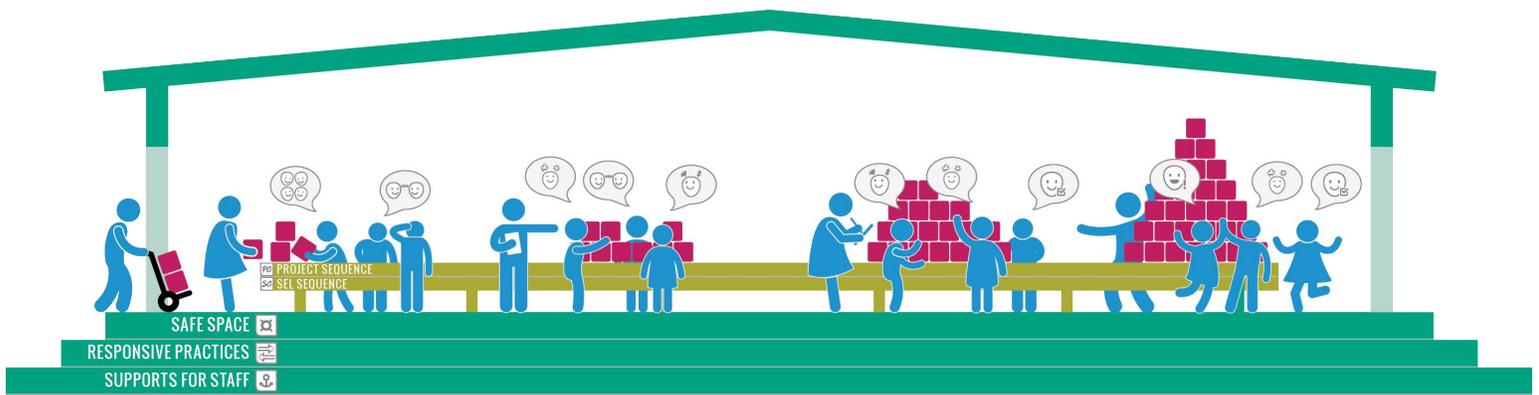
Third, we present three Bright Futures case narratives illustrating many of the concepts in practical ways.

Last, we invite you to reflect on applying what you have learned and also introduce you to tools available through www.SELpractices.org that will help you enhance the impact of your SEL initiatives for children.

Overall, you will be able to use this document to pick and choose what is applicable to your program setting, tailoring to your needs, whether you are working with a structured SEL curriculum or seeking to build SEL skill development into your program offerings more generally.

We are always interested in your input as this work evolves, so please contact us at SEL@cypq.org to share your thoughts, learning, insights, and questions. We are interested in learning from your experiences, and in supporting your practices, so please let us know about them.

Figure 1: How all the elements of Social and Emotional Learning fit together



Key

STANDARDS FOR SEL PRACTICE



FOR EACH DOMAIN THERE ARE A SET OF STAFF PRACTICES AND KEY YOUTH EXPERIENCES THAT SUPPORT SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILL BUILDING.

² Figure 1 presents a visual summary on how all the elements fit together in supporting children's SEL growth through program experiences. It shows a project sequence where children are involved with projects (represented as red blocks in the figure) that increases in complexity over time and an SEL sequence where the thought bubbles above the children represent various opportunities to learn SEL skills. You will also notice how the role of the staff changes from being more hands-on to more of a facilitator. The three green bars in the figure represent safe space, responsive practices, and supports for staff that are the three curriculum features that form the base for the challenging work around SEL. We recognize that the progression is not always as picture perfect as Figure 1 and there are many challenges that we face both internally and externally as we work on developing SEL skills for children.



PART I: *Overview*

Part 1. Overview

Out-of-school-time (OST) organizations change the lives of school-age program participants by developing the whole child. Social and emotional learning (SEL) is one of the key processes through which this occurs. SEL supports children in building the skills needed to engage in positive social interactions with others, achieve success in academic settings, and develop skills for work and life ahead. In this document, we build on earlier work with adolescents summarized in *Preparing Youth to Thrive: Promising Practices for Social Emotional Learning* and extend the applicability of this work to program offerings involving school-age children (5-13 years old). The current project was generously funded by the Wallace Foundation, building on the earlier initiative.

The term **out-of-school time** is used to refer to settings variously labeled afterschool, expanded learning, extracurricular clubs, summer camps, and sports; many mentoring, tutoring, apprenticeship, and workforce development programs; programs for disconnected and homeless youth; and some alternative schools.

Our goal for this document is to share with you – OST organization and program leaders – what we have learned about SEL that can apply to pre-adolescent, school-age children in OST program settings. Just as *Preparing Youth to Thrive* describes the rigorous process that was used in developing SEL standards and indicators in six domains for adolescents, this guide describes the process by which these standards were adapted to ensure they similarly guide high-quality OST programs to provide opportunities and support that lead to positive outcomes for pre-adolescent, school-age children.

While we strongly encourage you to review *Preparing Youth to Thrive* (visit www.selpractices.org to download), this guide can also be used on a stand-alone basis in your work within programs serving a younger age group.

In the pages ahead, we will start by highlighting why SEL is important for children. From there, we will describe the participants and methods used to evaluate the standards and indicators to assess their applicability to pre-adolescent children and their program settings. We will then introduce you to the standards and indicators that you can use in thinking about how your program settings and practices help facilitate SEL among the children with whom you work.

We will conclude with case examples from a collaboration with the Eastern Michigan University-Bright Futures network which yield illuminating information that brings many of the aspects of SEL to life, supporting the application of the standards and indicators to your setting. In reading them, we are sure you will see parallels to your work.

This document will be a constructive jumping-off point in your work with pre-adolescents, as you shape elements of your program, curriculum, and organizational approach to maximize SEL for the children with whom you are working.

Why Focus on Social and Emotional Skills for Children?

Social and emotional skills are important. A child's ability to self-regulate – to manage emotions, attention, motivation, and behavior to achieve specific purposes – is related to a wide range of positive outcomes. Furthermore, the ability to intentionally shift focus away from environmental cues that cause reactive or negative emotional responses, or to choose to be in environments already free from those cues, is a powerful step toward transcending contexts that limit potential. Likewise, seeking out contexts that can support growth is very important developmentally. Social and emotional skills are action skills that develop self-regulation and agency.³ We know that these skills are relevant to children's development, can be scaled to be age-appropriate, and build on one another over time. By providing multiple opportunities for children to practice SEL skills across contexts, they will be more likely to benefit from age-appropriate instruction in adolescence as skills are developed and mastered.

³ See the extensive footnotes in *Preparing Youth to Thrive* supporting these points.

The evidence is in. We still have much to learn about social and emotional skills, yet we have a great deal of evidence already. Definitive meta-analyses—studies that summarize across findings from many prior studies—tell us that SEL skill-building curricula, delivered in both OST and school settings, have positive effects on a wide range of skills and outcomes. These include: improved attitudes about self and others, increased pro-social behavior, lower levels of problem behaviors and emotional distress, and improved academic performance (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger, 2011 and Durlak, Weissberg, and Pachan, 2010).

The available information about SEL practice can be difficult to use. Much of the available information about SEL practice is difficult to use in improving your program. Intervention designs are often privatized in specific curricula and tools that do not support translation and integration in settings like yours. Curricula can be difficult to implement in some circumstances, using different SEL frameworks, and often do not include technical supports for adaptation. Finally, much of the scientific description of SEL is focused on individual skills and outcomes rather than curriculum features and staff practices that produce those skills and outcomes. Preparing Youth to Thrive provided an opportunity to distill this information for programs serving adolescents, but we know that the need is just as great for programs serving children. We hope our focus on curriculum features, staff practices, and key experiences for children, all built on the six domains of SEL established in our earlier work, will help you discern what you can apply in your program settings.

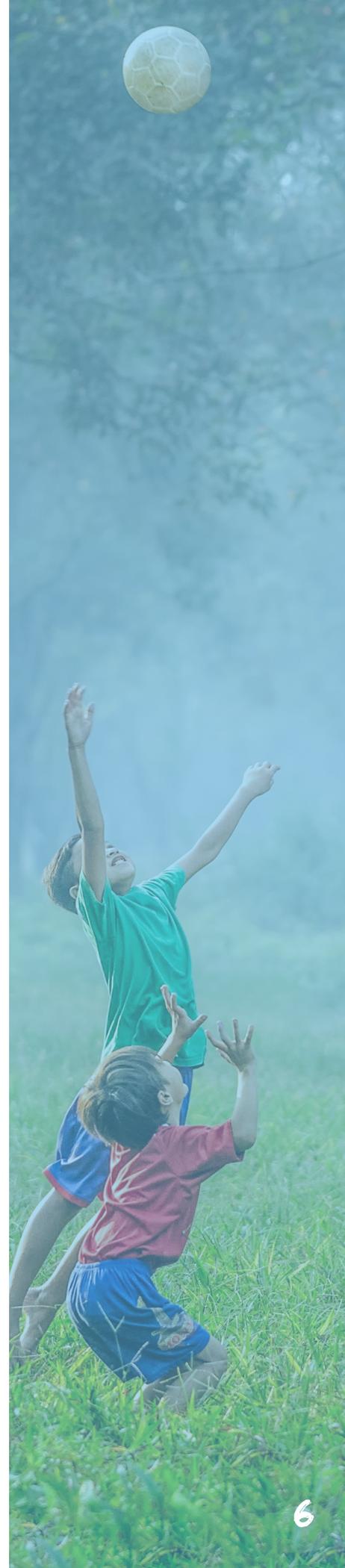
The six domains of SEL we will delve into are:

 <p>Emotion Management <i>Abilities to be aware of and constructively handle both positive and challenging emotions.</i></p>	 <p>Empathy <i>Relating to others with acceptance, understanding, and sensitivity to their diverse perspectives and experiences.</i></p>	 <p>Teamwork <i>Abilities to collaborate and coordinate action with others.</i></p>	 <p>Responsibility <i>Dispositions and abilities to reliably meet commitments and fulfill obligations of challenging roles.</i></p>	 <p>Initiative <i>Capacities to take action, sustain motivation, and persevere through challenge toward an identified goal.</i></p>	 <p>Problem Solving <i>Abilities to plan, strategize, and implement complex tasks.</i></p>
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Focusing on the standards and indicators outlined across these six social and emotional skill domains enhances the likelihood of programs influencing children’s development of social and emotional skills. These six SEL domains cut across the three broad areas identified by brain research that are critical to children’s development: basic regulation, beliefs and skills, and executive functions.⁴

No child will be truly ready for school, work, and life by young adulthood without developing social and emotional skills within the six SEL domains, and OST programs are uniquely positioned to help launch this skill development for the children they serve.

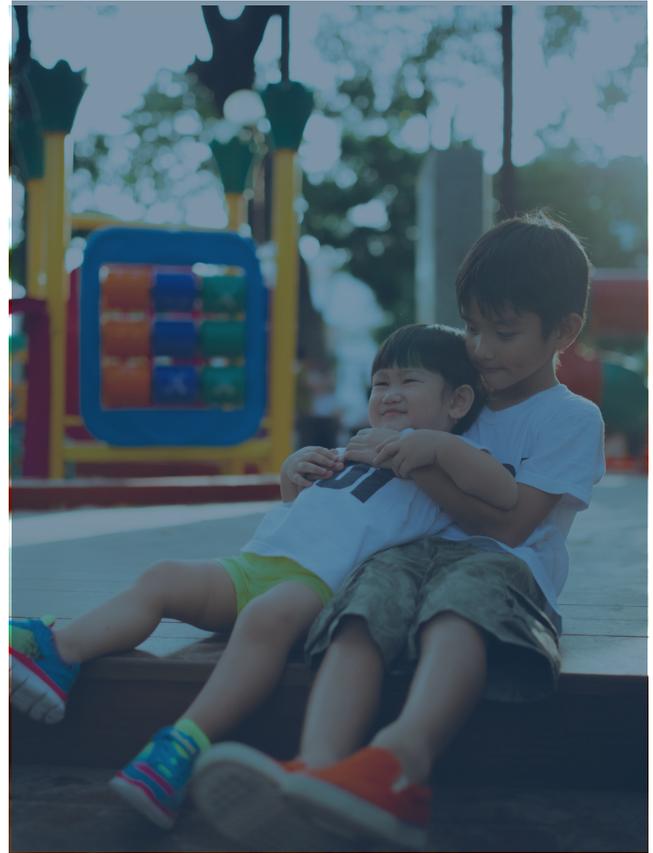
⁴ Emotion Management and the curriculum features of Safe Spaces and Responsive Practices relate most closely to Basic Regulation; Emotion Management, Empathy, Teamwork, and Responsibility relate most closely to Beliefs and Skills; and Initiative and Problem Solving relate most closely to Executive Functions.



Participants

The current project, which led to the document you're reading now, built on the SEL Challenge by engaging with the Bright Futures programs. Bright Futures is a 21st Century Community Learning Centers network that is housed within Eastern Michigan University's Institute for the Study of Children, Families, and Communities. It is a high-quality network that serves students and families across three school districts, including Romulus, Wayne-Westland, and Ypsilanti Community Schools. In 2016, with support from the Wallace Foundation, we partnered with Bright Futures, one of the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality's (Weikart Center) long-time partners and advocates of social and emotional learning, to gather feedback around adaptability of the SEL Challenge standards for pre-adolescent, school-aged children.

Seventeen sites from Bright Futures serving children ages 5 to 13 years old were our primary pool to explore the adaptation of our adolescent standards for pre-adolescent, school-age programs. In Bright Futures programs, students receive targeted academic support, experience project-based clubs resulting in career exploration, and learn academic content and skills to transition successfully to the next level. Bright Futures has developed a strong culture of best practices focused on social and emotional learning, positive youth development, embedded academics, and family engagement.



Background: The SEL Challenge

In 2015, the Weikart Center partnered with the Susan Crown Exchange, staff teams from eight exemplary OST programs, and technical consultants in the SEL Challenge.

The goal of this partnership was to create a common framework, in plain language, through the identification of promising practices for building social and emotional skills for adolescents and develop technical supports for using these SEL practices at scale. These promising practices are featured in *Preparing Youth to Thrive: Promising Practices for Social Emotional Learning* and in a suite of tools and technical assistance found on a companion website (www.SELpractices.org).

The SEL Challenge study allowed for the articulation of a set of standards that are broadly relevant and can empower a wide variety of OST programs to adapt SEL best practices for their unique contexts. As defined in *Preparing Youth to Thrive*, the term “standards” describes practices that:

- (1) Appeared across Challenge offerings
- (2) Were described as important by the expert practitioners
- (3) Were supported in the evidence base.

The SEL Challenge study also articulated more specific aspects or expressions of a standard, called practice indicators, that describe specific youth experiences, staff behaviors, or other objective conditions that occur during OST offerings.

The standards and practice indicators include both key youth experiences and staff practices that occur in exemplary SEL-based programs (Smith, McGovern, Peck, et al., 2016).

See **Preparing Youth to Thrive** for more details on the participants and the process used to develop the standards and practice indicators.

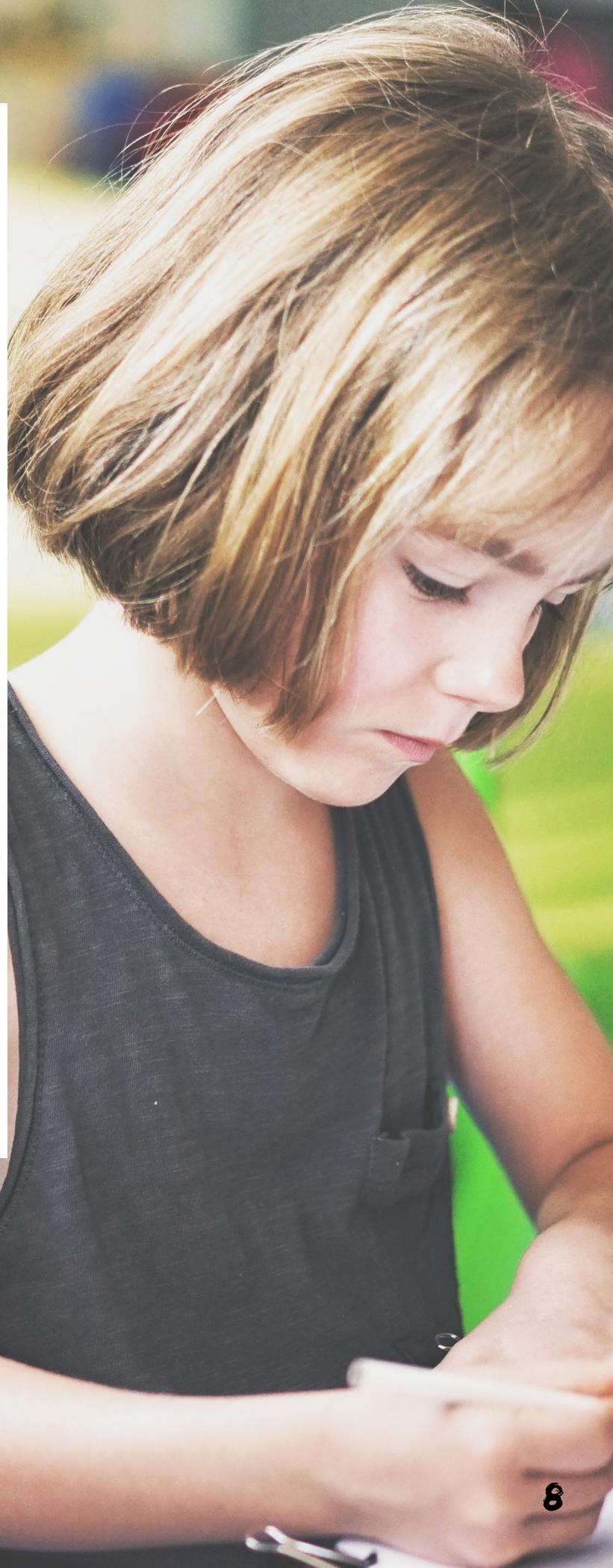
Method

We used a multi-stage process to investigate the extent to which the SEL Challenge standards and indicators were adaptable for pre-adolescent children.

The stages were:

- * An initial literature review of the vast array of developmental differences across childhood and adolescence that guided our initial draft of the school-age standards.
- * Surveys of, and focus groups with, expert practitioners who provided staff impressions of the draft version of the school-age standards.
- * Observational notes recorded by trained external assessors as they assessed staff practices in different school-aged programs within the Bright Futures network were reviewed to assess and analyze the prevalence of practice indicators in pre-adolescent, school-aged settings.
- * Case studies from expert practitioners in school-age settings who were actively involved in building children's social and emotional skills were used to analyze the importance of these standards for children.
- * All the data were filtered through a developmental lens, examining the likelihood that an identified practice or experience would support school-age children in learning a given SEL skill.

This process led to the identification of the standards and indicators for school-age children that are presented in Part II of this supplement.





Findings

Overall, we found that the standards and indicators that were generated for adolescents generally apply for pre-adolescent, school-age children with only two adjustments. While this may seem surprising at first, we view it as confirmation that the standards and indicators are broadly relevant, with specific applications during different developmental stages and across varying settings.

The Weikart Center engaged with expert practitioners from the Bright Futures network and gathered feedback on the initial draft for the school-age standards. Overall, their feedback during the focus groups was positive and practitioners agreed that the SEL Challenge standards that were identified through research in youth-based offerings were also suitable for pre-adolescent, school-age children. Participants shared personal anecdotes that showcased how these standards came to life in their offerings. Their feedback did indicate a need for an emphasis on unstructured time and play, especially for younger children.

We also conducted a survey with focus group participants to assess whether the practice indicators were important in their offerings, prevalent enough to be observed frequently, and clear and understandable to practitioners. The results showed that they were on all counts.⁵

We reviewed anecdotal notes that were collected from trained external assessors, who observed one or more of Bright Futures' school-aged offerings, to understand how the standards looked in practice (e.g., the ways that staff scaffold, model, and coach SEL skills) and assess if the focus group data correlates with what we see in terms of staff practices in the field.

These anecdotal examples are presented with the standards in Part II of this supplement. We also reviewed case studies that were gathered from three Bright Futures site coordinators to learn about the structures and norms that they were using to scaffold, model, and coach SEL skills (see Part III).

Despite developmental differences between pre-adolescents and adolescents, based on our literature review and feedback from Bright Futures practitioners described above, the school-age standards described in this guide differ very little from the previously described adolescent standards.

While almost all practice indicators for the six SEL domains (i.e., Emotion Management, Empathy, Teamwork, Responsibility, Initiative, and Problem Solving) and the curriculum features remain the same, we made two developmentally appropriate adaptations. One additional practice indicator was added to staff practices, under Teamwork, and a phrase adjustment was made to the SEL content sequence under Curriculum Features.

We will describe these adaptations and the rationale for each in more detail in the upcoming sections in which they apply.

⁵ Survey respondents rated each practice indicator on a three-point scale where 1 = "not very important," 2 = "moderately important," and 3 = "very important"; the results showed they were "very important" with an average overall rating of 2.82 out of a possible 3. Survey respondents rated each indicator again on this scale: 1 = "likely to be observed in < 40 % of sessions," 2 = "likely to be observed in 40-80% of sessions," and 3 = "likely to be observed in > 80 % of sessions"; these ratings yielded an overall average of 2.26 out of a possible score of 3, suggesting that indicators were likely to be observed in 40-80% of sessions. Finally, we asked the expert practitioners to rate whether each indicator was clear and understandable on a two-point scale where 1 = no, 2 = yes. This yielded an average rating of 1.94 out of a possible score of 2 across the six domains, showing that they were clear and understandable. Overall, the indicators were judged to be important, likely to be observed, and clear and understandable.



Using this Supplement

This supplement is designed so that you can skip to the information you are interested in. For example, if your goal is to improve problem-solving skills, you would skip to the standards and practice indicators on page 30 that provide guidance on how to support the development of children's social and emotional skills in the problem-solving domain. You might then continue through pages 31 and 32 to review examples of what the practice might look like for school-age children.

You will want to reflect on your knowledge and experience to add further context based upon your setting. The case narratives in Part III, on pages 37 to 42, provide a first-person account of expert practitioners' perspectives of how people in particular OST offerings worked on improving SEL through staff practices and children's experiences.

These narratives provide a window into the thought processes, motivations, and guiding principles of experienced practitioners, practical examples of what they did in their offerings, and resources that were useful to them in their journey toward improving children's social and emotional skills. In reviewing these case profiles, we encourage you to consider how each connects with your context and how you might implement supports and resources similar to those outlined in the examples.

One approach undertaken by many in roles like yours, who want to influence the creation and growth of social and emotional skills for children or youth in their offerings, is to start with a domain definition and standards for those skills, as presented in this supplement, and then select a packaged SEL curriculum that is designed to help children develop or practice those skills.

However, if instead you and your colleagues want to incorporate "best practices" that support these skills into your existing program, having a set of standards and associated practice indicators will allow you to facilitate a continuous improvement model which will be useful to ensure that SEL is integrated through everyday practices in all aspects of programming.

This supplement provides context for you to align SEL standards to building a quality program in support of your program's unique mission. These standards, along with the Preparing Youth to Thrive guide for adolescents and aligned performance measures⁶, support the implementation of a lower-stakes continuous quality improvement system. In a quality improvement system, you would have:

- * **Standards for good performance,**
- * **Performance measures and reports,**
- * **An annual continuous improvement cycle, and**
- * **Supports and incentives necessary to implement these three elements.**

A "lower-stakes" approach allows you and your colleagues to create a safe environment, to reflect on your practice and to receive support for building skills to benefit children without the fear of unfair sanctions. This kind of approach allows the standards and indicators to be actionable with a lens toward supporting you and your colleagues in strengthening practices and experiences, and adds a layer of regularly monitoring the indicators for both effectiveness and impact. Within a quality improvement system, additional supports such as professional learning opportunities and performance improvement tools can facilitate your ongoing growth in supporting children's social and emotional skill development. The Weikart Center's SEL Methods workshops are one example of such professional learning. More information on the SEL performance measures are available in the Methodology and Findings from the Social and Emotional Learning Challenge technical report (Smith, McGovern, Peck, et al., 2016) and online resources that were produced through the SEL Challenge are available via www.SELpractices.org.

As you read through the standards and indicators, and the case studies below, where do you see connections with your work developing SEL with children? How do the six domains of SEL – and the standards and indicators – apply to your OST program structure and practices? Which aspects of SEL are most relevant, and what kinds of adjustments, if any, would you make to your organization and program that would boost SEL? What would you keep doing that seems successful? Do you see parallels between the case narratives and your program? How can you leverage what you have learned to support the children you work with, for their ultimate benefit?

⁶ Performance measures for assessing the quality of management and instructional practices are described in Smith, Akiva, Sugar, Lo, Frank, Peck, & Cortina (2012) and Smith, Akiva, Sugar, & Hallman (2012).

PART II.

SEL Standards for Pre-Adolescent, School-Age Children





PART II. SEL Standards for Pre-Adolescent, School-Age Children

This section presents the standards, indicators, and curriculum features for pre-adolescent, school-age children that were derived through the multi-stage process described in the Methods section, including the two adaptations mentioned in the Findings section and noted below. Before presenting the standards, indicators, and curriculum features, we would like to offer several things for you to consider while you review the information that follows:

Quotes and case studies provide examples of how the practices are applied in different ways. At the end of each domain section, we present quotes from expert practitioners and observations recorded by external assessors, and in Part III we share case studies in expert practitioners' own words. These give you a sense of how practices are applied in real contexts. They also demonstrate an important developmental principle: many variations of the practices can be used to effect the same experiences for youth.

Children can be generators of their own social and emotional learning. Although the standards and indicators are presented for your use as organizational leaders and program staff, it is not meant to discount the active role of children in SEL. As we heard from all the SEL Challenge partners, as well as from the Bright Futures expert practitioners, adults are often only the facilitators of children's own active process of growing social and emotional skills.

Children's skills often develop in sequence and/or hierarchy. The individual standards describe the building of children's skills as a sequence and/or hierarchy where first children name and understand an SEL concept (figuring out what the "it" is) before going through the sequence of steps necessary to change the "it" in some way. Naming and modeling the SEL skill by an adult staff is often an important first step toward acting on and changing social and emotional skills in an intentional way. For example, to learn how to resolve conflict, first a child needs to understand what conflict resolution is, learn the steps in the process, and see staff use it in action. Then, when a conflict arises, they are better able to practice those steps with each other and acquire the skills for conflict resolution.

Emotion Management has a special place in SEL offerings. Emotional dynamics shift very quickly, and emotional states are linked to the context in powerful ways. Often, you need to understand the limits of self-regulation for individual children. Then, you can provide those children opportunities to practice and extend their limits of healthy emotional control. Emotion management is important for all children and may be of even higher priority when serving children who have been exposed to traumatic experience and toxic stress.

The relative importance and sequence of the standards are locally determined. The relative importance and structure (e.g., sequence and frequency) necessary for you to implement practices effectively is likely to vary with the needs of the children you are serving and the resources you have available to address those needs in your own context. These are decisions that need to be made by you, as an expert practitioner or organizational leader, and are the types of conversations that this guide should help support.

Once again, standards for SEL skills are categorized into six domains:



Emotion Management

Abilities to be aware of and constructively handle both positive and challenging emotions.



Empathy

Relating to others with acceptance, understanding, and sensitivity to their diverse perspectives and experiences.



Teamwork

Abilities to collaborate and coordinate action with others.



Responsibility

Dispositions and abilities to reliably meet commitments and fulfill obligations of challenging roles.



Initiative

Capacities to take action, sustain motivation, and persevere through challenge toward an identified goal.



Problem Solving

Abilities to plan, strategize, and implement complex tasks.

There are 34 standards and 61 practice indicators across the six SEL domains. In the SEL Challenge study, we also identified practices that do not necessarily belong to a specific domain but are foundational to the implementation of SEL work. These practices are referred to as Curriculum Features and are defined below.

The standards within the six SEL domains are organized into key child experiences and staff practices. Child experiences are traditionally based on adult decisions and behavior, but as was the case in the SEL Challenge offerings, they can also be intentionally co-created by staff and youth. We define staff practices broadly to include both staff behaviors that occur at crucial moments in response to situations that arise in the program, as well as behaviors that create norms and structures that staff build into their programs. These practices are further organized into five types: structure, modeling, scaffolding, coaching, and facilitation across the six domains.

After the standards within each SEL domain are described, anecdotes and staff observations are offered to illustrate the child experiences and staff practices that comprise the standards. These anecdotes and observations showcase how the standards manifest as experiences that we want children to have and the staff practices that support them.

The curriculum features that are presented after the SEL standards and indicators do not necessarily fit into any one SEL domain, yet they are foundational to all program offerings. Their placement after the SEL standards is not meant to imply that curriculum features are any less important. Indeed, in any given setting and moment in an effective program offering, several of these things may be co-occurring.

As you read about the standards, indicators, and curriculum features below, reflect on all the things we asked you to consider above, and how they apply to your organization, program setting, and children involved. What is most relevant to you, and the children you work with?



Emotion Management

Emotion management is defined as the abilities to be aware of, and constructively handle, both positive and challenging emotions (Smith, McGovern, Larson, et al., 2016). OST settings are strongly positioned to be a space where children can freely express their emotions. Establishing norms and structures that facilitate healthy strategies for engaging with emotions empowers children to feel safe and supported. Children benefit as they experience being aware of, identifying, and naming emotions as they reason and build strategies to cope with strong emotions.

Patterns of handling emotions are learned as staff model dealing with their own emotions effectively to support children in managing their emotions. Coaching children to monitor and reflect on their emotions helps them to evaluate situations and potential emotional triggers, leading them to build strategies to channel their emotions and make better decisions. For school-age children, the ability to manage emotions becomes increasingly important as they begin to navigate among a wider variety of social settings in which they interact with a wider range of people beyond their family or primary caregivers.

Table 1. Standards and Indicators for SEL practice under Emotion Management

Emotion Management *Abilities to be aware of, and constructively handle, both positive and challenging emotions*

KEY CHILD EXPERIENCES

S1. RANGE OF EMOTIONS. Children experience a range of positive and challenging emotions in a safe context

(EM1) Children engage in program work and activities in which emotions occur, are expressed, and are recognized as an important and often valuable component of human experience.

(EM2) Emotions are experienced within a shared program culture (e.g., rules, norms) structured to make emotional expression and reflection safe and supported.

S2. EMOTION AWARENESS AND SKILL. Children practice and develop healthy and functional emotion skills.

(EM3) Children practice being aware of, identifying, and naming emotions.

(EM4) Children practice reasoning about causes and effects of emotion.

(EM5) Children practice using strategies for healthy coping with strong emotions and for harnessing emotions to advance the program work.

STAFF PRACTICES

S3. STRUCTURE. Staff create and adjust the structure of daily activities to accommodate children's processing of emotion.

(EM6) Staff create time, space, or rituals within program activities for children to process and learn from emotion.

(EM7) Staff adapt program activities to respond to children's emotional readiness and needs

S4. MODELING. Staff model healthy strategies for dealing with emotion within the context of caring, mutually-respectful relationships with children.

(EM8) Staff model healthy strategies for dealing with emotions such as:

- a) active listening, remaining calm during intense episodes, and using problem-solving methods
- b) communicating effectively and honestly about emotions (including their own);
- c) respectfully acknowledging and validating emotions in others.

S5. COACHING. Staff provide coaching to children about handling and learning from their ongoing emotional experiences.

(EM9) Staff provide coaching that is respectful of children's emotional autonomy, including:

- a) using deep understanding of children and their emotional styles to monitor, appraise, and respond in the moment to children's ongoing emotions;
- b) fostering emotional awareness and reflection; helping children frame the situation and e
- c) encouraging problem solving in response to challenging emotions and the situations c them; suggesting strategies for dealing with them.

The following examples are either personal anecdotes that were shared by practitioners from Bright Futures during the focus group or anecdotal evidence recorded by external assessors during program observation. These examples illustrate a few specific performance indicators within emotion management that have been applied in pre-adolescent, school-age settings.

When presenting these examples for you in this section and others that follow, we have highlighted some of the practice indicators that are relevant so you can see the parallels. For some of the examples, one indicator aligns; in others, the description of the situation exhibits more than one aspect at a time. Once again, we encourage you to think about your program offerings and how these examples relate to what you are trying to affect in your situation.

Look for examples of these practice indicators as you read the following personal anecdotes shared by a practitioner:

(EM2) Emotions are experienced within a shared program culture (e.g., rules, norms) structured to make emotional expression and reflection safe and supported.

(EM3) Children practice being aware of, identifying, and naming emotions.

(EM6) Staff create time, space, or rituals within program activities for children to process and learn from emotion.

"I have a student who struggles with impulse emotions. He can go from zero to 10 in about three minutes, maybe less depending upon his frustration. If he feels he is not validated or heard or anything like that he will go to an absolute screaming tantrum and it can get pretty intense. He now knows that he can go straight to Alaska which is a by-yourself space and there is a bag of tools that he can use to calm down. When a teacher or an assistant sees that he is a little bit calmer, we will approach him and ask, "Hey are you ready to talk about it?" If he says "yes" we then go and chat in the kids' chat zone or we will just sit with him in Alaska and talk about it if he is ready. And if he is not, we let him take some more time or ask him to let us know when he is ready, and we will come to him."

"We have chat zones for kids which are like mediation spaces that are available to them. If kids have a disagreement together, they may choose to ask if they can go to the kid zone and talk it out; and we always ask, "Do you want a staff person or adult there?" and they get that choice if they do or don't. Obviously if we see it getting heated then we intervene and ask, "Hey can we help the situation?" But we want to give them as many independent choices as possible."

Look for examples of these practice indicators as you read the following anecdotal evidence recorded by an external assessor:

(EM3) Children practice being aware of, identifying, and naming emotions.

"Let's go around really quickly. Say your name, what grade you're in, then we're going to check in on how you're feeling on the emoji board. What were you feeling? What emotion? What's that called? I have two cups, one with emotions, and one with actions (like brushing your hair). I added some of the emotions that you shared. So, you're going to act it out. Whoever gets it right goes next."

(EM5) Children practice using strategies for healthy coping with strong emotions and for harnessing emotions to advance the program work.

Staff speaking to a child: "So, based on what happened with you and ____, what do you think would be appropriate?" Staff continues to speak to the child, "This is about you, so you can be in control. Focus on what you can influence. Can you think of two more things you want to do to avoid conflicts or outbursts? Ok, so walk away, breathing techniques, like those mindfulness things we did at the beginning of the day. What else can you do?"



Empathy

Empathy is described as relating to others with acceptance, understanding, and sensitivity to their diverse perspectives and experiences (Smith, McGovern, Larson, et al., 2016). Children begin to expand their social worlds as they reach school age and interact more with their peers. They begin to observe differences between themselves and others as they play together and share stories about families, cultures, and personal beliefs.

They also begin to observe that people are stereotyped and treated unfairly based on their race, gender, physical characteristics, religion, etc. It is developmentally appropriate for school-age children to experience staff practices that incorporate structures and norms that address these concepts and emphasize treating people fairly – without discrimination or bias.

Children thrive in programs where staff promote principles of inclusion where all people are different, important, and respected. In these programs, they learn to accept diverse perspectives and care for each other. Children build empathy skills as staff recognize the influence of their own identities, model norms that set boundaries, and ensure that stereotypes and prejudices are checked and used as opportunities to coach children to be more empathetic and accept mutual differences.

Table 2. Standards and Indicators for SEL practice under Empathy

Empathy *Relating to others with acceptance, understanding, and sensitivity to their diverse perspectives and experiences.*

KEY CHILD EXPERIENCES

S6. INEQUALITY AND IDENTITY. Children explore social structures and power in relation to themselves and others.

(E1) Children explore effects of stereotypes, discrimination, and social structures (e.g., based on race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, ability, etc.).

(E2) Children own and articulate their identities, including in relation to these social structures.

S7. DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES. Children share their stories and listen to the stories of others.

(E3) Children develop and share personal stories.

(E4) Children provide attentive, empathic listening to the experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives of others.

S8. ACCEPTANCE. Children practice relating to others with acceptance and understanding.

(E5) Children practice identifying, understanding, and managing judgments.

(E6) Children experience empathy and demonstrate caring when others reveal or share emotional experiences.

STAFF PRACTICES

S9. STRUCTURE. Staff provide programs with appropriate structure for sharing experience and promoting equity.

Staff cultivate a safe and caring space, including:

(E7) Employing appropriate structure for sharing different cultural backgrounds, personal beliefs, and stories (particularly those that are emotionally charged) without judgment.

(E8) Actively promoting inclusion and equity and demonstrating support for the principles that all are different, equal, and important.

(E9) Cultivating a program culture in which people actively care for each other.

(E10) Providing programs with ritual structures for multiple sessions that allow children to first check in, then open up, and end with reflection.

S10. MODELING. Staff model empathy skills with children.

(E11) Staff model empathy skills, including:

a) intentionally recognizing the influence of their own identities and how these may affect interpersonal interactions

b) active listening

c) serving as an ally for children who are isolated by differences in culture, family background, privilege, or power

d) modeling boundary-setting, including sharing or withholding personal experiences as appropriate and as needed.

The following examples are either personal anecdotes that were shared by practitioners from Bright Futures during the focus group or anecdotal evidence that were recorded by external assessors during program observations. These examples illustrate a few specific performance indicators within empathy that have been applied in pre-adolescent, school-age settings.

Look for examples of these practice indicators as you read the following personal anecdote shared by a practitioner:

(E3) Children develop and share personal stories.

(E4) Children provide attentive, empathic listening to the experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives of others.

(E6) Children experience empathy and demonstrate caring when others reveal or share emotional experiences.

"All day during the school day, the kids have so much to share about the weekend and often because of the content that needs to get through during the school day the stories get shut down and they don't have time to share those stories with teachers and students. So, when they come, they are like, "Hey I have so much to share from my weekend." So, we made a space called Connections where we sit in a circle and if they want they had the opportunity to share and it was open for others to make connections where appropriate. They would say "I made a connection with Pam this weekend because I too felt really happy when I went to the playground." So, they are making these connections and realize that they are often doing the same things as the other students during the weekends but through Connections now have the opportunity to share and listen to other students."

Look for examples of these practice indicators as you read the following anecdotal evidence recorded by an external assessor:

(E7) Employing appropriate structure for sharing different cultural backgrounds, personal beliefs, and stories (particularly those that are emotionally charged) without judgment.

(E8) Actively promoting inclusion and equity and demonstrating support for the principles that all are different, equal, and important.

(E9) Cultivating a program culture in which people actively care for each other.

(E11) Staff model empathy skills, including:

a) intentionally recognizing the influence of their own identities and how these may affect interpersonal interactions

b) active listening

c) serving as an ally for children who are isolated by differences in culture, family background, privilege, or power

d) modeling boundary-setting, including sharing or withholding personal experiences as appropriate and as needed.

Staff anticipated emotions generated by the election; emphasized taking them seriously. The session was structured so that the staff answered questions submitted anonymously. Everyone listened to the concerns of others (as read by staff). Staff acknowledged the diversity of experience by bringing up concerns of undocumented immigrant classmates. "Some of you might be afraid, some might not be." The staff gave examples of different ways people or their ancestors might have arrived in America (including an example of her immigrant grandfather). Staff spend most of the session responding to concerns and questions submitted by children. A child asks, "Can he [...] send me back to Africa?"

Staff continues talking to children and says, "This is a safe spot." "No laughing. No jokes. These are things people are genuinely afraid of." Staff tells children, "Always take other people's feelings into consideration," "never interfere in someone else's relationships." Staff tells children about potential consequences.



Teamwork

Teamwork is described as abilities to collaborate and coordinate action with others (Smith, McGovern, Larson, et al., 2016). Teamwork becomes an increasingly important skill for school-age children as they are expected to spend more time both working independently and engaging in interdependent work together. It is challenging to manage group dynamics at all ages, and OST staff have an opportunity to support and coach school-age children to intentionally engage in teamwork. Children need staff to communicate and enforce norms and rules for effective group work. These structures help children feel safe, develop trusting relationships, and create a sense of group identity as they work toward common goals. As staff model sensitive interpersonal interactions and cultivate mutual accountability, children learn to become responsible for their behavior as they practice resolving conflicts. Children may form their own clubs or groupings where they establish identities and group norms. For instance, think of the tree fort with the “no girls allowed” sign and secret codes. We added a standard for “play time” given its developmental and structural importance for younger children to learn and practice skills.

Expert practitioners from the Bright Futures programs highlighted the importance of play time for practicing social and emotional skills, especially among younger children. These informal and self-selected interactions are key contexts where children learn teamwork skills and work out group dynamics. The standards listed on page 21 describe child experiences and staff practices for fostering teamwork.

Table 3. Standards and Indicators for SEL practice under Teamwork

Teamwork Abilities to collaborate and coordinate action with others.

KEY CHILD EXPERIENCES

S11. TRUST AND COHESION. Children develop group cohesion and trust.

(T1) Children participate in work teams that develop cohesion and trusting relationships.

(T2) Children develop a sense of group identity and purpose.

S12. COLLABORATION. Children participate in successful collaboration.

(T3) Children work together toward shared goals.

(T4) Children practice effective communications skills (e.g., turn-taking, active listening, respectful disagreement).

(T5) Each group member's contribution is valued and affirmed.

S13. TEAM CHALLENGE. Children manage challenges to creating and maintaining effective working relationships.

(T6) Children practice managing the challenges of group work, such as miscommunication, obstructive behavior, and conflict over goals and methods.

STAFF PRACTICES

S14. STRUCTURE. Staff provide programs with norms and structure.

(T7) Staff provide children opportunities for unstructured play.

(T8) Staff help children cultivate norms and rituals for effective group work

S15. MODELING. Staff model teamwork skills with children.

(T9) Staff model sensitive and high-level interpersonal functioning in staff-children and staff-staff interactions.

S16. FACILITATING. Staff facilitate or intervene as needed to foster or sustain children-led group dynamics and successful collaboration.

(T10) Staff facilitate or intervene as needed to foster or sustain children-led group dynamics. This includes:

a) cultivating mutual accountability (e.g., by communicating the importance of all children's successful contributions to the group's work) (See also Responsibility)

b) intervening only as needed, allowing children to lead group processes

c) helping to manage individuals' personalities when warranted (e.g., through one-on-one conversations before, during, or after a group activity)

d) diffusing unconstructive conflict, regrouping, reorganizing, getting group back on track and functioning well.

The following examples are either personal anecdotes that were shared by expert practitioners during the focus group or anecdotal evidence recorded by external assessors during program observations. These examples illustrate the standards and performance indicators within teamwork that have been applied in pre-adolescent, school-age settings.

Look for examples of the following practice indicators as you read the anecdotal evidence recorded by an external assessor:

(T2) Children develop a sense of group identity and purpose.

(T3) Children work together toward shared goals.

(T5) Each group member's contribution is valued and affirmed.

(T6) Children practice managing the challenges of group work, such as miscommunication, obstructive behavior, and conflict over goals and methods.

(T10) Staff facilitate or intervene as needed to foster or sustain children-led group dynamics.

This includes:

a) cultivating mutual accountability (e.g., by communicating the importance of all children's successful contributions to the group's work) (See also Responsibility);

b) intervening only as needed, allowing children to lead group processes;

c) helping to manage individuals' personalities when warranted (e.g., through one-on-one conversations before, during, or after a group activity);

d) diffusing unconstructive conflict, regrouping, reorganizing, getting group back on track and functioning well.

Staff says to children, "Who was on my feather team last week? Who was on the flower team? We may need to create some things together today because we are missing a few people." Staff facilitates a reflection after the activity by saying, "Why was it so important for you to make those flowers today? Why is it so important for the performance? Let's bring it in to a Think Pair Share." Staff continues speaking to children, "I want you to close your eyes and think; you can share what you did in your club today, and why was it important to be flexible?"

Look for examples of the following practice indicators as you read the personal anecdote shared by a practitioner:

(T6) Children practice managing the challenges of group work, such as miscommunication, obstructive behavior, and conflict over goals and methods.

(T7) Staff provide children opportunities for unstructured play.

(T10) Staff facilitate or intervene as needed to foster or sustain children-led group dynamics.

This includes:

a) cultivating mutual accountability (e.g., by communicating the importance of all children's successful contributions to the group's work) (See also Responsibility)

b) intervening only as needed, allowing children to lead group processes

c) helping to manage individuals' personalities when warranted (e.g., through one-on-one conversations before, during, or after a group activity)

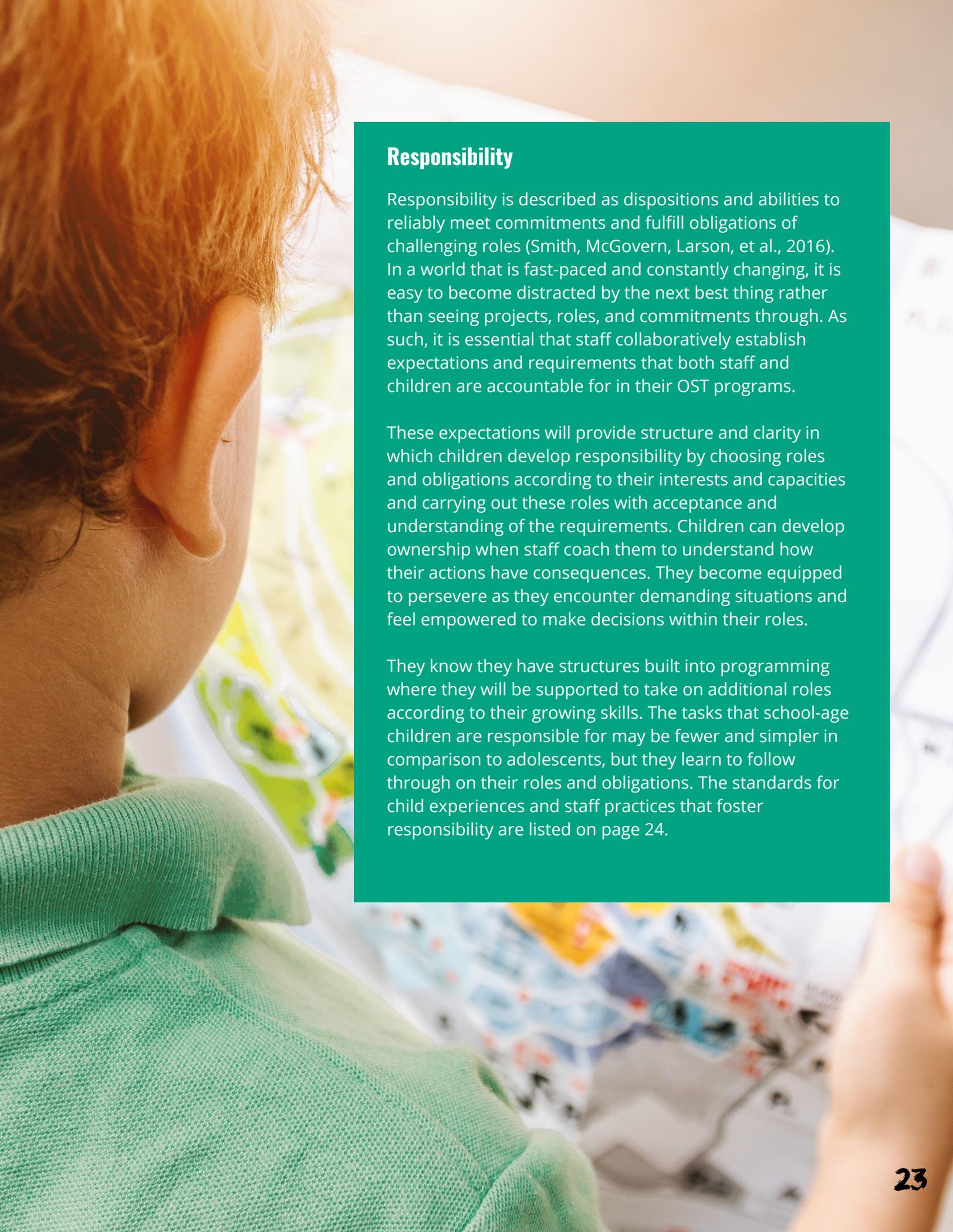
d) diffusing unconstructive conflict, regrouping, reorganizing, getting group back on track and functioning well.

"I work with the youngest of kids. During play time there may be a mayor and a princess and conflicts may arise as to who would lead the role of a princess. This matter of choice is very authentic to those kids and these decisions are very child-initiated which is very important. I know that there is a lot of research that shows that these make-believe worlds give children a setting where they feel powerful in a way that they might not in a teacher-directed activity. So, for them this unstructured setting gives them opportunities for problem solving and teamwork and they do it without stopping the play or going to an adult to figure out the solution."

"They decide if there will be two princesses within their imaginary world. These kinds of give and take that are child-initiated only work in an unstructured setting."

(T8) Staff help children cultivate norms and rituals for effective group work

"We often use a speaking tool, like a ball or rubber ducky or something, so that if someone is holding the talking item it is their time to share. We tell them that when someone is speaking you are actively listening. We set that up, we showed them/taught them what active listening meant – what it looked like when you are listening – and then everybody can share once if they want and then everybody gets a chance to make a connection if they want. But you don't have to share if you don't want."



Responsibility

Responsibility is described as dispositions and abilities to reliably meet commitments and fulfill obligations of challenging roles (Smith, McGovern, Larson, et al., 2016). In a world that is fast-paced and constantly changing, it is easy to become distracted by the next best thing rather than seeing projects, roles, and commitments through. As such, it is essential that staff collaboratively establish expectations and requirements that both staff and children are accountable for in their OST programs.

These expectations will provide structure and clarity in which children develop responsibility by choosing roles and obligations according to their interests and capacities and carrying out these roles with acceptance and understanding of the requirements. Children can develop ownership when staff coach them to understand how their actions have consequences. They become equipped to persevere as they encounter demanding situations and feel empowered to make decisions within their roles.

They know they have structures built into programming where they will be supported to take on additional roles according to their growing skills. The tasks that school-age children are responsible for may be fewer and simpler in comparison to adolescents, but they learn to follow through on their roles and obligations. The standards for child experiences and staff practices that foster responsibility are listed on page 24.

Table 4. Standards and Indicators for SEL practice under Responsibility

Responsibility *Dispositions and abilities to reliably meet commitments and fulfill obligations of challenging roles.*

KEY CHILD EXPERIENCES

S17. ROLES. Children take on roles and obligations within program activities.

(R1) Children choose or accept roles and their obligations; in some cases, they initiate the roles.

S18. DEMANDS. Children encounter difficult demands.

(R2) As children get into the roles, they encounter demands, requirements, and obligations; they understand that their actions in response to these demands will impact self, peers, or others.

S19. ACCOMPLISHMENT. Children draw on resources to fulfill challenging roles and internalize accomplishment.

(R3) Children draw on resources to successfully fulfill roles and obligations. Resources include drawing on inner strength, commitment, or newfound resolve; a sense of obligation to their peers and the program goals; and/or leaders' support and encouragement.

(R4) Children succeed in their roles and internalize the experience of having fulfilled valued roles.

STAFF PRACTICES

S20. STRUCTURE. Staff provide structured but open-ended roles for children.

(R5) The program design and the staff help create a variety of roles for children that:
a) have clear expectations and requirements
b) have sufficient flexibility to allow children's initiative and ownership and accommodate children's growing skills.

(R6) Staff help fit individual children to roles appropriate to their interests and capacities.

S21. MODELING. Staff model and fulfill their own roles.

(R7) Staff model and fulfill their own roles in the program, defining and discussing them with children.

S22. COACHING. Staff promote high expectations, respect children's ownership of their roles, and provide help only as needed.

(R8) Staff articulate, encourage, and enforce high accountability for children living up to roles and obligations

(R9) Staff vigorously support children's ownership, empowerment, and latitude for decision-making within their roles, providing assistance only as necessary.

The following examples are either personal anecdotes shared by practitioners from Bright Futures during the focus group or anecdotal evidence recorded by external assessors during program observations. These examples illustrate the standards and performance indicators within responsibility that have been applied in pre-adolescent, school-age settings.

Look for examples of these two practice indicators as you read the following personal anecdote shared by a practitioner:

(R3) Children draw on resources to successfully fulfill roles and obligations. Resources include drawing on inner strength, commitment, or newfound resolve; a sense of obligation to their peers and the program goals; and/or leaders' support and encouragement.

(R4) Children succeed in their roles and internalize the experience of having fulfilled valued roles.

"We have a ritual called snaps if children want to applaud what their peers did. They state why their peers deserved snaps and then everyone acknowledges and snaps. We were tracking and tallying shout outs on a giant white board which I think also increased motivation. So like Monday you saw that a particular child got snaps and by Thursday if you notice that the same child got snaps each day then the other kids are like 'Wow!!--- got shout outs every single day and he is new.' You get to know that the child felt confident and motivated at the point."

Look for examples of these practice indicators as you read the following anecdotal evidence recorded by an external assessor:

(R1) Children choose or accept roles and their obligations; in some cases, they initiate the roles.

(R5) The program design and the staff help create a variety of roles for children that:

a) have clear expectations and requirements

b) have sufficient flexibility to allow children's initiative and ownership and accommodate children's growing skills.

"Staff presents a motion for debate on the board and assigns three separate roles that each child in a group of three can individually select but work as a group either proposing or opposing the motion that is up for debate. Each group of three is responsible to present their views to the larger group. For the second part of the same session the staff person distributes raw materials for a cooking activity. Group members can either select one raw material and practice cutting or practice mixing and experimenting ingredients or do both depending on their skill level. An older child is seen to be skilled in cutting onions. The staff nudges the older child to take responsibility to mentor his group member to do the cutting."

(R9) Staff vigorously support children's ownership, empowerment, and latitude for decision-making within their roles, providing assistance only as necessary.

During a session where students are working on finishing their gondolas staff asks open ended questions, "What is a gondola used for?" Staff checks in with every group once to ask questions like "what's that for?" Staff helps youth work through the problem of the broken gondola and asks open-ended questions in order to provoke the students to come up with the answer themselves. Staff says to a child, "This is your project; this is up to you to decide. What can we do to help the gondola latch on?"

Initiative

Initiative is described as the capacities to take action, sustain motivation, and persevere through challenges towards an identified goal (Smith, McGovern, Larson, et al., 2016). Children take initiative to do their tasks if they are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated.

To build both kinds of motivation, they need scaffolding to understand the importance of the allotted task both for themselves and for others. Their motivation is sustained only when they feel confident about their ability to complete tasks and roles. Children feel valued, and this confidence grows, when they are acknowledged for their efforts and contributions.

Further, they need staff to coach them to see the connections that the present task has to their future tasks or goals. These connections to their future goals enable staff to build motivation and help children select or shape their programs according to what matters to them.

Staff can scale the concept of future and societal context to the level appropriate for children just as they continue to scale the complexity of content presented to them.

The standards for child experiences and staff practices that foster initiative are listed on page 27.

Table 5. Standards and Indicators for SEL practice under Initiative

Initiative *Capacities to take action, sustain motivation, and persevere through challenge toward an identified goal*

KEY CHILD EXPERIENCES

S23. SETTING GOALS. Children set ambitious but realistic goals.

(11) Children have experiences setting challenging but achievable short- and long-term goals.

S24. MOTIVATION. Children develop and sustain motivation by doing work that matters to them.

(12) Children develop motivation as they:
a) form connections with collaborators
b) build skills and confidence
c) see the value in the work for their futures (adult roles and career), their communities, and the world.

S25. PERSEVERANCE. Children have experiences persevering through the ups and downs of difficult work

(13) Children have repeated experiences of persevering through strenuous tasks and challenging work.

(14) Children experience the satisfaction of accomplishment and social acknowledgment of their efforts and achievements.

STAFF PRACTICES

S26. SCAFFOLDING. Staff provide ongoing assistance to help children develop motivation within the work.

(15) Staff help children develop motivation by having children select or shape the program goals and project(s) according to what matters to them.

(16) Staff support children's discovery of personal motivation in the program work by kindling children's experience of belonging, competence, and connection of the program work to personal goals or societal purpose.

S27. COACHING. Staff encourage children to persist through challenging work, making sure that the effort behind children's achievements is recognized.

(17) Staff give children opportunities to persevere through challenges, setbacks, and tiredness/tedium/boredom, and also provide encouragement as needed to keep children's attention focused and their effort engaged in keeping the program work moving forward.

(18) Staff help children see the progress and successes that come from their effort and perseverance.

The following examples are either personal anecdotes that were shared by expert practitioners during the focus group or anecdotal evidence recorded by external assessors during program observations. These examples illustrate the standards and performance indicators within responsibility that have been applied in pre-adolescent, school-age settings.

Look for these practice indicators as you read the following anecdotal evidence recorded by an external assessor:

(13) Children have repeated experiences of persevering through strenuous tasks and challenging work.

(16) Staff support children's discovery of personal motivation in the program work by kindling children's experience of belonging, competence, and connection of the program work to personal goals or societal purpose.

(17) Staff give children opportunities to persevere through challenges, setbacks, tiredness/tedium/boredom, and also provide encouragement as needed to keep children's attention focused and their effort engaged in keeping the program work moving forward.

One student in the puppet-making class constantly ventilates that he has made a mistake and needs urgent attention. The staff person approaches the student each time calmly and helps him out. She tells him that he should not worry because he did not really make a mistake. She adds that even if he did, he has the option to work on a new one. Staff goes to each team. Asks questions...states "it's frustrating, I know, but you need to persevere. You learn from your mistakes. Show me what you have...ok, then what? There is nothing wrong with taking your time to get through this."

Look for examples of this practice indicator as you read the following personal anecdote shared by a practitioner:

(14) Children experience the satisfaction of accomplishment and social acknowledgment of their efforts and achievements.

"I work with 2nd graders and 4th graders and we have the 4th graders distributed among different clubs. During Shout outs the 4th graders applaud any student that they feel went above and beyond from the 2nd grade. They might give a shout out to someone for persevering through a challenge that they had that day or perhaps about their behavior, maybe they started off really rough. We have noticed that since we have done that younger graders also want to be more involved. They won't say they want to shout out, but they will be like 'I have a comment and I would like to share what made me excited.' I like that because who does not like to be validated or celebrated by your peers, or older kids than you. They feel like "they notice me!" So yes, it helps in maintaining a positive peer climate."

Look for these two practice indicators as you read the following anecdotal evidence recorded by an external assessor:

(12) Children develop motivation as they:

a) form connections with collaborators

b) build skills and confidence

c) see the value in the work for their futures (adult roles and career), their communities, and the world.

(18) Staff help children see the progress and successes that come from their effort and perseverance.

Staff to a child, "You know how you told me you want to work on computers when you're older? You're doing all the things you need to do to make that happen." Staff to third child, "You know how you're doing very well in scratch (game)? It's because you've put a lot of time into it."

Problem Solving

Problem Solving is defined as the abilities to plan, strategize, and implement complex tasks (Smith, McGovern, Larson, et al., 2016). Children learn these skills when they observe staff modeling problem-solving strategies and sharing specific knowledge required for the assigned activity. Children need to be exposed to successful steps from activities done in the past as they plan and organize the future steps required for their present activity. It helps them to build a sense of self-efficacy and confidence as they experiment within their activities.

Children benefit when they experience how to brainstorm and think about the purpose, method, and outcome of the activity they are involved in. OST programs provide opportunities for children to practice concrete planning skills that might be unfamiliar to them, then facilitate, scaffold, and coach them to reflect and identify progress and challenges.

Coaching them to do anticipatory thinking, if-then thinking, and contingency planning helps them to reflect on the outcomes of their efforts and identify mistakes, successes, and challenges. They need scaffolding as they practice problem-solving skills, with staff intervening with inputs or stepping back as appropriate. Children thrive in programs where staff set high expectations and goals for all children. The standards for child experiences and staff practices that foster problem solving are listed on page 30.



Table 6. Standards and Indicators for SEL practice under Problem Solving

Problem Solving *Abilities to plan, strategize, and implement complex tasks.*

KEY CHILD EXPERIENCES

S28. SETTING GOALS. Children engage in projects that involve organizing actions over time.

(PS1) Children build project-specific knowledge and skills (e.g., carpentry, leadership, public speaking).

(PS2) Children conduct projects that require organizing multiple, cumulative steps of work (e.g., creating a work of art, planning an event or a service project).

S29. PLANNING-ACTION CYCLES. Children learn through cycles of strategic planning, execution, responding to emergent problems, trial and error, and reflection on outcomes.

(PS3) Children engage in planning, including: a) brainstorming and generative planning; b) thinking strategically about the purposes, methods, content, and outcomes of the project; c) anticipatory thinking, if-then thinking (e.g., about how the work and various constraints interact), and contingency planning.

(PS4) Children have multiple opportunities to practice implementing the same skills to achieve greater success (e.g., by trying and trying again).

(PS5) Children grapple with adjusting short- and long-term goals and strategies to emerging challenges and changing circumstances in their work

S30. OUTCOMES VERIFYING SKILLS. Children reflect on how outcomes of their work provide information that helps build and verify skills.

(PS6) Children reflect on the outcomes of their efforts at all stages of the work to identify mistakes and successes, note progress, and identify current challenges.

(PS7) Children's sense of self-efficacy, accomplishment, or confidence grows as outcomes demonstrate their developing skills, and they critically evaluate how their actions influenced outcomes. (See also Initiative)

STAFF PRACTICES

S31. STRUCTURE. Staff provide sufficient structure to children-driven projects.

(PS8) Staff provide training experiences for children to help them learn project-related skills.

(PS9) Staff place a high priority on children having latitude to make choices and learn from experimenting within their projects.

(PS10) Staff set high expectations and structure projects that are achievable (e.g., by setting goals, setting timelines and deadlines, setting boundaries).

S32. MODELING. Staff creates opportunities for children to observe models of successful work.

(PS11) Staff model skills children need to learn for their projects (e.g., carpentry or speaking skills, skills for planning and problem solving) and expose children to models of successful work that set high expectations (e.g., children learn about projects from prior years, novices work with veteran youth or expert staff).

S33. SCAFFOLDING. Staff provide assistance, as needed, to help children learn and solve problems on their own.

(PS12) Staff scaffold children's progress on projects by stepping in to provide assistance and input as needed to help children solve problems and learn (e.g., helping children develop strategies when stuck or unsuccessful).

(PS13) Staff step back to support children's increasing independence in their work as their skill grows and to allow children space to struggle with challenges.

S34. REFLECTION. Staff offer children opportunities for reflection on project outcomes.

(PS14) Staff ensure that children have opportunities to reflect on the processes that led to the outcomes of their work and to evaluate the impact and meaning of completed projects for both the children and other stakeholders.

The following examples are either personal anecdotes that were shared by expert practitioners during the focus group or anecdotal evidence recorded by external assessors during program observations. These examples illustrate the standards and performance indicators within problem solving that have been applied in pre-adolescent, school-age settings.

Look for examples of these following practice indicators as you read the anecdotal evidence recorded by an external assessor:

(PS2) Children conduct projects that require organizing multiple, cumulative steps of work (e.g., creating a work of art, planning an event or a service project).

(PS3) Children engage in planning, including:

a) brainstorming and generative planning

b) thinking strategically about the purposes, methods, content, and outcomes of the project

c) anticipatory thinking, if-then thinking (e.g., about how the work and various constraints interact), and contingency planning.

Children brainstorm to come to a final conclusion on their invention and after which they will plan who their customers are, their prices, etc.

During a different session staff had children create a plan for their costumes and staging for their ballet performance. Staff informs children that "You will create a planning board today. Plan out what color you want your dress to be, what supplies you will need, what the stage will look like. Talk to your group about it."

(PS6) Children reflect on the outcomes of their efforts at all stages of the work to identify mistakes and successes, note progress, and identify current challenges.

(PS14) Staff ensure that children have opportunities to reflect on the processes that led to the outcomes of their work and to evaluate the impact and meaning of completed projects for both the children and other stakeholders.

Staff to children during a reflection activity, "What did we do well? What's something we can get better at next time?" "Who can tell me how your progress is coming on your performance?" Teacher responds when a child mentions acting, "Acting, tell me what that means?" Staff to a child, "Tell me about your part..." Staff continues talking to the child, "Why was it so important for you to make those flowers today? Why is it so important for the performance?"

Look for examples of this practice indicator as you read the following personal anecdote shared by a practitioner:

(PS9) Staff place a high priority on children having latitude to make choices and learn from experimenting within their projects.

I had a day when the kids were in nature club and it was pouring outside. We spent time experimenting and using pine needles, pine cones, and leaves as different kind of paint brushes and sticks. They were so engaged with those materials and were being so creative. Everything that they painted that day looked like mud mess and I appreciate having a little bit of wriggle room for the younger learners to sometimes not need to produce a finished product.

Look for examples of these two practice indicators as you read the following anecdotal evidence recorded by an external assessor:

(PS12) Staff scaffold children's progress on projects by stepping in to provide assistance and input as needed to help children solve problems and learn (e.g., helping children develop strategies when stuck or unsuccessful).

(PS13) Staff step back to support children's increasing independence in their work as their skill grows and to allow children space to struggle with challenges.

Staff says to a child, "If you're not carefully measuring, things may turn out or not turn out." Staff says to another child, "I'm going to suggest that you add a little more water at a time." Staff speaks to another child, "I would suggest that you make a new batch." Staff comments on another child's creation, "See, that's looking a little better. So, you need more sand, because remember the first time you made it, you didn't have enough sand."

Curriculum Features

For successful integration of the key child experiences, it is essential to create an environment that facilitates staff's ability to implement practices that lead to the growth and development of children's social and emotional skills. The program features that create this environment are referred to as curriculum features and are listed in Table 7 on page 33. The term "curriculum" includes both (a) the sequence of content and experiences fit to the developmental and learning needs of children and (b) the supports necessary for the instructional staff to implement the sequence (Smith, McGovern, Larson, et al., 2016). These curriculum features do not necessarily fit into one of the SEL domains but are essential bases for staff to carry out SEL work. For instance, recruiting children who will benefit from the program helps promote program development that emphasizes social emotional skill development. Similarly, all organizations need to provide professional learning so that staff can plan, collaborate, reflect on, and improve their practices. All children need staff to provide opportunities for them to practice skills and benefit from staff norms and practices that are responsive, inclusive, and respectful of differences. Staff need to encourage child input to shape their offerings and engage their communities as they establish goals and sequences of operation according to the developmental needs of the children. In fact, the roles played by safe spaces and responsive practices are particularly crucial for school-age children as younger children are relatively more dependent on adults.

We adapted the indicator, "offerings follow a progression through SEL domains," that appeared in *Preparing Youth to Thrive*, so that it is more developmentally applicable for children. It now reads: "The offerings incorporate opportunities to practice a range of SEL skills." Younger children have less ability to shift thinking from issues and events that are "here and now" to plan for a distant future. Therefore, project sequences for children tend to extend over shorter periods of time than for adolescents. Age-appropriate curriculum sequences are ways to adapt the findings of the SEL Challenge to school-age programs. Opportunities for free "play time" are also important, especially for younger children who do not necessarily follow a routine sequence but are, instead, provided with a wide variety of activities and opportunities to practice social and emotional skills. Also, among younger children, the degree of autonomy expected is less and the projects generally aren't as complex. Nevertheless, children can learn from ownership of a task at an age-appropriate level. The general principle of teaching a skill by increasing challenges with appropriate scaffolding and increasing independence over time is true for everyone.

Table 7. Curriculum Features

Curriculum Features	
Project Content Sequence	
1	Staff shape the offering work with child input, often requiring child ownership.
2	Staff shape the offering work with complex goals and/or a complex sequence of operations.
3	Staff shape the offering work with repetitive skill practice in diverse contexts.
SEL Content Sequence	
4	The offerings incorporate opportunities to practice a range of SEL skills.
5	Offerings are structured for children to engage their community.
6	Children master social and emotional skills and experience increasing agency.
Safe Space	
7	Staff cultivate ground rules for group processes (e.g. listening, turn-taking, decision-making) and sharing of emotions.
8	Staff cultivate a culture around the principles that all are different, equal, and important in which people actively care for, appreciate, and include each other.
9	Staff cultivate a culture where learning from mistakes and failures is highly valued.
10	Staff organize consistent routines, activities, roles, or procedures to provide a structured and predictable experience.
Responsive Practices	
11	Staff observe and interact in order to know children deeply.
12	Staff provide structure for check-ins to actively listen to and receive feedback from individual children.
13	Staff coach, model, scaffold, and facilitate in real time as challenges occur.
Supports for Staff	
14	The organization recruits children who will benefit from the offering.
15	There is more than one staff member in every program session with the ability to implement responsive practices.
16	Staff work together before each program session to plan and collaborate on the session activities and regularly debrief following each session to discuss children's progress, staff response, and adjustments for future sessions.
17	Staff are supported to grow professionally and rejuvenate energy for the work.
18	Staff are supported by their organization to reflect on and improve their practices through a continuous improvement process.

PART III.

Case Narratives: Bright Futures Expert Practitioners



PART III. Case Narratives: Bright Futures Expert Practitioners

Bright Futures is a network of 21st Century Community Learning Centers that is housed within Eastern Michigan University's Institute for the Study of Children, Families, and Communities. It is a high-quality network that serves students and families across three school districts including Romulus, Wayne-Westland, and Ypsilanti Community Schools. In 2016, the Weikart Center partnered with Bright Futures to pilot the Weikart Center's performance tools and measures focused on SEL. Seventeen out of 20 sites from Bright Futures serving children ages 5 to 13 years old were our primary pool to explore the adaptation of our adolescent standards for pre-adolescent, school-age programs. The three case studies here were selected for presentation because these programs are high quality, innovative about and committed to SEL, and have been long-time partners of the Weikart Center.

The three profiles in this section provide holistic, first-person accounts from expert practitioners on how particular OST offerings worked to improve children's SEL skills.

These case narratives provide a window into the thought processes, motivations, and guiding principles of experienced practitioners, as well as practical examples of what they did in their offerings and resources that were useful to them in their journey toward improving children's social and emotional skills.

Each example is a narrative from one person. Our intention in presenting these case studies is to help you see what SEL looks and feels like in action. As you read these accounts, notice how the program leaders talk about the various dimensions of SEL and describe, in their own language, many of the elements contained in the standards and practice indicators introduced earlier.

How many connections can you find to those standards and practice indicators, and how do these relate to your work?





CASE NARRATIVE

Bright Futures at Perry Early Learning Center, Ypsilanti Community Schools



“

This year, I was willing to stop, take a deep breath, and admit when and why I felt frustrated, confused, upset, etc. to the students sitting in front of me during the program. Overall, it seemed to make the work more real and authentic!

”

Guiding Philosophy

Strive to cultivate an engaging and enjoyable classroom environment where a community of students and teachers feel like a family and can learn, thrive, and grow together. Nurture curiosity, use encouraging language and feedback, and provide daily positive reinforcement and redirection. Work together as an EMU Bright Futures Perry family to inspire each other daily, and to consistently try our personal best in everything that we do. **-Katie Dreyer, Site Coordinator, EMU Bright Futures**

A window into an SEL-focused offering

I felt that in order for SEL to happen in my classroom, I needed to start with putting expectations and routines in place. As a team, we created promises and norms that we would follow during program time. Throughout the school year we kept going back to them as was necessary. The students felt ownership over these promises because they helped the teachers to create them. We modeled and then practiced our routines and made sure that each student felt that they were being followed every time they showed up after school. One of the most important routines for the students was saying hi to each teacher and giving them a hug, high five, or handshake when they came through the door. It also allowed us to take a mini moment with each student, which really showed them that we cared. We played icebreakers such as Stand Up If, This or That, The Wind Blows If, etc. Throughout the year, we continued getting to know each other by sharing “Good News” from the weekend and playing Connections from the Critical Friends protocol developed by the National School Reform Faculty.

I also wanted to give the students a “toolbox” of calm down breathing strategies that they could use when they became upset or overwhelmed. We continuously did breathing exercises together so that the students would get used to the process. We taught them that breaths with long exhales slowed the heart rate and were great for calming down. Some of these breaths that we practiced were: 1. Smell the roses (inhale through nose), blow out the candles (big exhale through mouth); 2. Balloon Breath: three swift inhales, reaching arms up with each one, then one big exhale to relax arms down alongside the body; and 3. Volcano Breath: inhale the arms up overhead, exhale “bubbling” fingers slowly down like an overflowing volcano. Additionally, we also use breaths of the drain, pretzel, and S.T.A.R from Conscious Discipline (Bailey, 2000).

Much of the SEL took place during imaginative play. Our classroom is full of choices such as dress-up costumes, a kitchen, blocks, Legos, a small farm, bins of different animals, dinosaurs, Lincoln Logs®, etc. The students were able to choose what they wanted to play and who they wanted to play with. During this choice time, they had to integrate all the social and emotional skills (even if they did not know they were practicing what they learned!). For example: they had to take initiative to ask a friend to play, problem solve how to share the telephone in the kitchen, be responsible for cleaning up after their choice, manage their emotions when they did not get their way, build structures together as a team with blocks, and show empathy towards another friend when they felt sad. All of these skills were enhanced through this work. Teacher intervention was necessary sometimes, especially at the beginning of the year. But as the year went on, we tried to guide the students to figure things out on their own.



We also did Teamwork Tuesdays. This day incorporated a lot of work on solving problems together. We did teamwork challenges such as: building a castle out of blocks with several students (harder than it sounds!), painting one big canvas, creating numbers and letters with our bodies, and Lego building challenges. These activities also integrated problem-solving skills because it was very challenging for the students. At this young age, it was hard for them to think about what others might want because they want their immediate needs to be met. They are at an age where it is developmentally appropriate for students to be egocentric.

This often caused a lot of students to get upset when they did not get things their way. We usually support this by giving the students some problem-solving language to use. We adapted strategies from Conscious Discipline (Bailey, 2000) and introduced language like "I feel (insert emotion), when you (insert problem), because (insert reason), next time please (insert creative problem solution)." By teaching the students this language they were able to use conflict resolution skills on their own. They also already had a toolbox of calm down strategies and breaths that they could use before they went through the conflict-resolution language, which made the conversations calmer.

During sharing time with the students, we practiced active listening and really showed a lot of empathy towards others. Once these promises and procedures were in place and we began to know one another a little bit, we started some more work on emotion management. I began this process by reading a lot of picture books such as Saxton Freymann and Joost Elffers' How Are You Peeling? and Janan Cain's The Way I Feel to introduce the concept of different emotions. The picture books helped students to start identifying the way different emotions are felt and helped them to build their vocabulary. Once they were familiar, we would use facial expressions and body language to "show" different feelings. This continued to help build their concept around emotions.

We also incorporated Mindfulness Mondays into our schedule. This time consisted of games, activities, breathing exercises, five senses work, yoga, and meditation. We used the Sun Dance (kids' version of the Sun Salutation), Go Noodle videos (<https://www.gonoodle.com/>), recommendations from Susan Kaiser Greenland's (2010) The Mindful Child and other meditation work such as body scans, mindful listening, mindful looking, mindful smelling, etc. These activities allowed the students to become more aware of the way they felt emotionally and physically in the present moment, which ultimately helped their emotion management and overall well-being.

"Teacher intervention was necessary sometimes, especially at the beginning of the year. But as the year went on, we tried to guide the students to figure things out on their own."

Bright Futures at Hicks Elementary School – Wayne Westland Community Schools



“

I hope that my own journey and work in this area will translate the importance of these skills to my students through the years.

”

Guiding Philosophy

Embrace personal vulnerabilities that reflect the continual growth process in us which is also an important aspect of modeling for my students' growth. Build meaningful and genuine relationships with my students who know and feel that they matter and have a voice in this world. Cultivate a student-centered community where all are treated with positivity and equality, and shown appreciation for their unique differences while building personal responsibility. Make afterschool a place where the school day is supported and a wide variety of practices and activities are explored in a low-stakes, supportive environment. **-Kate Gale, Site Coordinator, EMU Bright Futures**

A window into an SEL-focused offering

We begin each year by cultivating a process of classroom expectations that are created by the students. We discuss with students how we want the program to look as a large group. We ask questions like, “How do you want the program to feel? What words do you want to hear? What words don't you want to hear? How would you like your friends and staff to treat you? How do you want to treat your friends and the staff?” Students have opportunities to share ideas within the whole group and students decide and agree on if an idea can be added to our Bright Futures Expectations visual. We have also started the process with a brainstorming sheet where each student gets 5-10 minutes of think time to explore their feelings about how they want the program to look, feel, sound, etc. and then we come together to have open discussions about our expectations. Having done this activity in various ways, it always ends with all students agreeing with what goes on the visual and that being an agreed upon expectation of our program.

We ask the students to sign their name around the Bright Futures Expectation visual which is posted up where it is easily visible. It not only presents children as creators of these expectations for all to abide by but also stipulates that they agree and will follow these expectations to the best of their ability. Staff signs around our document as well. The ownership that each student takes at the end of this activity keeps them accountable, lends itself toward more positive behaviors, and keeps other students just as accountable for their actions. I have found this strengthens our community aspect as well as helps the students have a hand in creating a safe and supportive environment. It provides a lot of ongoing responsibility and leadership. This groundwork guides our program environment for the school year.

I love to see the faces that the children make when we announce that there are no “rules” here, only expectations that you will create for yourself, your friends, and the staff. Once the shock wears off, I have found that our students are incredibly thoughtful of how they would like our program to be and feel, and a sense of ownership grows within them. This has been a standard of my program since year one, aiding the SEL development of responsibility, initiative, teamwork, and problem solving.

When students enter the program, one of the first activities that they do is an emotional check-in. We use different emoji faces partnered with a vocabulary word of an emotion or feeling, and students and staff place their name clip on any emoji face they feel represents their emotional state at that moment. I have found this is a simple yet effective way to check-in with students and staff in a nonverbal approach while providing strong indicators of how the team needs to be prepared for that afternoon. If a student identifies an emotion or feeling that causes concern (i.e., frustrated, angry, or tired), a staff member will casually question if the student would like to talk about their feelings. We encourage their emotional self-awareness, never forcing a conversation upon the student. Furthermore, when a student’s name clip lands on excited, happy, or okay, this simple tool lends itself to invite conversations about each of these feelings as well.

Additional tools and activities are incorporated throughout our program, giving multiple opportunities for students to experience and learn strategies to cope with their emotions. One example is the use of Alaska which is a safe place where students can “chill out.” This tool, also referred to as “calm down kit,” allows our students to self-regulate and uses their emotional management skills to manage their own feelings and raise self-awareness.

Alaska is an independent zone that students request to sit in, in order to help them calm down when they feel out of control, a type of “time-out” space that does not carry a negative stigma. In this area, students can read books about emotions and feelings, use hand-sized stress balls, watch glitter fall to the bottom of a bottle, allow their hands to move using fidget items, and use other calming tools that help them to regain emotional control. When students feel as though they have “chilled out,” a reflective conversation takes place with a trusted staff member of their choice to discuss what happened, the reactions and emotions that took place, and oftentimes strategies to help the student process through their emotions.

Another location that promotes emotional management, empathy, and problem solving is our Kids Chat Zone. This space is intended to be a mediation area for our students to talk to each other, or a staff member, in a productive and safe environment. Students help develop the norms that are posted in the space, as reminders for conducting respectful conversations. The Kids Chat Zone is not classified as either a positive or negative space, but rather a neutral area for open dialogue to occur.

I have been guided and inspired by many professional learning experiences in the development and creation of the many SEL activities and norms that we carry out in the program.

Prior to becoming a site coordinator, a baseline point for me was understanding Weikart Center’s Youth Program Quality tool and pyramid. Over the years, as I have grown as a professional, I have been inspired by collaborating with other quality educators and colleagues, both in and out of afterschool programming, and my team of dedicated youth development workers.

Through Carol Dweck’s *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Brené Brown’s *Daring Greatly*, and other inspirational and relevant readings, videos, and professional development opportunities, I was moved to bring more to my students as well as myself. I felt motivated to begin to develop my own personal journey of mindfulness, which will always be a work in progress because life is forever shifting, ebbing, and flowing. I hope that my own journey and work in this area will translate the importance of these skills to my students through the years. I have also been intentional about providing a well-rounded collection of children’s books surrounding these ideas and embedded in SEL skills for more exposure. I have to particularly credit Pinterest, as well, for continually sparking creativity and ideas in some activities and projects that have been truly successful and meaningful at our program.



CASE NARRATIVE

Bright Futures at Holmes Elementary School – Ypsilanti Community Schools



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To best serve the needs of our students and their families, support for emotional development is a must in our programs.

”

Guiding Philosophy

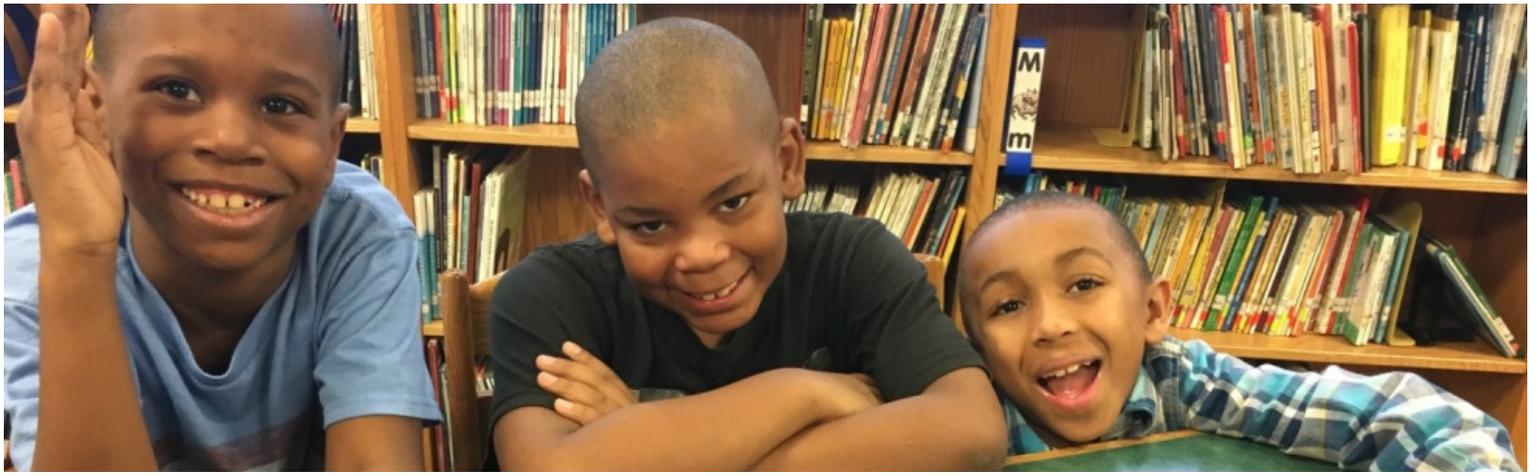
Fostering growth and development of unique interests and abilities of all students through hands on and team-based academic and extracurricular opportunities. Continuing to base our program offerings around student voice and choice, where students not only choose what activities to participate in, but a majority of club offerings are co-created by students as it leads to higher-levels of engagement in students. Building and maintaining positive relationships is at the heart of our program, and we believe that the connection our staff makes with our students and families and that our students make with each other is a key component to their academic and social and emotional growth. Striving towards supporting the potential of the amazing students that I work with and the program as a whole that reflects the talents and interests of the students, families and staff members. - **Kelly Riffer, Site Coordinator, EMU Bright Futures**

A window into an SEL-focused offering

Our students often bring many strong emotions into the classroom from life outside of the program. They might be dealing with stressful situations at home or peer conflict at school, but it's often obvious when something is off. Sometimes they need support such as strategies for cooling off or letting go of the emotion before they can focus on tasks at hand, sometimes they need practice being frustrated in a supportive environment.

To best serve the needs of our students and their families, support for emotional development is a must in our programs. As a staff, we focus on building opportunities for students to practice mindfulness, experience failure, take initiative, work as part of a team, and develop empathy and responsibility into our program offerings.

We have specific areas of the room designated as calm down corners, which our students call “Alaska,” that have comfortable, secluded seating and calm down strategies posted in clear view. We have posters around the room depicting ranges of emotions, words of encouragement, and the value in learning from mistakes. Our program staff receives ongoing professional development from our organization’s professional learning communities (PLCs) and via the Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality. Instead of having whole group sessions explicitly about emotion management or problem solving, we work this curriculum into our already engaging clubs.



For example, last year we ran a self-portraits club where students learned about and expressed themselves through different art projects. Mini lessons around naming emotions and mindful eating (<https://heartmindkids.com/adapting-the-raisin-exercise-just-for-kids/>) were weaved into the lesson plans, often in the form of games, story prompts, or during reflection. One of their projects involved students taking a selfie and then creating a collage from magazines and clip art of things that describe them and sharing it with the group.

They were able to form connections with each other and to reflect more on what it means to be them. As an opener, our staff member led them through a variation of “mapping cultural values,” (Walker, Olson, & Herman, 2017) which got them thinking about where they see themselves on a continuum. For this activity, the leader marks a line on the floor (or just uses the two ends of the room) to represent each end of the spectrum and reads questions for students to move around and answer.

This is sort of like “Would you rather,” but this time you can go anywhere in between the two choices! Some example questions are “I prefer to hide/cover my strong emotions” or “I prefer to express my emotions openly” or “When I have an issue or problem, I bring it up right away and deal with it” or “When I have an issue or problem, I prefer not to bring it up so I don’t upset anyone.” It’s stated that there are no wrong answers, and after students choose there is waiting time built in to think about why that might be true for each student.

In an Improv Club, students might each write down an emotion on paper, and then take turns playing charades for others to guess, following with conversations about what might trigger certain emotions. You hear students saying things like “I get frustrated when I don’t understand my homework” or “I calm myself down by taking big belly breaths.”

Over the past two years, I’ve developed a “Makerspace” curriculum with our partners at the Ann Arbor Hands On Museum where students explore STEM concepts through hands-on building projects where they are expected to create to “the point of failure” in order to figure out for themselves what needs to change. During our “Make it Float” unit, students were given certain materials and were explicitly told that all projects will fail, but it was their job to find the failure point and to then revise their structures.

Students experienced many successes and many failures over the course of their projects, but the biggest change we saw in them was a growth in their confidence, grit, and creative problem solving. Students went from saying “I can’t do it” or “This won’t work” to “I haven’t solved it yet” and “I haven’t figured out how to make it work yet.”

As instructors we made sure we were guiding students with questions rather than with steps for completion. It took many repetitions for students to get comfortable not having concrete steps and not having a “right” answer to work toward, but it led to more creative exploration and more of a willingness to try something new.



**PART IV:
NEXT STEPS**

PART IV: Next Steps

We have covered quite a bit of ground, building on the work begun in *Preparing Youth to Thrive*, extending the overview that was developed regarding adolescents to now also apply to school-age pre-adolescent children. Our intention in presenting the standards and practice indicators for social and emotional learning was to give you a framework to articulate how your work relates to SEL.

For example, we've talked about how children experience a range of both positive and challenging emotions in program settings, and how staff help provide a safe, respectful context for children's processing of those emotions. Many of the examples in the *Bright Futures* case narratives also brought the various aspects of emotion management to life.

We've looked at the other domains of SEL — empathy, teamwork, responsibility, initiative, and problem solving — in a similar light. We also saw the foundational role that curriculum features play in building effective SEL programs.

Now that you've completed the guide, spend some time thinking through your answers to the questions introduced earlier and begin to plan how you will take what you have learned and implement it in your program: Where do you see connections with your work, developing SEL with pre-adolescents? How do the six domains of SEL – and the standards and indicators – apply to your OST program structure and practices? Which aspects of SEL are most relevant, and what kinds of adjustments, if any, would you make to your organization and program that would boost SEL? What would you keep doing that seems successful?

Do you see parallels between the case narratives and your program? How can you leverage what you have learned to support the children you work with, for their ultimate benefit? We invite you to take it further by using the SEL Strengths Builder approach (see box below). It was developed to provide a method for taking the practices highlighted in the standards and practice indicators in this document to scale and focus on helping you assess your SEL curriculum design if you have an existing one, assess SEL practices in a particular domain and assess youth SEL skills within a continuous improvement cycle.

SEL STRENGTHS BUILDER

Additional resources at www.SELpractices.org can help you build a continuous improvement cycle with your staff team:

Use the standards to self-assess. Start with a self-assessment process using the SEL practices checklist (available at SELpractices.org). Engage a staff team to complete the checklist independently to identify practices that are both prominent and infrequent in your program offerings. Hold a meeting for staff to discuss their results and start to build a common vocabulary around SEL practices. The self-assessment conversation can be extended by asking staff to complete a rating of youth behavior for a few program participants and discussing results. With the guide and some performance information in hand, staff can ask an array of important questions to spark insights.

Plan with SEL performance information. The self-assessment conversations feed into a cycle that can lead to an improvement plan that suggests changes in practice and better use of moments in the curriculum where opportunities for SEL practices occur.

Identify system supports. For sustainable change, professional development and assessments should be aligned and integrated into your annual cycle with skill-focused professional development available to help build skills and knowledge. See SELpractices.org to learn more!

We are always interested in your input as this work evolves, so please contact us at SEL@cypq.org to share your thoughts, learning, insights, and questions. We are interested in learning from your experiences, and supporting your practices, so please let us know about them.



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