



High 5/Edge of Leadership: 2021-2022 Year-End Report

September 2022

Dear Friend of High 5,

When we work with students in the classroom or at the High 5 campus, they have the opportunity to participate in a range of Edge of Leadership (EOL) activities, in a variety of ways. When a student (or adult) is preparing to engage in an activity that may take them outside their comfort zone, particularly on our challenge course, we ask them “what kind of support do you want from others?” Their responses often range from asking that everyone be quiet, to asking for others to cheer them on loudly. This acknowledgement - that we all need support but what it looks and feels like can vary widely - is an important component of all we do at High 5 and in the EOL program. It provides the individual with control over their experience, and an opportunity to advocate for what they need.

Sometimes support can look like the opposite of what we might imagine. Instead of getting involved and helping, especially for us educators, it can mean giving space for someone to figure it out themselves. This is one of the ways we approach empowerment as a central theme to guide what we do and how we facilitate.

Connect.
Empower.
Lead.

During the past school year, asking teachers what kind of support they wanted for themselves and their students was critical in prioritizing areas of focus for High 5/EOL programming and shifting

our work to meet those identified needs. Asking that question repeatedly throughout the school year also helped to keep us on track. The types and levels of support requested varied from classroom to classroom and school to school, and it was necessary to understand that in order to adapt to specific contexts and cultures. The next time you’re not sure how to help a person or group of people, ask “what kind of support would you like?” And be sure to share with others how you want to be supported. It’s so simple yet so important to acknowledge our own needs and the needs of others. Without asking, we would be guessing - and our guesses might not be correct.

We’ve developed this annual report to give you some insight into the successes we accomplished and the challenges we faced during the 2021-2022 school year. So what kind of support would we like from you? Knowing that you trust in and value High 5/EOL is the best support you can give us. It keeps us moving forward, allows us to refine and improve upon our program, and motivates us to share the best of ourselves with others. We truly believe in the impact High 5/EOL has on students and teachers in Keene and beyond, and we’re committed to continue on this path.

Stay Connected & Be Well,
The Edge of Leadership Team

Anne Louise

Ryan

Jim

Sam

Anne Louise Wagner, Ryan McCormick, Jim Grout, & Sam Copland

2021-2022 School Year Highlights

High 5/EOL Programming in Keene, NH

In reflecting on the 2021-2022 school year there are many highlights that stood out, not the least of which was the tremendous growth in students, specifically in terms of social-emotional development. Despite concerns about lost time and stolen opportunity, students once again became a shining example of the resilient nature of young people.



We learned some important factors about the sequence and design of our programming. In order to meet the needs of rebuilding after a pandemic, we made adjustments to the program that—upon reflection—improved its impact. We were able to slow down and meet students where they were while avoiding premature advancement through lessons like tasks on a to-do list. Continued communication with Keene teachers allowed us to craft sessions that spoke to what was going on for them in the classroom while staying attuned and responsive to what was happening in the moment.

We were able to dive into conversations that were relevant and really engaged students because they were about topics they were invested in discussing. A clear example was when we did *Challenge Circles* with 7th graders, which sparked some great sharing about topics that are relevant to many 7th graders but are not readily discussed in the classroom setting.

The disturbance of the pandemic forced a more dynamic and innovative approach and the result was that we had one of our most creative years - from sequence and design to new activities and props, it was an incredibly inventive year from start to finish.

Edge of Leadership Summer High School Program

During the first week of August, we were excited to run the Summer EOL program again! Students and adults from Greater Lowell Technical High School joined us on campus for three days of meaningful and sometimes challenging activities to build stronger relationships between students and teachers through the development of leadership skills. After taking two summers off, it was wonderful to have folks back on campus for our foundational program.



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

The vision of High 5's EOL program 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 eighth annual report to the community provides an executive summary of the 2021-2022 school year, as well as the most current evaluation of program outcomes and impacts.

Stories from the Road

We'd like to share a few stories of memorable moments and accomplishments during the past school year as a way to give you a glimpse into High 5/EOL in action...

- We worked with a fifth grader who was challenged to participate in class, including during High 5/EOL. However, the power of human connection, patience, and the reassurance of choice over oneself slowly created changes. The student went from not even being present during High 5/EOL to sometimes quietly showing up. Over time, they began participating in activities and sometimes sharing. Eventually in our final sessions they emerged as a leader, providing support to others, sharing ideas on how to solve problems, and participating in reflections on what could be better and what they learned. It wasn't the High 5/EOL program that supported these big changes; rather, it was the hard work of the teachers and the student. However, High 5/EOL provided the stage for this student to showcase growth and competency in emerging skills. This is one of the often overlooked but most valuable attributes of our program. High 5/EOL provides students with opportunities to practice applying skills while at the same time providing teachers opportunities to assess students in a different light.
- One of our favorite moments of last school year was the opportunity to bring sixth graders to the challenge course in the spring. Because of COVID restrictions, these students didn't get to come at all during fifth grade, a time when they would normally make three visits to the course. It also allowed the sixth grade teachers to come to High 5, many of them for the first time. We loved and appreciated watching teachers working with their homerooms; seeing students and teachers challenging themselves, supporting each other, and applying the skills we worked on in the classroom all year.
- While hiking around in the back woods at High 5 during the spring 7th grade visit, one group happened upon a big stick hanging high up in some vines. The students got the idea that they wanted to take it down because it was a "safety hazard" but also for the challenge... Everyone got involved in a variety of ways – from gathering big sticks to help free it from the vines, to coordinating the pulling team, and beyond. It took them a long while, but time mid-hike was made for their self-imposed challenge. They felt so accomplished afterwards and were eager to share with others what they did. This story was later recalled in a team meeting with teachers, highlighting the power and uniqueness of adventure education!



Emotions

Talking about emotions was a particularly important component of our programming this past school year. Here are some emotions that were felt by the EOL team members as well as shared by students and teachers during our time together.





Replication

From the inception of High 5/EOL, our vision has included developing a realistic replication model for other schools and districts based on the current Keene lab school program. In addition to Keene, we provided programming this past year at Leland & Gray Union Middle and High School in Townshend, VT. More importantly, we began in depth conversations around ways in which we can impact replication efforts through professional development.

We continued promoting and refining Rebuilding After COVID (RAC), our online professional development program created for upper elementary, middle school, and high school educators to help them re-engage students through experiential social-emotional learning (SEL). This promotion included a second free introductory webinar offered to interested participants on October 25, 2021. We were excited to become a partner with the *Share My Lesson* online educational platform in order to provide free RAC resources to teachers on a national level.

A cohort of teachers from Greater Lowell Technical High School in Massachusetts used Rebuilding After COVID regularly throughout the school year and provided valuable evaluation feedback to help us improve the program. Most evaluation survey respondents wanted more and most were “promoters” of the program, which are good indicators of success. Identified strengths of Rebuilding After COVID included:

- Student benefits, especially rebuilding community and connections with teachers and each other
- Increased connections between students and teachers
- Positive student interactions
- Offering new activities to integrate into classrooms
- Increased student communication, connection, and collaboration
- Being part of a supportive community who shared ideas was very valuable to educators

Suggestions to build on these successes included adding more activities to the program and continuing to integrate an understanding of the current climate and context in schools for teachers and students, keeping in mind stressors related to time and student behavioral needs.





College & University Affiliations

We are continuing to develop opportunities for collaboration with Keene State College and Plymouth State University to offer CEUs and college credit for High 5/EOL programs, as well as affiliations with other colleges and universities as we plan to expand our online offerings, including a High 5/EOL-focused professional development model.



Professional Development

High 5's efforts to provide high quality professional development programs continued throughout the past school year. Staff development workshops were held at Keene Middle School and at Wheelock Elementary. We also worked with Keene High School Paraeducators and provided staff development at Franklin Elementary.

In addition to our work in Keene and Leland & Gray, the High 5/EOL team was busy sharing their expertise by providing professional learning opportunities across the country:

- Anne Louise Wagner and Lisa Hunt presented *Identifying & Managing Emotions as School Leaders* at the NHASP annual conference.
- Sam Copland and Phil Brown presented a *Rebuilding Community Through Play* workshop and a *Rebuilding After COVID* station at the BOOST conference in California.
- Anne Louise and Lisa presented a free webinar, *Practices to Help Students and Staff Identify and Talk About Emotions* on the Share My Lesson online platform.
- Anne Louise and Lisa provided staff development to Physical Education teachers in Westport, Connecticut.
- Sam and Phil presented *Activities that Focus on Emotions* at the virtual BOOST Cafe.
- Ryan McCormick and Lisa presented a custom workshop, *Experiential Basics for Social-Emotional Well-Being* to staff at the Mystic Seaport Museum in Connecticut.
- Anne Louise and Lisa presented the virtual workshop *Reclaiming Emotional Health: Integrating Emotional Stabilization Efforts within the School Community* for the New Hampshire Association of School Principals (NHASP).
- Anne Louise and Lisa provided staff development to faculty at Fuller Elementary School.
- Jim Grout participated in the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) Virtual Global Forum webinar *Taking Care of Teachers: SEL Starts with Adults*. Keene Middle School Principal Deanna Zilske also participated in this panel discussion.



This past summer we embarked upon a new initiative to develop a long-term professional experience that supports teachers' understanding and ability to live out the key concepts of High 5/EOL in classrooms and schools in a way that is wanted, needed, and practical. We're excited to be integrating new activities into our programming during the 2022/2023 school year to launch this multi-year effort and look forward to sharing more information in the future.

Teacher Quotes

"We saw a noticeable difference with our students being able to take safe risks and reach beyond their comfort zone."

"I noticed an increase in ability for some students to put words to their feelings and recognize the size of a problem."

"After struggling through the effects of COVID on the last two school years, it was a pleasure to be able to work with the High 5 staff in person this year. The increased focus on social and emotional learning was really important, and the High 5 staff rose to that challenge with the fifth graders."

"High 5 staff has a way of teaching with social-emotional learning in mind that I wasn't doing in the past. I tried to embrace and use their strategies throughout this school year."

"Because of COVID, our students came into sixth grade in a very different place. EOL adjusted and brought SEL to the classrooms and focused on the skills the students were lacking. Beginning to end was amazing. Number one thing was self awareness. If students needed help with this, they learned the vocabulary to use, and skills to use to make adjustments."

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. The main goal of High 5/EOL evaluation is to provide classroom teachers and school administrators the opportunity to share insights into the program’s impact on:

- Students’ social and emotional skills
- Teachers’ approaches to teaching and learning in their classrooms, and
- Administrators’ pursuit of improving school culture

Collecting and analyzing this information in order to inform program improvement is of the utmost importance. Working with an independent contractor assures our evaluation efforts are comprehensive and objective.



The Question

Our evaluation efforts during the 2021-2022 school year focused on the following guiding question: *To what extent is High 5/EOL meeting its goals to support teachers, students, and classroom communities in connecting, empowering, and leading, through adventure-based learning?*

Program evaluation aims included:

1. Exploring teachers’ and principals’ experiences with the High 5/EOL program and professional development
2. Understanding the potential impacts of High 5/EOL on teachers and students.
3. Comparing results of this evaluation with recent evaluations.

Thirty teachers and four principals responded in May-June 2022 to an online survey about their experience with High 5/EOL during the 2021-2022 school year. Descriptive analyses of quantitative data and thematic analyses of qualitative data were conducted. Analyses of recent evaluation reports were also conducted.

Summary of Findings

Students: Relationship skills, social and emotional awareness, and group functioning and problem solving skills were particularly influenced by High 5/EOL in the 2021-22 school year. Confidence was a new and frequently mentioned outcome. High 5/EOL was very important for students and classroom communities.

Teachers: High 5/EOL also had important effects on teachers, especially broadening their perspectives on their work and students, and learning new activity and facilitation skills. Teachers reported noticeable and strong impacts in most areas intentionally influenced by High 5/EOL. While teachers overwhelmingly had positive experiences, a few also offered suggestions to further enhance the utility of High 5/EOL for teachers.

Professional Development: For the subset of respondents who also participated in the High 5/EOL professional development, these teachers reported building relationships with colleagues and learning activity facilitation to be important outcomes of their experiences. Teachers and principals would like more professional development opportunities.

Principals: Comments about High 5/EOL from principals aligned with those of teachers.

High 5/EOL program: The flexibility and responsiveness of the High 5/EOL program provided opportunities for adaptation through adventure-based learning. High 5/EOL staff and the activities they led were highly regarded and appreciated. Staff provided variable and targeted support to teachers and classrooms, based on their individual needs.

Comparisons with past school years: High 5/EOL seemed to be needed more than ever to encourage opportunities for students and teachers to connect and learn vital social and emotional skills that contributed to better group work and functioning in the classroom. Given the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the adventure-and challenge-based activities and approaches of High 5/EOL provided continuity and built important skills as students and teachers adapted to being together again.

Bottom Line

Strengths of High 5/EOL include adaptability to specific contexts, strong staff members, and meaningful activities for students and teachers that advance social and emotional learning and connection with self and others. To further build on these assets, High 5/EOL should plan for more opportunities for empowerment and leadership, and more professional development for teachers.

Evaluation Takeaways

Comments from teachers about the increased challenges they faced due to diminished skills as a result of two years of COVID were telling. This seemed to be a consistent observation of many teachers throughout the report. It was also noteworthy that many of them spoke to the flexibility of our programming to meet the challenging and diminished skill levels. This is a key component of how we have adapted our curriculum, etc. to meet changing demands.

- Teachers see the value in watching High 5/EOL staff facilitate because it allows them to learn about their students as well as some activities and skills they can use with their students.
- Teachers repeatedly named High 5/EOL as “confidence boosting” this year and this speaks to our theme of Empowerment.
- Comments reinforced what we heard during end-of-year meetings and informal conversations: many teachers are interested and invested in their own development and growth to be able to facilitate sessions like the High 5/EOL team in their classrooms.



The Answer

Based on the thoughtful, reflective responses of teachers and principals, we can answer the guiding question of this evaluation: *To what extent is High 5/EOL meeting its goals to support teachers, students, and classroom communities in connecting, empowering, and leading, through adventure-based learning?*

To a large extent, High 5/EOL meets its goals to promote social and emotional learning and connection for students, teachers, and classroom communities. To a somewhat lesser extent, High 5/EOL meets its goals for promoting empowerment and leadership, which is understandable given the enormous pressures and constraints faced by educators and students during the COVID pandemic. Focusing on connection first sets the stage and builds the skills necessary to empower and lead. The skillful use of adventure-based learning and challenges offers students and teachers opportunities for personal and social growth and development, which are building blocks to social and academic success.

If we agree with Kurt Hahn that the “foremost task of education [is] to ensure the survival of these qualities: an enterprising curiosity, an undefeatable spirit, tenacity in pursuit, readiness for sensible self denial, and above all, compassion,” we see good evidence that High 5/EOL is an important partner for educators to complete this task.



Conclusion and Next Steps

Over the past school year we witnessed first-hand the lingering impacts of the COVID pandemic. Students exhibited delays in social-emotional skills due to time spent at home with remote learning in previous school years. Teachers were particularly challenged to increase students' academic levels while at the same time address emotional immaturity and behavioral issues.

In reflecting on High 5/EOL in terms of ourselves, others, and the greater collective, we identified a variety of challenges and gaps. There is the on-going need for us as educators and individuals to manage any continued fear, stress, and distractions from the pandemic. Within High 5/EOL we will continue to determine our evolving roles and structure of the department. Within schools, we see teachers needing more time for self care and to collaborate with each other. Students also need the time to play and relax with their peers.

Despite all this, we saw a lot of strength in teachers and students to bounce back from all that was thrown at them within the last school year and keep showing up to enjoy each other. We witnessed folks building strong connections and communities that allowed them to overcome some of the pressure of lack of time (and energy). Students and teachers demonstrated amazing resiliency skills, forging ahead with learning academic content and relearning how to connect and interact in positive and meaningful ways.

Overall, the biggest success of the past school year was how the High 5/EOL team collectively supported the Keene Schools, both in terms of the students and the adults in the community. Here are some other successes to celebrate:

- The High 5/EOL team was able to speak to our general themes in the classroom, but in a way that worked with the unique needs and current abilities of each of the classes and schools at the 5th grade level. This adaptability was necessary as we were seeing distinct differences between the 5th grade classes.
- Slowing down at the start of the year to discuss emotions and self-management strategies was important. We continued to loop back to the mood meter and emotions in creative and supportive ways throughout the year as well.
- We made room for extra conversation about emotions for adults, too. This took place mostly during professional development workshop days and team time or check-in meetings.
- Teachers demonstrated interest in getting more involved and building their facilitation skills/knowledge. Several teachers took extra time to collaborate with us to shape the themes for the sessions. Many teachers at the end of the year named that they wanted to take time to build their own capacity! They saw the importance and worthiness of this work and were willing to invest their time/thinking into it.

In thinking about the upcoming school year, we're enthusiastic about having the opportunity to dedicate time and energy to support educators' development in addition to working with students. There has been increasing interest from teachers to hone their skills and expand their knowledge in this work. We are able to organize ourselves where we can dive in to support the growth of those who are interested in going there with us. We're also excited to take what we learned from this past year and expand upon it, and are confident that High 5/EOL is going to put out some of its best work in 2022-2023!



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2021-2022 Program Stats

School Participation

Keene Elementary Schools



184 students
13 teachers

Keene Middle School

427 students
29 teachers



Program Sessions

Franklin Elementary - **18**

Fuller Elementary - **27**

Symonds Elementary - **18**

Wheelock Elementary - **18**

Keene Middle School

6th grade - **22**

7th grade - **34**

Bridges program - **5**

Challenge Course Visits

Elementary - **22**

(13 fall, 9 spring)

Middle School - **13**

(4 fall, 9 spring)



Total Sessions: 177

Total Participants:

611 students

42 teachers/administrators

Faculty Professional Development

Keene Middle School
August 30, 2021

Wheelock Elementary
August 31, 2021

KHS Paraeducators
August 31, 2021

Franklin Elementary
January 25, 2022