



# High 5/Edge of Leadership: 2022-2023 Year-End Report

November 2023

*Dear Friends,*

Since its inception, Edge of Leadership® (EOL) has provided impactful experiences that develop leadership skills through our unique experiential programs for students and educators. We're pleased to share this ninth annual report with you to demonstrate our work and its impact on our school partners, and the communities that they serve.

Our **School Programming** is uniquely successful because we:

- Intentionally address challenging topics, such as emotions and accountability for our actions. Our society can teach us to shy away from these topics.
- Go beyond social-emotional learning (SEL) by focusing on leadership skill-building. An effective leader balances care for self, for others and for the collective group.
- Integrate experiential and adventure learning pedagogy into our curriculum. Our programs are impactful and fun – and can serve as lessons for a lifetime.

Our newly-piloted **Professional Learning** initiative provides a different approach from the typical professional development structure because:

- We offer opportunities to nurture one's profession by learning and collaborating as a cohort of peers, instead of using lecture-based, expert-led styles of teaching.
- The work is structured as a facilitated experience that balances the growth of both the collective group and the individual.
- Content and approaches are aligned with our impactful student programming – because the foundations of our work serve all ages and communities.

This report demonstrates the successes and challenges of our work in Keene, NH and beyond, and summarizes the most current evaluation of program outcomes. Our appreciation for those who support our work cannot be overstated - we're truly fortunate to have the opportunity to do this crucial and meaningful work. THANK YOU!

Connect.  
Empower.  
Lead.

With gratitude and appreciation,

Anne Louise

Ryan

Jim

Chris

*The Edge of Leadership Team: Anne Louise Wagner, Ryan McCormick, Jim Grout, & Chris Sanchez*





## Our Mission

High 5 Adventure Learning Center is a non-profit educational organization dedicated to helping individuals, schools, teams, and communities use adventure experiences as an effective tool for improving the way they live, learn, work and lead together. High 5 provides educational experiences for all ages that develop a sense of connection and community in a learning environment of discovery, challenge, and fun.

## Our Themes:

**Connect. Empower.**

**Lead... Be the Example**

EOL's themes remain relevant and strong, particularly given the ever-changing landscape of education.

**Connect** - Building social and emotional skills to form trusting and supportive relationships.

**Empower** - Growing competency and confidence to solve problems, achieve goals, and overcome challenges.

**Lead** - Taking action to support the wellbeing of self, others and the collective.



## 2022-2023 School Year Highlights

### Programming Expands in Keene, NH

Emerging from pandemic-responsive programming, we've added sessions to 6th and 7th grade, and are working to grow middle school programming to be more inclusive of students in alternative education settings. Our programs focus on supporting others, responsibility and accountability, problem-solving and leadership. You can read about the important outcomes of this program beginning on Page 5.

### We Launched our New Professional Learning Pilot Program

Brand new! We have created a professional learning program, High 5-style, to support educators in their craft. A pilot program took place in the spring, eliciting promising feedback. A full-year program is underway for the 2023-2024 school year and beyond. See *Professional Learning* on Page 3 to learn about this exciting new program.

### New Educational Tools Emerge From Our Work

When we discover a need or challenge within our Keene Laboratory work – identified by our staff, students or educators – we use our ingenuity to create and experiment with new tools to meet the need. Our newest resource, home-grown in Keene: Emotions by High 5®, a set of flashcards that supports emotional intelligence.



### Summer High School Program Finds a New Normal

Our EOL Summer Program continues to rebuild after a pandemic pause. This year, 23 students and 5 adults from Greater Lowell Technical High School joined us for three days of meaningful and challenging activities to build leadership skills.





# Professional Learning

## EOL's Collaborative Professional Learning Cohort

It's crucial that educators are supported to build and maintain relationships, have permission to explore and take risks as they hone their craft, and have opportunities to lead as members of their community. Research shows the clear connection between educator well-being and student performance — when teachers are doing well, their students do better. However, so much of professional development focuses on what teachers can do for students, and not on what they can do for themselves, or for one another, to reinvigorate their practice and love for their craft.

Seeing this need, High 5 used our evidence-based experiential learning methods to create a completely different kind of professional learning — a year-long, personalized, facilitated process that connects educators to each other as peers and to their craft. Through engagement in activities, dialogue, and reflection, a supportive network is formed for continued professional growth beyond the year-long cohort experience.

**The initial experience ran from January to June 2023 with nine pilot cohort members participating, including:**

**1 fourth & 2 fifth grade classroom teachers**



**1 middle school paraeducator**



**2 sixth grade teachers (English & Special Education)**



**1 seventh grade teacher (Math)**



**1 middle school special education case manager/teacher**



**1 school counselor**

During our initial six-month pilot, each member dedicated an average of 26 hours to direct engagement with the cohort through monthly meetings, one-on-one meetings, and observation time. Additional time was spent independently through prompted reflection and generating written submissions. In total, the nine cohort members engaged in 230+ hours of cohort-related activities.

In the 2023-2024 school year, we're slated to have a range of educators with different specializations and grade levels, including folks from early elementary and high school. Unlike last year, this will run the full school year (from mid-August 2023 to late June 2024) with an estimated 40 hours of direct engagement within facilitated activities, reflection, and discussion.







## Professional Development Presentations

High 5's efforts to provide high quality professional learning programs continued throughout the past school year. We offered several professional learning opportunities in addition to the inception of EOL's Collaborative Professional Learning Cohort in Keene. Here are some highlights:

**June 27, 2022**

Anne Louise Wager and Lisa Hunt presented *Identifying & Managing Emotions* as School Leaders at the NHASP annual conference.

**August 25, 2022**

Sam Copland and Anne Louise Wagner provide staff development to educators at Wheelock Elementary School.

**April 15, 2023**

Ryan McCormick, Chris Sanchez and Sam Copland presented the workshop *Bad Ideas can Only Get Better* to support facilitators creativity and confidence when adapting activities to best meet their groups' needs at High 5's Annual Symposium.

**August 10, 2023**

Anne Louise Wager, Lisa Hunt and Aaron Moody (one of the educators that participated in the 2022-2023 cohort) presented *Taking the Time: Reflecting on Our Practice* in support of educators having more opportunities to pause and wonder about their past and future experiences as an educator in a growth-oriented way.

## College & University Affiliations

We are continuing to develop opportunities for collaboration with Keene State College to offer CEUs and college credit (when applicable) for High 5/EOL programs. We're also exploring additional affiliations with other colleges and universities, particularly for collaboration and possible research-based work with our EOL Collaborative Professional Learning Cohort in Keene.

**Keene**  
STATE COLLEGE





## Student Programming Evaluation

Edge of Leadership evaluation is an ongoing annual process that has evolved over time in content and format in order to gather and reflect on meaningful data. The main goal of High 5/EOL program 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 guiding question for 2022-2023 program evaluation was:

*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.

Thirty-one teachers and five principals responded in May-June 2023 to an online survey about their experience with EOL during the 2022-23 school year. An external evaluator (Dr. Ann Gillard) conducted descriptive analyses of quantitative data and thematic analyses of qualitative data. Analyses of recent evaluation reports were also conducted.

## Summary of Findings

**Students:** High 5/EOL strongly influenced group, leadership, and relationship skills in students. Students also improved their willingness to take risks and build community, as well as social and emotional skills. Educators reported some students still struggled with behavior and group dynamics.

**Teachers:** Participation in High 5/EOL is linked to improved mindsets and personal social and emotional awareness, encouragement to model behaviors expected of students, and integration of adventure and challenge concepts in the classroom and academic work. One effect that was particularly strong this school year was the formation of stronger classroom communities.

Overall, skilled and reflective staff and flexible, classroom-specific activities are the key ingredients in High 5/EOL.



*My experience last year at Edge of Leadership was genuinely life-changing. I pushed myself well beyond my limits and discovered my true self."*

- Logan, EOL Summer Program Student





## Top Student Skills Impacted by EOL

Theme	Teacher Quotes
<b>Social &amp; Emotional Awareness</b>	<i>Between the EOL programming and our regular Bridges program, I have seen an increase in student's self-control and self-regulation skills compared with the beginning of the year.</i>
	<i>I feel like the students really benefit from talking about awareness of their actions and the way their actions can impact the group goal.</i>
	<i>EOL has had the strongest impact on students' social awareness skills.</i>
	<i>I think the biggest skill EOL has impacted in my students is thinking beyond themselves - thinking of others. They came into the year incredibly self focused. Many have built a greater awareness and appreciation for their classmates. Not all, but many.</i>
	<i>Self managing emotions.</i>
	<i>High 5 is a great way to build community and develop certain executive functioning skills.</i>
	<i>It brings out positives in kids who don't often shine academically. I've seen kids who may feel like they don't have anything to contribute in group class work get very involved in High 5 activities.</i>
<b>Group Work</b>	<i>Willingness to work together with purpose.</i>
	<i>Helping kids with leadership skills so everyone has a voice.</i>
	<i>Listening to the input of others, and ensuring that everyone has a chance to share their ideas.</i>
	<i>The most impact was on their group problem-solving skills. Students are willing to take risks within the group setting.</i>

## Recommendations

The primary recommendation of this evaluation is to continue the High 5/EOL model, and consider expanding to more classrooms and schools. Given the consistency of outcomes as perceived by teachers over several years, the model of Connect-Empower-Lead contributes to the development of both students and teachers' social and emotional awareness and group functioning.

## Closing Thoughts

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?

The answer: To a large extent, High 5/EOL meets its goals to promote connection, empowerment, and leadership in classroom communities. A key mechanism of High 5/EOL's efforts include intervention at the teacher level, through modeling effective facilitation and group management skills.

John Dewey - American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer - was a fierce advocate for experiential education: learning through doing. High 5/EOL has demonstrated how doing - be it problem solving, challenges, or reflection - are key ingredients for the learning of students, teachers, and school communities.







## Professional Learning Evaluation

In addition to evaluating EOL programming this past year, we conducted a separate evaluation of our Collaborative Professional Learning Cohort during the spring of 2023. Data was drawn from a focus group with all 9 members of the cohort, surveys, and documents and artifacts from the program.

### Guiding questions:

1. How well did the Collaborative Professional Learning Cohort program work? (What was transformed or changed?)
2. To what extent is the Collaborative Professional Learning Cohort program producing worthwhile results?
3. How satisfied are the Collaborative Professional Learning Cohort participants?
4. What were the particular features of the Collaborative Professional Learning Cohort program and context that made a difference?

### The primary social-emotional changes in participants identified in relationship to EOL themes included:

- **Self** – reflecting on teaching practice more often and more deeply
- **Others** – supporting and being supported by others
- **Collective** – building school community
- **Connect** – with other educators
- **Empower** – to be more confident to try new things
- **Lead** – students and school communities in social-emotional skills

Changes to educators' integration of EOL themes and practices in their own classrooms reflected (1) stepping back and encouraging students to lead activities, and (2) adjusting curriculum to better meet the needs of students.

### Three themes demonstrated the key changes experienced by the Collaborative Professional Learning Cohort:

1. More reflection
2. Connections with others/ support system
3. Trusting self

### Key results identified by the focus group:

1. "Professional nurturing"
2. Appreciating focusing on educator practice in COVID context
3. Becoming more willing to try new things; finding my voice
4. Connecting with other educators – forming a community of practice
5. Taking more time to understand, connect with, and empower students

*"This has been probably the best professional development of my career so far. The most valuable that I can actually really use. And it's going to benefit staff and it's going to benefit the students. It's going to be something that can continue to evolve even if this group is ending. But even if all of the ties with High 5 were to stop at some point for us personally, I know that I can continue with that area of inquiry. Feel confident continuing to build on that for many years."*

- Cohort Member

### Conclusions

Based on examination of data from multiple sources, we can conclude the following about the Educator Professional Development program:

- This program provides educators with high quality experiences in a valuable space where they meaningfully reflect with a caring and supportive community the art and practice of education.
- The educator-specific and high quality coaching provided by EOL staff appears to lead to educator practices likely to foster greater student engagement.





## Conclusions and Next Steps

Over the past school year we have continued to hone our educational facilitation skills and share our expertise through implementing EOL in the Keene Laboratory School and elsewhere. We've developed educational products to supplement and enhance EOL programming. We've created and implemented EOL's Collaborative Professional Learning Cohort, a new highly individualized and comprehensive initiative. Evaluation data and feedback has allowed us to identify and reflect on past programming, to gain insight into improving our work and meeting the ever changing needs of students, educators and school communities.

Renowned guitarist and Led Zeppelin founder Jimmy Page once said, "I believe every guitar player inherently has something unique about their playing. They just have to identify what makes them different and develop it."

The EOL team has done just that - we've named what's unique and different about our program. We've intentionally worked outside current expectations in educational programming, and forged a model based on the real-time needs of students and teachers. We understand the need to challenge ourselves and others to think beyond convention and develop new pathways to learning. We'll continue to improve and expand upon the work we do, creating an even stronger connection between the impacts we're having on students through programming, and the impacts we're having on educators through professional learning. Being unique and different is what makes EOL so successful!



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## 2022-2023 Program Statistics

### School Participation

Keene Elementary Schools  
184 students • 10 teachers



Keene Middle School  
402 students • 31 teachers

### Program Sessions

Franklin Elementary - 20

Fuller Elementary - 30

Symonds Elementary - 30

Wheelock Elementary - 18

Keene Middle School - 59



### Challenge Course Visits



Elementary - 28 (fall & spring)

Middle School - 13 (fall & spring)

**Total Sessions: 198**

**Total Participants:**

**586 students • 41 teachers/administrators**

### EOL Summer 2022

Greater Lowell Technical High School

**15 students • 3 adults**



### EOL Summer 2023

Greater Lowell Technical High School

**23 students • 5 adults**



### Faculty Professional Development

Wheelock Elementary - August 25, 2022

### EOL Professional Learning Cohort

January - June 2023

**9 cohort members**

from Keene elementary and middle schools

**230+ total hours  
of cohort work**

