



# High 5/Edge of Leadership: 2020-2021 Year-End Report

October 2021

## Dear Friend of High 5,

We at High 5 Adventure Learning Center are grateful for the beautiful environment in which we work and play. The Winston-Prouty campus houses our challenge course, climbing tower, programming spaces and offices. Getting to the challenge course requires a trip up "The Hill" - a short but steep walk that is at once tiring and exhilarating. If you take a moment (better yet, several) to turn around once you arrive at the top, you're rewarded with a breathtaking view of the Vermont mountains. It's an important reminder that when things are difficult, we need to place one foot in front of the other and move forward in order to get to our destination and reach our goals. Even when - especially when - the path is steep.



The Hill has become a metaphor for High 5 and our Edge of Leadership (EOL) program as we move forward and upward to navigate the challenges of the pandemic and find new and innovative ways to deliver our mission. The High 5/EOL team succeeded in staying connected with teachers and students even during times when we were not able to be in schools. We developed an exciting new digital resource to support teachers and students in reconnecting with each other and rebuilding relationships. We've expanded our reach beyond the Keene, NH laboratory setting to share our expertise with educators and students across the country. Now more than ever, we are inspired to continue this critical work.

We hope this report will give you an insight into all we were able to accomplish during the 2020-2021 school year, by continuing to move forward and upward. We would not be able to have the impact we're seeing in Keene and elsewhere without your support, and we sincerely thank you for believing in us. Our goal has been and will always be to improve the lives of others, and we believe High 5/EOL programs and resources are doing just that for students and teachers in Keene schools and beyond.

Be well,  
The Edge of Leadership Team

Connect.  
Empower.  
Lead.

Anne Louise

Ryan

Jim

Sam

BETH

Anne Louise Wagner, Ryan McCormick, Jim Grout, Sam Copland and Beth Buoro

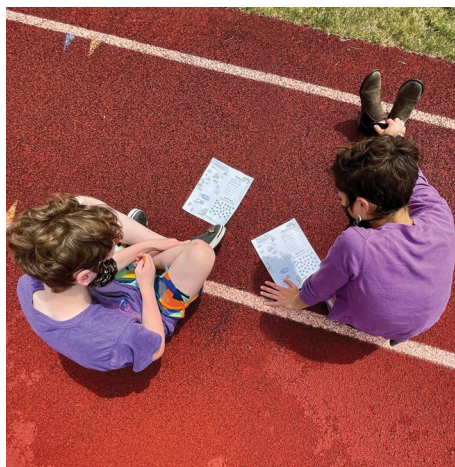
## **Connect Empower Lead... Be the Example**

The vision of High 5's Edge of Leadership program (EOL) remains relevant and strong, particularly given the ever changing landscape of education. Highlighting EOL's work with the Keene, NH public schools and beyond, this seventh annual report to the community provides an executive summary of the 2020-2021 school year, as well as the most current evaluation of program outcomes and impacts.



## **2020-2021 School Year Summary**

### **High 5/EOL Programming in Keene, NH**



The 2020-2021 school year began in Keene with fully remote instruction, transitioned back and forth between remote and hybrid learning schedules, and ended in June with students back in classrooms. Throughout the school year, the EOL team worked diligently to remain connected with Keene teachers, staff and students through consistent communication as well as continued virtual sessions despite the physical distance created by the

pandemic. We supported teachers as best we could during these transitions by sharing resources and problem solving within team meetings. The EOL team provided virtual programming from December through June.

In June, we were grateful to be able to return to schools and have the opportunity to do in-person programming. We were excited to spend time at almost every Keene school prior to the end of the school year. This helped us reconnect with students who were part of EOL during the 2019-2020 school year, as well as meet 5<sup>th</sup> graders in person who were new to the program. These sessions were mostly held outdoors and were both literally and figuratively a breath of fresh air for students, teachers, and the EOL team!

While we were unable to run our EOL Summer program this year due to the pandemic, we did host an EOL Summer reunion on July 31st. A total of eleven EOL staff and former participants/student facilitators spent the day together at the pavilion, challenge course, and on the hill. It was wonderful to see everyone and have time to reconnect!

### **Replication**

From the inception of EOL, our vision has included developing a realistic replication model for other schools and districts based on the current Keene lab school program. This remains part of our mission, and we are excited to be providing programming at Leland & Gray Union Middle and High School in Townshend, VT and Oak Grove Elementary School in Brattleboro, VT for the upcoming school year. Our hope is that in addition to in-person programming, embarking on a new journey with the Rebuilding After COVID online professional development program will help us continue to work toward achieving our vision.







## Rebuilding After COVID

In August 2021, High 5 embarked on a new model for professional development created for upper elementary, middle school, and high school educators to help them re-engage students through experiential social-emotional learning (SEL).

Informed by the evidence of how children and adults recover from trauma and drawing from the High 5 team's 35 years of work in experiential education and social-emotional learning, Rebuilding After COVID offers educators tools to help students overcome the impact of the pandemic and re-engage with learning. This program is aligned with the Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework and complements other SEL curricula.

Rebuilding After COVID has three areas of focus to help educators recognize and address how the pandemic has impacted learning communities, with tools for socially-distant, remote, and hybrid settings:

- Rebuilding Community: Restore school climate and reconnect learning communities.
- Rebuilding Emotional Wellbeing: Recognize and manage the emotions that are likely to arise now and during the transition to the COVID recovery period.
- Rebuilding Physicality: Use activities to create kinesthetic outlets for overcoming social distancing, screen learning, and internalized experiences of trauma.

Over 90 people registered for an introductory webinar held in August, and we received positive feedback from those who attended. We currently have educators registered for Rebuilding After COVID from seven states, and several schools (including Greater Lowell Technical High School in Massachusetts) have signed up large cohorts of educators. As the result of generous funding by the Thomas Thompson Trust, we've provided over twenty free scholarships to teachers in Windham County, VT.

*"High 5's 'Rebuilding After COVID' is a pioneering accomplishment, providing a platform for those who teach and lead our youth to not only practice and increase social and emotional skills, but to use them to build relational trust and collective intelligence at school-wide and organizational levels."*

Chip Wood, Co-Founder, Responsive Classroom; Co-Creator, Soul of Leadership



Photo above taken prior to the pandemic





## Professional Development

High 5's efforts to provide high quality professional development programs in spite of pandemic restrictions resulted in newly developed virtual workshops. The following workshops were offered at no cost to all SAU 29 staff members during the 2020-2021 school year in collaboration with the High 5 Training Team:

- 10 Completely Flexible Pair Activities
- Activities that Focus on Emotions in a Virtual Setting
- Adventure Free Play
- Escape Zoom
- Gathering Again: Adventure Activities & Low Elements (in person)
- Gathering Again 2: High Elements Training (in person)
- Virtual Ubuntu Activities
- When In Doubt, Give Them Your Heart



Photo taken prior to the pandemic

Several SAU 29 teachers participated in the virtual workshops and provided positive feedback about the benefits to their students.

Anne Louise Wagner and Lisa Hunt presented *Deepen Classroom Connections through Emotional Literacy Activities* at the 2021 New England League of Middle Schools (NELMS) virtual conference on March 12<sup>th</sup>. Anne Louise and Lisa also presented this workshop at Project Adventure's SEL virtual symposium and the Heartland AEE virtual conference, both held in April.

The EOL team was invited to train and facilitate team development with the entire SAU 29 administrative team at their retreat on August 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup>. Several pre-planning meetings were held with Superintendent Robb Malay to assure the work of the team aligned with the vision of the district and goals for the week. Of utmost priority was giving participants the opportunity to connect (for new hires) and re-connect, both in the large group and in breakout groups by school.



## College & University Affiliations

We are continuing our long-term collaboration with Keene State College and Plymouth State University to offer CEUs and college credit for High 5/EOL programs. Additionally, we're exploring affiliations with other colleges and universities as we plan to expand our online offerings, including a possible EOL Master Facilitator certification program.



## Evaluation

Edge of Leadership evaluation is a multi-year, ongoing process that has evolved over time in content and format in order to gather meaningful data. Providing classroom teachers and school administrators the opportunity to share insights into EOL's impact on students' social and emotional skills, teachers' approaches to teaching and learning in their classrooms, and administrators' pursuit of improving school culture is of the utmost importance. Working with an independent contractor assures our evaluation efforts are comprehensive and objective.

Our evaluation efforts this school year began with a focus on the digital EOL resources shared with Keene teachers in the fall of 2020. This was a precursor to Rebuilding After COVID. An initial process survey specific to use of the EOL digital platform was disseminated to Keene teachers in October. The purpose of this evaluation was to find out 1) how often and to what extent EOL-supplied resources were used by teachers, and 2) how satisfied teachers were with the EOL-supplied resources. This feedback informed us of the adjustments and additional resources we needed in order to create the Rebuilding After COVID Professional Development Program.

In April, we sent a second evaluation survey to Keene teachers in order to:

- Explore teachers' experiences with the Edge of Leadership (EOL) Digital Program, virtual programming, and professional development
- Understand the potential effects of EOL on teachers and students, and
- Discover more about teachers' expectations for the upcoming fall semester.

Twenty-nine educators responded to an online survey about their experience with EOL during 2020-21. For those who participated in virtual programming or professional development, respondents reported these programs to be good or high quality, useful for their teaching, and effective at building a sense of community in the classroom or cluster. Teachers who participated in EOL's professional development had a positive view, with a couple of teachers making suggestions for improvement.



*I am constantly inspired by High 5 - the staff and the activities. It helps me to focus on different aspects of communication and collaborative work, and how I can support the students as they build their skills in these areas.*

Teacher, Keene School District

### Teacher-reported effects on students

EOL's presence maintained some continuity for students and enhanced classroom cohesion and functioning. Most teachers commented positively on their students' reactions to EOL, but some mentioned limitations in EOL's effects on students due to the challenging nature of the school year.

Teachers expressed positive experiences with EOL virtual programming and their students, especially giving students a refreshing way to connect that wasn't only focused on academics, such as practicing communication and problem-solving.

While most teachers reported gaining ideas and encouragement to build community and promote social and emotional learning (SEL) with their students, a few recognized the challenges of the school year as inhibiting their abilities to implement EOL strategies.

### Teacher-reported effects on teachers

EOL provided assistance, inspiration, tools, and strategies for teachers to use with their students. A few teachers mentioned "stepping back" to observe and be mindful of students' processes. Other topics mentioned included skills teachers used for community building and building relationships. A few teachers mentioned limitations in their classrooms due to the challenging school year.

### Teacher-reported effects on their teaching

While most teachers reported gaining ideas and encouragement to build community and promote social and emotional learning (SEL) with their students, a few recognized the challenges of the school year as inhibiting their abilities to implement EOL strategies.



## Ending the 2020-2021 School Year

As students transition out of this unusual school year, teachers described students as exhibiting the following behaviors:

- Worry and anxiety
- Decreased familiarity with school routines, structures, and expectations
- More immature behaviors than typical
- A need for support in building relationships, groups, and communities Lowered stamina for attention
- Issues involved in considering others' viewpoints because political issues are seeping into students' lives in new ways
- Preferences for being together in person

Teachers observed a range of student experiences in the pandemic; necessitating a one size does not fit all approach.



## Teachers' priorities and concerns for students in 2021-2022

Teachers responded passionately to this question about their students' needs going into the Fall 2021 semester.

Themes that emerged included concerns about:

- Academic skills (e.g., time management, critical thinking, grit, organization)
- Consideration of others
- Social and emotional learning
- Community building
- Dealing with conflict

## Recommendations

Key recommendations based on evaluation results include:

1. Continue working closely with educators to understand and meet their needs and the needs of students.
2. Continue fostering group cohesion, student empowerment and leadership opportunities, and teambuilding.
3. Enhance coaching teachers in the use and application of EOL concepts and techniques.

Evaluation efforts for the 2021-2022 school year will address in-person and virtual (if needed) programming, as well as our Rebuilding After COVID online professional development program





## Your Voices Heard

The following comments were provided by teachers in evaluation survey responses. Being able to reflect on this crucial feedback provides the opportunity for us to understand what teachers are witnessing in their own classrooms, and sheds additional light on the scope of change affected by EOL.

*"This has been a challenging year. The virtual programming was a great change of pace for our class. The students enjoyed working with other adults. The activities were brand new to us, and inspired all of us to think creatively. As a teacher, it helped me to talk more about the process of brainstorming and problem solving - to encourage the students to think about the steps and the roles that they take on in the process of working as a whole group."*

*"Because of work I did with High 5/EOL to develop curriculum over the summer, I started the school year with a solid plan of how to implement activities to build community and routines during this crazy covid year. As a result, my homeroom group(s) have felt cohesive and respectful of me and each other all year."*

*"The virtual programming had a positive effect on my students. The activities provided the students with a chance to brainstorm ideas as they explored a new concept or challenge. It encouraged them to work with each other, to communicate their ideas, and to get actively involved in the class. The programming brought some fun, shared time into the classroom."*

*"High 5 helps engage the students in different activities that get them taking the lead in figuring out solutions to a challenge or problem. It can provide them with an opportunity to be a teacher/expert based on their experiences - and the knowledge that they want to share with peers."*

*"Social and emotional learning has been a big focus this year, and will continue to be next year as well. We spent a great deal of time talking about mindfulness and having a growth mindset as we learn new things and are faced with challenges/frustrating situations. There were many things to be frustrated about this year, so we tried to focus on the positives and help each of the students move forward and work through these frustrations. I imagine next year will be equally challenging. As a teacher - my priority is focused not only on academic growth, but on supporting social and emotional growth. Next year I want to continue to support the students as they develop stronger communication skills so that they can work with and collaborate with other students in positive ways."*

*"Being able to reach out to High 5 staff with questions or ideas has been helpful when it came to planning SELactivities with my class. This relationship is valuable to me."*

## Conclusion and Next Steps

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on schools significantly challenged and altered the way in which the EOL team was able to connect and work with the Keene Schools during the 2020-2021 school year. This was clearly our biggest challenge. As Keene students and teachers navigated moving between remote and hybrid learning, we were able to successfully remain connected and support them in their work and these transitions. Having the opportunity to reconnect in person with students and teachers at most schools in June was a wonderful way to bring positive energy and joy to the end of the school year.

In spite of our challenges, we had great success in providing support by:

- Rerouting from in-person programming to offer creative and flexible opportunities to support, facilitate and participate in classroom activities at the elementary, middle and high school levels.
- Rolling out the initial digital EOL platform last fall, which gave us a starting-off point for expansion of the EOL program within and beyond the Keene School District.
- Launching the Rebuilding After COVID professional development program, which will enable us to work toward our mission to provide outreach and support to educators well beyond the Keene School District.
- Offering free virtual professional development workshops to all SAU 29 educators.
- Presenting at three regional virtual conferences.

We continue to be encouraged by positive feedback from teachers, principals, and students, who appreciate our presence and anxiously awaited our return to Keene schools in June. We feel confident that we are heading in the right direction with the Rebuilding After COVID program and look forward to developing additional resources that will enable us to reach a broader educational community, while continuing our crucial lab school work in Keene.



Given the urgency of providing students and teachers with the support they need to successfully re-engage in learning, the importance of programs like EOL that facilitate social-emotional learning – especially now – cannot be overstated. There has never been a better time to bring SEL to center stage, to take a lead role in revitalizing classrooms and school communities. Yes, students may have fallen behind in academics. But if they are not able to return to a welcoming school environment where they feel connected and valued, they won't be able to successfully engage in social-emotional or academic learning. The High 5/EOL team has the expertise, experience and determination to help teachers help students...and that's really what it's all about!



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**Grocers**

Funding for Edge of Leadership is provided by C&S Wholesale Grocers, headquartered in Keene, NH

## 2020-2021 Program Stats

### School Participation

Keene Elementary Schools



**179 students**  
**22 teachers**

Keene Middle School

**244 students**  
**13 teachers**



Keene High School - EOL



**15 students**  
**1 teacher**

Marlborough  
Elementary School

**9 students**  
**1 teacher**



**Total Sessions: 292**

**Total Participants:**  
**432 students**  
**44 teachers/administrators**

### Faculty Professional Development

Virtual summer  
curriculum work with  
KMS teachers (2020): **9**



In-person Gathering  
Again workshop: **3**

In-person Pre-session  
Team Development  
(August 2020): **39**



Virtual workshops  
for SAU 29 staff: **21**

SAU 29  
Administrative  
Retreat (2021): **38**

