Social/Emotional Learning in New York City

Overview

Social/emotional learning, or SEL, is a foundational part of young people's education and healthy development. According to national experts at CASEL (2025), SEL is the process through which young people acquire and apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, achieve goals, empathize, establish relationships, and make responsible decisions. SEL is directly linked to children's academic success (Taylor, et al, 2017; Urban Assembly, n.d.). These skills are necessary for young people to succeed, require investment and quality services from multiple city agencies, and benefit our civic life and economic outlook. Despite the importance, not all children have access to high-quality SEL opportunities.

The vision of the City at Hope Coalition, representing organizations from across the youth services ecosystem, is: *Every person and every space serving children in NYC has the resources needed to provide quality social/ emotional development opportunities, and every child in NYC has an opportunity to develop all four SEL competencies.*

Figure 1. City at Hope SEL Framework (see Appendix A for details)

Self-Awareness I am… recognizing who I am, what I need, and how I feel relative to the world around me.
Self-Management I can… manage my behavior in pro-social ways.
Social Awareness I care… by demonstrating an awareness of the role and value of others in the greater community.
Social Management I will… interact with others in meaningful and productive ways.

After conducting a baseline survey and listening to education and youth development leaders (see Appendix B for details), we found significant opportunities to 1) coordinate SEL efforts across schools and youth programs, 2) improve access to resources and funding, and 3) better prepare adults working with youth.

To achieve our vision, we all need to work together, including NYC leadership in City

Hall, NYC Public Schools, NYC Department of Youth and Community Development, and other agencies including community, corporate, nonprofit, advocacy, and philanthropic partners. Written with support from NYCPS and NYC DYCD, this brief provides an overview and key data on SEL in NYC, as well as recommendations to ensure all young people have the social and emotional competencies needed to succeed.

Recommendations for NYC Leadership

To best support children and youth, we recommend NYC government officials and candidates for public office take action on and support the following:

1. Champion and Align SEL Citywide

- Recognize and promote the power of relationships as a foundation for thriving, learning, mental health, and workforce readiness.
- Implement a high-level communications and implementation strategy and an associated playbook on delivering evidence-based SEL in multiple settings – school, out-of-school time structured activities, and in community settings.
- Ensure alignment across all city agencies, including at least NYCPS, DYCD, ACS, NYCHA, Libraries, SBA, and the Mayor's Office, to create a cohesive approach to SEL across city schools and programs, from birth to early adulthood. This should include explicit SEL skill development; creating safe and supportive learning environments through which SEL is practiced and strengthened; prioritizing joy and hope in youth spaces; and using pedagogies such as project-based and inquiry-based learning to foster collaboration and relationship-development.
- Create synergy across education and mental health initiatives citywide, taking a holistic approach to youth development; for example, provide a referral directory to schools and youth programs on how to access City and community-based behavioral health resources.

2. Strengthen and Leverage Out-of-School Time (OST) Programs and School/Community Partnerships

- Continue and expand baselined funding for programs and positions that support SEL, including: dedicated SEL Coordinators in schools, after-school and summer programs, and community schools.

- Sustain the commitment to existing community schools and OST programming, including Beacon and Cornerstone programs, ensuring consistent funding that covers the full cost of delivering high-quality programs with a stable workforce.
- Expedite payment to contracted organizations for OST services to mitigate gaps in service, negative effects on young people, and other barriers to quality.

3. Invest in and Share Power with Educators and Youth-Serving Professionals

- Support OST job quality, with consideration to pay and benefits, access to education, and working conditions, thereby stabilizing the workforce and minimizing disruptions to young people's experiences and relationships.
- Invest significantly in high-quality professional development for teachers and OST professionals to build capacity in delivering SEL. This professional development should be rooted in evidence-based practices and supported by mentorship, coaching, and investment in organizational culture to increase staff retention and well-being.
- Empower and resource educators to work with students and caring adults to address pressing challenges, starting with school climate and culture, leading to improvements in attendance, learning, and positive youth development.

Participating Organizations

Carmel Hill Fund
Carnegie Corporation of NY
Change Impact
Children's Aid
Chinese American Planning Council
CUNY School of Professional Studies Youth Studies
DREAM Charter Schools
Educators 4 Excellence
ExpandED Schools
Fordham University
Global Kids
Hello Insight
New Settlement
New York Edge
NYC Outward Bound
NYS Network for Youth Success
Partnership for After School Education
Pinkerton Foundation
Restorative Justice Initiative
Roads to Success
Robin Hood
Student Success Network
United Federation of Teachers
United Neighborhood Houses
Urban Assembly

Contact Us

If you'd like to learn more about the City at Hope Coalition, please contact David Adams, Chief Executive Officer at Urban Assembly, at dadams@urbanassembly.org.

Appendix A: City at Hope Coalition: SEL Framework

Self-Awareness **I am…** Recognizing who I am, what I need, and how I feel relative to the world around me.	**1A - New York City youth demonstrate awareness of their needs and emotions.** *I am aware of what I need and feel.* *(Adults around me model awareness of what they need and feel.)* **1B - New York City youth demonstrate awareness of their personal traits.** *I am aware of my traits, know what I do well, and know what areas I can work on.* *(Adults around me articulate what they do well and areas they are working on.)* **1C - New York City youth demonstrate awareness of their external supports.** *I am aware of the supports I have around me.* *(Adults in my life articulate the supports they have around them.)* **1D - New York City youth have a sense of personal responsibility.** *I am aware of my responsibilities.* *(Adults in my life model awareness of their responsibilities.)*
Self-Management **I can…** Manage my behavior in pro-social ways.	**2A - New York City youth demonstrate ability to manage their needs and emotions.** *I can responsibly manage my needs and emotions.* *(Adults in my life show me how to manage my emotions through their actions and words.)* **2B - New York City youth are genuine and demonstrate honesty/integrity.** *I can act in a genuine and honest manner.* *(Adults around me act in a genuine and honest manner.)* **2C - New York City youth use effective choice-making and decision-making skills.** *I can make good choices and decisions.* *(Adults around me create opportunities for me to make good choices and decisions while providing feedback when I make mistakes.)* **2D - New York City youth demonstrate increasing levels of independence and the ability to set and achieve goals.** *I can demonstrate increasing levels of independence and set and achieve goals that will help me to be successful.* *(Adults around me help me to set goals that show me that I have influence over my own motivation, behavior, and social environment.)*

Social Awareness **I care...** By demonstrating an awareness of the role and value of others in the greater community.	**3A - NYC youth demonstrate awareness of other people's roles, their emotions and perspectives.** *I demonstrate knowledge of other people's roles and I care about the feelings and viewpoints of others.* *(Adults around me demonstrate knowledge of other people's roles and care about the feelings and viewpoints of others.)* **3B - NYC youth demonstrate consideration for others and a desire to positively contribute to their community.** *I care about others and do my part to make my community better.* *(Adults around me show me how to care for others and how to contribute to bettering our community through their actions and the opportunities they provide me.)* **3C - NYC youth demonstrate an awareness of cultural issues and a respect for human dignity and differences.** *I care about and respect the individual differences of others.* *(Adults around me show me how to care about and respect the individual differences of others through their actions and words.)* **3D - NYC youth can respond to and read social cues.** *I care about how I perceive others and am being perceived by them.* *(Adults around me appropriately read and respond to my social cues, and interact with me in ways that can help me be successful.)*
Social Management **I will...** Interact with others in meaningful and productive ways.	**4A - New York City youth use positive communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.** *I will interact well with others.* *(Adults around me show me how to use my social skills to interact effectively with others through their actions and words.)* **4B - New York City youth develop constructive relationships.** *I will work on having constructive relationships.* *(Adults around me show me what constructive relationships look, sound, and feel like through their actions and words.)* **4C - New York City youth demonstrate the ability to prevent, manage, and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways.** *I will deal with interpersonal conflicts constructively.* *(Adults around me show me how to solve problems in constructive ways through their actions and words.)*

Appendix B: Social/Emotional Development and Wellness in NYC

Prior to the City at Hope Coalition's efforts, little data were aggregated to assess the status of social/emotional development (the process of building SEL skills) and youth wellness (the result of SEL) at the citywide level. The Coalition completed an initial baseline survey in Winter 2025 to begin to explore SEL practices across the ecosystem of education and youth development government and nonprofit partners. Below are the results of that survey, as well as data collected by Coalition partners that further illuminates the status of SEL in NYC.

City at Hope Survey Results

This exploratory survey was completed by 20 unique organizations, representing both public and private agencies. Respondents represented all five boroughs. Aside from the public agency partners, who serve the entire city, respondents represent 57,000 students.

Finding #1: Most organizations provide explicit or implicit SEL instruction, with fewer providing both.

The survey asked respondents to indicate which elements of the four SEL competencies their organization addresses, and whether they provide explicit support (use of an SEL curricula or specific teaching strategy) or implicit support (support is offered but not tied to a curriculum or specific teaching approach). The data showed most organizations do one or the other, with more organizations opting for explicit SEL instruction.

***Implication*: NYC may need to ensure more schools and programs implement both explicit SEL curricula as well as embedded opportunities to practice SEL skills across learning and development experiences.**

Finding #2: Students citywide receive lower levels of focus on Social Awareness compared to other SEL competencies.

Both in this survey as well as a dataset reflecting NYC public schools, we consistently see less focus on Social Awareness. This element of SEL includes skills such as understanding cultures, recognizing social cues, respecting differences, and empathy.

***Implication*: NYC should invest in additional practices and curricula, in both schools and other learning and social settings, that develop Social Awareness skills.**

Finding #3: Of the ~135,000 adults working with youth in NYC, survey respondents train about 19% of them.

Among the respondents, 15 organizations provide some form of training to adults as an indirect SEL service. This includes professional development on SEL (e.g., evidence-based training, coaching, mentoring) as well as formal education and credentials through higher education partners. Thirteen organizations also provide some form of resource and/or curriculum development.

***Implication*: NYC requires a deeper investment to prepare all adults working with children, across settings, to deliver high-quality SEL.**

Data Beyond the Survey

In addition to the survey data, several organizations in NYC have curated data relevant to young people's social and emotional wellness. A brief summary is provided below.

Transcend Education conducted a landscape scan, speaking with 25 leaders from NYCPS, charter schools, and intermediaries, as well as analyzing existing data on chronic absenteeism and family/teacher survey results. Findings include:

- Chronic absenteeism rate of 37% among NYCPS K-5 students, and 175 elementary schools where at least 50% of students were chronically absent
- A post-pandemic spike in challenging behaviors, with 79% of teachers noting disruptive behaviors in their classrooms
- Despite high levels of belief in the importance of SEL, investments in training, curricula, and support in this area have decreased in light of significant investments in ELA and other academic areas.

***Implication*: Recognizing the evidence-based connection between SEL and academic achievement, NYC public schools could have more structured opportunities to support students' SEL.**

Urban Assembly (UA) and Fordham University collected and analyzed data that confirms the connection between SEL and workforce development, showing a correlation with social and emotional competencies and employability. In this study, most students (84%) developed the social/emotional skills that support their transition to post-school readiness. The WorkKeys assessment results show positive, statistically significant correlations with the DESSA social/emotional skills, suggesting a focus on developing social emotional skills in K-12 may provide a strong foundation for future skills.

	Social Emotional Competence	Self Awareness	Self Manage-ment	Social Awareness	Relationship Skills	Decision Making	Optimistic Thinking
Work Ethic	.59**	.45**	.66**	.52**	.39**	.55**	.48**
Collaboration	.35**	.29**	.27**	.32**	.36**	.29**	.26**
Resilience	.24*	.17	.29**	.11	.03	.12	.34**
Creativity	.61**	.54**	.57**	.45**	.46**	.56**	.57**
Leadership	.45**	.42**	.42**	.26**	.39**	.43**	.48**
Integrity	.29**	.27**	.16	.28**	.34**	.29**	.23*

***Implication*: Given the connection between SEL and economic outcomes for individuals and the city as a whole, NYC might identify ways to tap workforce development funds and programs, as well as corporate partnerships, to support young people's SEL.**

Hello Insight found that, across 500+ organizations implementing SEL and positive youth development programming, approximately 75% of youth were successfully developing SEL competencies. The distribution of results ranges from 51% to 86%, indicating young people are having significantly different SEL outcomes across programs. The two youth development practices least implemented in the programs studied by Hello Insight are promoting peer bonds and managing goals.

***Implication*: NYC might focus on the social and goal-setting aspects of SEL to support youth to build these competencies at a higher rate. Our collective of schools and**

programs would also benefit from a more consistent, comprehensive approach to SEL to ensure 100% of children and youth receive SEL programming and support across all SEL domains.

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