



UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

CHANGE THE WORLD FROM HERE

Social-Emotional Learning and Play

by

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Abstract

Playworks is a growing national nonprofit that uses an evidence-based program to deliver opportunities for social-emotional learning (SEL) to children at elementary schools. This program is innovative in its approach, focusing on recess, a predominantly overlooked part of the school day. Recess is a time when children learn how to interact with each other in an unstructured environment. It provides an opportunity where, with the right tools, children can learn cooperation, good decision-making, conflict resolution, teamwork, and leadership – all essential SEL skills. Playworks fosters an environment where these opportunities thrive.

While Playworks is confident in their program's effectiveness, this project further substantiates the connection between Playworks' SEL competency building and students' ability to successfully navigate the school system. This project examines the state of existing literature on the topic, and analyzes an internal Playworks survey to devise approachable ways for staff to discuss SEL in the context of their work on the ground. Survey results, the literature review, and expert interviews inform the creation of a messaging matrix and map to further aid Playworks staff in their fluency of the topic.

The intention of this project is to provide more data-based evidence to build Playworks' case and provide recommendations to the organization and the field. The broader goal is to enhance the field of SEL and encourage the sector in connecting SEL to longer term and broader economic and public health outcomes. Currently in the "awareness building" stage, the field of SEL has the potential to revolutionize public policy and transform the educational experience of all students.

Keywords

Social-emotional learning, SEL competencies, Playworks, play, recess, school success, non-cognitive skills, mindsets, emotional intelligence, systems change

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Keywords.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Tables and Charts.....	v
Introduction.....	Page 1
Objectives and Values.....	Page 4
Methods.....	Page 6
Results	
Literature Review.....	Page 11
Survey Results.....	Page 38
Expert Interviews.....	Page 45
Discussion and Analysis.....	Page 53
Limitations.....	Page 62
Recommendations.....	Page 63
Conclusions.....	Page 68
References.....	Page 70
Appendices.....	Page 75

List of Tables and Figures

Table 1. “Social-Emotional Learning” Chart.....	Page 18
Table 2. SEL Measurement Chart.....	Page 19
Table 3. Playworks State of SEL.....	Page 21
Table 4. Influences of Absenteeism.....	Page 24
Table 5. Teacher Survey Results.....	Page 31
Table 6. Buzzwords Table.....	Page 39
Table 7. Receptivity Chart.....	Page 40
Table 8. Messaging Map.....	Page 41
Table 9. Confidence Level Table.....	Page 42
Table 10. Challenges Graph.....	Page 43
Table 11. Terminology Map.....	Page 54
Table 12. Receptivity Map.....	Page 56
Table 13. Matrix Excerpt.....	Page 60

Introduction

Playworks is a growing national nonprofit that uses an evidence-based program to deliver opportunities for social-emotional learning (SEL) to children at elementary schools. This program is innovative in its approach, focusing on recess, a previously overlooked part of the school day. Recess is a time when children learn how to interact with each other in an unstructured environment. Many children across the country, however, are coming to school lacking the pro-social skills needed to be successful on the playground together. At its worst, recess is the most concentrated time of bullying, disciplinary incidents, office referrals, and violence. At its best, however, recess is also an opportunity where, with the right tools, children can learn cooperation, good decision-making, conflict resolution, teamwork, and leadership. Playworks helps foster an environment where these opportunities thrive (playworks.org, 2016).

Playworks' mission is to promote the health and well-being of children by increasing opportunities for physical activity and safe, meaningful play. Based in Oakland, California, Playworks plans to reach 3.5 million kids at 7,000 schools across the country by 2020 (The Play Movement, 2017). The program has three main programs:

- **Playworks Coach:** A full time Playworks staff person works at a partner school facilitating games and creating a positive climate at recess and throughout the day.
- **TeamUp:** An experienced coach provides year-long consultation and support to four schools throughout the year to guide their recess teams towards delivering healthy play independently.
- **Playworks Pro:** Professional development training for school teachers and staff in Playworks' methodologies and practices (playworks.org, 2016).

Over the last 20 years, Playworks has been enormously successful in measuring and delivering these programs proven to increase students' social-emotional competencies. Playworks' evaluation team has collected data and evidence that their programs increase these competencies, defined by CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, & Emotional Learning) as essential for positive social development. (casel.org, 2016).

CASEL and other organizations have also developed a strong and growing body of literature proving positive long-term outcomes for students who develop these competencies when they are young. Many of these outcomes are connected with positive adult outcomes: higher high school graduation rates, higher numbers of students attending college, and higher likelihood of working full time by age 25 (Jones, Greenberg & Crowley, 2015). A tome of existing literature indicates there is evidence that developing social-emotional competencies in young children can give them the tools they need to navigate the school system and graduate high school. This research project will focus on that process, as a step towards longer term, broader outcomes such as increased access to employment opportunities, and higher lifetime earnings that are a result of earning a high school diploma.

While Playworks is confident in their program's effectiveness, this connection is not absolutely clear in their SEL messaging. Executive leadership is not sure as to whether Playworks program staff is fluent in robust and evidence-based messaging around this focal area. Playworks program staff may also be challenged by a lack of common language around social-emotional development by teachers, principals, parents, and district staff.

The purpose of this capstone project is to make these connections, and to devise approachable ways for Playworks staff to discuss the SEL field in the context of their work on the ground. The intention is to provide more data-based evidence to build their case, and to add to the growing body of literature that spreads the growing awareness of the importance of SEL and the long-term impacts it can create in students.

Objectives and Values

Objectives

The objectives of this capstone project are as follows:

- To provide Playworks with a robust literature review and discussion on the topic including:
 - An overview of existing language and definitions
 - Playworks internal and external SEL evidence
 - Available data and evidence on SEL and school success
 - Available evidence on the connection to long-term positive adult outcomes
 - The bigger connection to policy and systems change
- To clarify language, terminology, and definitions around SEL, and provide a mapping tool for Playworks staff to more clearly understand what language is used throughout the country
- To provide messaging data for Playworks Regional Partnerships Directors and Program Directors and Managers for talking with principals, parents, and school and district staff about the efficacy of Playworks programming in creating SEL opportunities and why this matters
- To further substantiate the connection between the development of social-emotional competencies and Playworks' contributions to the field
- To make recommendations for next stages of Playworks evaluation and for the emerging SEL field

Values

As an organization, Playworks seeks to exemplify their core values in every day of their work. These values include: respect, inclusion, healthy play, and healthy community. As a researcher at the University of San Francisco, in my approach I also hold close the values of equity and empathy. As a researcher that also works at Playworks, I have made the attempt to create an unbiased and objective report in an area separate from my normal job description. The population surveyed in this report consists of many respondents with whom I have very little

interaction with at the organization. So while the survey responses were submitted to a colleague, the questions on the survey did not contain any information that would reflect job performance or other ethical issues. My hope is that as a member of the Playworks organization, my approach is motivated and informed by my passion and inspiration behind the mission. As a leader that values equity and empathy, my hope is also that this project will help inform the movement that Playworks is building to create the next generation of leaders in this country that also value these entities.

Methods and Approaches

This project examined the research question: What social-emotional competencies do students need to possess to succeed in school, and how does Playworks develop those competencies?

Additionally these guiding questions informed the study:

- What is predictive about students' high school graduation rates?
- What protection factors need to be present?
- What social-emotional competencies do students need to navigate the educational system and graduate high school?
- How does Playworks create those competencies?
- How does this development and outcome around graduation link to larger social and economic impacts, policy work, and systems change?
- What terminology and language is used in various regions throughout the country to refer to this issue?
- What information do Playworks staff need to navigate this and effectively message their program?

Hypotheses

Based on institutional history with Playworks and initial conversations with Playworks executives and a preliminary literature review, the following hypotheses were formed:

1. There are many organizations developing strong and effective SEL programs but the field is scattered and full of contradicting and confusing terminology.
2. Playworks has evaluations to show that they create SEL competencies but schools are not open to it or awareness has not spread so it is challenging to message.
3. SEL is a predictor of high school graduation rates and that there is evidence in the field to prove it.
4. SEL skills have long-term positive outcomes.
5. More data and clear evidence is needed to influence policy, especially under the current administration.

To reach these objectives, and to respond to these hypotheses, this project consisted of a robust literature review, an internal survey of Playworks staff, and expert interviews.

Literature Review

The literature review focuses on the research and guiding questions to address these hypotheses, using online search tools such as the Gleeson Library, Google Scholar, and websites of influential organizations. Articles were uncovered initially through search engines, then subsequently through the reference lists of the most important articles discovered. The literature gathered about Playworks specific topics was gathered through Playworks internal evaluations sites and through conversation with director of evaluation Jennette Claassen. The literature review was divided into five sections according to the hypotheses and based on the objectives. This created an overview of the SEL field as well as Playworks' place in that, followed by a deep dive into the broader implications of these outcomes. The literature review itself was requested by Playworks as a deliverable for this project. It also informs the messaging tool developed also as a deliverable for Playworks, and for these reasons it is included in the results section.

Playworks Internal Survey

Next, a survey was created in conjunction with Jennette Claassen and Eileen Pederson, Director of Impact at Playworks. The survey questions are meant to supplement the information about SEL discovered through the literature review and are geared to help understand the language and programs used throughout the Playworks nation, as well as identify challenges and

confidence level of staff in messaging this data. The survey was drafted in Playworks' internal network through Google forms, then sent to Claassen and Pederson for review and feedback. After incorporating their suggestions and expertise and ensuring that the responses were in alignment with what they both hoped to discover, it was sent to Playworks' three Regional Executive Officers for permission to disperse among participants. This permission was granted with an opportunity to speak on a national program call to introduce the survey to the participants. A slide and talking points were created to communicate the importance of the survey not only for myself and my education but also to ensure and instill in understanding that this will culminate in a tool helpful to the respondents themselves. The Regional Executive Officers agreed that this presentation prior to serve a distribution was essential to create the buy-in necessary to garner stronger participation.

Survey results were collected in google forms and analyzed for incorporation into the discussion and messaging tool. Responses to survey questions were translated to google sheets for further analysis. Responses to open-ended questions were sorted in sheets and coded by emergent themes that were then assigned quantitative values to determine frequency within the sample. Results are reported in the results section, and discussed and analyzed in depth in the discussion section of this report.

Expert Interviews

Lastly, interview questions were created and email and phone outreach was performed to determine three experts in the field that would supplement information missing from the literature review. The interviewees included:

Jennette Claassen: As Director of Evaluation at Playworks, Claassen is in the position to lead all measurement and evaluation efforts around social-emotional competency development at Playworks. Her work and her leadership inform the way that Playworks talks publicly about SEL and what they measure in this field. This interview served to help guide my understanding of where Playworks was positioned, what information, data points, and tools were missing, and what direction Playworks would like to go with SEL evaluation.

Sara Krachman: Krachman is the Co-Founder and Executive Director of Transforming Education, a leading research and policy organization in the field of SEL. Playworks and Transforming Education are currently in collaboration in a project measuring SEL impacts of the Playworks program in Southern California. As Executive Director, Krachman leads the strategy and direction of the organization. Her expertise helped guide the discussion of the broader SEL field and the long-term implications of this kind of work in terms of systems change and public policy.

Charlene Voyce: Voyce is the Director of Out-of-School-Time Partnerships at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. The Center collaborates with Playworks, and Voyce is currently working on a project adapting components of Yale's SEL initiative (RULER) to out-of-school-time programs, including Playworks. She has worked in the field of SEL for 26 years and informed the discussion around language and terminology, and current public policy.

Expert interview results will be outlined in the results section and discussed further in the discussion section as they relate to the literature review and survey results.

Messaging Tool and Map

Together the results of these three data collection methods informed the messaging tool and map developed as a deliverable for Playworks.

The map included in the results section was created by transferring survey results into Excel, and sorted to be used in Google Maps. This data was uploaded to the map in layers to visualize themes and consistencies across the country for the following topics: school receptivity to conversations about SEL, common terms or buzzwords used in the area, other SEL programs available, staff fluency, and other professional development teachers receive. The map is a live tool that can be accessed via the link provided in the results section and can be manipulated to view that data in different ways.

The messaging tool is a matrix developed in Google Sheets, synthesizing several aspects of collected data. The tool was originally conceptualized and started by Jennette Claassen and Eileen Pederson of Playworks, and their format and ideas served as a starting place. The literature review provided most of the evidence support, and the survey results informed the game examples included. The full tool is included in the appendices.

Results

Literature Review

To better understand the landscape of the field of social-emotional learning (SEL) and Playworks' opportunities within it, it was first essential to synthesize the growing body of literature in the subject. The field of SEL is scattered across the globe, with dozens of studies proving over and over the effectiveness of SEL skill development towards long-term adult outcomes. Several organizations have stepped up to help create overarching language and structures to support this burgeoning field, and yet there is still much to be evaluated. Respecting the limits of the research question, this literature review is structured by hypothesis. The review begins with a discussion of more general SEL literature, describing a short history of the field, some definitions, common language, key players, and measurements. Next the review puts Playworks at the center, focusing on how SEL has been measured at Playworks, and some of the evidence base from which the organization has become confident in their success. Discussed next is the academic and school success outcomes that point toward the meat of the research question, followed by a discussion of the broader implication of these outcomes in regards to systems change and public policy.

Hypothesis 1: There are many organizations developing strong and effective SEL programs but the field is scattered and full of contradicting and confusing terminology.

This section describes the history, definitions, language, and measurement tools used in the field of SEL. The purpose is to provide a background and overall understanding of the concept and the field.

In “Social and Emotional Learning: A Short History,” the author describes the birth of the field dating back to the 1960’s. It began with an examination of low performing schools in New Haven, Connecticut, and a series of interventions based in children’s psychological and social development. The field grew slowly through school-based interventions identifying needs for children’s emotional competence. One of the more influential SEL organizations, CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning) was created in 1994 and helped coin the term “SEL.” Again the movement was largely research driven and being developed primarily in academia prior to the early 2000’s when the terminology and conversation became more mainstream. CASEL and other drivers behind this movement created the bill HR 2437 in 2011, the Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act, to attempt to shape public policy in the field. The bill did not pass, despite bipartisan support, but was another step in the legitimization of the field. CASEL, Transforming Education, the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, and other education research organizations continue to pave the way for a more mainstream understanding of the importance of social and emotional learning in schools (Social and Emotional Learning, a Short History, 2011).

CASEL, as described above, has taken the lead with the creation of a language, framework, and definitions of overarching social-emotional competencies. In their report

“Effective Social Emotional Learning Programs,” the authors give an overview of the competencies and their impacts. They define the five main competency clusters as follows:

- **Self-Awareness:** A person’s ability to recognize emotions and thoughts and their influences on behavior. Assessing one’s own strengths and limits and a sense of confidence and optimism
- **Self-Management:** A person’s ability to regulate their emotions, thoughts and behaviors in different situations, manage stress, control impulses, motivate, and work towards goals
- **Social Awareness:** A person’s ability to perceive and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand behavioral norms, and recognize surrounding support systems
- **Relationship Skills:** A person’s ability to create healthy relationships with people and groups, communicate clearly, actively listen, resolve conflicts, seek and offer help
- **Responsible Decision Making:** A person’s ability to make respectful and constructive decisions about behavior, consider ethical standards, safety, social norms, and to make a realistic evaluation of consequences (CASEL, 2013, p.9)

Together, this comprehensive array of competencies gives a strong overview of the depth of skills and knowledge necessary for students to navigate the social world of the educational system. This set of definitions also highlights the trouble the field has encountered around articulating and measuring this skillset. This guide, however, boldly introduces this set of definitions, which has subsequently been broadly adopted by the field.

The authors further describe the importance of the development of these competencies in the context of children’s education. They provide evidence that links SEL to important outcomes such as improved attitudes about school, pro-social behavior, academic achievement, and reductions in aggression, mental health problems and substance abuse (CASEL, 2013, p.6). They state that “the best learning emerges in the context of supportive relationships that make learning challenging, engaging, and meaningful” (CASEL, 2013, p. 7). Their stance is that for children to

be engaged and productive learners, relationships between peers and adults are critical to their success. The authors even further state that “social-emotional skills play a role in determining how well-equipped children will be to meet the demands of the classroom” (CASEL, 2013, p.10). They cite evidence (to be discussed in detail later in this literature review) that proves that children with higher competencies in the areas described above, overall perform better in school and are better able to succeed. The quality of interactions between teachers and students is a predictor of academic performance (CASEL, 2013, p.10). Furthermore, CASEL advocates for school-wide approaches, to create not just singular, academic based interventions, but school cultures that support the creation of these competencies. They cite that students can learn these skills, and, just like reading and math, they need to have practice opportunities to master them.

In “Transforming Students’ Lives with Social and Emotional Learning,” Marc Brackett and Susan Rivers further contextualize the importance of SEL skills in young people today, and offer another succinct definition of the term. Brackett and Rivers state that one in five children in the United States experience anxiety and depression. This leads to a higher likelihood of bullying behaviors, risky behaviors, and social withdrawal (Brackett & Rivers, 2014, p. 3). This statement shows the need for this kind of skill development across the board. They offer a definition for social-emotional learning as follows: “SEL refers to the process of integrating thinking, feeling, and behaving in order to become aware of the self and of others, make responsible decisions, and manage one’s own behaviors and those of others” (Brackett & Rivers, 2014, p.4). This corroborates with the defined competencies above with an emphasis on developing awareness

and behavior management. Brackett, Rivers, and CASEL agree that the school environment is an effective place for children to learn these competencies, and both discuss evidence that teachers have unparalleled opportunities to influence this growth. Brackett and Rivers further discuss evidence that schools in economically depressed areas have an even more substantial opportunity for this kind of learning (Brackett & Rivers, 2014, p.7).

In “The Impact of Enhancing Students’ Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions,” Durlak and colleagues further discuss the impact of social-emotional learning on student outcomes. They cite a national survey of 150,000 sixth to twelfth graders. Only 29 to 45 percent of these students had social-emotional competencies such as empathy, decision-making, and conflict resolution skills. By high school, 40 to 60 percent of these students were chronically disengaged (Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Shellinger, & Weissberg, 2011, p.405). Durlak offers more to the definition of SEL: competence promotion and youth development for reducing risk factors and fostering protective mechanisms. Students with strong social-emotional skills are those who have flexible responses to demands and can capitalize on opportunities in their environment (Durlak et al., 2011, p.406). Durlak also agrees that schools are the perfect setting for this type of learning because at school, teachers can offer systematic instruction to teach, model, and practice these skills to make them part of students’ “daily repertoire” (Durlak et al., 2011, p.407). The authors also agree that effective SEL programs all have the following attributes: programs are sequenced, step by step, include active learning, skill development, and have explicit learning goals (Durlak et al., 2011, p.408). Most importantly, the positive effects of developing social-emotional competencies remained statistically significant

six months after the initial measurement. This shows that these types of skills can not only be developed in the short-term but can also remain influential in students' lives for much longer (Durlak et al., 2011, p.417).

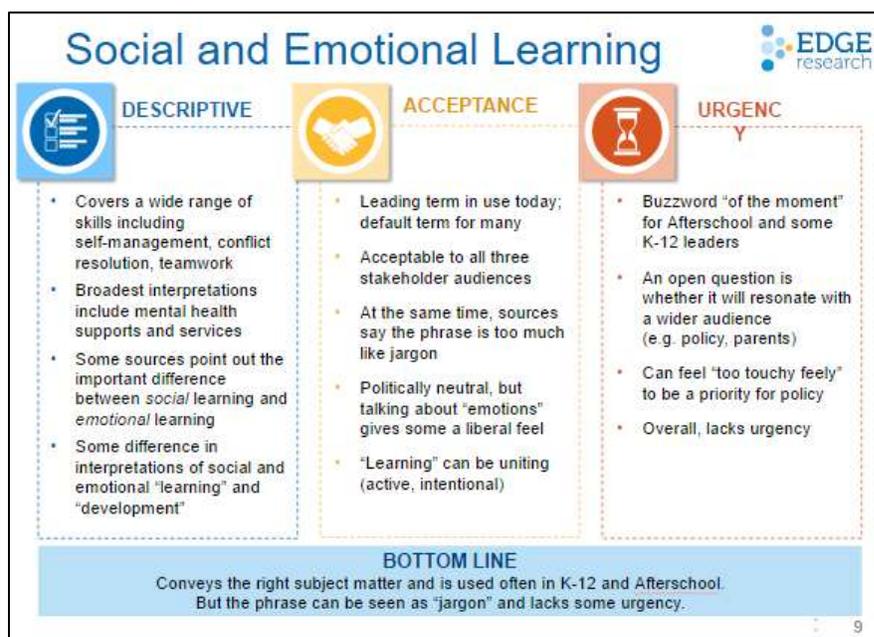
Although CASEL has led the way towards creating overarching standards and definitions in the field, one complicating factor is the prominence of many other terms and definitions of these competencies. This literature review focuses primarily on the CASEL definitions of social-emotional learning because this is the language that Playworks has adopted. In the article discussed above Mark Brackett and Susan Rivers also refer to the competency development of social-emotional skills as “emotional intelligence.” (Brackett & Rivers, 2014, p.4) Other authors discussed in this review define SEL as “non-cognitive skills.” Even further, in “Education for Life and Work,” James Pelligrino and Margaret Hilton offer another list of skills and definitions around social-emotional learning.

- Deeper learning
- 21st century skills
- College and Career readiness
- Student-centered learning
- Next Generation learning
- New basic skills
- Higher order thinking

They define these skills as inter- and intra- personal skills. Intrapersonal skills include the ability to manage behavior and emotions to achieve goals. Interpersonal skills include expressing ideas and interpreting and responding to messages from others. Pelligrino and Hilton state that to succeed in a 21st century educational or work environment these are the types of skills that students must develop. Each of these has its own set of competencies. Further, the authors state

that conscientiousness, or the ability to stay organized, act responsibly, and work hard, is the attribute in students that is most highly correlated with positive outcomes (Pelligrino & Hilton, 2012, p.4). Navigating this complex set of definitions will be addressed during the discussion section of this report. This section of the review serves to demonstrate an overview of the vast selection of terms available to describe the same set of skills that are necessary for student success.

Edge Research and the Wallace Foundation collaborated in a market research study on the topic of SEL language and communications. The purpose of the study was to determine what terminology was being used consistently across the country, understand the perspective of school communities and stakeholders, and to help define a common set of terms and framework. Their key findings showed that there was no one set of terms across the board, but that the term “social-emotional learning” was used most consistently (Edge Research & the Wallace Foundation, 2016, p.8). The concept of “gains,” as in the prospective benefits that students would receive or develop from concentration in this skillset, was the most productive framework when engaging stakeholders. Specifically, they found it was productive to stress SEL as a compliment to academics, frame in the big picture of long-term outcomes, and acknowledge the critical role that parents play in this development (Edge Research & the Wallace Foundation, 2016, p.12). The study goes in depth into each term (SEL, whole child, success factors, and youth development) and assess each according to urgency creation, political receptivity, and accessibility. Below is a chart with an overview of their findings around the term social-emotional learning.



(Edge Research & the Wallace Foundation, 2016, p.9)

Terminology around SEL connects also to the more mainstream rhetoric of tenacity and grit. In a recent article in *Forbes*, Margaret Perlis describes "grit" as a "firmness of character and indomitable spirit" or a "perseverance and passion for long-term goals" (Perlis, 2013). She continues to describe the development of grit in similar terms to the discussion of SEL: learning to manage failure predicts success (Perlis, 2013). Although terms like "tenacity" and "grit" seldom appear in the rest of the literature cited here, this article demonstrates the growing awareness of the importance of building skills beyond academics, and makes the connection to more mainstream ideologies outside of academia and the realm of public education. This in turn makes a deeper understanding of SEL more accessible to a larger public.

Lastly, in *Preparing Youth to Thrive*, Charles Smith and colleagues discuss measurement tools for understanding this subject area. This study highlights the other prominent challenge in

the field of SEL: an inconsistency in the way in which this skill and competency development is measured. This creates a significant obstacle to the further legitimization of the field and the applicability of the research to shaping public policy and creating systems change. They offer the following measurements to describe the behavior and belief development of students.

Management Quality:	Instructional Quality:	Youth Skills:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content • Staff capacity • Horizontal communication • Vertical communication • Job satisfaction • Manageable workload 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth governance • Curriculum planning • Growth and mastery • Instructional quality • Engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional management • Empathy • Teamwork • Responsibility • Initiative • Problem solving

(Smith, McGovern, Peck, Larson, & Roy, 2016, p.39). The author's theory behind this kind of skill measurement is in their understanding that to activate SEL skill development, teachers must activate students' prior knowledge in order to support self-regulation and emotional processes. Students must feel safe focused and motivated. Teachers must activate their declarative or naming skills and procedural skills to instill a belief in their own potential (Smith et al., 2016, p.41). In other words teachers must play to their strengths, and know what these are in order to do so. The table above summarizes the results from their comprehensive study and offers a baseline measurement system for effective SEL programs.

Hypothesis 2: Playworks has evaluations to show that they create SEL competencies but schools are not open to it or awareness has not spread so it is challenging to message.

This section reviews how Playworks positions itself in the field of SEL. It describes several studies that form an evidence base for Playworks and demonstrates how the organization measures their performance in the development of social-emotional competencies that lead to student success.

As stated above, Playworks primarily measures the effectiveness of their program in developing social-emotional competencies in students using the CASEL definitions. As a nonprofit focused on creating opportunities for play at school, Playworks uses a curriculum of games as well as a set of social and cultural norms to develop an environment for kids to thrive. In “The State of SEL in Playworks,” Director of Evaluation, Jennette Claassen, and Director of Program Quality, Eileen Pederson, synthesize the CASEL competencies with the Playworks games and cultural norms that help develop these competencies. In this way, Playworks helps create that connection of skill development with our program curriculum. This tool is the first step that Playworks has taken to develop a shared language nationwide around how they develop these competencies. Aligning with the CASEL definitions make sense for the organization given the prominence of CASEL in the field.

Broader Term	Playworks Language	At Recess
Social Awareness	inclusion, respect, compassion, empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Games that all abilities can play • "Good job, nice try" • Adult modeling
Relationship Skills	conflict resolution, playing fair, cooperation, play outside peer group, communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ro-sham-bo • Cooperative not competitive games • Coach invitations • Common rules
Self Management	self-regulation, responsibility, motivation, emotional safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Game choice • Peace path • Equipment use
Responsible Decision Making	problem solving, being good citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer/adult support in conflict resolution • Respecting rules

(Claassen & Pederson, 2016).

Playworks has enjoyed support of many external evaluations over the last several years. These evaluations have helped create an evidence base for Playworks that has prompted the investment of several prominent health and education funding organizations including the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the S.D. Bechtel Foundation, and the Einhorn Charitable Trust. Internally at Playworks, many reviews of these studies are already available for staff to use in fundraising and messaging to school partners. The following are a small selection of particularly significant evaluations performed over the last several years. It is not at all inclusive of the vast body of evidence that Playworks has accumulated to support the evidence base of their social-emotional competency development in students. It serves as an overview of a few prominent studies as they specifically contribute to this research question.

Also included in the appendices of this report are several examples of Playworks internal evaluations regarding social-emotional competencies. These include our survey results from our

annual school staff survey, our annual internal data collection of Junior Coach performance, and an SEL infographic developed recently by our marketing staff citing one particular study. Playworks' evaluation and marketing teams develop these infographics and tools for all of their regions throughout the country each year for staff to use for fundraising and partnership development.

In "Physical Activity and Youth Development," Madsen, Hicks, and Thompson describe the protective factors students need in order to help successfully navigate the school system. The article focuses on Playworks and how the program helps create these protective factors. These factors include the social and emotional skills of problem solving, holding relationships with caring adults, and meaningful participation in school. One of the other main competencies that Madsen et al. find to be essential for student success is that of resiliency. This character trait, as found with other social and emotional skills described above, can be developed in students with practice, and leads to better academic achievement and occupational success. Madsen et al. state that play and physical activity are natural opportunities for interaction and reduce isolation among students. In this way, Playworks helps provide students with countless and ongoing opportunities to practice and develop resiliency. This article points to the unique opportunity that Playworks creates for this learning, by focusing on an area of the school day that teachers normally ignore. Madsen et al. also describes how a student's sense of connectedness and emotional well-being, attributes bolstered by Playworks' presence at schools, help improve test scores (Madsen, Hicks, & Thompson, 2011, p.7). This article has been influential in the

development of an evidence base for physical activity and play in particular as a road to SEL competency development.

In 2013, Playworks released the results of a randomized control trial conducted by Stanford University and Mathematica Research Policy. This study revealed many statistically significant results of the Playworks programming and has been a cornerstone for the evidence-based of Playworks effectiveness. The results from this evaluation that are significant to this particular review include the following:

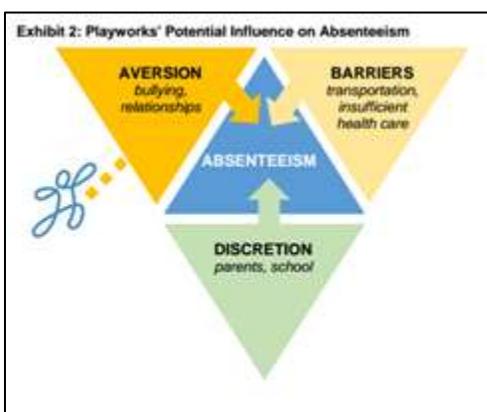
- **Playworks Schools Have Less Bullying:** Teachers in Playworks schools reported significantly less bullying and exclusionary behavior during recess compared to teachers in control schools, a 43% difference in average rating scores. According to the Special Advisor for Evaluation at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Playworks “had a much greater impact than other bullying interventions studied in randomized control trials.”
- **Students Feel Safer at School and Recess:** Playworks teachers’ average rating of students’ feelings of safety at school was 20% higher than the average ratings reported by teachers in control schools. Specifically focusing on recess, Playworks teachers’ average rating of students’ feelings of safety and engagement in inclusive behavior during recess was 26% higher than the average rating reported by teachers in control schools (Bleeker et al., 2012, p. 10).

As cited throughout this review, student’s experiences at school shape their social and emotional competencies. Students thrive when they feel safe and supported, and this evidence points to the greater effects of a school environment with less bullying and stronger relationships between teachers and students.

Playworks partnered with Kaiser Permanente in the 2015-16 school year to conduct a study through UC Berkeley that created further evidence that students in the Playworks Junior Coach Leadership Program were able to develop social-emotional skills throughout the school year. “Evaluating the Social-Emotional Competencies of Junior Coaches” had several significant

outcomes. Junior Coaches had significant improvements of an average of four points higher on social competency scales after the program. This was in comparison with the average effect size for a control group. 84 percent of students that began the program at the level of “need for instruction” showed improvement. Gender differences were also observed. Female Junior Coaches started the program with higher social-emotional competencies and male Junior Coaches had a higher percentage of reliable improvement. Higher levels of social-emotional competencies were developed through this program then were through a representative national sample (Accomazzo, 2015, p.2).

In 2015, the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and their Communities published an article connecting Playworks programming to school attendance. In “The Relationship between Playworks Participation and Student Attendance in Two School Districts,” the authors help build the case for Playworks in connecting their programming with mitigating students aversion to school.



(Urbel & Sanchez, 2015, p.7). As shown in our Mathematica research results above, Playworks is proven to have a positive effect on bullying and relationship-building in students. This article

demonstrates Playworks' use of a developed understanding of the factors involved in student absenteeism which is critical in this review of factors contributing to student success in the navigation of the school system.

In 2015, Playworks also partnered with the PEAR Institute and further assessed the Junior Coaches in eight different regions. Junior Coaches made significant progress in 14 social-emotional competencies including the following as sampled from our Northern California results. The survey was based on the holistic student assessment retrospective which is a national tool that assesses social and emotional well-being of students. This is another example of a measurement tool developed by a leader in the field that Playworks has taken advantage of to assess their performance.

- 74% of students improved in assertiveness
- 59% improved in the area of emotional control
- 89% improved in empathy
- 87% improved in perseverance
- 91% improved in academic motivation
- 90% improved and learning interest
- 80% improved in adults relationships (Playworks 2016, p. 1).

In February 2017, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation published a brief on the importance of recess and play for children's health. The article focuses on Playworks and how the program develops a positive and healthy recess culture. The author states that “a safe and healthy recess promotes a Culture of Health in schools by providing students time to develop socially, emotionally, physically, and academically. During recess, students learn and practice important social and emotional skills, such as conflict resolution, decision-making, compromise,

and self-regulation” (London & Standeven, 2017, p.1). This brief further substantiates Playworks position as the leading organization to use play and recess as an opportunity for social and emotional development in students.

Hypothesis 3: SEL is a predictor of high school graduation rates and that there is evidence in the field to prove it.

This section expands on the literature that is available in the broader SEL fields that ties this competency development to academic success. This section outlines several studies that, although not directly about Playworks, they demonstrate the characteristics of effective programs that lead to these outcomes. In their alignment with the definitions set by CASEL, Playworks is positioned to benefit from these broader studies that show similar programs having academic and school performance results. This section of the review constitutes the research that informs the messaging tool being developed for Playworks staff as a result of this project.

Transforming Education, another leading organization in the SEL field, created a report that synthesized several studies the link SEL to academic success. In “Ready to be Counted,” authors Gabrieli, Ansel, and Krachman discuss that the key finding in several studies around SEL is the element of self-control. In the “Dunedin Health Study” in New Zealand, the researchers showed that children’s ability to maintain self-control at a young age is a predictor of a range of outcomes later in life, even more than intelligence or socioeconomic status of the family. Children with low self-control or more likely to fall into adolescents snares. These children are:

- 2.5 times more likely to smoke by age 15
- 8 times more likely to drop out of high school
- 4 times more likely to have an unplanned pregnancy. (as cited in Gabrieli, Ansel, & Krachman 2015, p.1.)

In this report the authors refer to SEL as “non-cognitive skills.” They find that non-cognitive skills predict high school and college completion, and further discuss the diminished opportunities available to young adults if they don't graduate from high school. They state that cutting dropouts in half would increase the gross domestic product by 9.6 billion dollars by the time this set of students reached mid-career age. (Gabrieli et al., 2015, p.7).

Several studies that Transforming Education cites in this report show that the likelihood of students' dropping out of high school is predictive from indicators of self-control during childhood. Another study by Balfanz shows that one of the five indicators of students not graduating is an unsatisfactory behavior grade in eighth grade, related to the competency of self-management. (Gabrieli et al., 2015, p.6). And another study by Segal showed that students who displayed strong self-management skills in 8th grade were three times more likely to graduate college. (Gabrieli et al., 2015, p.6). All of these studies showed that self-discipline was a stronger predictor of academic success than IQ, and that self-control predicts that students will improve performance over a year. The research they cite shows that delaying gratification predicts higher test scores and higher educational attainment. These studies corroborate with Durlak and other authors above, that these kinds of skills are malleable and can be improved through specific interventions (Gabrieli et al., 2015, p.9).

Authors Farrington et al. at the University of Chicago further examine this link between non-cognitive skills and academic success in the article “Teaching Adolescents to Become

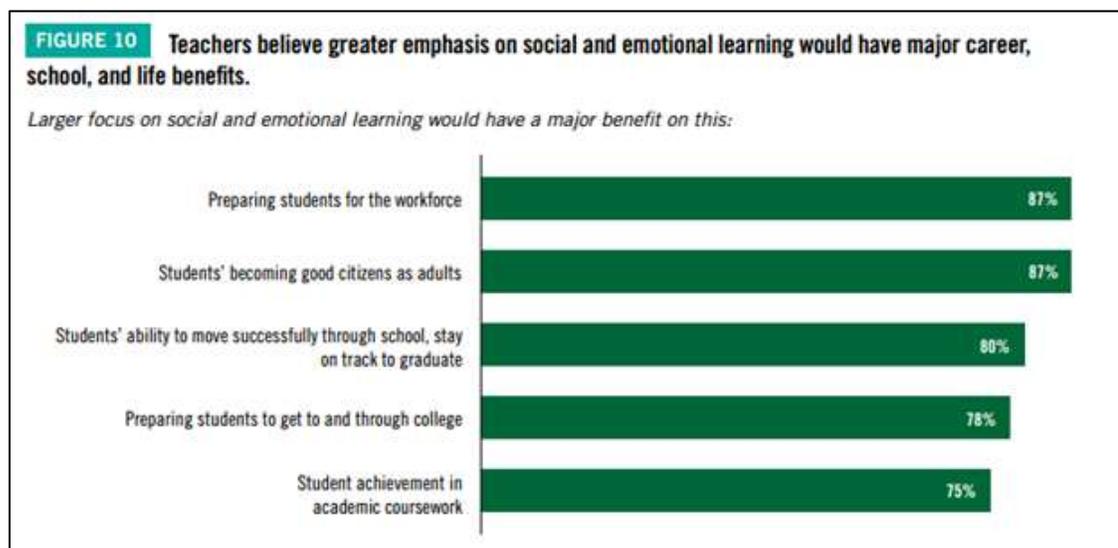
Learners.” They show that self-discipline is one of the reasons that students fall short on their intellectual potential. Academic difficulties for many students are due to non-cognitive factors such as paying attention in class, working with others, and keeping track of materials. So if practitioners or teachers know how to change and work with these competencies, this can help students navigate the increasing complexity of academics as they get older (Farrington, Roderick, Allensworth, Nagaoka, Keyes, Johnson, & Beechum, 2012, p.5). They break down non-cognitive skills into several categories. The category that relates most specifically to Playworks’ work is that of the development of “social skills.” The authors define social skills as “socially acceptable learned behaviors that enable a person to interact effectively with others and to avoid socially unacceptable responses” (Farrington et al., 2012, p.48). They cite a longitudinal study through first, third, sixth and tenth grades that showed that the social-emotional adjustment of students at school is predictive of test scores at every point. Social-emotional skills enhance social interactions that both give rise to learning and also minimize disruptions to learning. Additionally, teachers reward pro-social behaviors with higher grades and punish behavioral interruptions with lower grades. 37 percent of teachers consider behavior and grades as one study showed. And 21 percent of school level documents show that behavior and attitude is a factor in student evaluation, alluding to the systemic nature of this finding (as cited in Farrington et al., 2012, p.49). In this way, social skills both directly and indirectly affect student grades and student's ability to perform.

Another study by Malecki and Elliot demonstrated that social skills positively correlated with concurrent grades, problem behaviors negatively correlated with concurrent grades, and

social skills predicted future performance. They call social skills “academic enablers in school environment” (as cited in Farrington et al., 2012, p.49). One of the challenges around measuring the link between social skills and academic attainment is that many studies like this one show a correlational not causal link. This creates a scientific roadblock for legitimizing this field. The narrative of this report does show a logical progression between the development of social skills as they lend themselves to developing academic behaviors which then indicates academic performance. So while it is not possible to isolate social-emotional factors or non-cognitive factors to prove a causal link, in many of these studies the evidence still point to an undeniable correlation.

Furthermore, in “Student Academic Mindset Interventions,” Snipes, Fancsali, and Stoker discuss how students’ “academic mindsets” are their beliefs and attitudes about school. This mindset affects how students engage and learn. They argue that shifting students’ mindsets help them successfully navigate the school system, and can significantly improve academic performance. Additionally, they state that children's learning strategies are a mediating factor between mindset and outcomes (Snipes, Fancsali, & Stoker, 2012, p.15). This further substantiates the evidence cited by Transforming Education and the University of Chicago that students’ mindsets and behavioral skills influence their ability to perform academically. Even further, it connects to the ability of Playworks to develop a safe and productive school environment, on and off the playground, to give students the space to develop these mindsets. Arguably, what Snipes et al. call an academic mindset is very similar to Madsen’s idea of resiliency, and CASEL’s competency clusters.

In “The Missing Piece,” Bridgeland, Bruce and Hariharan continue building the evidence base for student success linking with social-emotional skills. In this study, the authors interview hundreds of teachers across the country on different aspects of social-emotional learning and long-term outcomes in students. They state that SEL can help reduce student absenteeism and improve student interest. These are both strong indicators of students being on track to graduate (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013, p.5). They show that schools with essential support systems in place are ten times more likely to have gains in reading and math scores (Bridgeland et al., 2013, p.22). These are schools in which school climate is safe, welcoming, stimulating, and nurturing - all characteristics of a Playworks school. Most importantly, this is where students have positive relationships with teachers and with each other. They show that the ability to regulate emotion, attention, and behavior is related to achievement. They set the benchmarks of student success as excelling at coursework, high marks on standardized tests, and staying on track to graduate. Social-emotional skills and the ability to become self-aware and confident in one's own learning abilities is what helps students successfully hit these benchmarks. Stress management, problem-solving, and decision-making skills help students get better grades. 80 percent of teachers surveyed believe that SEL will help students move through the system and stay on track. 75 percent agree that SEL will improve achievement in academic coursework, and 77 percent agree that it will improve standardized test scores (Bridgeland et al., 2013, p.23).



(Bridgeland et al., 2013, p.9).

The chart above shows the myriad of positive outcomes that teachers, the ones previously shown to be the most successful translators of social and emotional skills with children, believe are correlated with social and emotional learning.

A recent Gallup poll also showed evidence that hope, engagement, and well-being influence students' academic success. In their pool of 1 million students between 2009 and 2011 they discovered that hope accounts for a 13 percent variance in student academic success. They show that engagements decreases significantly in middle school where students indicate that they are not known, valued, or recognized like they were in elementary school. Significantly, they also indicate that school, once reaching the middle school level, no longer has play incorporated into the curriculum (Heitin, 2012). This evidence shows the correlation between play and student engagement, which Playworks is exactly doing.

Hypothesis 4: SEL skills have long-term positive outcomes.

This section outlines several studies and publications that discuss the implications of SEL and long-term outcomes. This includes both public health outcomes and economic outcomes for both individuals and society as a whole.

In “Early Social Emotional Functioning and Public Health,” authors Jones, Greenberg, and Crowley demonstrate the implications that social-emotional competence has in developing long-term outcomes. They agree with the studies cited above that non-cognitive abilities such as self-control during childhood are predictive of adult outcomes such as physical health, crime, and substance abuse. They detail how predicting workplace success is more accurate when looking at educational attainment measures over IQ (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015, p.2283). This shows that while academic factors obviously contribute to academic and workplace success, looking at educational attainment (which is influenced by social-emotional skills) is a more accurate predictor. They further state that the future likelihood of committing crimes is influenced by social empathy, externalizing behavior and effectively regulating emotions. He shows that social competence or the ability to complete tasks and manage responsibilities and handle social and emotional experiences is again not a causal link but a correlated link to adult successes in these areas. This study did show statistically significant unique associations in all outcomes (Jones et al., 2015, p.2288).

In “The Effects of Social Development Interventions 15 Years Later,” Hawkins, Kosterman, Catalano, Hill, and Abbott measured social-emotional development skills 15 years post intervention in a public school. Their results showed significantly higher educational

attainment, mental health, and sexual health in students that had higher social-emotional development in kindergarten. They concluded that their social competence interventions in elementary schools helped increase their adult functionality. This led to greater accomplishment and engagement in school, work, and community, and fewer health problems (Hawkins, Kosterman, Catalano, Hill, & Abbott, 2008, p.1139). This evidence further bolsters the case for Playworks that elementary school is the prime opportunity for influencing long-term adult outcomes.

Furthermore, in “The Economic Value of SEL,” Belfield and colleagues conduct a cost benefit analysis to substantiate the need for social-emotional development in students. This cost benefit analysis puts a dollar measurements on social values. The results of the study showed that the benefit of all of the social-emotional programs studied exceeded the cost of the program. The authors show through this analysis that SEL can help students take advantage of opportunities and predicts success in the labor market as well as school (Belfield, Bowden, Klapp, Levin, Shand, & Zander, 2015, p.11). They showed a strong positive impact on future earnings when social-emotional skills were enhanced; specifically they showed a nine percent increase in earnings with an increase in non-cognitive abilities. Current lifetime earnings for a third grader average \$575,000. Earnings go up in a range of 4 - 15 percent or at least \$46,000, when social-emotional skills are increased. This analysis is important to the field by showing the dollar amount that increasing social-emotional skills for future productivity in every child (Belfield et al., 2015, p.12). Again this shows that SEL skills correlate with educational attainment which influences lifetime earnings and therefore the larger market economy. This

evidence also helps build the business case for SEL, an important step for organizations like Playworks seeking cross sector partnerships with businesses who care about the cause.

Although it is beyond the scope of this project to examine the achievement gap, it is worth noting that social and emotional skills potentially hold a solution to addressing this issue, as well as larger issues of inequality and inequity. In “Preparing Students for Successful Employment,” the organization Strive Together creates the argument around the skills gap and job readiness. The states that the difference in earning between black and white households in 1967 was \$19,000, and by 2011 that number had increased to \$27,000. Additionally there is a skills gap, with 11 million people unemployed across the country and four million unfilled jobs. They conclude that people need the skills to fill these jobs and to address the inequalities across the board (Strive Together, 2017, p.2). While Playworks does not specifically address job readiness, preferring to focus more on education and leadership development, the competencies that Playworks fields around SEL do have broader implications as shown through this study.

In “Skill Formation and the Economics of Investing in Disadvantaged Children,” Heckman shows that skill mastery, specifically referring to social or non-cognitive skills, is essential for economic success. He refers to a study that shows that a stronger motivation to learn in preschoolers predicts higher achievement scores, higher high school graduation rates, higher salaries, higher likeliness of owning a home, lower welfare participation, and lower number of arrests. The economic rate of return on this intervention was 15 to 17 percent. He shows that there is a “serious tradeoff that exists between equity and efficiency for adolescent

and young adult skill policies” (Heckman, 2006, p.1902). This argument further substantiates the need for early intervention like Playworks that build SEL skills in young people, and that this intervention can seriously impact our economy as a whole.

Hypothesis 5: More data and clear evidence is needed to influence policy, especially under the current administration.

This last section seeks to go one step further and connect the outcomes above with the even larger contexts of public policy and systems change in education. This includes a brief discussion of current policies, and the broader idea of systems change as it relates to Playworks’ place in the educational forum.

The “Every Students Succeeds Act,” (ESSA), was passed with bipartisan support in Congress and by the Obama administration on December 10, 2015 (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2017). It was an update of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) from the Bush era which gave greater power to the federal government to regulate standards around educational success. ESSA gives states much more power and de-emphasized standardized testing - the much criticized aspect of NCLB. ESSA gives states and local school districts more flexibility around tests, and more choice around indicators of success - including school climate. This implies that schools would have greater local control over spending funding on programs that support SEL, especially ones that can be measured to meet an indicator around school climate. Although not discussed in depth for this research question, school climate is a very related indicator in the SEL field, an aspect supported by Playworks. So much of the data from this report also can relate to

Playworks' messaging around school climate. The act moved into the implementation phase to be in effect for the 2017-18 school year. (Klein, 2016).

However, as of early March 2017, the New York Times reports that Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, the Trump administration, and Congress have rolled back some of the regulations included in ESSA, handing back much of the power to the federal government. Current state policymakers were already drafting their changes for ESSA, and now are unable to submit current plans (Goldstein, 2017). This serves as an example of the implications of policy level changes that affect organizations like Playworks, and their school partners. The next few months will reveal more as to this current shift in public policy and the way that schools prioritize SEL.

Additionally, the Trump administration recently proposed a budget that would cut funding for after-school programs through the organization 21st Century Learning Centers. This organization funds after-school programs that serve 1.6 million students nationwide. In a broadcast during *Anderson Cooper 360*, the executive director of one after-school program facing devastating cuts to programming states that a recent study showed that WINGS, the SEL after-school program she founded, has a positive correlation with pro-social behaviors in participating students, and a negative correlation with negative behaviors (Anderson Cooper 360, 2017).

In another recent article in *The Atlantic*, author Askarinam discusses recent comments by Mick Mulvaney, the US Director of the Office of Management and Budget, where he asserts that there is no evidence that shows that after-school programs help students perform better in

school. The studies to which Mulvaney refers are outdated, and the author goes on to describe more recent studies that shows after-school programs resulting in trends in academic achievement and higher class participation. They also refer to the same randomized control trial referred to above about WINGS, showing that the program resulted in improved academics and attendance for participants (Askarinam, 2017).

Additionally, Playworks has also looked heavily into the idea of “systems change.” This idea has caught on in the funding community as a method of change-making from the ground up. In “Systems Change in Education,” authors Raman and Hall define systems change as “transforming existing systems into new “learning ecosystems” (Raman & Hall, 2017). The idea is that in order to create actual changes in the educational system, such as more extensive inclusion of SEL as a learning priority, people across the board have to commit to a shared purpose. Organizations like Ashoka are creating models for this type of change through “changemaker schools” and other innovations. (Raman & Hall, 2017).

Playworks has internally begun discussions around systemic change. Working with the Billions Institute, Playworks developed what they are calling “The Aim,” of reaching 3.5 million children in 7,000 schools by December 2020. They are looking to create a movement for play. Reaching this aim would mean hitting the tipping point for broad social change: ten percent of all elementary schools in the US (The Play Movement, 2016). To reach this aim, Playworks is adapting current outreach strategies to create systemic change. Playworks is particularly targeting school districts to move their partnership building to higher levels.

For this reason, this section of the literature review is included, to create that third level of understanding necessary to contextualize the included SEL data into larger scale change. This change is only possible with a rigorous commitment to scientific evidence, to ensure that policies created on this topic are based on data. This capstone project as a whole will provide tools to Playworks to help them build this evidence base and reach their aim.

Survey Results

This survey, as noted in the methods section, was created and sent to Playworks internal staff. The survey was emailed to 83 staff in the organization on March 16, 2017, and remained open until March 31, 2017. 48 employees responded to the survey, a completion rate of 58 percent. 21 of Playworks' 23 regions, or 91 percent of the Playworks nation, were represented in these results, as well as several staff that work in multiple regions. No results were collected from Louisiana or Michigan offices.

56 percent of respondents were Program Managers, 33 percent Program Directors, and the remaining were Regional Partnership Directors, and Pro Account Managers. All of these staff work directly with partner schools in their regions, managing relationships and negotiating current and future services.

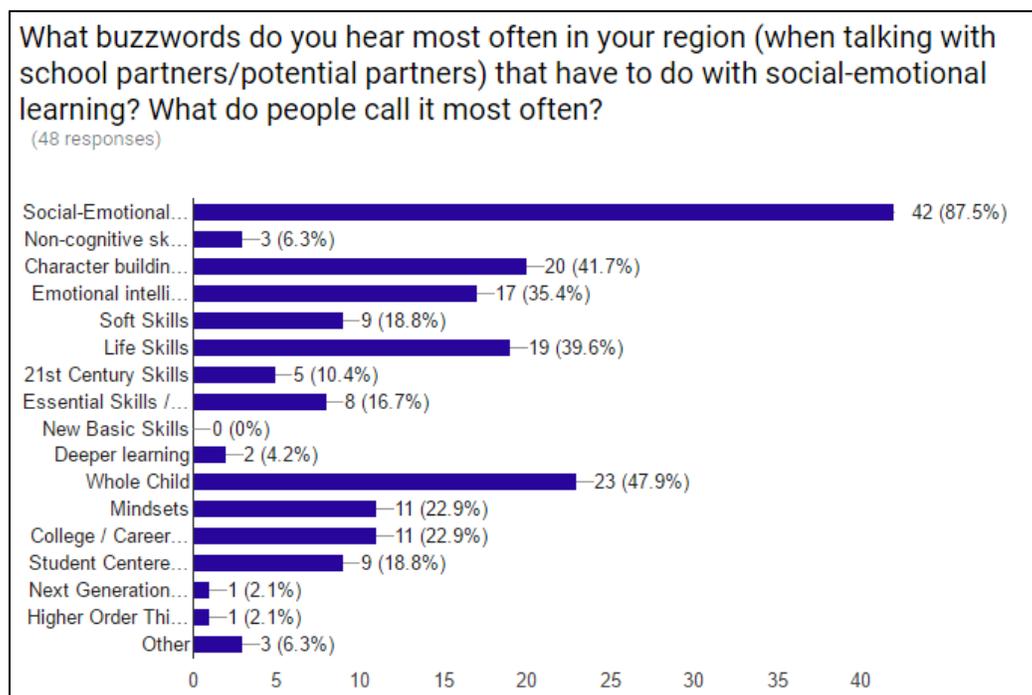
The survey asked 14 questions including: demographic information - name, region, and position, questions about the language used in their region pertaining to SEL, challenges around messaging, and what Playworks games they think relate to specific SEL competency

development. Six questions were open-ended, and eight were either multiple choice or checkboxes.

SEL Language and School Perspectives

In these questions, survey participants responded to questions about SEL language being used in their region, and on schools' perceptions to hearing about this aspect of Playworks' work.

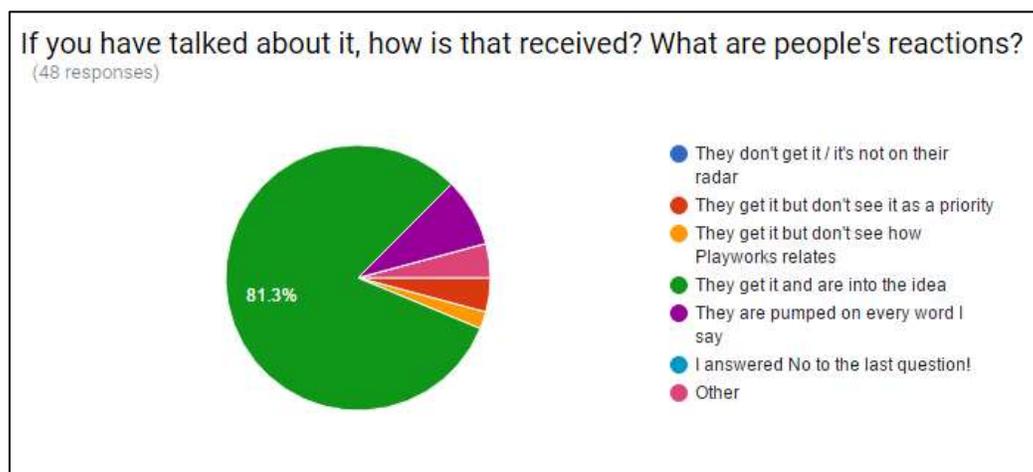
The chart below shows that 87.5 percent of participants indicated that “Social-Emotional Learning” was a term used most often in their regions. “Whole Child,” at 47.9 percent, and “Character Building” at 41.7 percent were also popular terms.



Regarding other SEL programs being done at partner schools in their regions, 89.4 percent of participants checked PBIS Programs (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports). PBIS Programs are different than programs like Playworks, in that they are more of a framework around discipline and behavioral issue management and prevention (www.understood.org, 2016). Programs called Responsive Classroom and Second Step were next most popular at 34 percent and 25 percent respectively.

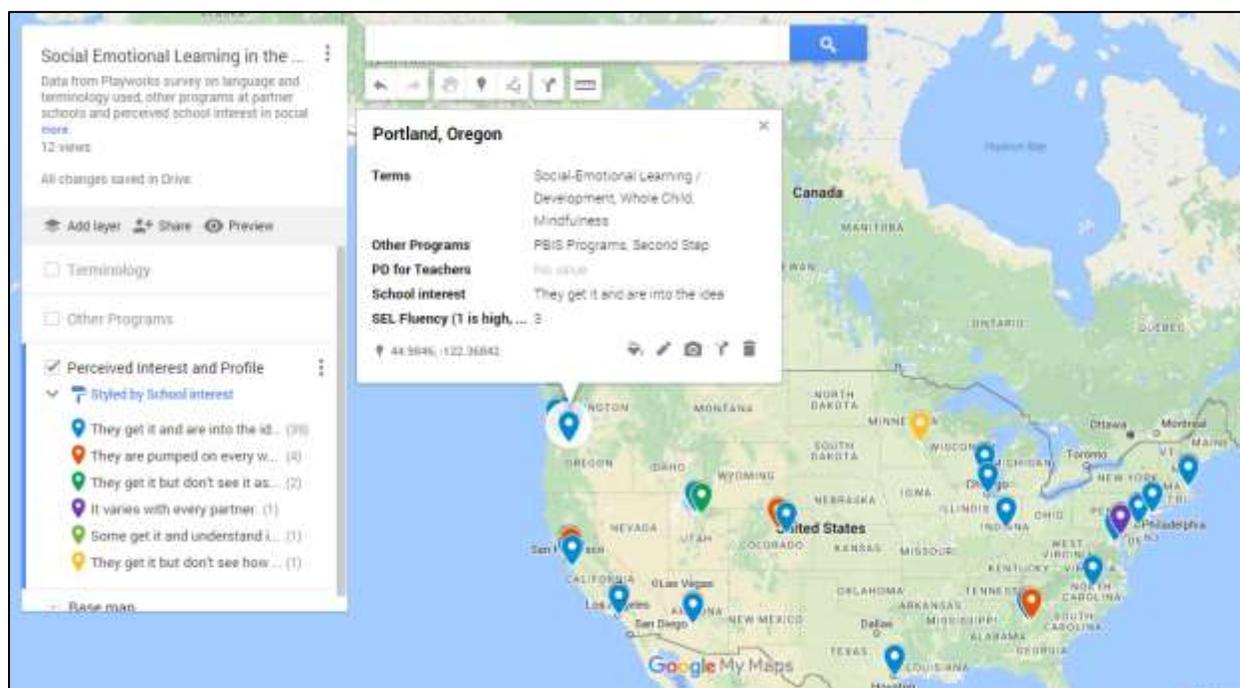
As for professional development around these programs for teachers and staff, most respondents indicated that professional development came with the PBIS program, Second Step, or other programs indicated in the previous question. 25 percent of respondents stated that no professional development was given, or that they were unsure.

As indicated by the chart below, the vast majority of participants, 81 percent, indicated that school staff that they speak with regarding SEL “get it and are into the idea.” This indicates a strong awareness across the nation of the importance of this discussion. An additional eight percent are “pumped on every word.”



As for frequency of how often the conversation about SEL comes up in school partnership discussions, 72.9 percent indicated that they talk about SEL all the time. The remaining 27.1 percent indicated that they sometimes talk about it. No respondents checked once, never, or other.

A map of all of this data, grouped by question, can be found [here](#) (accessible in the Playworks network). The map shows the data from the questions described above in a visual format to identify cross-country trends.



The purpose of the development of this map is to supplement the above data to help the Playworks leadership team understand what language is used where, what other professional development tools are available to teachers, and the receptivity of various audiences. “SEL Fluency” is derived in this map from the confidence question (see below) so that Playworks

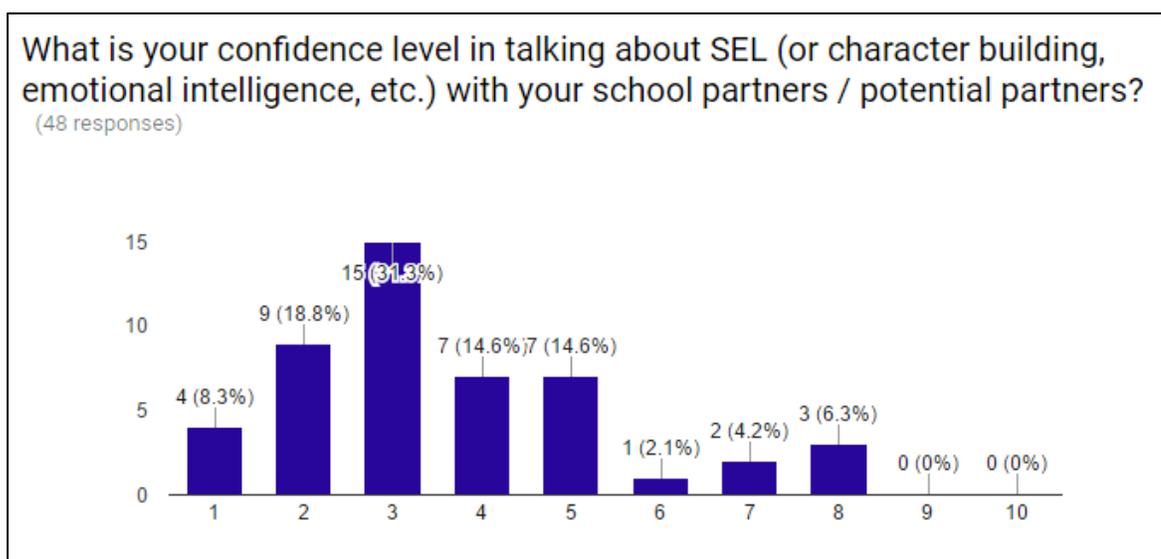
leadership can see how fluent staff are in SEL language, compared with the above data.

Themes identified through this map are expanded on in the discussion section of this report.

Messaging for Playworks Staff

This section of the survey sought to identify what questions and challenges arise for staff when talking about SEL with school partners, and asked them to identify specific games they could reference in these conversations.

As shown in the chart below, when asked about confidence in talking about the subject, respondents were asked to rate their level on a scale of one to ten. One being high confidence, and ten being zero confidence. 31.3 percent of respondents put themselves at a three, and a total of 87.6 percent at a level of five or less, indicating a fairly high level of understanding and fluency of the topic.

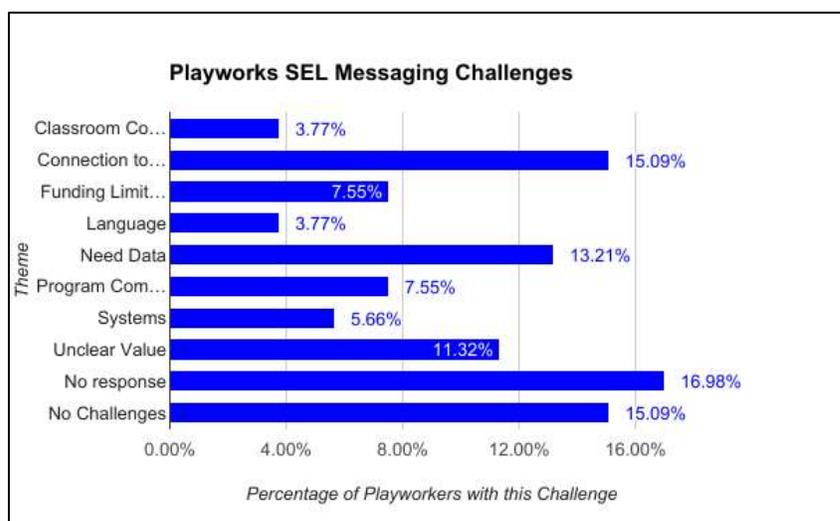


The following three questions targeted the challenges staff face in their messaging, questions they received from partner schools, and help needed. These open-ended questions were sorted in Excel and coded by emergent themes.

The challenges that staff faced in regards to messaging SEL and Playworks were all over the map. The majority of respondents stated they had no challenges. The chart below identifies the frequency of major themes that were coded from responses.

Eight emergent themes were identified as follows:

- **Classroom Connection:** How looking at SEL opportunities at recess connects to classroom behavior and work
- **Connection to Play:** How play and recess actually create SEL competencies
- **Funding Limitations:** The need to prioritize programs because of budget restrictions
- **Language:** Challenges around confusing, unfamiliar, or different terminology
- **Need Data:** The need for statistics and data to provide evidence of past success
- **Program Competition:** Why choose Playworks when there are other SEL programs available or being used
- **Systems:** Points around larger educational framework and district initiatives
- **Unclear Value:** School staff do not see the value of SEL, healthy play, or a high functioning recess



88.5 percent of respondents also indicated that they had not encountered questions from school partners that they could not answer. The themes that emerged from this question, each representing less than four percent of the sample were as follows: Program Competition, Connection to Play, and Need Data.

40 percent of respondents indicated that they needed help with messaging SEL according to the following themes:

- 8 percent - Connection to Play
- 6 percent - Examples of games
- 4 percent - SEL training
- 2 percent - Need Data
- 2 percent – Systems

18 percent of respondents stated that no help was needed and 42 percent left no response.

Participants were then asked the following question, “Please name a specific Playworks game that helps kids practice controlling their anger or other intense emotions (SEL competency of Self-Management).” Responses were sorted to reveal duplicate answers, and were coded into emergent themes.

Games that were listed multiple times included:

- One Fish, Two Fish
- Foursquare
- Three Line Basketball or Soccer
- Mountains and Valleys
- Roshambo Games
- Relay Races

Themes that emerged included:

- How facilitation techniques affect the games

- Competitive games where kids may “get out” or finish last
- Games that are modified specifically to make “getting out” less terrible
- Adapting and accepting failure, dealing with frustration
- “Recycle lines” - Playworks term for rotational games
- Using Roshambo to solve conflicts

Participants were then asked, “Please name a specific Playworks game that helps kids understand the concept of empathy - getting where someone else comes from even if it is different than you (SEL competency of Social-Awareness).”

Games listed multiple times included:

- I Love my Neighbor
- Band-Aid Tag
- If You Really Knew Me
- Trust Falls
- Steal the Bacon
- Partner to Partner

Emergent themes included:

- Learning about each other and sharing
- Finding out things you have in common
- Cheering for both teams
- Safe tagging and understanding how it feels to get tagged too hard
- Reading emotions on other people’s faces
- The game facilitation is more important than the game itself
- “How do you think your partner felt when....”

Expert Interviews

Jennette Claassen, Director of Evaluation, Playworks.

Interview Date: February 10, 2017

In this expert interview, Claassen discussed the position of Playworks in the SEL field. Questions pertained to how Playworks has been defining and measuring their work in SEL, what challenges rise to the top, and what areas of focus for this project would be helpful to advance Playworks' knowledge and position for future research, data collection, and messaging.

Working with a national organization like Playworks, with 23 regional offices from California to New England, Claassen identified that language and terminology across the country is a consistent problem in Playworks messaging. The field is growing too much, too fast and Playworks is navigating a landscape of various terminologies and definitions. In some regions its SEL, some it's character development, others it's non-cognitive skills. Playworks needs a language that is broad enough for cross-marketing, but narrow enough to retain meaning in different regions.

Because of this issue, Playworks has chosen to align their definitions in the work of SEL with CASEL's competencies. Through their internal and external evaluation work, as discussed in depth in the literature review, Playworks has identified the CASEL competencies of social awareness and self-management as outcomes that they build. They are confident in their data that Playworks has evidence to stand behind these statements. The competency of self-awareness may also be there, with slightly less confidence.

Claassen also stated that Playworks knows a lot about our Junior Coaches, 4th and 5th grad participants in the Playworks Junior Coach Leadership Program, but less about the general student population. Playworks is currently experimenting with measurement tools that exists already to measure how their program affects the general student population, so results can be

more generalizable. A collaboration with Transforming Education is currently working on this issue.

Lastly, Claassen identified a few areas of research that Playworks is interested in pursuing to help guide future messaging about the program. First, Claassen and Playworks have seen that “the conversation continues to be around curriculum and what you do in the classroom. There is not an instant connection about how recess is a huge laboratory for kids to try things on” (Claassen, 2017). Playworks needs more data about the SEL connection to play and recess. Second, Playworks’ evaluation department is looking at the transition between elementary and middle school, and needs more data on what students need to make this transition, and the eventual transition to high school and graduation, more successful. Her hope was that this literature review and analysis would provide some of this connection and information.

***Sara Krachman, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Transforming Education.
Interview Date: April 7, 2017***

This interview with Sara Krachman focused on several questions that came up during the literature review process. Krachman discussed her background and point of view, the measurement tools that Transforming Education has curated, the language issue, her impression of Playworks, and how her work relates to public policy and systems change.

As Executive Director, Krachman does a little of everything at Transforming Education. As they have grown, she now does less direct work with partners, but focuses more on strategic planning, building teams, and supporting and overseeing the work they do with school districts and other partner organizations. What drives her in this work is that she saw

early on in her career that there was a disconnect between what parents and teachers wanted their children to get out of their education, and what was being measured - reading and math test scores. Her work looks at what schools can bring to students in a more holistic way.

Transforming Education, as an organization that bridges research, practice, and policy, has curated measures of MESH (Mindsets, Essential Skills, and Habits) that were developed by researchers and helped schools and program providers implement these measures at scale. She discussed a recent 5 year longitudinal study (unpublished) that followed 8th graders through high school. Their results showed that students who self-reported high scores on “growth mindset” and self-management were more likely to graduate (Krachman, 2017). Krachman saw these results as a strong reminder that social-emotional competencies predict and support longer-term outcomes for students. The results from this study do not prove a causal connection, but practitioners and policymakers have still found the results to be compelling.

Transforming Education, like Playworks, has had to navigate a language issue in a fast-growing field. Krachman sees this issue at once as both important, as well as semantic, potentially distracting from a more productive conversation. Transforming Education created the term “MESH” to bridge the gap between the term SEL (sometimes perceived as more emotional and liberal) and Character (sometimes more associated with morality, or something that parents, not schools, should be responsible for). They also use the terms intra- and interpersonal skills, which have less political implications. They have gotten positive feedback with their MESH language, but she acknowledges that it does add another term to the mix. She is clear that that

language debate is important and ongoing, as people are attached to different pieces and assumptions within each term.

Krachman and Transforming Education are currently collaborating with Jennette Claassen and Playworks to further evaluate how Playworks helps students build SEL competencies. She appreciates Playworks because their approach is much more light hearted and fun than other methods she has seen. It “taps into the inherent joy of being human and being a kid” (Krachman, 2017). She has seen other game based approaches to teaching and assessing SEL skills, and sees that they point to students’ intrinsic motivation more than other classroom based interventions over time.

In order to create systematic change in our education system, Transforming Education takes an approach that toggles between the micro and macro, in the effort to stay focused on what the on-the-ground work looks like. Krachman describes the micro as “what are the practices and measurements in the field, and are they working” and the macro as “what would it mean to scale that?” (Krachman, 2017). The organization is intentionally looking at both of these at once. They believe, that in such an emergent field, policy must be created, but that policy needs to be based in what is working on the ground.

In light of the current administration and changes to ESSA, her sense is that state education policy will be more relevant than federal education policy in the years ahead. This will change the locus of control for decision making at district and school levels around funding and strategic priorities, potentially affecting her future work. There is a lot of uncertainty, and people are currently reacting to that uncertainty, especially regarding budget and funding.

Krachman's vision is that SEL skills are held up next to academics as just as important for student success. She is cautious in her approach, to ensure that the policies that Transforming Education creates or supports don't get ahead of the data. As an organization, they believe that there must be a data informed approach for the field to learn what is working and scale those approaches over time. She feels it is still early, and that we are still in the awareness building and resource sharing stage of the game, and the current work is to build out that groundwork strategy.

Charlene Joyce, Director of Out-of-School Time Partnerships, Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence.

Interview Date: April 7, 2017

Voyce discussed several similar areas of focus in this interview, from a very different perspective. These included her background and current work, the language issue, current public policy, her impressions of Playworks, and the challenges and opportunities with programs involved in the out-of-school time arena. "Out-of-school" includes both after-school and recess times.

Voyce's work with the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence focuses on their programmatic tool RULER (Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing, and Regulating emotions). She is currently collaborating with several out-of-school time organizations, including Playworks, to adapt RULER program components to meet different needs. The program was originally built to be a classroom tool, but it is more difficult for out-of-school programs to implement the full thing, so they are looking at how to use particular components, and also how to train school staff, recognizing a different approach is needed in this space than

regular teacher trainings. Her motivation comes from 26 years of work in the field, seeing that many times student behavioral issues really stem from systemic problems in education, not the faults of students. She is motivated to build structure to support this aspect of education, and particularly sees the out-of-school time space as an opportunity for students. This is a time of the day that is less structured, and has more opportunities for students to interact with other students and apply, practice, and reinforce skills they learned during the school day.

Speaking to the language issue, Voyce has not encountered the same problem as Playworks and Transforming Education. The Center generally refers to SEL using the CASEL definitions. She speaks to a connection between SEL and the more mainstream rhetoric of “grit and determination.” She notes that SEL skills are involved in the concept of grit: courage is really managing a fear of failure and vulnerability, and long-term goal setting and endurance are part of emotion management. She notes that out-of-school time organizations are more open to the concept of SEL than are some schools, as they have broader goals beyond academics. The disconnect happens however, in the research and implementation of SEL programs by practitioners and on the ground staff, and there is less awareness of the scientific and literature based approach to these programs, which ultimately make them more effective.

Voyce sees Playworks as an important organization focusing in this space. Playworks helps schools move beyond the educational opportunity of recess by really creating an emotionally and physically safe space for students to practice these kinds of skills. Playworks’ practices, like solving problems using Roshambo (rock, paper, scissors) give students opportunities to regulate their emotions. Playworks’ game modifications create a structure to

recess games that gives students opportunities to manage frustration and “gives little bites of practice over and over, it’s like muscles, little bits of practice provides those” (Voyce, 2017). Playworks’ hi-five culture gives students a quick way to practice doing something pro-social, and it becomes habitual. The combination of physical activity and social interaction is what creates protective factors for students, and helps students reduce stress and anxiety.

In terms of policy and the current administration, Voyce’s concern for her partners and her work is around funding cuts. The funding cuts announced in the current proposed budget are devastating to the out-of-school time arena. Wings, an organization she partners with, is slated to lose 1.6 million dollars in funding. She sees in this policy a denial of the science, consistent with other areas of the administration. This denial is happening despite overwhelming evidence that out-of-school time and SEL development do affect academic performance, employability, lower dropout rates, and mental health. Every dollar invested in an SEL program has an 11 dollar return. Also, with current changes to ESSA, there is room for states to circumvent requirements around SEL measures by applying for waivers.

Looking to the future, she hopes that by focusing on “everyone with a face,” kids, teachers, custodians, staff, there is an opportunity to bring SEL to out-of-school programs across the county. There is an increasing awareness of the importance of these skills and this arena is a perfect opportunity for practice and skill reinforcement.

Discussion and Analysis

This discussion and secondary analysis synthesizes the results from the literature review, survey, and expert interviews. It triangulates these three sources of data to further clarify the original research question, “what social-emotional competencies do students need to possess to succeed in school, and how does Playworks develop those competencies?” and extrapolate on the data found to respond to the hypotheses outlined in the methods section. This discussion also influences the recommendations in the following section.

Hypothesis 1: There are many organizations developing strong and effective SEL programs but the field is scattered and full of contradicting and confusing terminology.

In the literature review, it became clear that there are indeed many organizations running effective, measurable, and innovative SEL programs in schools. Several organizations rose to the forefront as prolific thought leaders and experts in the field. The article “Education for Life and Work,” CASEL, and Edge Research and the Wallace Foundation all introduced several definitions and sets of terminology for describing this type of work. For this reason, part of the survey addressed this question: where are these different terms being used, and how popular are they?

Three different findings corroborated in response to this hypothesis, showing that there actually is more definition and compatibility in the field than originally predicted. First, Edge Research and the Wallace Foundation showed in their study that the term “social-emotional learning” is the most popular terminology used to describe this work. The authors state that although it lacks urgency, this term has more clarity in meaning and is less divisive than terms

such as “whole child,” “success factors,” or “youth development” (Edge Research & the Wallace Foundation, 2016, p.12). Second, the Playworks internal survey and messaging map show that social-emotional learning is indeed used in 87.5 percent of respondents’ regions. Here the map shows the regions where this term is used:



And third, interviewee Charlene Voyce agreed that SEL and the CASEL definitions were most prominent in her work in the out-of-school-time arena. Voyce stated that navigating the language issue has not been a problem in her work (Voyce, 2017).

However, as discussed by interviewee Sara Krachman, the language issue is both a challenge as well as something that should not “distract from a more productive conversation” (Krachman, 2017). With a better understanding of the predominance of a certain set of terms, the field can continue to move forward, while still recognizing the nuance of other, less popular terminology. That is, this hypothesis holds somewhat true, that yes, the field still struggles with scattered and varied definitions around the work, but it is not as large of an obstacle as originally

predicted in the start of this project. The first recommendation for the sector in the following section will introduce next steps in further navigation of the issue.

Hypothesis 2: Playworks has evaluations to show that they create SEL competencies but schools are not open to it or awareness has not spread so this is challenging to message.

Before beginning this project, it was clear that Playworks was an effective evidence-based program. Playworks has enjoyed the support of several prominent research and health organizations, with a history of studies demonstrating a strong evidence base, as summarized in the literature review. In Jennette Claassen’s interview, she identified several issues for Playworks including language (as discussed above), measurements of entire school populations, and the connection with SEL in the out-of-school-time arena of recess (Claassen, 2017). From this discussion, survey questions were developed to ask program staff across the country about their abilities to effectively message SEL with school partners.

Results demonstrated that Playworks not only has a strong external evidence base, but also has a strong and confident staff. Furthermore, survey results showed that 81 percent of school partners “get it and are into the idea” (blue) and another 8 percent are “pumped on every word they say” (yellow). This map shows that the spread of this 89 percent majority is nationwide:



The two interviewees external to Playworks are working in collaboration with Playworks to further common goals. Charlene Voyce commented specifically that playing games with Playworks gives the practice students need to reinforce and develop these skills (Voyce, 2017). This assertion was also demonstrated in Kris Madsen’s evaluation of Playworks, showing that recess is an opportunity for students to develop the trait of resilience (Madsen, 2011, p.463).

Survey results also showed fewer messaging challenges than expected. 60 percent of respondents did not report challenges in messaging. The most prevalent challenge themes that arose from the emergent coding process were “Connection to Play” with eight percent of respondents, and “Examples of Games” with six percent of respondents. These themes influenced the development of the messaging tool to help bring together the evidence from the literature review and survey results.

These results together show again, as with Hypothesis 1, there are definite areas for improvement, but overall the landscape is more favorable than anticipated. Schools are receptive to SEL, and staff needs help that is now available through the messaging tool. According to

Charlene Voyce, the out-of-school-time arena is even more open than schools to SEL competency building, training, and new programs (Voyce, 2017). This is an area of opportunity for Playworks to look towards for coalition building, connecting services, and training more organization in Playworks methodologies, as will be expanded upon in the recommendations in the following section.

Hypothesis 3: SEL is a predictor of high school graduation rates and that there is evidence in the field to prove it.

As discussed at length in the literature review, there is a great volume of research and scientifically proven evidence to show this hypothesis to be true. The messaging tool developed in this project gathered several of the prominent indicators that lead students to successfully navigate the school system, and connects the evidence from the literature review and Playworks' methodologies. The complete messaging tool can be found in the appendices of this report.

The school success indicators referenced in the messaging tool include:

- Confidence
- Growth Mindset / Academic Mindset
- Regulating Emotions
- Self-Control
- Resilience
- Grit
- Social Skills
- Empathy
- Meaningful relationships with adults
- Meaningful participation in school

- Reduced stress/anxiety, increased mental health
- Attendance
- Economic success

Through the literature review and survey, a few of these indicators stood out strongly in the context of Playworks' work. Specifically, the concept of empathy and social awareness, as well as self-management/regulating emotions/self-control were cited most in the literature review. Of all the open ended questions in the internal survey, the most thoughtful and robust responses were in the game example questions, again indicating a strong understanding among staff of how Playworks' games and methodologies connect to these particular indicators. Likewise, the ability to synthesize all the different terminology from the literature review also supports the results from Hypothesis 1 that a common language is not out of reach.

Further, as demonstrated in various sources of the literature review, there is ample evidence that SEL is learnable, just like reading or math. In "Ready to be Counted," Gabrieli et al. state that SEL skills can be improved through specific interventions, and that they are malleable (Gabrieli, Ansel, & Krachman, 2015, p.10). This is a standout finding in terms of awareness and movement building in the field and moves a step beyond this hypothesis, demonstrating that not only can SEL skills predict success in navigating the school system, but that all students are capable of learning and deserve the opportunity to practice and enhance these skills.

Hypothesis 4: SEL skills have long-term positive outcomes.

All of the evidence gathered in this project point to the truth of this hypothesis. The literature, the specific evidence about Playworks, and the expert interviewees all prove

it. However, as discussed by Sara Krachman in her interview, the field is still in the “awareness building stage” (Krachman, 2017). Because the field is so new, and because of the variety of terms, measurements, and organizations working from different angles, the evidence behind this body of work must still continue to grow. As discussed in the recommendations for the sector in the following section, the field will benefit from a further unification of definition and language, as well as an ongoing dedication to collecting scientific and evidence-based data. As stated in “The Missing Piece,” “although we have powerful evidence that SEL is gaining momentum across the country, we have more to do. We have seen the country address, only in fits and starts, various aspects of SEL, such as school climate, character education, or bullying prevention. Although valuable, too often these programs are ad hoc or add-ons in schools, in response to a tragic event or because of someone’s passion for the issue” (Bridgeland et al., 2013, p.3). In this way, the literature supports Krachman’s stance that more awareness is needed to connect the data available in academia, with the on the ground work.

Currently, Playworks’ aim and on the ground work is in building a movement for play. This movement is fueled by the continuing success of the program, and the growing tome of evidence to support their growth and scaling. The messaging tool, as shown in the excerpt below, and in full in the appendices, pushes this hypothesis, making evident the connection between specific facets of Playworks’ programming with the literature available in the field.

SEL and School Success Indicator Messaging				
SEL Competency	Success Indicator	What Playworks Does	Data / Evidence Support	Playworks Game
Self-Awareness: A person's ability to recognize emotions and thoughts and their influences on behavior. Assessing one's own strengths and limits and a sense of confidence and optimism				
	Confidence	Playground games build on skills that students already have, games that involve sports that some students already excel at are modified to simultaneously build confidence in both students that excel, and those that are still developing	<p>In <i>The Impact of Enhancing Students' SEL</i>, Durlak states that students who are more aware/more confident in their learning capacity try harder and persist when facing challenges. (Durlak, 2011, p.419)</p> <p>In <i>Preparing Youth to Thrive</i>, the authors discuss youth development theory that shows that activating youth's prior knowledge (skills, memories, beliefs) can support self-regulation of attention and emotional processes. It can help students feel safe, focused and motivated (Smith et al, 2016, p.42).</p>	Championship Knockout
	Growth Mindset, Academic Mindset	Playworks games build skillsets throughout the year, with increasingly complex rules and physical movements. This progression allows students to practice being successful in skill development, demonstrating to themselves that they can grow and learn. This confidence translates to a growth mindset, where students think forward to future success and understand that trying and practicing builds their skills. Games like dodgeball and tag that are banned at some schools are slowly introduced with modifications to make them more safe and inclusive. Children understand that shifting their behavior can result in more positive and healthy options.	<p>In <i>Student Academic Mindset Interventions</i>, the authors discuss how students' academic mindsets are their beliefs and attitudes about school. This mindset affects how students engage and learn. They argue that shifting students' mindsets help them successfully navigate the school system, and can significantly improve academic performance. Children's learning strategies are a mediating factor between mindset and outcomes (Snipes, Fancali, Stoker, 2012, p.15).</p> <p>The Holistic Student Assessment showed that in Playworks Junior Coaches, 91% improved in academic motivation and 90% improved and learning interest (PEAR, 2016, p.1).</p>	Dodgeball variations

Hypothesis 5: More data and clear evidence is needed to influence policy, especially under the current administration.

As stated above, evidence in this report points to the SEL field still being in the “awareness building” stage. CASEL and other advocates of SEL attempted to pass a bill on SEL in 2011 which failed despite bi-partisan support (Social and Emotional Learning: A Short History, 2011). As also demonstrated in the Edge Research and Wallace Foundation research, there still remain political implications behind the terminology of this work. The study shows that terminology is loaded. For example, the term “whole child” is seen to be a more liberal term, and too “touchy feely” for policy work (Edge Research & the Wallace Foundation, 2016, p.10). This demonstrates that more unification and dissemination of terminology is needed before the field can be recognized and legitimized on such a level that it could influence federal or state policy.

Section five of the literature review, noting current events, shows that with the current administration policies, and changes to ESSA, SEL may not currently be on the policy agenda. Additionally, Alyson Klein in *Education Week* states that themes from states proposed submissions for compliance with proposed ESSA regulations are varied across states, focusing mainly on combating absenteeism and college and career readiness. The article points out that SEL, grit, and growth mindset are not currently on the agenda for state accountability measures for ESSA (Klein, 2017). The proposed budget and agenda of the current administration also indicates a continued lack of understanding of the impact of SEL work. Policy makers are quoting outdated evidence to support their assumption that this work is still not as important as academic performance measures, despite resoundingly clear and ample evidence to the contrary (Askarinam, 2017).

However, some states and districts, such as Oakland Unified School District, are currently adopting SEL performance measures and school climate measures as part of their strategic plan to better serve their students (Social Emotional Learning in OUSD, 2016). This shows that, in congruence with the survey findings, that while SEL may not be on a federal or state policy agenda, on the school and district level, administrators and stakeholders understand the importance and benefit of this work. So despite the current policy trend still being stuck on an outdated model of focusing solely on academics, the tide is turning, and with continued vigilance and further research, the field will continue to build influence in the political sphere.

Limitations

While effort was made to produce a comprehensive and ethically based analysis, this applied research project also had limitations. In the Playworks survey, Playworks staff reported on language they used and heard regarding SEL around the country. While questions were framed to focus on their experience at partner schools, Playworks staff is already familiar with the term “social-emotional learning” because of internal trainings and messaging, which may have influenced their responses. The survey also could not control for how much depth of knowledge and relationship staff has with each school, so some current programs being run at schools could have been missed by respondents. With more time, a series of interviews with experts from more leading organizations in the field could produce a stronger sample size and opportunity to further draw out themes around policy work and systems change. Research was limited to partner elementary schools, and different results would yield from a survey that included middle or high schools, providing a more comprehensive look at the full transition between elementary and high school. Research conducted only looked at schools and policies in the United States.

Recognizing these limitations, the following sections offer recommendations for use of this project, and suggestions for further research to build on these studies.

Recommendations

This section discusses recommendations for Playworks and for the emerging field of SEL and the nonprofit sector. These recommendations stem from the above research to guide the organization and the field in this next phase of growth.

For Playworks

Create a Robust SEL Training for Impact Team and Regional Staff. Using the messaging tool, develop a two hour training for Playworks staff and AmeriCorps members on the Impact and program teams. This training could benefit everyone from director level to coaches. Incorporate messaging regarding the definitions of SEL terminology, with regional variances identified, and incorporate specific games that lend an experiential understanding of SEL skill development. Specific games would include “I love my neighbor” to demonstrate social awareness and empathy, and “One Fish Two Fish” to introduce self-management. Include a targeted set of debrief questions for reflection after each game to ensure understanding and connection. Focus discussion on how Playworks can complement other SEL programs and PBIS programs. The messaging tool can also serve as a handout or takeaway from this training.

Develop more Comprehensive SEL Messaging for Development Team. Using the messaging tool and literature review, develop a detailed addendum to the Playworks Grant Template (case statement that is updated each year by the foundations team) that summarizes the multiple studies available that support Playworks’ ability to develop strong SEL competencies and their connection to adult outcomes like school success, and high school graduation. Using this literature review as a starting point, further research could develop more messaging around

job readiness, the achievement gap, or public health. Use the Playworks Quote Bank (internal collection of stories and testimonials) to match stories to data and external studies. Develop regionally-specific messaging with targeted language as informed by the messaging map included in this report.

Further Incorporate SEL Messaging into all Pro Trainings. Playworks' Pro department, who train teachers and school staff in Playworks methodologies, are already providing professional development in SEL. As demonstrated in the staff survey, there may be an opportunity for more professional development for teachers regarding SEL, so incorporating specific messaging and training, informed by this research, to participants would help expand that connection between SEL and play. As cited in "The Missing Piece," teachers are crucial messengers for SEL and have a huge opportunity to deliver SEL to students each day in the classroom (Bridgeland et al, 2013, p.1). Likewise, more professional development is needed to bolster the myriad of after-school programs that complement Playworks. Playworks Pro, a rapidly growing department, is positioned to be an expert, with a platform to grow and expand the field.

Build on the Playworks Business Case. As shown in the literature review, a cost business analysis can be performed to connect SEL skills with economic outcomes. "The Economic Value of SEL" showed a strong positive impact on future earnings when social-emotional skills were enhanced; specifically they showed a nine percent increase in earnings with an increase in non-cognitive abilities (Belfield, 2015, p.11). Using this literature review as a base, further research can connect Playworks to SEL skills with economic impacts such as

savings in teachers' time, public health costs, lifetime earnings potential for students, future market productivity, and addressing the job skills gap. Language development around mainstream concepts like “grit” builds a case for stronger messaging for cross-sectoral partnerships with corporations and other investors.

Integrate Playworks Program Components with other SEL Programs. Being one of very few SEL programs that focuses on recess, Playworks is positioned to reinforce, rather than compete with, other classroom-based or after-school SEL programs. As cited in the survey results, Playworks would benefit from positioning themselves as a complement rather than a competitor with the other programs, or even as a coalition-builder. This idea can be realized through researching curriculum of programs like PBIS, Second Step, or RULER, and designing component curriculum, such as Class Game Time, to reinforce specific lessons being taught in other programs. This would more effectively serve students, and also strengthen Playworks messaging in district and school partnership discussions.

Conduct Further Research into Related Impacts in Equity. Using the literature review, conduct further research in the areas of the school-to-prison pipeline and the racial achievement gap and their connection with SEL competency development. Evidence cited in the literature review connects early SEL skill development with high school and college graduation rates, and reduction in criminal activities. This language would guide the earlier recommendation for the development of SEL impact messaging as it relates to racial equity, and could broaden funding support.

For the Sector

Build the Case for SEL with Common Language. As corroborated by both the Playworks survey and the research conducted by Edge Research and the Wallace Foundation, CASEL’s language and the term “social-emotional learning” leads the conversation around skill development. However, as demonstrated, there is a myriad of other terms and definitions by other prominent players in the field, with contrasting and complementary language. The field would benefit from an umbrella for this vocabulary, in the form of a hub website or database. This database could serve as a backbone to the plethora of effective organizations that approach this work from different angles. It could demonstrate where these different terms fit together, and where they diverge. It could help build an overarching coalition of organizations that are doing this work inside and outside the classroom all over the country. Further surveying nationwide school and organizational data could provide a more comprehensive map of all SEL programs and their dissemination to understand the scope of the field.

Look Outside the Classroom. As evidenced by Playworks and shown through the literature review, SEL skills require reinforcement and practice. Playworks demonstrates recess as the perfect laboratory for the practice needed to develop these muscles. And as discussed by Charlene Voyce, the out-of-school-time arena also provides an unparalleled opportunity to enhance academic performance through SEL skill practice in a safe and supportive environment. As Voyce discussed further, out-of-school-time staff need more professional development around SEL skills, to bring the science of the field to all the adults that influence and interact with children on a daily basis at school (Voyce, 2017).

Measure Existing Programs Instead of Creating New Ones. The literature review and expert interviews conducted in this project reveal that there are dozens of effective and comprehensive SEL focused programs and organizations. And as shown on the messaging map, many of these are already spread across the country. What the field needs to focus on is further development of measurement systems, like Transforming Education's MESH, to build the case for future policy and advocacy work. As discussed by Sara Krachman, the field is in the early stages of its lifecycle, and it needs to focus on understanding what is working before jumping into policy building (Krachman, 2017). Building a common language index, building awareness of the data that is already available, and synthesizing existing and emerging measurement tools are all necessary to effectively create a groundwork for future policy work.

Conclusions

This project reveals how far this field has already come. Beginning this project, it appeared that the field of SEL was scattered, with a lack of clear evidence and a variety of disparate descriptors and measurement tools struggling to tell the story of the importance of SEL. However, this research project demonstrates the opposite, from the perspective of a leading organization in the field. Playworks has a strong evidence base and a staff with a baseline of competence and confidence in their messaging skills. The survey and messaging tool developed through this project show that Playworks is positioned for growth in SEL competency development through fine-tuning their language, definitions, and clarity of evidence base and program examples. The recommendations above provide next steps for this development.

This project also demonstrates the plethora of data and evidence connecting SEL skill development with students' ability to navigate the school system and graduate successfully. This, in turn, is demonstrated to lead to a myriad of positive adult outcomes, from better public health to positive impacts in the job market. So while there are multiple organizations approaching this topic from a variety of angles, there is a strong base of evidence, and effective players in the field leading the way.

In this time of uncertainty and political change, our children need consistent and caring adults to provide positive leadership, and role model the social-emotional skills that they will need to be successful. Now more than ever does the field of SEL need to focus on building a comprehensive, clear, and unified set of scientifically based evidence to prove to policy makers the importance of empathy, respect and inclusion. It is clear that building these skills in our

youth is going to determine our future, our next generation of leaders depends on us staying true to these values and raising our voices to build this vision together.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Playworks SEL Messaging Matrix, Michelle Collier

Appendix B: Playworks Junior Coach Survey

Appendix C: SEL Infographic

Appendix D: Playworks Annual Survey Results



SEL and School Success Indicator Messaging

SEL Competency	Success Indicator	What Playworks Does	Data / Evidence Support	Example of Programming or Game
Self-Awareness: A person's ability to recognize emotions and thoughts and their influences on behavior. Assessing one's own strengths and limits and a sense of confidence and optimism				
	Confidence	Playground games build on skills that students already have, games that involve sports that some students already excel at are modified to simultaneously build confidence in both students that excel, and those that are still developing	<p>In <i>The Impact of Enhancing Students' SEL</i>, Durlak states that students who are more aware/more confident in their learning capacity try harder and persist when facing challenges. (Durlak, 2011, p.419).</p> <p>In <i>Preparing Youth to Thrive</i>, the authors discuss youth development theory that shows that activating youth's prior knowledge (skills, memories, beliefs) can support self-regulation of attention and emotional processes. It can help students feel safe, focused and motivated (Smith et al, 2016, p.42).</p>	Championship Knockout
	Growth Mindset, Academic Mindset	Playworks games build skillsets throughout the year, with increasingly complex rules and physical movements. This progression allows students to practice being successful in skill development, demonstrating to themselves that they can grow and learn. This confidence translates to a growth mindset, where students think forward to future success and understand that trying and practicing builds their skills. Games like dodgeball and tag that are banned at some schools are slowly introduced with modifications to make them more safe and inclusive. Children understand that shifting their behavior can result in more positive and healthy options.	<p>In <i>Student Academic Mindset Interventions</i>, Stupski discusses how students' academic mindsets are their beliefs and attitudes about school. This mindset affects how students engage and learn. He argues that shifting students' mindsets help them successfully navigate the school system, and can significantly improve academic performance. And that children's learning strategies are a mediating factor between mindset and outcomes (Snipes, Fancali, Stoker, 2012, p.15).</p> <p>A <i>Holistic Student Assessment</i> showed that of our Junior Coaches: 91% improved in academic motivation and 90% improved and learning interest (PEAR, 2016, p.1).</p>	Dodgeball variations
Self-Management: A person's ability to regulate their emotions, thoughts and behaviors in different situations, manage stress, control impulses, motivate, and work towards goals				
	Regulating Emotions	Games present small conflicts and disappointments that give students the opportunity to handle small failures or mistakes.	A <i>Holistic Student Assessment</i> of Junior Coaches showed: 74% of students improved in assertiveness and 59% improved in the area of emotional control (PEAR, 2016, p.1).	Mountains and Valleys
	Self Control	Games are chosen to practice controlling physical movements, adherence to game rules, management of frustration or anger, and create quick decision making opportunities.	<p>In <i>Ready to be Counted</i>, Transforming Education cites studies that show that self-discipline was a stronger predictor of academic success than IQ, and that self-control predicts that students will improve performance over a year. The research they cite shows that delaying gratification predicts higher test scores and higher educational attainment. The authors cite the Dunedin Health Study in New Zealand, which showed that children's ability to maintain self-control at a young age is a predictor of a range of outcomes later in life, even more than intelligence or socioeconomic status of the family. Children with low self-control or more likely to fall into adolescents snares. Children with high self-control are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -2.5 times less likely to smoke by age 15 -8 times less likely to drop out of high school -4 times less likely to have an unplanned pregnancy. (Gabrieli, Ansel, and Krachman, 2015, p.1) 	One Fish Two Fish
	Resilience	Recess gives opportunities to practice failing and trying again every day. Playworks creates cultural norms to encourage students to try again if they fail. Students are also encouraged to make choices about what games they play.	In <i>Physical Activity and Positive Youth Development</i> , Kris Madsen states that play and physical activity are natural opportunities for interaction and reduce isolation among students. In this way, Playworks helps provide students with countless and ongoing opportunities to practice and develop resilience (Madsen, 2011, p.463).	Recycle lines in foursquare
	Grit	Gives students the opportunity to manage the fear of failure and vulnerability, fostering courage and longer term goals of self-improvement.	In <i>Skill Formation and the Economics of Investing in Disadvantaged Children</i> , Heckman shows that skill mastery, specifically referring to social or non-cognitive skills, is essential for economic success. He refers to a study that shows that a stronger motivation to learn in preschoolers predicts higher achievement scores, higher high school graduation rates, higher salaries, higher likelihood of owning a home, lower welfare participation, and lower number of arrests (Heckman, 2006, p.1901).	3 Line Soccer
Social Awareness: A person's ability to perceive and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand behavioral norms, and recognize surrounding support systems				
	Social Skills	Games and cultural norms provide practice opportunities for pro-social skills, group agreements and facilitated play create ground rules for pro-social group interaction.	In <i>Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners</i> , the authors cite a longitudinal study through grades 1st, 3rd, 6th, and 10th that showed that the social-emotional adjustment of students at school is predictive of test scores at every point. Social-emotional skills enhance social interactions that both give rise to learning and also minimize disruptions to learning. Additionally, teachers reward pro-social behaviors with higher grades and punish behavioral interruptions with lower grades (Farrington et al, 2012, p.48).	Hi Fives are an easy pro-social action



SEL and School Success Indicator Messaging

SEL Competency	Success Indicator	What Playworks Does	Data / Evidence Support	Example of Programming or Game
	Empathy	With an emphasis on inclusion and respect, games are specifically modified to be inclusive of students with different abilities. Playworks uses group management techniques to encourage students to play with those outside of their peer group.	<p>In <i>The Impact of Enhancing students' SEL</i>: the authors cite a national survey of 150,000 6th to 12th graders. Only 29 to 45 percent of these students had social emotional competencies such as empathy, decision-making, and conflict resolution skills. By high school, 40 to 60 percent of these students were chronically disengaged (Durlak, 2011, p. 405).</p> <p>In <i>The Effects of Social Development Interventions 15 Years Later</i>, Hawkens shows that social-emotional competence intervention in kindergarteners resulted in increased adult functionality: greater accomplishment and engagement in school, work, and community (Hawkens, 2008, p.1135).</p>	I Love my Neighbor, games where you get to know other people or find out things you share in common. "Good job nice try!"
General SEL and Longer Term Impacts				
	Meaningful Relationships with Adults	Coaches foster students' sense of belonging. They are caring and consistent adults role modeling behavior. Playground games encourage communication skills and adult participation.	<p>In <i>The Missing Piece</i>, CASEL shows that schools with essential support systems in place are 10 times more likely to have gains in reading and math scores. These are schools in which school climate is safe, welcoming, stimulating, and nurturing - all characteristics of Playworks school (Bridgeland, Bruce, Hariharen, 2013, p.22).</p> <p>In the <i>The Impact of a Multi-Component Physical Activity Programme</i>, authors Massey et al showed that Playworks programming in Wisconsin produced findings suggesting that recess time provides a contextual opportunity in which adults and students can build a trusting relationship, which is vital given that positive teacher-student relationships can serve as a protective mechanism against a difficult home environment as well as help enhance academic achievement (Massey et al, 2017, p.9).</p>	Partner to Partner
	Meaningful participation in school	Creating stronger engagement on the playground translates to higher engagement in the classroom with fewer conflicts, more cooperation and simple conflict resolution strategies.	CASEL's <i>Guide to Effective SEL Programs</i> links SEL to important outcomes such as improved attitudes about school, pro-social behavior, academic achievement, and reductions in aggression, mental health problems and substance abuse. (Weissberg et al, 2013, p.6).	Watch your back tag
	Reduced stress/anxiety, increased mental health	Playworks combination of physical activity and safe social interaction, simple conflict resolution techniques, common game rules allow students to know what to expect when they jump into a game	In <i>The Effects of Social Development Interventions 15 Years Later</i> , Hawkens measured social-emotional development skills 15 years post intervention in a public school. His results showed significantly higher educational attainment, mental health, and sexual health in students that had higher social-emotional development in kindergarten (Hawkens, 2008, p.1134).	Roshambo to solve conflicts without escalation, Peace Path
	Attendance	Creates a safe and supportive environment, reduces bullying, helps create positive student/adult relationships	<p>In <i>The Relationship between Participation in Playworks and Attendance</i>, authors Leos-Urbel and Sanchez state that one of the three reasons for chronic absenteeism is "aversion" which arises from a student experiencing a lack of meaningful relationships and/or experiencing negative or scary incidents at school such as bullying (Leos-Urbel and Sanchez, 2015, p.6).</p> <p>In a study by Mathematica Research Policy, Playworks programming results in a 43% reduction in bullying incidents (Mathematica, 2013, p.1).</p> <p>In <i>The Missing Piece</i>, authors state that evidence based SEL can help reduce student absenteeism and can improve student interest: strong indicators of being on track to graduate from high school (Bridgeland, Bruce, Hariharen, 2013, p.5).</p>	If you really knew me
	Economic success	Learning minutes are recaptured because of the smooth transitions created between recess and the classroom, which contributes to teacher effectiveness and the self-management skills needed in the future workplace.	<p>In <i>Ready to be Counted</i>, Transforming Education states that cutting dropouts in half would increase the gross domestic product by 9.6 billion dollars by the time this set of students reached mid-career age. (Gabrieli, Ansel, and Krachman, 2015, p.7)</p> <p>In <i>The Economic Value of SEL</i>, the authors show through this analysis that SEL can help students take advantage of opportunities and predicts success in the labor market as well as school. They showed a strong positive impact on future earnings when social-emotional skills were enhanced; specifically they showed a nine percent increase in earnings with an increase in non-cognitive abilities. Current lifetime earnings for a third grader average \$575,000. Earnings go up in a range of 4 - 15 percent or at least \$46,000, when social-emotional skills are increased (Belfield et al, 2015, p.12).</p>	Sequence Touch

Junior Coach Leadership Program

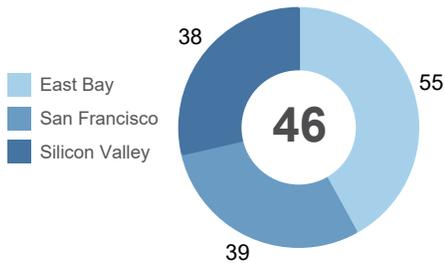
2015-2016 Report- Northern California



PLAYWORKS

The Junior Coach Leadership Program promotes leadership development by teaching students to model positive encouragement, work together as a team to lead games, and apply conflict resolution strategies on the playground and in the classroom.

Average # Hours Junior Coaches Spent in Training



Total Junior Coaches Enrolled

1,036

Average Attendance Rate

93%

"Playworks has a huge impact on our school culture and environment! The Junior Coach program has been a great way for my students to see other students as role models and aspire to become them one day. I think it has also encouraged physical activity, fun and teamwork across all grade-levels."
K-2 Teacher

Junior Coach Skill Development

Teachers who have Junior Coaches in their classroom and Playworks Program Coordinators assess the skills of individual Junior Coaches at entry and exit of the program. Teachers and Program Coordinators saw improvements in their Junior Coaches in the following areas:

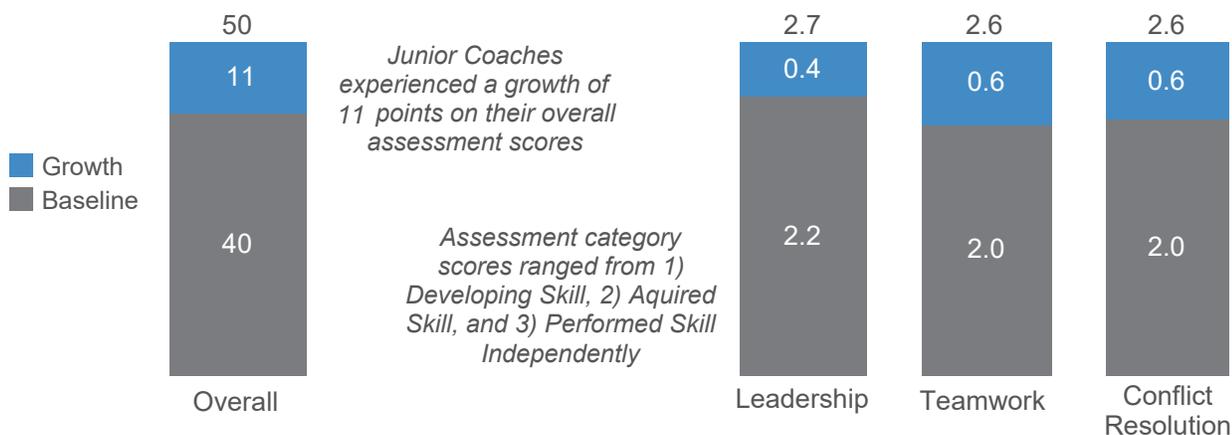
Teachers: In the Classroom



Program Coordinators: On the Playground



Average Score Growth from Baseline to Endpoint



n* = 952

*Skill Development data represents all Junior Coaches from our Coach schools meeting the minimum dosage requirements (20 training hours and 90 days) with a complete baseline and end point assessment

Play powers

Social and Emotional Learning.

Social and emotional skills include demonstrating empathy and a sense of fairness, cooperating, and treating others with respect.

Over **90%** of educators at our schools agree that Playworks¹

increases student **cooperation with others**

increases students' **ability to focus in class**

increases student **use of conflict resolution strategies**

increases student **feelings of inclusion**

Elementary students with strong social and emotional skills are²



54% more likely to **earn a high school diploma**

2x

as likely to **attain a college degree**



46% more likely to **have a full-time job by age 25**

To learn more, visit playworks.org

¹ 2015 Playworks Annual School Staff Survey. For more information, contact: info@playworks.org.

² American Journal of Public Health: November 2015. Early Social-Emotional Functioning and Public Health: The Relationship Between Kindergarten Social Competence and Future Wellness.



PLAYWORKS



2016 Annual Survey Results

PLAYWORKS

From a survey of administrators, teachers and other staff at schools with Playworks programming

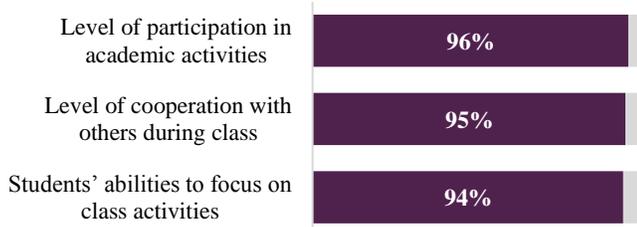
NorCal

COACH & TEAM UP

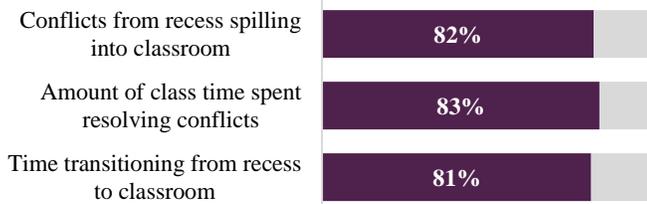
96% of administrators, teachers and support staff want Playworks to return next year

In the Classroom

% of staff that report an INCREASE in...



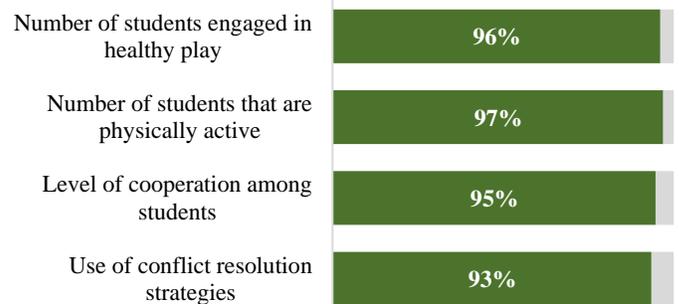
% of staff that report a DECREASE in...



18 Average number of hours recovered transitioning from recess to learning

On the Playground

% of staff that report an INCREASE in...

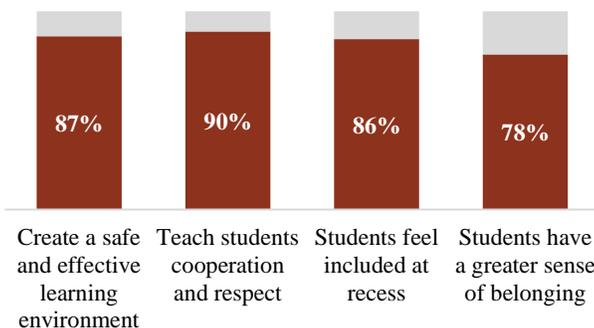


% of staff that report a DECREASE in...



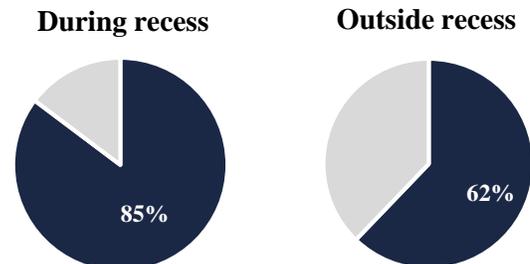
Overall

% of staff that report Playworks helps...



Youth Leadership

% of staff that report Junior Coaches take a leadership role...



Beyond School

% of staff that report Playworks supports the following:

- 76%** Helps students develop necessary skills to succeed **in the classroom and their community**
- 73%** Helps students develop necessary skills to succeed **in the workplace**

1,016 Total responses