



**SEL
+
OST
=
PERFECT
TOGETHER**

**A CONFERENCE REPORT
BY ELIZABETH DUFFRIN**

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This Wallace conference report was produced as part of a commitment by The Wallace Foundation to develop and share information, ideas and insights about summer, afterschool and other out-of-school-time programming as well as social and emotional learning. Other publications and resources on these topics, along with this report, are available free of charge from www.wallacefoundation.org.

Elizabeth Duffrin is a freelance education writer based in Chicago and a former education journalist.

Front and back cover images: Teens performing in dance programs from the After School Matters organization in Chicago.

Conference photos by Michael Kardas. Photos of After School Matters programs, courtesy of After School Matters. Keep it Simple illustration on p. 15 adapted from a Learning Heroes graphic; courtesy of Learning Heroes.

Design by José Moreno

TABLE OF CONTENTS



*Top: Elizabeth Cushing,
president, Playworks
Left: Learning Heroes worksheet*



Preface	4
A Conference Report	6
How One of Chicago's Largest Afterschool Programs Does SEL	12
How Safety and Support Can Undo the Damage of Adversity	16
Conference Partners	22
Bibliography	24

PREFACE



The first was the coronavirus pandemic, which has disrupted the lives of many in the United States, but left few so affected as young people in low-income communities. At a time when many of them are lonely and frightened—facing food insecurity,

may be the main organizations that are stepping in to ensure that young people are as socially and emotionally healthy as possible.”

After School Matters in Chicago, which provides teen programs that teach 21st century skills, continued informally through the spring with check-in calls and remote learning. Students choreographed dances via video conferencing or cooked together with household staples, worked on art projects with supplies teachers dropped at their front doors and shared their creative writing via the internet.

The formal program was scheduled to resume this summer with instructors trained in trauma and resiliency as many teens may be dealing with grief, said Melissa Mister, chief program officer for After School Matters, who also spoke at the October event. “What’s most important is that our kids are feeling connected and supported.”

Similar efforts are under way across the country. BellXcel, a national nonprofit that works with communities to provide evidence-based summer and afterschool programs, plans to focus on “relationships and routines” this summer, said Brenda McLaughlin, chief impact officer, another presenter at the event. “Routines support a young person’s feelings of safety,” she explained. “If you know what to expect every day, you can relax into that routine a bit more and be more open to learning.”

For children without computers, she said, one routine might be scheduled calls from a teacher to read a story together and talk about the characters.

Jodi Grant, executive director of the Afterschool Alliance, knows of afterschool providers who are knocking on doors to drop off food and see how kids are doing. “If kids are feeling isolated and detached, there is nothing more important than knowing there is someone out there who cares about you,” she said.

She’s concerned that public discourse about the pandemic’s impact on young people seems narrowly focused on academic loss “and not nearly enough on the need for social-emotional learning and trauma-informed care.”

Indeed, research presented at last fall’s event demonstrated that trusting relationships, a sense of safety and belonging, healthy mindsets, and social and emotional competencies are all essential for optimal learning.

In this report, we hope that you find insights that contribute to your thinking as you move through the challenging times ahead. Whatever the coming months bring, the expertise of out-of-school-time providers in fostering young people’s social and emotional growth will be of heightened importance to our children’s well-being, their academic success, and their futures.

Jodi Grant, executive director, Afterschool Alliance

heightened health risks and family job loss—social and emotional learning may be more important than ever.

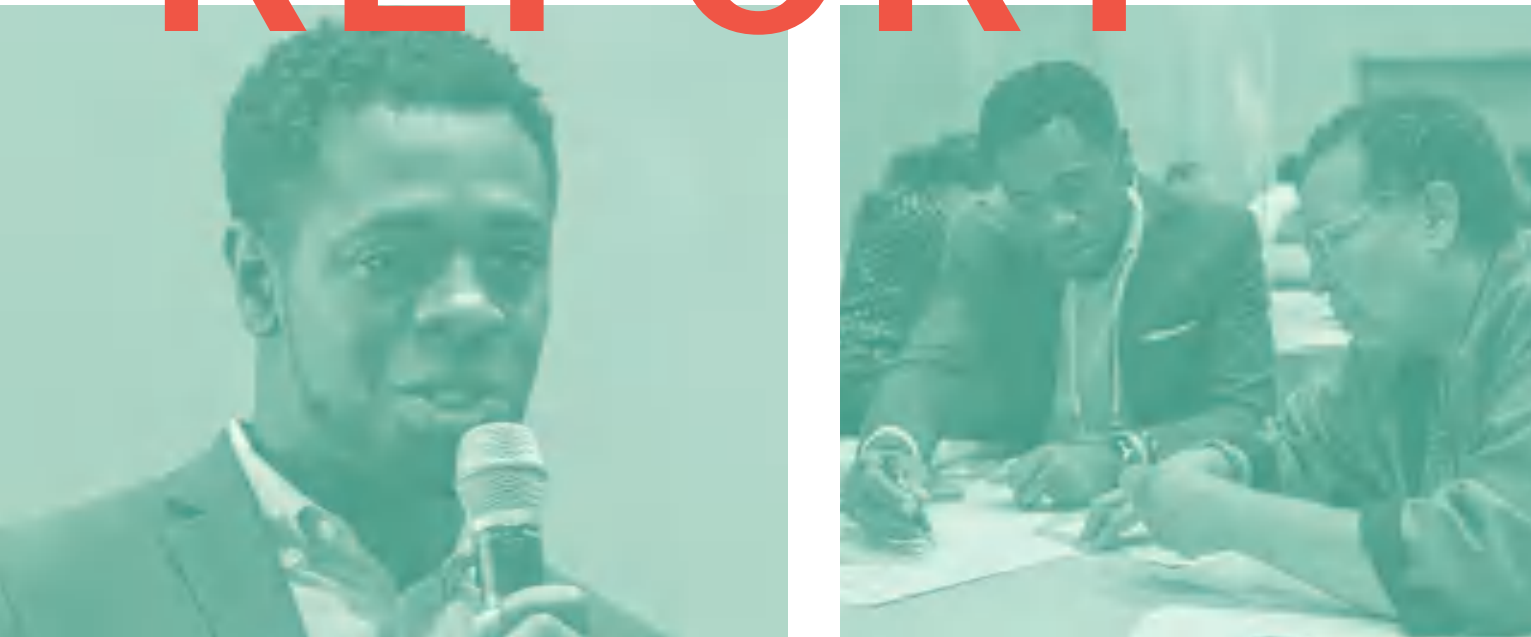
The second was the energized racial justice movement that emerged following the killing of a Black man, George Floyd, by white police officers in Minneapolis and that has succeeded in shining a sharp spotlight on the racial inequities in our society.

Given the times, the role of out-of-school-time providers has become increasingly vital. And programs have been working hard to meet the challenge.

“Schools may be closed during the summer, but out-of-school programs are not,” said Karen Pittman, a pioneer in the field of youth development and a presenter at the Chicago event. “They

In October 2019, The Wallace Foundation and America’s Promise Alliance hosted a day-long event in Chicago to address the challenges of teaching social and emotional skills to young people in out-of-school time programs. We drafted the conference report that is in your hands, however, before two major developments in the life of this nation had yet to occur.

A CONFERENCE REPORT



Growing up in a home with domestic violence, Byron Sanders found refuge in the afterschool programs he attended. Whether improvising a scene on the theatrical stage, running for a pass on the football field, or digging through primary sources for his history day project, Sanders discovered in afterschool a place where he could be a “happy, effervescent kid.” He also found a pathway to opportunity.



But today, as president and CEO of Big Thought, a major youth development organization in Dallas, Sanders believes his afterschool experience fell short in one respect. The social and emotional skills he desperately needed weren’t intentionally taught. Today, that lapse is still true for young people in too many afterschool programs, he told some 150 educators and youth development leaders gathered for an October 2019 forum in Chicago on social and emotional learning and out-of-school-time programming. “How many kids do you know of today who can access that power, which is what social and emotional learning truly is?” he asked the audience.

Social and emotional skills—which can include the capacity to work productively with a group,

manage feelings well, resolve conflicts satisfactorily and an array of other capabilities—are increasingly recognized as a key to success in modern life. Just think about the workplace today. A 2015 [study](#) by the National Bureau of Economic Research found that jobs requiring high levels of social interaction made up a growing share of the U.S. labor force. Out-of-school-time programs can play a crucial role in developing the skills needed for those interactions by providing opportunities less hurried than those found during the school day for young people to try, fail and persevere at a favorite pursuit and to grow with support from trusted adults and peers.

In recent years, scientists have also demonstrated how deeply intertwined social and emotional

*P. 6, far left: Opening remarks by Byron Sanders, president and CEO, Big Thought
P. 6: Byron Sanders and Karen Pittman, president and CEO, The Forum for Youth Investment
Top: Teens in a musical theater program offered by Chicago’s After School Matters perform a number from In the Heights.*



Social and emotional well-being is deeply intertwined with children’s cognitive development.



Deborah Moroney, managing director, American Institutes for Research, and Karen Pittman

well-being are with children’s cognitive development. Accordingly, efforts to integrate social and emotional learning (SEL) into the classroom and out-of-school-time (OST) programs have grown exponentially over the past decade.

The day-long forum during which Sanders spoke aimed to build on that momentum. Called SEL+OST=Perfect Together?, the meeting attracted youth development leaders, researchers and educators interested in the latest SEL research and eager to discuss two of the field’s biggest challenges—developing the ability of adults to teach social-emotional skills and communicating the importance of those skills to those who may be unaware of how vital they are. The meeting was sponsored by The Wallace Foundation and [America’s Promise Alliance](#) as part of their efforts to develop and disseminate insights into how communities can best support children’s social, emotional and cognitive

development. It also served as a prelude to an event the next day: the inaugural SEL Exchange, hosted by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), which drew approximately 1,500 participants.

This report describes highlights from the SEL+OST forum along with additional commentary from presenters.

Research Suggests Out-of-School-Time Programs Can Contribute to Social-Emotional Learning

The study of social and emotional learning in afterschool, summer and other out-of-school-time settings is relatively new. In the 1980s, researchers began to quantify the effect of afterschool programs on young people’s lives, including long-term outcomes such as finding employment and avoiding incarceration. “We didn’t call it ‘social-emotional learning’ at the time,” said Deborah Moroney, managing director at American Institutes for Research, a behavioral and social science research and evaluation organization. “But the studies were there on experiences that led to what we now consider social and emotional competencies.”

A major catalyst that linked SEL with out-of-school time, Moroney says, came in 2007 when child psychology researchers Roger Weissberg and Joseph Durlak released a pivotal study of existing research, [The Impact of After-School Programs that Promote Personal and Social Skills](#). “They found that when young people participate in high-quality programs defined as SAFE—sequenced, active, focused and explicit—that they experienced social-emotional growth linked to academic outcomes,” she said.

Karen Pittman, for one, is excited that so many youth development practitioners and K-12 educators now believe in the importance of social and emotional learning and are asking for more guidance on how to do it well. Pittman, a pioneer in the field of youth development, is president and CEO of The Forum for Youth Investment, a non-profit working to improve the odds that all children and youth will be ready for college, work and life. One response to the eagerness for more guidance on SEL, she said, was the creation of The Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, which convened researchers, policymakers and practitioners over a



Sequenced, Active, Focused, Explicit programs can foster social-emotional growth linked to academic outcomes.

two-year period to explore how learning happens and how schools and communities can work together to support children’s development.

The Commission’s recommendations were released in January 2019 in the report [From A Nation at Risk to a Nation at Hope: Recommendations from the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development](#) (available at <http://nationathope.org/report-from-the-nation/>). A central point in the report was the importance of “learning settings,” said Pittman, who served on the commission.

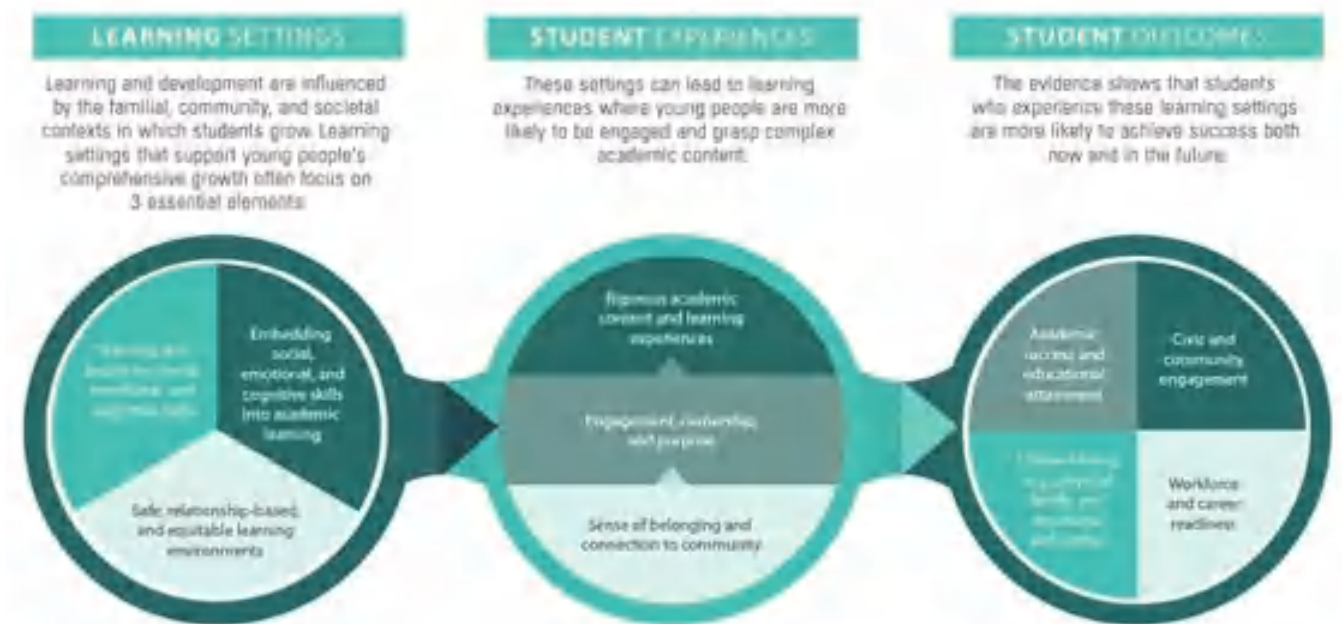
A learning setting is more than a place. It encompasses the learner’s experience, she explained, referring to the graphic below which illustrates the commission’s “theory of action” for arriving at the

best possible student outcomes. “Learning settings start with relationships, and then you add in content, and then you add in rigor,” she said. “But they have to start with the relationships.”

To be effective as a vehicle for children to develop SEL skills, a learning setting must include direct instruction of the skills and opportunities to practice them, according to the commission. When all of the elements are in place, the theory goes, students become engaged in learning and develop those skills thoroughly enough to apply them to other parts of their lives.

Every setting where young people spend time holds potential for SEL and cognitive development, Pittman asserted—soccer practice, band, the library.

What This Looks Like in Schools and Communities



Source: From *A Nation at Risk to a Nation at Hope: Recommendations from the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development*, page 23.



with a twist. In the original, preschoolers were left alone with a marshmallow and promised a second one if they could resist eating the first until the researcher returned. Those who could delay gratification were found to have better academic achievement years later in adolescence, an experiment that was taken to demonstrate that self-control is a stable trait predicting future success. In a more [recent study](#), researchers added a step before the

marshmallow test. A child in the waiting room was offered a coloring book and a box of crayons that turned out to be crumbled. The researcher promised a new box but followed through for only half the children.

Whether the promise was kept or broken had a profound impact on how children fared when faced with that tempting marshmallow, Pittman said. “The kids who had the immediate prior experience of having an adult do what they said they were going to do were five times more likely to be able to wait than the kids who had the immediate prior experience that they couldn’t trust adults.”

Recent research in neuroscience and other scientific disciplines underscores the importance of building trusting relationships with children and taking a holistic approach to learning, according to Pittman. She shared findings from a series of articles by the Science of Learning and Development Project, an initiative aimed at improving education policy and practice with scientific research. The project’s findings echoed the insights in the report from the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development.

In some ways, what the scientists reported wasn’t new, she noted: Optimal conditions for learning exist, the studies found, in the context of strong relationships, a sense of safety and belonging, rich instruction, individualized supports, and the intentional development of essential mindsets, skills and habits.

“We all know that, but what the science told us is—we can’t just pick some of these things,” Pittman

said. “At the point where we’re not doing all of these things at a threshold of doing good, we actually could be doing harm.”

For instance, she explained, “we can’t just say, ‘We have to do social-emotional skill-building, let’s bring in a curriculum,’ if we haven’t paid attention to relationships and belonging.”

But when learning experiences are optimal, she said, “you can actually undo the damage of adversity.” *[For more, see sidebar on p. 16]*

A Key Challenge: Preparing Adults to Foster SEL

Developing the ability of adults to teach social and emotional skills is a challenge both for schools and out-of-school-time providers. There is a body of important content teachers and youth leaders can learn about teaching social and emotional skills and a range of good curricula for that work. But before adults can foster SEL, they first need to be competent at using those skills themselves. That was the message from Ron Berger, chief academic officer at EL Education, a nonprofit that provides professional development to a national network of schools and districts. “Who you are is what changes kids—what your staff models,” he said.

Adults can find it particularly challenging to summon their social and emotional skills during the times children are having the most difficulty, Berger noted. “When a kid acts like a jerk in class, often the teacher is upset. But if she can be upset and still be calm, respectful and firm, then kids realize, ‘Wow, that’s the way you can be,’” he said. “It’s one thing to say to children, ‘Regulate your emotions,’ but it’s another thing to model it when students can see that you’re upset.”

Adults Need Social-Emotional Skills, Too

To model strong social and emotional skills, staff members need more than training, according to Berger. They need to recognize and improve their interactions with adults and children. “There is no way you can build in a couple of days a week of professional learning and assume that’s going to change teachers,” Berger said. “You have to create cultures in schools that are supportive environments and engines for personal and professional growth.”

In one low-performing school where Berger worked as a turnaround coach, for example, the principal had inherited a toxic culture. “Teachers



A twist on the classic marshmallow test underscores the importance of trusting relationships.

badmouthed each other: ‘If the second grade teachers were just doing their job, we wouldn’t get these kids in third grade who couldn’t read.’ Everybody felt defensive. There weren’t enough supplies, and people felt it was everyone for themselves. You hid in your room and hoarded your supplies.”

To lay a foundation for a better school culture, Berger worked first on building relationships among adults. “We spent two days as a staff having conversations,” he said. “The whole staff had never been in a circle before. They had always faced the principal. They had never talked about their personal lives, their professional vision. It was hard to begin.”

Berger noted that even organizations well aware of best practices for working with youth often fail to apply that knowledge to adult interactions. “The way meetings happen in many organizations is often a terrible model of what we understand as best practice,” he said. “They can be hierarchical and without clear meeting norms and protocols. We would never do that with kids.”

Creating new social norms begins with envisioning a better culture, he said. In one protocol, he asks participants, “If this school were what we hope and dream it could be, what would it look like?” He’s heard responses like, “‘People wouldn’t diss each other in the teachers’ room.’ ‘Everyone would show up on time for their duties so others aren’t left in the lurch.’” These kinds of conversations are tough, Berger said, “but it’s liberating to talk about things that nobody talks about in school.”

*Top (L to R): John Gomperts, then-president and CEO, now senior adviser, America’s Promise Alliance; Brenda McLoughlin, chief impact officer at BellXcel and managing partner of its Sperling Center for Research and Innovation; and Ron Berger, chief academic officer, EL Education
Bottom: Ron Berger, chief academic officer of EL Education*

The more specifically those settings can be named and described, she said, the more clearly youth development practitioners can think about how to improve conditions for learning.

To determine whether learning settings are of sufficient quality, “we actually should talk to and observe the students,” she added. “As opposed to saying, ‘We implemented a curriculum correctly and therefore they got an optimal experience.’”

Building Trust is Crucial

To illustrate the importance of relationships in SEL, Pittman shared findings from an experiment that replicated the classic “marshmallow test”—but

HOW ONE OF CHICAGO'S LARGEST AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS DOES SEL



Image top right: Teens taking part in After School Matters' program with Windy City Harvest

When 17-year-old Duncan applied for another session of an urban gardening program with After School Matters in Chicago, his instructor, Kris De la Torre, had news for him. If he wanted to return, he needed to curb the complaining and the sarcasm that had often undermined group productivity.

To her surprise, he accepted the feedback. Two sessions later he was promoted from apprentice to intern, a position that furthered his growth as a leader, said De la Torre, who is with Windy City Harvest, a department of the Chicago Botanic Garden that works in partnership with After School Matters. "I made sure to praise him when he used his social sway to energize the group or get everyone working collectively on a project," she said.

Each year, more than 17,000 Chicago teens participate through After School Matters in paid apprenticeships and internships with professionals in fields including STEM, sports, communications and the arts. But whether students are learning to program a robot, choreograph a dance, or design an urban garden, the effort's first priority is to help the teens develop important workplace skills, such as how to cooperate with others, solve problems and communicate.

Given that, instructors are asked to organize the day to include an education in both the discipline at hand and social-emotional skills in one or more of six domains, such as social awareness and collaboration. The domains, in turn, cover 35 specific capabilities, things like, "clarifies areas of disagreement that need to be addressed to achieve a common goal."

Skills are listed on colorful posters and referred to frequently, said De la Torre. At the end of the day's activity, when it's time for reflection, "that language is right in front of them and they can pull from it to describe what worked or didn't work: 'We didn't communicate well, we didn't delegate well or we overcame a challenge together.'"

Activities in the Windy City Harvest program include designing and planting a rooftop garden, maintaining an aquaponics system (where fish fertilize water-grown plants), and leading gardening and composting workshops around the city. Having tangible goals helps young people understand the purpose of the targeted workplace skills, De la Torre explained. "If a group is going to plant seeds, maybe they didn't finish in enough time and others did. Or they finished everything on their to-do lists, and they're feeling confident. They realize what they do or don't do has clear outcomes."

In Duncan's view, "One of the most important things Kris did was what she called, 'straight talk.'" Once a week, she would sit down with students in small groups with her notepad and comment on each individual's work performance, he recalled. "There was a compliment that



Over time, I've become more patient and willing to listen to others' ideas, an After School Matters student says.

makes you feel like you're doing well and something you can work on, which helped me manage the goofing off versus actually working."

The trusting relationships teens build with peers and instructors make participants willing to accept feedback, according to Samara, 17, an After School Matters veteran who has participated in gardening, video editing, creative writing and now a youth leadership council.

"Over time, I've become more patient and willing to listen to others' ideas," she said,

"because peers have told me, 'It hurt my feelings when you didn't hear my point of view.' The instructor would tell me when I was speaking too much. 'Hey Samara, let someone else have some voice.' We create a relationship where that's okay."

After School Matters doesn't leave relationship-building to chance. Each instructor gets training and a booklet with simple team-building activities aligned with the six skill domains.

Angela Morano, a milliner who teaches apparel design with After School Matters, said that she begins her program each day with an icebreaker. When students are just getting to know each other, she keeps the questions light, "How many siblings do you have? What's your favorite pizza place?" As we get more comfortable, "how is everyone feeling today?" Sometimes teens will say, "I had a really hard test or I thought it was unfair I got this demerit." They open up about their personal experiences and that helps build a safe community." During one conversation, a student, visibly upset, shared something personal about his family, she recalled. "And another boy just went over and gave him a hug. We all applauded."

Samara said that the relationships she's built through After-school Matters are what she values most about the program. Where school is "mostly lecture-style and there's not interaction with peers or even your teacher," she said, After School Matters programs are designed to promote collaboration and trust.

"The instructors don't just care about their field. They care about the teens," she said. "That's what makes it different than school and that's what keeps me coming back each year."



talking to that kid in the hallway, that was hard for me.”

A number of schools in his network hold schoolwide or grade-level affirmation and apology meetings with students and staff members. Berger said he’s heard statements from teachers like, “I want to apologize. I yelled at students twice last week, and I’m trying not to do that.”

Kids receive a powerful message in hearing teachers apologize, according to Berger. “It normalizes the sense that, ‘we’re not going to be perfect here, we’re going to blow it sometimes, but we’re going

to keep trying to be better members of this school community,’” he said.

Summer: A Time When Teachers Can Strengthen SEL Muscles

BellXcel, a nonprofit that works with communities to design and execute evidence-based summer and afterschool programs for prekindergarten to eighth-grade students, takes a similarly holistic approach to developing social and emotional skills, starting with the adults, said Brenda McLaughlin, chief impact officer for the organization.

In addition to a strong focus on professional development, BellXcel focuses on building culture, which includes things like agreements between staff members and students on how to interact with each other. Each class comes up with its own simple rules, such as listening when others are speaking. The idea is that students are more likely to follow rules when they have a voice in creating them.

Classrooms also have a daily “community time” for students to share how they’re feeling and reflect on social and emotional learning, usually related to one of BellXcel’s core values, such as courage. The teacher might say, “Tell me about one time you were courageous,” said McLaughlin, “and then

they’ll have a conversation about courage and what courage means.”

The BellXcel curriculum even has language in each lesson for building students’ “growth mindset,” or their belief that their abilities are not fixed but can grow with effort. One math lesson suggests teachers say, “As you learn this, mistakes are expected. Your mistakes help me support you. Let’s make mistakes together!”

The idea is that putting structures in place and continually reinforcing them will, over time, change the culture, she explained. “If you’re not willing to write up your culture and bring it up in staff meetings, people are going to act how they’ve always acted.”

This doesn’t mean that creating a positive culture across BellXcel’s 150 sites is easy. A frequent challenge is getting instructors used to giving students “voice and choice” in activities and soliciting their feedback on lessons, she said.

One obstacle to improved practice, McLaughlin said, is that the national organization trains site leaders, who in turn train teachers—“and sometimes there are breakdowns in those transfers.” Challenges can begin with hiring, she added. It’s important for site leaders to ask questions to ensure candidates are a good fit for the culture. “Not everyone wants to come in and talk about growth mindset all day,” she said.

Despite challenges, BellXcel has made a difference in changing teaching practices, according to McLaughlin. For one thing, teachers who work in the BellXcel summer program report that during the regular school year they are using what they have learned about growth mindset language and positive behavior strategies—such as praising students who are on task and quietly correcting those who are not.

When We Say...	Try This...
Self Regulation	Self Control
Grit	Taking on challenges. Learning from effort.
Growth Mindset	Learning from mistakes
Executive Function	Organizational Skills

To understand how experience in a summer program helps teachers change their practices, BellXcel is working on a study in partnership with the RAND Corporation. So far, educators report that the preservice professional development in the program is only a foundation for making changes in their practice. What really makes the difference is “living throughout the summer with an instructional coach, with time for reflection with their peers, with opportunities for building relationships with the kids. It’s the totality of the experience,” McLaughlin said.

Talking to Parents About Social and Emotional Learning

Parents are essential allies in developing children’s SEL skills. Yet the way that practitioners talk about those skills can be confusing to dads, moms and other caregivers, said Bibb Hubbard, president of Learning Heroes, a nonprofit that conducts research and provides information and resources on how parents can better understand and support their children’s learning.

A [large-scale national study](#) by Learning Heroes found that while K-8 parents agreed on the importance of some social and emotional competencies, such as respect, confidence and problem-solving,



To build a better school culture, Ron Berger worked first on building relationships among adults.

Top: Brenda McLaughlin, chief impact officer at BellXcel and managing partner of its Sperling Center for Research and Innovation

Once new norms are defined and agreed upon—showing up on time; treating others respectfully; speaking respectfully of colleagues, students and families; sharing supplies—staff members also need to agree to hold each other accountable for meeting them, he said. That might mean raising an issue during a teachers meeting—“I don’t want to name anybody, but twice this week, I heard teachers yell at kids”—or even approaching a colleague: “I’m sure you didn’t mean it this way, but when you were

How Safety and Support Can Undo the Damage of Adversity

Everyone knows how a sudden threat—real or imagined—seems to flip an internal switch: adrenaline surges, the heart races, breathing quickens.

For children with ongoing adversity in their lives, that “flight, fight, or freeze switch” can be too easily flipped or even stuck in the “on” position, said Karen Pittman, who heads The Forum for Youth Investment. Those children are at a serious disadvantage in the classroom, she noted. When the sympathetic nervous system is in overdrive, the body remains hyper-focused on survival. Memory and decision-making are impaired.

“The good news,” she said, “is that when children feel safe and supported, that switch can be turned off, and memory and learning are reactivated: Neuroscience finds that when you put people in safe and supportive situations, their brain chemistry changes.”

The change in brain chemistry can happen quickly, she explained. “You can immediately send the signal that this is a place you can relax, this is a place where you can trust adults.”

The more often a child experiences care and safety, the more brain chemistry is altered in a way that enhances learning, she said. “The effects are both immediate and cumulative.”

they didn’t give much weight to others, including growth mindset, executive functioning and grit, because they didn’t understand the terms, or understood them differently from what had been intended, according to Hubbard. “Many folks in out-of-school settings use ‘grit.’ For parents, it sounds negative, dirty, like a struggle,” Hubbard said. “And parents are not comfortable with their kids struggling. They think, ‘I’m not doing my job if they’re having to struggle.’”

When communicating about the importance of SEL, she explained, it’s important to carefully define unfamiliar terms and illustrate them with real-life examples.

Parents may also need some context to understand the importance of other common terms that didn’t fare well in the survey, such as “curiosity,” said Hubbard. “We heard in focus groups, ‘curiosity killed the cat.’ If you have a curious middle-schooler, you feel a little anxious,” she said.

Higher Achievement, a national nonprofit with a year-round academic enrichment program for middle school students, joined with Learning Heroes to pilot an approach to discussing SEL with parents. Those conversations need to be carefully framed, noted Lynsey Wood Jeffries, Higher Achievement CEO. “Families feel, ‘It’s my responsibility that my child become a good human being,’ so training on social-emotional learning for families can come across awkwardly,” she said.

To overcome that obstacle, Higher Achievement talks about SEL in the context of a goal the nonprofit shares with parents: preparing students to enter college preparatory high schools. “To get into a good high school takes a whole host of social-emotional skills,” Jeffries explained. “It takes self-efficacy to

feel, ‘I can get into the school and I’m going to take steps to do it.’ It takes executive function, getting all the materials in on time . . .”

Providing time for parents to discuss their own experiences in relation to social and emotional learning is also important, according to Cornelia Calliste, then-director of programs at Higher Achievement Baltimore. At one workshop, most parents strongly objected to the idea that being able to “bounce back from disappointment” was an important skill for college readiness, a skill on par with knowing how to apply for financial aid. But parents changed their minds after hearing a mother who had sent two children to college explain how the sibling who was able to handle setbacks had thrived there while the other one struggled.

SEL-OST in Action: How It’s Playing Out in Three Localities

What do playing four square on the playground, interning in apparel design, and taking part in a middle-school afterschool program have in common? All are opportunities for social and emotional learning. Out-of-school-time leaders in California, Illinois and New York explained their approaches to fostering SEL, developing their workforces, and addressing equity.

Ensuring That Recess, Too, is a Time for SEL

Playworks, a national nonprofit based in Oakland, Calif., provides professional development to teachers and school staff members on how to build children’s social and emotional skills during recess and on-site coaches to model those practices with kids. Through games like kickball, four square and tag, kids learn how to work with others to achieve a goal, regulate themselves, and resolve conflicts on

their own without adult intervention. “What we hear from principals, teachers and parents is that it changes the whole climate of the school and the experience of the school day,” said Elizabeth Cushing, Playworks’ president.

To earn buy-in from educators, what Playworks doesn’t do—they learned this long ago—“is go up to a principal and say ‘we are the best thing ever,’” quipped Cushing. Instead, “we say, how is recess going for you? And what we hear 99 percent of the time is, ‘It’s a time of discipline issues, it’s dragging down our academic efforts, and everyone hates it.’ We say, ‘we’re going to help you solve that problem.’”

Some adults in its network of schools are more amenable to changing their practices than others, Cushing said. To understand why, Playworks asked the American Institutes for Research to conduct a study of its partner schools. What the study found: “When adults in schools understand why play matters for learning and creating a good climate in school, they will pick up the skills and will use them,” Cushing said. “That understanding is a pretty simple thing to achieve.”

Providing high-quality recess is not just good in its own right; it’s also a matter of equity, she said. In partnership with an outside researcher, Playworks collected data on 8,000 elementary schools that completed a self-assessment on student recess. “What was shocking to us is that 70 percent of the schools [surveyed] do not offer the most basic level of safe and healthy play,” said Cushing. “We’re talking about physical altercations, verbal altercations on the playground.” And while those problems affected schools serving children of all socio-economic backgrounds, she noted, “the higher a school’s free and reduced lunch percentage, the less likely it is to be able to offer safe and healthy play for all kids.”

To address inequity at a larger scale, Playworks is seeking to offer professional development on its approach to more out-of-school-time providers.



In kickball, tag and other schoolyard games, kids can learn skills like cooperation and self-regulation.

At a location in Southern California, Playworks is “giving away what we know how to do” to a local Boys & Girls Clubs organization. “We don’t have to own this expertise. By working together, we have the potential to dramatically increase the number of kids who have safe and healthy play.”

For Chicago Teens, Internships that Build Social-Emotional Skills

After School Matters provides summer and after-school programs to 17,000 teens annually in Chicago. Through apprenticeships and internships, kids ages 14 to 18 learn skills from professionals in the arts, communications, science, sports or technology.

Top photo: Cornelia Calliste, then-director of programs at Higher Achievement, now director of partnerships, Learning Heroes

But teaching social and emotional skills is the first item on the agenda, according to Melissa Mister, chief program officer for After School Matters. “The transferable skills are what we want all our teens to walk away with,” she said.

Teaching adults who work with young people how to support SEL is essential, she said. “You are sending people to do internships with people who aren’t trained to work with teens. We understand that and we offer training.”

Adults learn how to plan each day with SEL in mind, to understand that teens have a different learning curve than adults, and to identify whom to call when they encounter difficulties interacting with a young person, she said. “We want them to expect that challenges will come up.”



Top: Teen artists in After School Matters’ metal works program show off the shadow puppets they designed and created.
Left: Kevin Washington, president and CEO, YMCA of the USA



Some take to the role more readily than others, she added. “We tap into those people and have them be mentor instructors.”

To address equity, After School Matters continually reviews its data to make sure its programs are fairly distributed throughout the city and that enrollment reflects the demographics of Chicago Public Schools’ students, she said. “It’s about recruitment and creating programs that are attractive to the population.”

Some people think of programs like After School Matters as a “nice-to-have,” she said, as in “Oh, that’s nice, they can have art.”

But once you understand how out-of-school-time can develop social and emotional skills or “21st-century skills” like collaboration and creative problem-solving that lead to workplace success, she said, providing those opportunities “becomes a serious question of equity.” [Find out more about After School Matters’ approach on p. 12.]

NYC Helps Youth-Serving Nonprofits Improve

New York City’s Department of Youth and Community Development is charged with carrying out a major local initiative—funding free afterschool programs for all middle school students in the city. And SEL is an important part of those programs, according to Denice Williams, the department’s deputy commissioner.

So, how does the city go about encouraging a strong infusion of SEL in programs that receive municipal funding? Historically, her department has focused on training youth workers on how to develop SEL. Now it is also trying to strengthen the nonprofits that carry out youth programs across the city, such as with workshops on how to improve hiring and staff training, according to Williams. “We took a step back from looking at the individual [youth worker] to looking at the context they’re working in,” she said.

Through its efforts, the department has found that to improve adult practice it’s useful to begin with helping staff members reflect on how the change might contribute to their professional growth or allow them to better serve kids. When adults aren’t convinced a new practice is worthwhile, the money spent on training can go to waste, Williams explained. “Every adult has a different [motivation for learning],” she said, “so what’s in it for them?”



Adults have to agree to learn. You’ve got to create a desire for change.”

Helping youth-service nonprofits improve their functioning is a role her department takes seriously, Williams said, and it’s necessary to ensure that municipally-funded efforts deliver the “quality experience” kids deserve.

The SEL+OST Mission: Unleashing the Potential of All Children

The SEL+OST conference concluded with words from Kevin Washington, president and CEO of the YMCA of the USA. It was a fitting set of remarks, centering on his childhood memories of attending the Christian Street Y in South Philadelphia, where later, as youth program director, he launched his career.

Washington recalled discovering the Y’s afterschool program as a 10-year-old. There, he could productively spend his time while his parents worked long hours and avoid gangs, drugs and crime. After school and on weekends, he studied, made friends and tried his hand in new endeavors such as music and art. The Y was the place where Washington found a mentor who would become one of the most influential people in his life. He also honed his basketball skills, which led to a scholarship at Temple University.



The head of the YMCA of the USA says caring adults and youth-serving programs can help children on their journey to adulthood.

Thanks to his out-of-school-time experiences, in other words, Washington was able to receive vital support on his journey to adulthood. “I am one of millions of people whose lives have been transformed by youth-serving organizations and caring adults who made it their mission to help a child,” he told the audience. “That’s why we’re all here isn’t it? To help kids— *all kids*—reach their full potential?”

Top left: Urban farming is one of many program options provided by After School Matters.
Top right: Bibb Hubbard, president, Learning Heroes



After School Matters gardeners in an Urban Growers Collective program in Chicago



Small group problem of practice discussions, led by Monika Kinbeloe, senior director, strategic initiatives & partnerships, America's Promise Alliance

Bottom: L to R: Lynsey Wood Jeffries, national CEO, Higher Achievement; Cornelia Calliste, former director of programs, Higher Achievement Baltimore; Bibb Hubbard, founder and president, Learning Heroes; Monika Kinbeloe, senior director, strategic initiatives & partnerships, America's Promise Alliance

CONFERENCE PARTNERS

The SEL+OST Conference Partners

For more than 15 years, **The Wallace Foundation** has worked to improve children's access to high-quality learning and enrichment opportunities after school and during summer, especially for children from low-income communities. In its initiatives, Wallace directly funds a small number of local efforts, while developing credible, useful evidence so others can benefit. Currently, the foundation is undertaking a six-year initiative in six communities to strengthen and align social and emotional learning practices in schools and out-of-school-time settings.

America's Promise

Alliance, based in Washington, D.C., is the nation's largest group of national and local organizations, community collaboratives, businesses and individuals dedicated to improving the lives of young people. The alliance conducts research, raises public awareness through national campaigns, hosts events and summits, and works in partnership with its members on initiatives aimed at improving young people's education, health, safety, opportunities for

service and involvement with caring adults.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning

(CASEL) is a Chicago-based nonprofit and leading promoter of SEL best practices. It conducts, synthesizes and commissions research; provides guidance to districts and states and field-tested learning materials to schools; educates policymakers; and hosts webinars and events to share best practices.

BIBLIOGRAPHY



Find Out More About Social-Emotional Learning and Out-of-School-Time Programs

All of the following reports—and many more—are available free of charge from Wallace’s Knowledge Center at www.wallacefoundation.org.

Social and Emotional Learning

[*Foundations for Young Adult Success: A Developmental Framework*](#) (2015)

University of Chicago researchers describe the elements that children need for adult success.

[*The Future of Children: Social and Emotional Learning*](#) (2017)

This special issue of *The Future of Children* finds that building social and emotional skills is essential for children, and that teachers and out-of-school-time program staff members need professional development to help children acquire these skills.

[*Kernels of Practice for SEL: Low-Cost, Low-Burden Strategies*](#) (2017)

Drawing on [*Navigating Social and Emotional Learning from the Inside Out*](#) (see below), this brief by Harvard’s Easel Lab explores the need to develop and test social and emotional learning (SEL) strategies that target specific behaviors and can be taught quickly.

[*Navigating Social and Emotional Learning from the Inside Out*](#) (2017)

Aimed at elementary schools and out-of-school-time providers and written by researcher Stephanie Jones and her colleagues at Harvard’s Easel Lab, this guide to 25 evidence-based SEL programs offers information about curricular content and programmatic features that can be used to make informed choices about SEL programming.

[*Preparing for Effective SEL Implementation*](#) (2018)

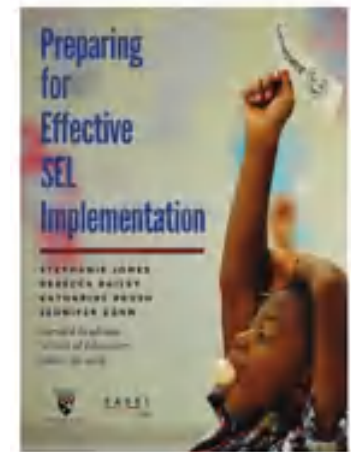
Drawing on [*Navigating Social and Emotional Learning from the Inside Out*](#), this brief by Harvard’s Easel Lab describes features and best practices of effective SEL programs and offers a set of recommendations for planning and implementing them.

[*Social and Emotional Learning: Feedback and Communications Insights from the Field*](#) (2016)

Market researchers explore the linguistic landscape of the many terms used to describe non-academic skills, finding some familiarity with the phrase “social and emotional learning.”

[*Social and Emotional Learning in Out-of-School Time Settings*](#) (2017)

This brief from Harvard’s Easel Lab, drawing on [*Navigating Social and Emotional Learning from the Inside Out*](#), provides considerations for adapting leading SEL programs to out-of-school-time settings.



[*Social and Emotional Learning Interventions Under the Every Student Succeeds Act: Evidence Review*](#) (2017)

This RAND analysis offers guidance to states and school districts on how they can use federal Every Student Succeeds Act funding to support social and emotional learning. A companion publication, [*Investing in Evidence-Based Social and Emotional Learning*](#) (2018), offers guidance on determining local SEL needs and interventions to address them.

Afterschool

[*Afterschool Programs: A Review of Evidence Under the Every Student Succeeds Act*](#) (2019)

A research review, with a companion guide, finds more than 60 afterschool programs that meet the most rigorous evidence standards of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act.

[*Growing Together, Learning Together*](#) (2015)

This report details the four elements that current evidence and experience suggest are essential to a successful afterschool system.

[*The Value of Out-of-School Time Programs*](#) (2017)

A RAND analysis finds that out-of-school-time programs are generally effective at producing the outcomes that would be expected by their content and design.

Summer Learning

[*Investing in Successful Summer Programs: A Review of Evidence Under the Every Student Succeeds Act*](#) (2019)

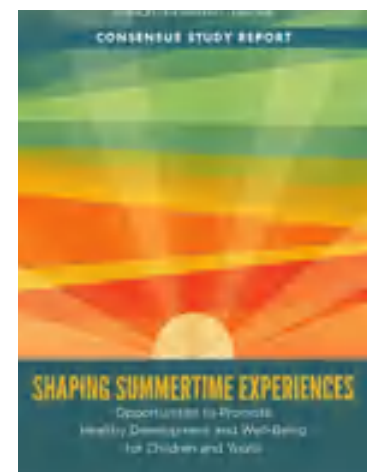
RAND describes in detail 43 summer programs backed by research strong enough to meet federal Every Student Succeeds Act requirements.

[*Learning from Summer: Effects of Voluntary Summer Learning Programs on Low-Income Urban Youth*](#) (2016)

A groundbreaking study finds that high-quality summer learning programs provide reading and math benefits for students who regularly attend the programs.

[*National Academies of Sciences Report on Summer Learning*](#) (2019)

A study of summertime experiences for young people offers recommendations for improving the quality, equity and effectiveness of summer programming.





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