



Propelling Social and Emotional Learning

PROPEL SEL CASE STUDY

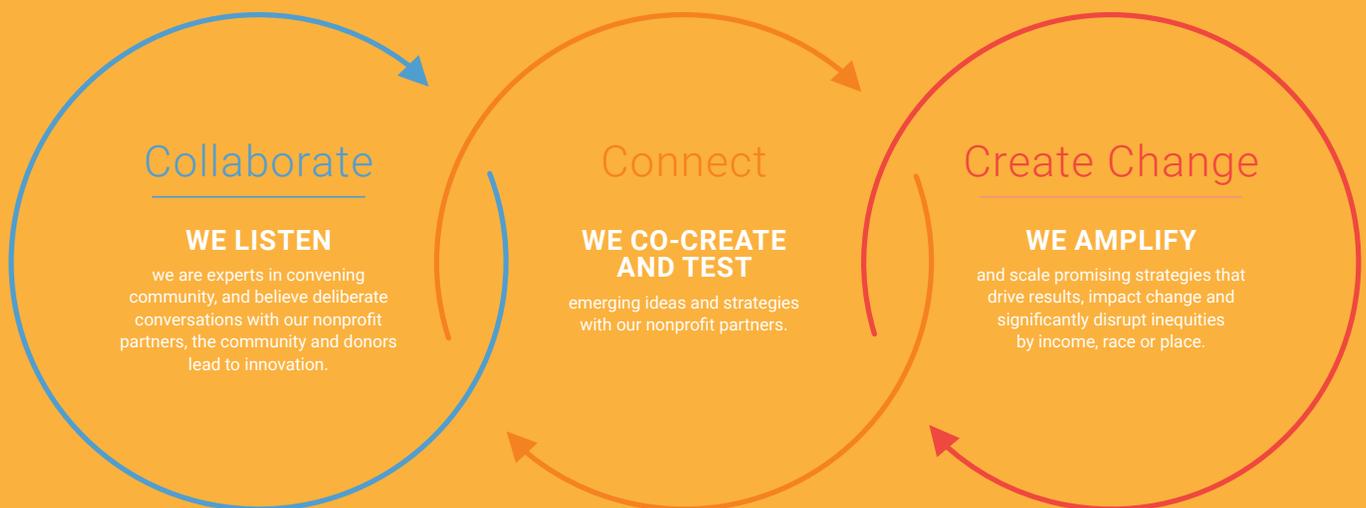


Greater Twin Cities
United Way

INNOVATING TO DRIVE INTENTIONAL OUTCOMES

Looking to build momentum around a learning approach proven to foster success in school and beyond, Greater Twin Cities United Way partnered with the Carlson Family Foundation to launch Propel SEL. We brought together hundreds of afterschool stakeholders, both youth and adults, to hear about their hopes and dreams as well as needs and barriers around social and emotional learning (SEL). We also gathered experts in equity and professional development and asked those who work with youth to dissect their own ways of thinking to transform how 21 youth-serving organizations understand SEL.

BIG CHALLENGES REQUIRE BIG IDEAS



Greater Twin Cities
United Way

INNOVATING FOR IMPACT



SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL LEARNING 101

Throughout our work in education, we've seen how the academic opportunity gap has challenged our community. In examining possible solutions, we saw potential in the social and emotional learning happening in out-of-school programs (e.g., before- and after-school activities, summer learning, arts enrichment) to make progress in closing the academic opportunity gap.

At its core, SEL is the process through which we all — kids and adults alike — gain and use the knowledge, skills and perspectives that help us move successfully through life. It's how we become more in tune with our emotions, learn to think critically and solve problems, empathize with others, achieve our goals, and build healthy relationships. These are not fixed personality traits but skills we can build on to help us navigate life.

THE KEY TO SUCCESS

Given the power SEL skills have to shape our successes and experiences in every area of life, it's no wonder they are seen as the key to ensuring children — regardless of income, race or place — are prepared for their futures. The enormous impact SEL has inside the classroom has been supported by more than a decade of research.

Studies have shown kids and young people who participate in SEL programs¹:

- Exhibit improved social and emotional development
- Are more engaged and interested in school
- Complete homework at a higher rate
- Achieve higher grades
- Perform better on standardized tests
- Are more likely to avoid risky behaviors

¹ Afterschool Alliance (2008). *Evaluations Backgrounder: A Summary of Formal Evaluations of the Academic Impact of Afterschool Programs*. Washington, D.C.: Afterschool Alliance

CHANNELING THE OPPORTUNITY

The potential of SEL to close the academic opportunity gap resonated with the Carlson Family Foundation and their focus on uplifting young people through education and mentorship. When we started working together to determine how best to use their donor dollars, we set our sights on accelerating the adoption of even more intentional SEL strategies across out-of-school programs.

Out-of-school and youth mentorship providers saw the opportunity to improve outcomes through SEL education. However, there was little consensus about the best ways to foster the SEL needs of young people or how best to evaluate the efficacy of any SEL work they were doing.

Phase 1: Listening to the Community

The first phase of Propel SEL was focused entirely on listening to people and organizations devoted to supporting young people across the greater Twin Cities. Over a series of 22 community engagement sessions, we heard from nearly 300 individuals who represented a range of youth mentorship roles and organizations.

In addition to these sessions, United Way convened a community advisory council comprised of 26 leaders in the field of SEL education. These advisors provided guidance on key goals and strategies.

WHAT WE HEARD

United Way learned practitioners and youth understand the value of SEL. We learned programs focus on more than 34 different SEL skills with no one set of SEL skills or single SEL framework rising to the top. But, most importantly, we learned, instead of frameworks, we need to start with professional development for youth workers.

The community engagement phase changed the entire trajectory of the project. It showed us the importance of taking time to listen and make sure we're heading in the right direction before taking action.

22

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
SESSIONS

300

PERSPECTIVES

26

COMMUNITY ADVISERS

21

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
ORGANIZATIONS

60

ENGAGED PARTICIPANTS

“The experience of being part of the Propel SEL learning cohorts was raw and intense. It was powerful. It’s rare in your professional life to have this kind of depth of learning.”

—SPPL STAFF



Phase 2: Creating a Learning Cohort

Matching our expertise to the known needs of out-of-school providers, Greater Twin Cities United Way developed and implemented a year-long, cohort-based professional development program in partnership with:

- Beacons
- Brooklyn Bridge Alliance for Youth
- Development and Training, Inc.
- Ignite Afterschool
- Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board
- University of Minnesota Youth Work Learning Lab
- Sprockets

Given the depth and complexity of the SEL movement, we realized *how* we taught was going to be just as important as *what* we shared. Using a cohort-based professional development model allowed us to dive deep into social and emotional discussions across topics like the relationship between racial equity and

SEL skill development, adult SEL skill development, and youth identity development.

Approximately 60 individuals representing 21 organizations that provide after school, summer youth development and enrichment programs were split across two cohorts. Participants unraveled the complexities of SEL, understood different frameworks and discussed delivery models to support high-quality youth programming.

ONGOING IMPACT

Confident in their collective learnings, participants brought new insights back to their teams to effect changes across their programs, training, policies, logic models and theories of change. As a result, Greater Twin Cities United Way will continue to see improved social and learning outcomes for youth in our communities long into the future.

**TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW YOU CAN
SUPPORT PROGRAMS LIKE
PROPEL SEL, VISIT GTCUW.ORG.**

**FOR MORE ON PROPEL SEL, CHECK OUT THE
REPORT FROM IGNITE AFTERSCHOOL AT:
IGNITEAFTERSCHOOL.ORG/PROPEL-SEL**



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