



High 5/Edge of Leadership: 2023-2024 Year-End Report

October 2024

Dear Friends of High 5,

Within schools today, both educators and students are facing immense challenges. Students are challenged by disrupted learning, mental health struggles, and instability at home. Teachers are navigating increasingly complex student behaviors and questioning their effectiveness and career choices. As an adventure education organization, High 5 addresses these critical issues by empowering educators, students, and school communities to navigate challenges and develop skills that fall under the umbrella of leadership.

Our programming invites students and educators to discover the style of leadership that fits their strengths, values, and passions. Many often hesitate to see themselves as leaders, but when we guide them to rethink what leadership truly means their perspectives shift. Growing the confidence to lead by example creates significant ripple effects throughout a school's culture, fostering a positive attitude toward learning and the resilience to persevere through challenges until resolution is achieved. Classrooms and schools thrive when everyone collectively exercises leadership. Redefining what leadership means is an important element of work - expanding leadership beyond a title someone holds or their ability to speak in front of a crowd. For us, leadership is defined as taking action to support the well-being of self, others, and the collective.

We are proud to share our impact through this publication showcasing our successes from the year and what's next. Through experimentation, evaluation, and reflection we continue to push ourselves to refine our craft and meet the evolving needs of schools. And we don't do this alone. With immense gratitude we recognize the impacts we've made over the last decade have been fueled by other leaders within our network. Thank you for your unwavering support as we partner in growing the next generation of leaders.

Sincerely, 
Nancy Heydinger & The Edge of Leadership Team



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.

Professional Learning Cohort for Educators

The 2023-2024 school year was the first time we ran the Professional Learning Cohort for the full year - with last year's 6-month pilot serving as our foundation to build from. Eleven cohort members were chosen from a pool of 30+ applicants to participate in an engaging and powerful facilitated experience responsive to their needs, challenges, and interests. The additional time allowed for members to build even deeper connections and dive further into personal projects. Dr. Ann Gillard conducted a robust evaluation using a focus group, document review, and surveys to support our understanding of the effectiveness of this professional learning experience. Three themes emerged as the key changes experienced by the Professional Learning Cohort members:

- Personal growth/self-reflection (ex. increased tools for classroom management)
- Connections with others to build a professional support system
- Coping with educational challenges in and out of the classroom or school.

The evidence strongly supported educators feeling connected and empowered, but there was less evidence for educators leading in their school communities based on the cohort members' self-reported engagement with the three themes. Although we personally witnessed many moments of leadership amongst this group of educators based on our definition of leadership, they may not have seen themselves as leaders while in search of big shifts in the educational landscape. As we prepare for the next cohort, leadership will be highlighted and explored further with more opportunities to stretch and explore in this realm.

Regardless, all participants made meaningful connections within the cohort, some were empowered to work more with administrators and others in their schools, and some identified new ways of leading their classrooms and leadership opportunities for their students. Participants engaged in adventure and experiential learning throughout the program and many practiced their newfound "bag of tricks" with students. All participants reported practicing extensive reflection through intentional and specific engagement with High 5 facilitators.



"[The] cohort has really helped me feel I am not alone in the pressures I often put on myself. The honest conversations on how to reset . . . have been a large reason I am feeling better about continuing to be an educator. The connections and relationships made with other educators within the district have been extremely helpful and important to support my career."

2023-24 Cohort Member

Educator Outcomes

With the help of cohort members past and present, we drafted a proposed **Theory of Change** framework to capture the intended impact of the program.

Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long-Term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increase knowledge and familiarity with adventure + experiential concepts ■ Build connections and relationships ■ Process thought-provoking questions with others ■ Engage in supported self-reflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Embrace adventure + experiential learning principles ■ Develop community support network ■ Be validated and gain deeper perspective of other school community members' experiences ■ Trust your own instinct and confirming clarity of purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Make pro-education choices and changes ■ Maintain long-term relationships amongst cohort educator partners ■ Spark changes in self, others, community, and systems ■ Be empowered to align their role with their strengths and passions within education



School Programming

For more than a decade, we have been honored to partner with 5th, 6th, and 7th grade students and educators in the Keene School District to refine and model leadership skills through our innovative programming. Continuing our tradition, we conducted an impact evaluation by Dr. Ann Gillard, which educators and principals completed at School Administrative Unit 29 (SAU29).

The evaluation reveals that EOL's school programming helped educators address challenges by demonstrating and facilitating transferable skills and providing opportunities for perspective-taking and reflection. In comparison to previous evaluation reports, this evaluation found transferable skills to be a strong outcome of this year's programming.

Educators Reflect on Student Improvement

"... improved perseverance in the face of difficult problems."

"...improved accountability, students now have vocabulary and experiences to reflect on."

"...growth in student leadership skills, creativity, and outside-the-box thinking."

"...improved self-management, growth in students faster than expected."

"Students are thinking about how to solve a problem instead of making impulsive choices."



The Middle School Framework

Our Middle School Framework for grades 5 through 7 outlines the structured sequence and organization of themes and learning objectives across different grade levels. It frames the mindset we adopt when facilitating sessions and setting up the program to guide student learning, and is designed to maintain the creativity of EOL teachers as they deliver the program, providing a structured yet flexible approach to our programming.

■ Grade 5: Support

Students learn to understand the value of helping others and seeking support when needed.

■ Grade 6: Responsibility and Accountability

Students learn to take ownership of their actions, both academically and socially, fostering a sense of accountability towards themselves and their community.

■ Grade 7: Self-sufficiency

Students learn to make informed decisions, manage their time effectively, and navigate challenges with resilience.

■ Grade 8: Leadership in Action

Students explore what it means to lead with integrity and empathy, honing their communication and collaboration skills.



Elevating Student Support Through a New Model

In the 2024-25 school year, EOL will implement a transformative delivery model that will assign a dedicated EOL Educator to follow each grade level. This innovative structure empowers EOL to:

- Deepen relationships with students through sustained, personalized support.
- Foster long-term growth
- Adapt more effectively to students' evolving needs and challenges.
- Launch new initiatives including replication efforts, training models, and educational product development.

Example of a New Program Increasing Student Support

Historically, students in Keene Middle School's Horizons program—a specialized initiative designed to provide additional support beyond what is available in general special education—have participated in grade-level clusters. However, we observed scheduling conflicts and realized that many students struggled to fully grasp the program's objectives. This year, we dedicated specific time to working directly with Horizons students, aiming to better address their needs and integrate them more effectively. The positive impact was clear during their spring visit to the challenge course, where students exceeded their perceived limits, displaying both fear and remarkable determination. The new program proved to be a significant and transformative experience for this group as well as the EOL staff.

Vision for the Future

EOL is positioning itself for sustainable expansion by replicating its model beyond the Keene Lab Schools. A strategic approach will allow EOL to reach more students and educators while effectively implementing our proven frameworks in new settings, while maintaining our commitment to innovation and the program's core values. As we look to the next school year, we foresee;

- Extending our reach by introducing the program to more schools – including professional learning opportunities, and challenge course experiences.
- Creating a publication detailing EOL's Framework.
- Expanding offerings at the middle school level (i.e. programming for 8th graders) and high school level (i.e. sports team development).
- Several SAU29 town school educators participating in the Professional Learning Cohort along with Keene School District staff.

Our visions, from the previous decade and those newly established, are all accomplishable due to the support we graciously receive from those within our network. We appreciate our school partners for dedicating time, thought, and input to our evolving work.

We look forward to more opportunities to deepen our connection and offerings within SAU29 and beyond as we look ahead to the 2024-2025 school year.



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We extend our deepest gratitude to C&S Wholesale Grocers for their early and insightful recognition of the transformative impact experiential learning and strategic leadership development have on students, educators, school cultures, and communities. For eleven years, C&S Wholesale Grocers has committed unwavering support to Edge of Leadership programming that is instrumental to developing the model, framework, and delivery of teaching empowering leadership skills to SAU29's school communities.