

Edge of Leadership in Keene Schools: 2018-2019 Year-End Report



“Be a Good Ancestor: Plant trees you’ll never see.”

November 2019

Dear Friend of High 5,

New Zealand’s All Blacks are the most successful athletic team perhaps of all time. A professional rugby team—named for their solid black uniforms—they have won some 80 percent of their matches over a period of 70 years. James Kerr, author of *Legacy: 15 Lessons in Leadership*, saw the All Blacks’ team ethic as a guide to how we can live our lives, both as individuals and as members of communities. One chapter begins with the above tree planting quote, reflecting on the legacies we all leave for others and how our actions can make a difference in the lives of people we will never know. Much of what we do at High 5 involves planting those figurative trees, starting with our own program participants and extending beyond them to their relationships with those in their respective communities, all joined in the ongoing legacy of a shared ideal of what being our best is all about.

Edge of Leadership (EOL), an enrichment curriculum created by High 5 for the Keene, NH public schools combining leadership training, team building and social emotional learning, is our legacy to the extended Keene community. To use the analogy of planting trees, Edge of Leadership does more than plant individual trees, it plants whole forests. More than 1,000 students and faculty in Keene’s elementary, middle and high schools participate each year in Edge of Leadership, which completed its seventh year in 2019. Edge of Leadership has helped thousands of students and teachers change and grow—whether in leadership abilities or professional perspective—creating a more positive environment for learning. Program outcomes are reported annually by participating faculty, analyzed both to provide a record of student growth during the year and serve as a guide to future curricular development.

This year we celebrated a milestone in our work with professional educators: a classroom teacher from Keene was the first to complete an EOL graduate course developed in concert with Keene State College. Increasing the expertise of in-school staff has been a priority for High 5, as it allows us to spread the impact of social and emotional learning while our staff’s involvement in classroom delivery still remains high. Training classroom teachers to become more adept at supporting EOL in their classrooms, or become dedicated EOL instructors for their schools, is increasingly showing itself to be a viable approach to program replication. For the present, with key additions to the EOL staff and growing interest expressed by other schools and districts, we are confident that EOL’s influence will increase next year and into the future.

Respectfully,

Jim Grout
Executive Director
High 5 Adventure Learning Center

Ryan McCormick
Director
Edge of Leadership





Connect. Empower. Lead... be the example.

This is the motto and vision of High 5's Edge of Leadership program (EOL), now active in all of the public schools in Keene, NH. This fifth annual report to the community provides an executive summary of a detailed evaluation of program outcomes, provided by an external evaluator. The evaluation has evolved over time, as High 5, classroom teachers and school administrators, have sought insights into EOL's effects on students' social and emotional skills, teachers' approaches to teaching and learning in their classrooms, and administrators' pursuit of improving cultures and strengthening environments for learning in their schools.

This year's evaluation focused more on qualitative feedback from classroom teachers working with High 5's EOL educators. This change from quantitative reports of previous years was predicated on the understanding that written narratives could provide specific insights into classroom behaviors, as well as changes realized across whole school cultures, rather than simply recording teachers' perceptions of students' social growth and progress of the students.

With our seasonal approach to evaluation (polling teachers in fall, winter and spring) we were able to document incremental changes from the body of teacher responses. As a means to understanding the major currents of change resulting from the EOL program, we present here a summary of findings based on the broad template of Connect-Empower-Lead. This allows us to organize and distill teachers' responses providing an efficient, easy to understand report for the community.

Summary of Effects/Outcomes

Developments in social emotional skills and the effects on the classroom learning environment.

Connect

Teachers observed students reaching out to partner with new people

Teachers used EOL interventions to help students connect

Students showed an interest in others

Students expressed themselves

Students showed kindness

Empower

Students were empowered through problem solving

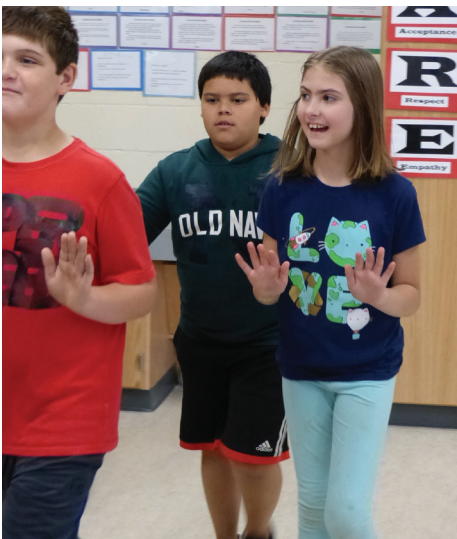
Teachers observed students trying new things

Students were more willing to speak up

Students participated in positive group dynamics

Teachers observed students engaging in pro-academic behaviors

Teachers used EOL interventions to encourage empowerment



Lead

Students engaged in specific leadership opportunities

Students engaged in positive group behaviors

Strengths in Classrooms

Students' positive individual qualities

Students' kindness to others

Students being community-minded

Students' self-expression

Challenges in Classrooms

Group skills

Self-regulation

A minority of students negatively affecting the entire class

Apathy



Changes in Teaching Practices

Increased use of High 5 themes and language

Offering more problem solving opportunities for students

Offering more choices to students

Improved commitment to teaching

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Additional insights can be found by examining teachers' observations offered in response to questions about specific behaviors. The following comments—in their own words—allow the community to understand what teachers are witnessing in their own classrooms and shed light on the scope of change effected by EOL. Select representative comments are grouped under headings that correlate to specific agendas of the EOL curriculum, offering a view into its complexity.

Connect

Partnering with new people

- Students socialize with other students between classes and during free times. They also connect with other students when working on assignments that require group or partner work.
- Students will engage in group work throughout units; sometimes reaching out to work with new classmates and sometimes interacting with their friend group.

Engaging in teacher interventions to help students connect

- Students seem better at forming relationships, but still need to work on understanding how their behaviors and actions affect others.
- Homeroom/advisory time is important, and often includes a share or reporting out about individual feelings and opinions.
- The discussions in class with High 5 focus more on building awareness of one's self and how individual behaviors impact others.

Showing an interest in others

- A practice that has been positive in my reading class has been personal sharing and kids have exhibited a true interest in the lives of their classmates.
- They show connection by asking each other to partner up with them during class activities.

Expressing themselves

- Students are expressing wants and requests appropriately.
- Describing how they are feeling when certain situations happen to them.
- Students write and share journal entries that are narrative nonfiction.

Exhibiting kindness

- After a major incident with a student in my room, students responded in a very caring and concerned way.
- Interacting with each other in a kind and respectful manner.
- They will help others when someone is in need.

Empower

Problem solving

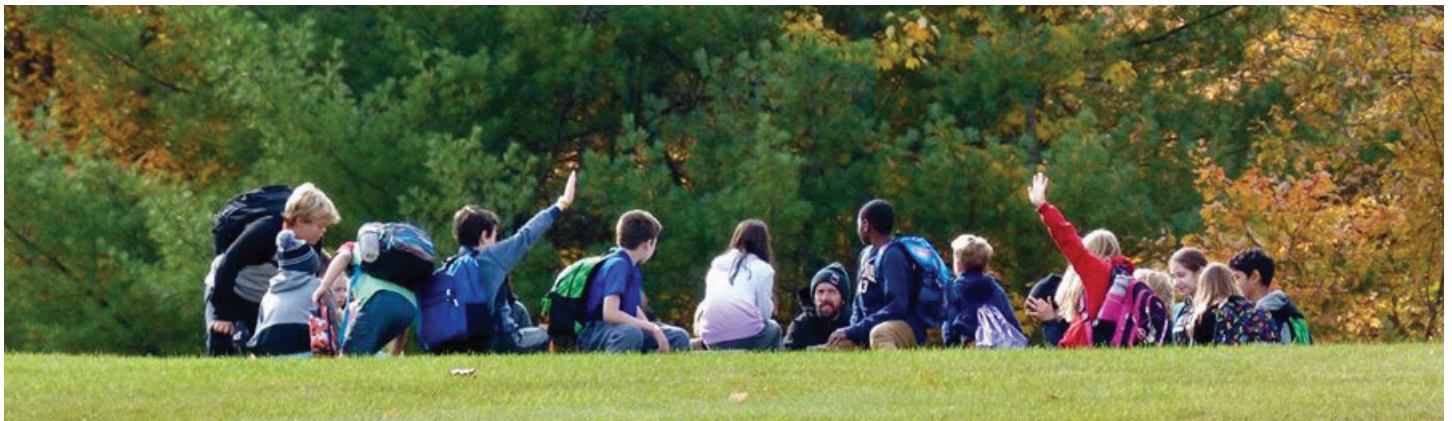
- Students worked within certain constraints and with limited materials to construct a bridge together. Though there were some bumps, most completed the task successfully.
- We are able to talk about a certain conflict/problem and solve together what we can do the next time if it arises again.
- Students like to work together to solve problems, but I would like to see more students willing to take (appropriate) risks, many of them still want to take the easy route because they know they'll be successful.

Trying new things

- Being willing to try something new while fully knowing that they may fail or stand out to their peers in a good or bad light.
- Many students are solving problems collaboratively and taking risks to attempt new and challenging tasks; some students are risk adverse and not willing to work with others.
- Strong relationships formed with each student so that they feel safe to make mistakes and ask questions.

"There has been a growing connection between EOL and the entire school communities. This has been especially true at Keene Middle School, where social and emotional learning has played an increasing role in shaping a more flexible culture for all students, and most especially for those students whose social development lags behind that of their classmates. That same increased flexibility will play an important role in the adjustment of faculty teams to a changing pedagogical approach."

SAU 29 Superintendent Robb Malay



Speaking up

- This has been a really challenging area for my students this year, as they are more likely to avoid conflict and not say anything at all. They tend to tell an adult first, instead of approaching the student and having a direct conversation with them.
- They show empowerment when they are able to share their ideas about a problem.

Working in group dynamics

- Academically, students are not as motivated to tackle challenges. However, in social situations students are usually willing to communicate and compromise.
- Making sure everyone in a group is included.
- Dividing tasks based on preference and skill.

Exhibiting pro-academic behaviors

- Emailing a teacher looking for another copy of something instead of just giving up on it.
- Participating in class discussions. Students in 6th grade at Keene Middle School are required to work in groups collaboratively. This is seen in all their classes throughout their day.
- Students face challenging assignments every day, and most begin assignments with a belief that they can succeed.

Lead

Participating in student leadership opportunities

- Students have shown leadership by taking on different roles as school as helpers to younger students. These roles are safety patrol members, peacemakers, kindergarten greeters, and big buddies.
- I see different individuals modeling leadership behavior daily in class, in the hallways, during cluster gatherings, and during small group work times.
- Leadership was seen often at the challenge course. Leaders would help to make sure everyone was safe and comfortable as well as being a big part of discussions. This was seen less in the classroom because High 5 gave everyone the opportunity to be involved.

Exhibiting positive behaviors in a group

- Many use encouraging words when working with a partner. They cheer when there is success...they can be supportive of one another.
- Leading by example is being brave to take risks, encourage others to share their ideas, being willing to be an individual, and listening/eliciting others' ideas.
- By making the right choice, regardless of what classmates/friends might be doing.

Constraints to leadership

- We have some really great kids that we have said all year, "We wish they would speak up about inappropriate behaviors."
- The trick is getting them to own positive behaviors...sometimes they know what to do but don't do it...
- A few students feel comfortable in a leadership role, but I think many are still afraid of what others will think and prefer to go unnoticed. We have worked on this all year.

Strengths

- The students in this classroom are very creative, curious, and social with one another.
- There have been moments when they have stepped up their game, worked together and showed what they really can do.

Class participation and discussion skills

- Taking risks and being courageous with different situations.
- For the most part, this year's group has been positive, energetic, and fun!
- Many positive role models and leaders.
- Collaboration, understanding expectations when they are clearly stated, asking questions.
- Most students are eager to learn.
- Offering choice in order to encourage buy-in and engagement.

Kindness

- I have a large group of positive students who like to do the right thing.
- Most kids have a desire to do well. I have some kind, respectful, thoughtful students.
- The majority of students are positive with one another, boosting one another's confidence.

Strengths in the classroom

- When given a task, most students rise to the occasion.
- For the most part, when given structure, students are able to complete tasks independent of me.
- This group of students seems more empathetic as a whole. It is evident that their educational career has included not only academic curriculum, but social curriculum, as well.
- We have some really nice students who consistently do the right thing but are often over-shadowed by others.

Community-mindedness

- The teachers, and a select group of students understood that we are a community and put forth their best effort to work around a lot of the negative behaviors.
- Our physical space allows for a small community in a larger school.
- This year, we have some strong leaders who try very hard to set good examples for the class and community.



Willingness for self-expression

- Students are not timid about expressing their opinions.
- Utilizing choice to help students take ownership of their learning.

Other

- Parents of students in my classroom have been more engaged than in past years. This has helped with some follow through at home.

Challenges

Difficulty with group skills

- Strong personalities dominate group conversations without regard for discussion norms.
- "Me" thinking has occurred much more than "we/us" thinking in the classroom.
- There are a few outlier students who have difficulty maintaining their own personal space and looking for a laugh from others, taking the attention from the speaker to themselves.

Self-regulation

- Endless blurting and interruptions by a handful of students daily.
- Disrespect and disruptive behavior that is meant to put the "spotlight" on certain students instead of classroom learning.
- There is a small handful of students that seem to attract most of our (teacher) attention. They are the ones that require the most support, mostly due to behavioral issues, and they take up most of our conversation during team meetings.

Apathy

- All but a couple have little interest in learning or challenging themselves.
- Lack of engagement with content (usually higher percentage of kids are into it).
- Difficulty taking responsibility for choices level of engagement.

Other

- Some students come from challenging home situations and, as a result, are not available to learn.
- Despite the group being empathetic as a whole, students suffering from trauma greatly change the dynamic of a class community.

Changes in the Classroom

Finally, Edge of Leadership engages some 250 faculty and staff in the Keene schools. Changes effected by raising the social and emotional learning of the students have allowed teachers to refocus their efforts, spending more time on academic instruction and less time in classroom management. The following comments will help community members appreciate the evolution of instructional practices in Keene schools resulting from EOL's continuing impact.

- I've adjusted some of my phrasing, adopted some of the activities, stop to reflect, refer to previous community-building activities.
- I have had higher expectations of students solving their own problems. I let them choose their own partners/groups more often as well.
- I try to give up the reins to the students much more often now.
- I am experiencing an improved commitment to teaching, I don't give up on them or their learning.
- It has helped me stay more committed to reminding kids that there is as much value in the process as in the outcome.
- I have focused more on emotional and social learning within the classroom, attempting to include more fun, engaging team building activities throughout the day.
- I have placed more of a focus in creating opportunities to work on the social curriculum.

"Seventh grade faculty at Keene Middle School dedicated a week of summer professional development work to increasing the role of social and emotional learning in their classrooms. The intent of their work was to increase their understanding of the role social intelligence plays in development of effective pedagogical styles and reinforcement of classroom cultures to reflect higher expectations for student behavior."

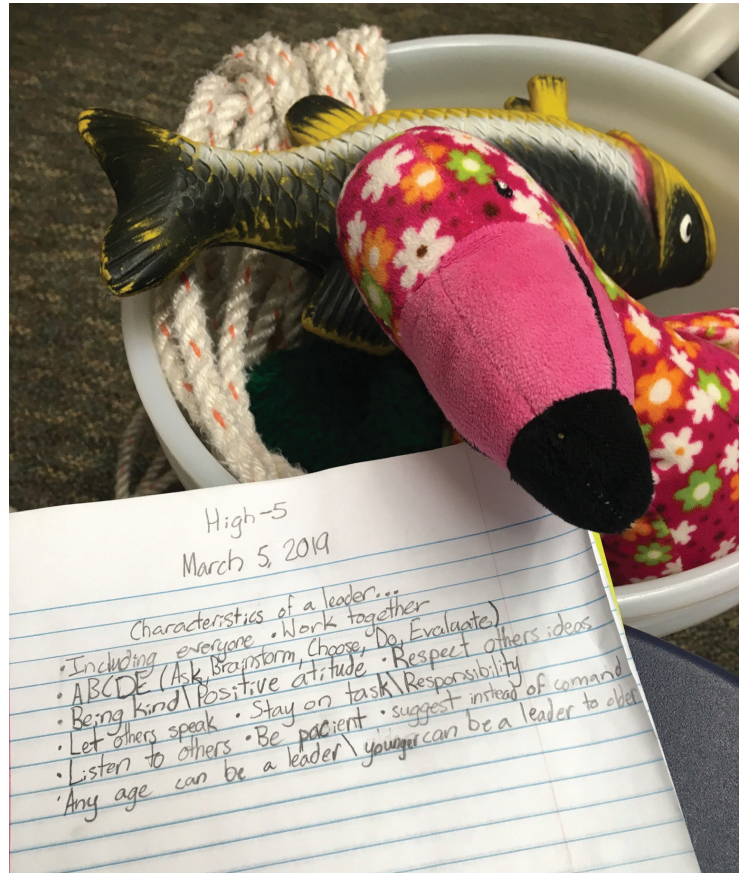
SAU 29 Superintendent Robb Malay



Conclusion: Trees You'll Never See

School and classroom teachers, by extension, are second only to families in their influence over the social and emotional development of the children in the Keene community. It is difficult to overstate the importance of increasing social and emotional learning broadly in shaping the quality of the learning environment, a positive, supportive and engaging culture in the classroom and school, and their combined influence on the emotional strength and maturity of young students, and their later success in adult life.

We are strongly reminded of the old English proverb: Mighty oaks from little acorns grow. Growth is inevitable in living and, as with oaks, we hope that growth will be straight and true. Edge of Leadership, guided by its motto Connect. Empower. Lead...Be the Example, is helping to shape the future success of Keene's children and, in turn, of Keene itself. As this report and its predecessors have conveyed, the social and emotional understanding of Keene's students is growing from year to year and grade to grade, like the rings on a very strong tree. High 5 is grateful for the continuing support of C&S Wholesale Grocers and to Keene's SAU 29 for the privilege of serving and partnering with the schools and the community.



2018-2019 Program Statistics

School Participation

Elementary Schools

209 students, 43 teachers

Middle School

460 students, 24 teachers

Keene High School

Summer Program: 40 students,
1 teacher

Total Sessions: 421

Total Participants: 714 students,
257 teachers/administrators

Faculty Professional Development Days

39 Wheelock staff members:
2 professional development
sessions during the year.

106 Keene Middle School personnel
participated in a pre-school year
professional development work-
shop and a mid-year
follow-up session.

Five 7th grade Middle School
faculty participated in a 5-day
curriculum development workshop,
integrating more social emotional
learning elements into their
classroom practices.

39 members of the SAU 29 Admin-
istrative Team participated in one
professional development session.

"Involvement of SAU 29 administration, High 5 and Keene State College in developing graduate level courses and professional training workshops has resulted in a Keene School District teacher completing EOL course requirements. This will be offered each year for all participating teachers with the hope that more teachers will take advantage of this opportunity. It will be through our dedicated educators that we will best broaden the reach as we seek to educate and nurture the "whole student" through these endeavors."

SAU 29 Superintendent Robb Malay



Funding for Edge of Leadership is provided by
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For more information about High 5 and the Edge of Leadership Program in Keene, go to edgeofleadership.org