



Edge of Leadership Annual Report 2024–2025

NOVEMBER 2025

Dear Friends of High 5,

In our world of rapid change and uncertainty, the need for leadership that can navigate the unknown has never been greater. At Edge of Leadership (EOL), we remain deeply committed to preparing students and educators to meet these challenges with courage, connection, and empowerment. The 2024–2025 school year was certainly transformative: we expanded our reach, refined our approach, and continued to demonstrate the power of adventure education in shaping resilient leaders. From students stepping beyond their comfort zones on the challenge course to educators reimagining leadership in their classrooms, we were honored to witness leadership in action every day.

Our theme, “Connect. Empower. Lead.” continues to inspire and guide our work. Students gained confidence, accountability, and problem-solving skills, while educators strengthened their practice, developed professional networks, and discovered new ways to lead in their schools. These experiences ripple outward, building stronger school communities and a culture of leadership that extends far beyond any single classroom.

Connect.
Empower.
Lead.

As we look ahead, EOL remains committed to expanding our impact, reaching more students, supporting more educators, and deepening partnerships that make this work possible. We’re truly grateful for your leadership and belief in this work. Your support is essential to this mission, enabling us to continue cultivating growth, resilience, and possibility in the next generation of leaders, leaders ready to Connect, Empower, and Lead.

With gratitude,

Nancy Heydinger

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.



School Programming

Student Voices:

"I learned I can step up and lead even when I feel nervous. The challenge course showed me I'm capable of more than I thought."

— Grade 7

"Working with my team on the adventure challenges helped me listen better and trust others. I feel more confident in class, too."

— Grade 6

"I realized helping others doesn't make me weaker; it makes the whole group stronger. I can use that every day at school."

— Grade 8

Educator Voices:

"I've seen students take more ownership of their learning and show leadership in ways I didn't expect. The program makes these skills stick."

— Middle School Teacher

"The EOL framework has changed how I guide students. They're more reflective, collaborative, and willing to take risks."

— 5th Grade Teacher

"Students are more resilient and proactive. I notice them applying lessons from the challenge course in everyday classroom situations."

— 7th Grade Teacher



Highlights from 2024-2025:

- Middle School Framework Expansion: We expanded our grade-level leadership curriculum, introducing new components for 8th graders that focus on leadership in action.
- New Student Support Model: A dedicated EOL Educator now follows each grade level to provide sustained, personalized support for students. This model has already shown promise in strengthening relationships and fostering long-term growth.
- We worked with 605 students, including upper elementary and middle school participants in core programming, high school programming with sports teams, and the Summer Leadership Program.
- We formally summarized our lessons so that educators can better reinforce EOL learnings in their classroom.
- Educators requested additional professional development workshops and summer curriculum planning sessions.
- We have been invited to share insights from our upcoming book about EOL theory as the featured speaker at the 2026–27 SAU29 all-district meeting.

Horizons Program Success

This year, we restructured our support for the Horizons program at Keene Middle School. Horizons is a specialized, small-group learning environment for students who need additional academic, social-emotional, or behavioral support beyond the traditional classroom. Through this partnership, students engaged in tailored leadership experiences that helped them push beyond their perceived limits, leading to transformative moments of personal growth.



Professional Learning Cohort for Educators

In its second full year, the Professional Learning Cohort has proven to be an essential resource for educators striving to meet the evolving needs of their students without experiencing burnout. We saw educators not only gain important insights but also build a sense of community and support that transcends their individual schools. Under the evaluation by Dr. Ann Gillard, key themes emerged:

Connection and Support: The cohort allowed educators to build a network of professional relationships, sharing strategies and overcoming challenges together.

Personal Growth and Self-Reflection: Educators gained valuable tools for the classroom and deepened their own leadership practices.

Navigating Educational Challenges: Educators felt better equipped to handle the unexpected within the classroom and school environment, thanks to the cohort's structure, lessons, and support system.

Dr. Gillard conducted a rigorous evaluation, including focus groups, surveys, and document review. This year, Dr. Gillard studied the long-term impacts of the professional learning experience amongst past participants and determined:

"Being part of this group helped me reconnect with my passion for teaching and the core ideals that originally inspired me to choose this profession. There was something deeply nourishing about gathering with fellow educators. The thoughtful activities and exercises designed by High 5 created a space where we could open up, share our vulnerabilities and struggles, and also celebrate our joys and triumphs. No matter how exhausted I was at the end of a school day, I knew that spending two hours with this group would leave me feeling energized, supported, and uplifted."

— Jen Kiernan, a Special Education Teacher at Harrisville Wells Memorial School



New Evaluation Partner: Goshen Education Consultants

As Dr. Ann Gillard retires, we honor her decade of service and guidance in shaping EOL's program development and evaluation. Building on this foundation, EOL has partnered with Goshen Education Consultants to lead the next phase of program evaluation.



As EOL has grown from its early learning roots into fully established school and professional learning programs, this new partnership will provide deeper insights into outcomes, refine our approach, and inform strategic growth.

Vision for the Future: Growth & Expansion

EOL is focused on thoughtfully growing impact while maintaining program quality and intentionality. Building on insights from our 2024–25 retreat, our priorities for the coming years include:

- **Expanding School Programming & Use of EOL Framework:** Using our new book (coming in 2026), we'll bring adventure learning and leadership experiences to more educators. It will serve as a guide for educators to implement EOL theory with fidelity and help to integrate leadership skills into classroom delivery.
- **Growing the Professional Learning Offerings for Educators:** Increase cohort-inspired programming and strengthen educators' ability to translate learning into school-wide leadership and culture change.
- **Finding New Opportunities for High School Leadership Development:** Provide programming for sports teams, clubs and student government, extending opportunities for growth for older students.
- **Strengthening Internal Systems to Support Sustainable Growth** Refine staffing structures and program systems to ensure consistent, high-quality delivery that enables scalable growth across all programs.

Gratitude and Acknowledgments

As always, High 5 is deeply grateful for the unwavering support of our partners, especially C&S Wholesale Grocers, whose continued commitment has been instrumental in the success of EOL programming. Their dedication to fostering leadership in young people has played a pivotal role in our ability to grow and make a lasting impact.

