![Carlson Family Foundation logo] ![LIVE UNITED United Way logo]
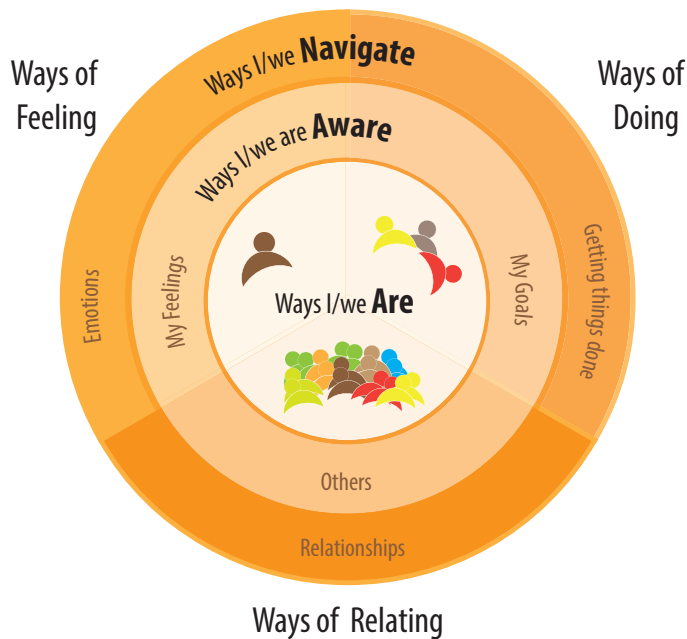
Propel SEL Initiative

Community Engagement Findings

April 2017

Carlson Family Foundation, Greater Twin Cities United Way, and Sprockets have partnered to lead the Propel SEL Initiative. Through community engagement and professional development, Propel SEL aims to increase understanding and build consensus among out-of-school time practitioners, mentors, systems stakeholders, and funders around key social emotional learning (SEL) skills and outcomes for middle and high school age youth. Community engagement meetings were held with youth and youth workers to share how their programs were building SEL in youth and what supports they needed to continue this work. The Ways of Being model was used throughout Propel SEL to promote shared language and understanding of social emotional learning. The model is unique in that it recognizes one's identity – including cultural identity – as core to one's being and informs how young people learn and develop their SEL skills, characteristics, and attitudes (see Figure A).

Figure A. Ways of Being Model*

* Adapted for Propel SEL Initiative

Ways of Being Model, Blyth, Olson, & Walker. http://www.extension.umn.edu/youth/research/sel/docs/issue-brief-ways-of-being-model.pdf. Retrieved March 15, 2017.

Propel SEL

Community Engagement Meetings

A total of 22 community engagement meetings, with nearly 300 participants, were held across the Twin Cities metropolitan area in partnership with Sprockets.

- Youth represent 25% of participants
- Other participants include youth workers; mentors; providers of culturally specific programs; youth program evaluators and trainers; youth funders; and Advisory Councils

Purpose

- Build shared understanding around SEL
- Increase consensus around key SEL practices
- Better understand how to create, shape and focus professional development for youth workers

Questions Answered

1. What are programs currently doing to intentionally support SEL in youth participants?
2. What conditions and environments are youth workers and programs paying attention to related to SEL in youth?
3. What needs and supports must be addressed to help youth workers and programs more intentionallity address SEL in youth?
4. What SEL skills, attitudes, resiliencies, and beliefs do community engagement participants see as priority for youth?

Youth Programs Support of SEL Skill Development

Participants detailed their intentional efforts to support SEL in youth through programming and experiences. Each identified skill, characteristic, or attitude was coded as either an SEL skill or a non-SEL skill. SEL skills were then coded into the Ways of Being model. Table A outlines the color key used when coding each SEL skill. After coding each individual SEL skill, as many skills as possible were collapsed into larger domains based on like concept/meaning. A total of twelve domains were identified during this process; they are listed with example SEL skills in Appendix A.

Table A. Ways of Being Color Key

Way of Being	Color
Way of Doing	🔴
Way of Relating	🔵
Way of Feeling	🟤
Way of Relating & Doing	🟣
Way of Feeling & Relating	🟢
Way of Feeling & Doing	🟠
Ways of Doing, Relating & Feeling	⬛
Cultural Skill	🟥

Table B shows the SEL domains coded into the Ways of Being model and provides the number of individual skills sorted into each domain. Seven of twelve SEL domains were categorized as exclusively one of the three 'ways of being'. Four domains represent 'Ways of Feeling,' (Hope/Optimism, Self-Awareness, Self-Management, and Voice/Autonomy two domains represent 'Ways of Relating,' (Social Awareness and Relationship Skills) and one represents 'Ways of Doing.' (Critical Thinking/Problem Solving). The remaining five were intersections of at least two 'Ways of Being.' Belonging as both ways of feeling and relating; Initiative/Leadership as both ways of relating and doing; Self-Efficacy/Growth Mindset as both ways of feeling and doing. One domain was coded as a combination of all three ways of being – Commitment/Dedication.

Finally, one SEL domain is dedicated to cultural fluency and fluidity to acknowledge the breadth of skills identified related to culture and identity. Although culture has an inherent influence on every domain, creating a separate domain to specifically address cultural fluency and fluidity is consistent with the values of Propel SEL in acknowledging the critical importance of these skills and characteristics in one's development.

The SEL domains were then ranked by the percentage of votes indicating that programs were already supporting

Table B. SEL Domains and their Associated Ways of Being and Number of Skills

Domain	Associated Way(s) of Being	Number of Skills in Domain
Belonging	Feeling & Relating	9
Commitment/Dedication	Feeling, Relating, & Doing	10
Critical Thinking/Problem Solving	Doing	9
Cultural Fluency/Fluidity	Cultural Skill	16
Hope/Optimism	Feeling	4
Initiative/Leadership	Relating & Doing	15
Interpersonal/Relationship Skills	Relating	19
Self-Awareness	Feeling	14
Self-Efficacy/Growth Mindset	Feeling & Doing	5
Self-Management	Feeling	18
Social Awareness	Relating	9
Voice/Autonomy	Feeling	16

such work ("currently supporting") in order to understand which domains were most commonly being addressed in youth programs (Table C). Four domains – Interpersonal/Relationship Skills, Critical Thinking/Problem, Solving, Self-Management, and Belonging – received at least 10% of votes. Three domains - Cultural Fluency/ Fluidity, Hope/Optimism, and Initiative/ Leadership – received less than five percent of "currently supporting" votes, suggesting that they are done less systematically by programs. The remaining domains – Self-Efficacy/ Growth Mindset, Commitment/ Dedication, Voice/Autonomy, Social Awareness, and Self-Awareness – fell in between those ranges, with each domain receiving anywhere between five and up to ten percent of votes.

Table C. SEL Domains Ranked by Percent of "Currently Supporting" Votes Received

Domain	% of "Currently Supporting" Votes (n=610)
Interpersonal/Relationship Skills	22%
Critical Thinking/Problem Solving	12%
Self-Management	10%
Belonging	10%
Self-Efficacy/Growth Mindset	7%
Commitment/Dedication	7%
Voice/Autonomy	7%
Social Awareness	6%
Self-Awareness	6%
Cultural Fluency/Fluidity	4%
Hope/Optimism	4%
Initiative/Leadership	4%

Youth-Identified SEL Development through Programming

During their engagement meetings, youth used slightly different language from adults when talking about ways programs support theirsocial emotional learning and development. They identified the following strategies:

- Activities to foster self-awareness and learn about themselves and their interests

- Building relationships with adults and with other youth they may not normally connect with in school or in their community

- Having their voice and opinions acknowledged & encouraging diversity and diverse points of view, especially on current topics and issues impacting them

- Encouraging creativity and expressions of creativity

- Opportunities to engage in civic and community projects, service projects, and leadership projects

- Development of communication skills; speech, eye contact, differences between outspoken and well-spoken, and how to lead conversations with adults or groups (large and small)

- College, career and/or employment programming and/or experiences

- Encouraging and discussing hope

Youth also highlighted the support they felt for understanding and expressing their identities and cultures. They identified specific efforts to educate and discuss different cultures, identities, and norms associated with them. Youth differentiated between strategies aimed at awareness and inclusion, and those that encouraged cultural identity and pride.

Conditions and Environments in Youth Programs

During community engagement meetings, several participants discussed the importance of intentionally creating specific conditions and environments best suited to youth's SEL development. In fact, many emphasized that building appropriate conditions and environments in programming were as important as supporting SEL skill development. More common conditions and environments identified include:

- Safe and welcoming spaces to talk and learn from one another without judgment

- Having places youth could call their own

- Welcoming activities

- Opportunities for youth to be heard and not apologize for who they were as individuals

Furthermore, having staff, community experts, and volunteers from similar cultural backgrounds to the youth as well as having staff that represented many different cultures and backgrounds were identified as both important and an area for improvement. Similarly, participants recognized the importance of bi/multi-lingual communication, and that acknowledging & celebrating food, cultural holidays, and other cultural practices added to a positive environment.

Table D: SEL Domains Ranked by Percent of Priority Votes for Youth Success Received

Domain	% of Priority Votes (N=771)
Interpersonal/Relationship Skills	16%
Critical Thinking/Problem Solving	12%
Social Awareness	11%
Self-Management	10%
Hope/Optimism	9%
Belonging	8%
Voice/Autonomy	8%
Self-Awareness	7%
Self-Efficacy/ Growth Mindset	6%
Commitment/Dedication	6%
Cultural Fluency/Fluidity	4%
Initiative/ Leadership	2%

Prioritizing SEL Skills

In an effort to better understand whether or not the field of youth work should prioritize a specific set of SEL skills, community engagement participants were asked to identify skills they believed were most important for all young people to have to be successful in life. Each participant was given the opportunity to identify three to five skills, regardless of what they currently provided in their programs.

Table D provides a summary of SEL domains prioritized by participants based on the percentage of priority votes each domain received. The domains are color coded for the Ways of Being model; see Appendix A for examples of skills within the domains. Interpersonal/Relationship Skills, Critical Thinking/Problem Solving, Social Awareness, and Self-Management received at least 10% of priority votes. Six domains – Hope/Optimism, Belonging, Voice/Autonomy, Self-Awareness, Self-Efficacy/Growth Mindset, and Commitment/Dedication – received between five and up to 10% of votes. Only Cultural Fluency/Fluidity and Initiative/Leadership received less than five percent of priority votes.

It is important to note that the lower percentage of votes certain domains received does not indicate their lack of importance for young people's success. Research supports that every one of these domains and the SEL skills they represent are indeed important for youth. What the percentage simply indicates is the domains noted as important by participants in the community engagement sessions.

Table E explores the SEL priority domains further, comparing to which level programs are currently supporting them against the level to which they are prioritized for youth's success. Three domains were high priority and also more widely in current practice – Self Management, Interpersonal/Relationship Skills, and Critical Thinking/Problem Solving. Social Awareness was seen as a high priority but got fewer votes as something that was already currently supported. Belonging, on the other hand, was being done by more programs but only got a moderate number of votes as a priority. Self-Awareness, Voice/Autonomy, Commitment/Dedication and Self-Efficacy/Growth Mindset were right in the middle on both dimensions. Table E suggests that Hope/Optimism is seen more a priority than it is currently supported. The domains that were least actively noted as being done and also less

often noted as a priority included Cultural Fluency and Fluidity and Initiative/Leadership.

A few points of note emerge when comparing the domains programs already address, what youth say they gain from their programs, and the domains participants prioritize as most important for youth:

1. **'Cultural Fluency/Fluidity'** remains at the bottom of both ranked lists. When compared to the community engagement qualitative data, this is in line with what participants said they were currently doing in their programs, but in contrast to the need to support culture and identity expressed by participants (especially those working in culturally-specific programs.)

2. Many of the SEL skills identified by youth as high and medium priority, i.e. 'confidence,' 'motivation,' and 'optimism' were categorized under some of the lowest-ranked domains.

3. While domains like **'Interpersonal/ Relationship Skills'** and **'Critical Thinking/Problem Solving'** are already both well supported and prioritized, **'Hope/Optimism'** is prioritized more than it is currently being supported in programs.

Table E. SEL Domains by Current Support and Priority for Youth Success		HIGH PRIORITY	MEDIUM PRIORITY	LOWER PRIORITY
	HIGH CURRENT SUPPORT	Critical Thinking/Problem Solving Interpersonal/Relationship Skills Self-Management	Belonging	
	MEDIUM CURRENT SUPPORT	Social Awareness	Commitment/Dedication Self-Awareness Self-Efficacy/Growth Mindset Voice/Autonomy	
	LOWER CURRENT SUPPORT		Hope/Optimism	Cultural Fluency/Fluidity Initiative/Leadership

It is essential to remember that these results are according to the perspectives of those in the community engagement groups. That is, we neither know how intentionally or effectively programs are actually addressing and supporting each area nor does it reflect what is known about what factors should be prioritized based on systematic evidence. For example, there is a lot of evidence self-efficacy is very important for success , and yet it receive medium priority votes and is it something programs are currently supporting at some level. Furthermore, these results are not necessarily representative of all youth, youth workers, and youth programs in the region. A different set of participants would yield slightly different rankings.

That said, it is important to consider the potential implications of these findings when developing professional development opportunities. These rankings may reveal areas in which participants need to be pushed and challenged to think more critically and deeply about SEL domains – namely identifying those that are important, appropriate, and feasible to address in their programs, as well as how to do so effectively. What is clear from this data is that the major areas of social and emotional learning are well represented in youth programs across the Twin Cities. While there is variation in language used and understanding of importance, the practitioners and youth that participated in the community engagement sessions get the essence and value of the key SEL domains.

Identified Needs to Intentionally Support SEL in Youth

Community engagement participants were also asked "what they needed to better support SEL in their programs." The needs identified were categorized into four different categories: a) training and workforce needs, b) SEL measurements, tools and resources, c) identity and culture-specific needs, and d) systems-level supports.

Training & Workforce

Training for staff, mentors, volunteers, community partners and administrators to understand what SEL is and the benefits of intentionally addressing these knowledge, skills, and attitudes was one of the most common needs identified by youth workers and leaders. Similarly, they identified the need to better help adults understand how culture and identity influences SEL development as well as what they can do to better support these needs through programming.

SEL Measurements, Tools, & Resources

Another consistently reported need by participants was for SEL tools and measurements, such as youth outcomes measurements, tools to assess conditions and environments supporting SEL, program planning resources and curricula, and frameworks to shape understanding of SEL. Participants also expressed the need for support in making stronger connections between their ongoing SEL work and the assessments and measurements they already used.

Culture & Identity

Programs and/or youth workers named a variety of methods and mechanisms to support youth's culture and identity, and many expressed the need for more support and resources to intentionally address these aspects of youth SEL development. Programs designed for specific cultural communities (i.e. race, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, etc.) addressed social emotional learning and development through these specific lenses and their intersections. These programs spent time discussing and validating specific cultural norms and how they were affirmed by or conflicted with the dominant cultural norms. They also discussed strategies to help young people affirm themselves and their cultural identity.

More often than not, participants of programs not designed for specific cultural communities were less likely to introduce culture and identity into the conversation. When culture and identity were brought up, these participants were more likely to discuss the importance of more external cultural skills (i.e. awareness, competency, appreciating difference, etc.) than the cultural components of positive identity formation (i.e. pride, affirmation, etc.) Furthermore, regardless of the likelihood of bringing up culture and identity, once they were mentioned during the engagement meeting, there was consistent and widespread agreement about their critical importance in youth development and the need for programs to support their youth in both respects.

Systems Supports

While the engagement meetings were focused on programs' efforts to build SEL in youth and program-level supports needed, participants were quick and eager to discuss systems-level challenges significantly affecting their ability to prioritize SEL in their programs. The most pressing challenges include:

- **Funding:** having specific resources to support SEL and build capacity around SEL from funding community

- **Communications:** having shared understanding (among different levels of organizations/programs and among the youth field generally) about why SEL matters, shared

Bandura, A. (1997). Self-efficacy: The exercise of control. New York: W.H. Freeman; Diener, C. I., & Dweck, C. S. (1978). An analysis of learned helplessness: Continuous changes in performance, strategy, and achievement cognitions following failure. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 36, 451–462.

language about SEL, and means to effectively communicate the value of SEL to external partners

- **Workforce:** high turnover in staff, limited time and resources for staff/volunteer development, agreement among decision-makers to support SEL (program and/or community level)

Addressing these systems-level issues will impact Propel SEL's success especially when programs are unable to manage these concerns internally.

Finally, there was strong support for efforts to support getting more intentional about SEL – so long as it was not done in overly prescriptive or one-size-fits-all ways, that it did not lead to high stakes accountability, and that the focus remained primarily on practice improvement (rather than youth outcomes.) Efforts to increase awareness, develop a common language, and come to a better understanding of how to support SEL were highly valued by community engagement participants.

Professional Development Recommendations

Creating communities of practice that encourage learning among peers, coworkers and within an organization are essential to meaningful learning that increases intentional practice. The following list of recommended professional development priorities is based on findings from community engagement meetings. These recommendations will inform the design of Propel SEL's professional development opportunities.

1. **Professional development should capitalize on the significant opportunity Propel SEL presents to support youth workers in intentionally fostering identity and cultural exploration among youth.**

   Culture in particular should be acknowledged both as a lens through which all SEL development occurs, and as a layered "skill" that needs targeted nurturing to build fluency.

2. **Professional development should include a community of practice to encourage ongoing learning within programs and between professionals at different organizations.**

   This would serve not only to acknowledge and elevate the work already happening within programs, but also to strenghten the diversity of perspectives from which participants can grow in their practice.

3. **Professional development should support intentional practice, program design, and evaluation.**

   Participants clearly expressed the need for concrete, tangible, and applicable strategies, tools, and resources to build intentionality in their programs' SEL focus. Once consideration might be going deep or becoming highly intentional in a given domain – not to encourage work on that specific domain but rather to illustrate the multiple ways programs can become more intentional in the way they operate.

4. **Professional development should remain tool and framework neutral and help programs better select and connect work to different frameworks and SEL competencies.**

   Rather than pushing for conformity to a specific tool or framework, professional development should focus on how various frameworks and tools support program goals and track outcomes. Recognizing the cultural relevancy of tools and the cultural aspects of tools is critical to creating an inclusive community of practice. The Ways of Being model is useful in that it provides a foundation for connecting.

5. **Professional development should consider how to maintain youth voice throughout the process.**

   Youth participation in the professional development design and implementation will ensure priority is given to their perspectives and needs.

6. **Professional development should offer topic-specific trainings to address systems-level challenges and build capacity.**

   Training around funding, communication, and workforce will complement program-level SEL focus.

7. **Professional development should consider using a continuous improvement approach and use data as one of the tools that informs, challenges, and supports changes to practice.**

   Professional development on SEL should help practitioners make connections to quality efforts but also recognize the unique aspects of getting intentional about SEL.

Propel SEL Domains with Example Skills

1. **Belonging:** Connectedness, safe relationships, trust others around you, and inclusion
2. **Commitment/Dedication:** Persistence, perseverance, motivation, passion and engaged
3. **Critical Thinking/Problem Solving:** Decision-making, curiosity, creatively, flexibility, and thoughtfulness
4. **Cultural Fluency/Fluidity:** Cultural healing, cultural awareness, cultural difference, cultural diversity, and cultural understanding
5. **Hope/Optimism:** Hope, optimism, and resiliency
6. **Initiative/Leadership:** Effort, forward-focusing, goal orientation, accountability, and leadership skills
7. **Interpersonal/Relationship Skills:** Communication, collaboration, positive relationships with adults, and active listening
8. **Self-Awareness:** Knowledge of self, self identity, self reflection, self –discovery, and pride
9. **Self-Efficacy/Growth Mindset:** Knowing regardless of their circumstances they can achieve their goals
10. **Self-Management:** Emotional development, emotion control, emotional maturity, self-regulation, and impulse control
11. **Social Awareness:** Accepting others' opinions and feelings, empathy, respect, sensitivity, and compassion
12. **Voice/Autonomy:** Assertiveness, empowerment, ability to gain independence, and agency

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