

STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-25

Overview: Midterm Goal 2

Children have access to high-quality social-emotional learning support.



Context: Strategic Plan 2020-2025

In October 2020, the Health Foundation for Western and Central New York announced a new vision statement and strategic plan that will guide the work of the Health Foundation through 2025. An extensive planning process that began in 2019 has resulted in a new organizational vision statement, as well as three long-term goals and corresponding mid-term goals to pursue that vision. **Our new vision is a healthy central and western New York where racial and socioeconomic equity are prioritized so all people can reach their full potential and achieve equitable health outcomes.**

The Health Foundation's mission will continue to be improving the health and health care of the people and communities of western and central New York. The plan also reaffirmed the Health Foundation's commitment to young children impacted by poverty; older adults; and the community-based organizations that serve them.

Our new vision will be pursued through a set of long- and mid-term goals. This an overview of why we chose a specific goal, and how we plan to pursue it.

Midterm Goal 2: Children have access to high-quality social-emotional learning support.

The Health Foundation for Western and Central New York has been a leader in supporting children's social and emotional development in our regions. The Health Foundation helped seed and nurture the growth of multiple evidence-based models for supporting child development, and has engaged partners to ensure this work continues to be sustained and spread throughout the region. Social and emotional skills are central to a child's long-term ability to thrive as a member of the community and promote strong interpersonal relationships.

Additionally, social and emotional skills can serve as a buffer for children with adverse childhood experiences; by increasing social and emotional competencies, a child builds resilience, which can mitigate the severe long-term impacts of trauma.

BACKGROUND

A child's first five years of life are critically important—90 percent of a child's brain and personality development occur before a child's fifth birthday. These early years offer the greatest opportunity for supporting vulnerable children and families by helping equip caregivers with the tools necessary to support healthy brain development.

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is a broad term that includes many different approaches to skill-building and dozens of specific programs. The SEL approach can be thought of as a process for helping children acquire core competencies related to emotion recognition and management, maintaining healthy relationships, self-awareness, decision making, and other interpersonal skills. These competencies serve as the foundation for better adjustment as children age and

are reflected in more pro-social behavior, improved academic performance, fewer conduct problems and less emotional distress.

Research demonstrates that children with well-developed social and emotional skills are more prepared for kindergarten, have better overall academic outcomes and a healthier physical and emotional trajectory throughout their lifespan. Similarly, researchers have found that social competency at kindergarten entry significantly predicts adult outcomes when measured 13 to 19 years later. Children who had average or above average social competencies were significantly more likely to have graduated high school, enrolled in college, and were significantly less likely to be involved with the criminal justice system, or have a substance use disorder. The roots of these social competencies are planted early in childhood and need to be nurtured along with other traditional academic competencies, such as reading.

When students lack social and emotional skills, it impairs their ability to engage and participate at school, and they become progressively less engaged over time. Low social-emotional competencies are strong predictors of not graduating from high school and engaging in high-risk behaviors in adolescence, such as substance use, violence, and risky sexual behavior.

Children living in poverty are at greater risk for deficits in social and emotional skills, and these early deficits often grow in magnitude, with these children lagging further and further behind their peers over time. Children with social and emotional deficits receive less academic instruction time than their peers due to disciplinary problems and problems with attention which often leads to falling behind academically. Early intervention and universal instruction in social and emotional skills benefits all children, but especially those most at-risk for behavioral and academic problems due to deficits in social and emotional skills.

From an early age, children spend a large percentage of time at school, which means that schools have a tremendous opportunity to foster these essential social-emotional skills in early childhood. Extensive research, including studies that followed children from kindergarten to high school graduation, have supported the value of universal social-emotional learning (SEL) programs to support children's development of these critical competencies.

For children with more significant deficits in social and emotional learning, early identification and intervention is especially critical. Developmental screenings are recognized as one of the most effective methods available to identify developmental delays and behavioral dysfunctions which, when followed by appropriate interventions, greatly improves school readiness and future success in young children. Based on both state and national statistics, 15 percent of children will experience a developmental delay or disability, with significantly higher rates among children who live in poverty. The positive effects of early intervention are well documented; however, New York State has lagged behind the rest of the country in offering statewide developmental screenings that are crucial for early identification of developmental and behavioral problems in young children. In 2018, 27 percent of children in New York aged 9-35 months received a developmental screening, compared to 33 percent national average.

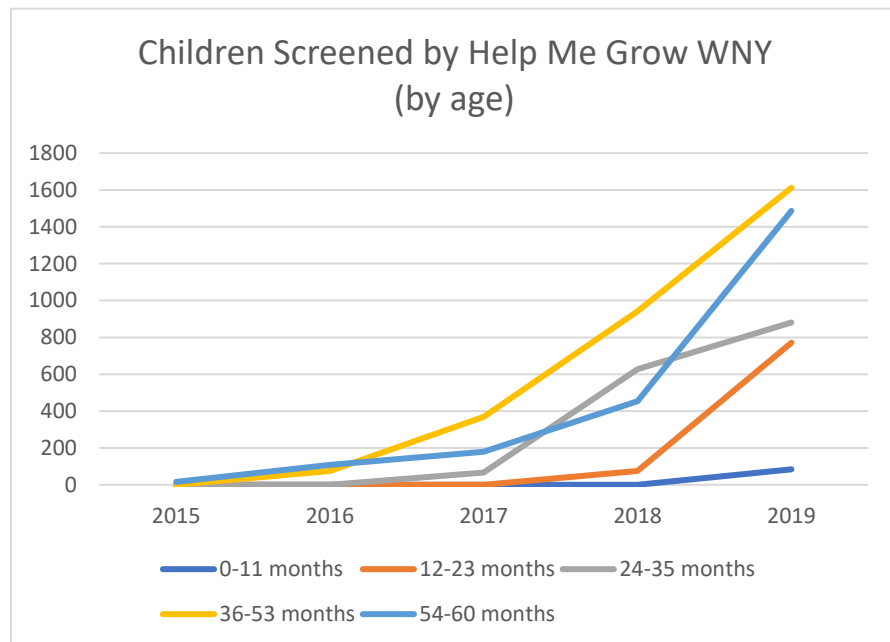
In 2012 (the most recent year data was available), 21 percent of New York State children under six received a developmental screening, compared to the national average of 30 percent. This is especially alarming given that in the same year, 33 percent of parents of New York State children under six had concerns about their child’s development, which was higher than the national average (26 percent).

The lack of early widespread screening for developmental and behavioral problems means that children often are not identified as needing services until they are in formal school settings, which may not happen until kindergarten. At that point, these delays or disabilities are often more complex, difficult and expensive to address because so much of the child’s brain has developed.

WHAT THE FOUNDATION HAS DONE TO DATE TO ADDRESS THIS GOAL

Under the 2014-2019 Strategic Sharpening, the Health Foundation had a focus on ensuring kindergarten readiness for children living in poverty. During this time, two flagship programs were launched: Help Me Grow, a nationally recognized model for promoting developmental screenings, and PEDALS, which incorporates the evidence-based *Second Step* curriculum for social and emotional education.

Help Me Grow provides developmental screenings for children with the goal of increasing parent and caregiver knowledge of childhood development and important developmental milestones. These screenings are important for early detection and treatment of developmental delays. Screenings are provided by Help Me Grow staff, as well as by community



partners, school districts, childcare centers, and pediatricians.

Additionally, Help Me Grow provides referrals and linkages to essential support services when necessary.

Help Me Grow provides a cross-systems framework that identifies and maximizes existing programs, funding, and data systems to improve resource allocation and create community

connections in a family-centered service delivery system. This helps parents access the supports and services they need and improves developmental outcomes. Help Me Grow is one of the Health Foundation’s longest running initiatives and is continuing to grow and evolve in both western and central New York.

Positive Emotional Development and Learning Skills (PEDALS) is a two-year intervention for three- and four-year-olds that combines evidence-based curricula, classroom coaching, technical assistance and evaluation to create an environment in which children actively learn and develop self-regulation, attachment and communication skills. This program was developed in partnership with the Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation and was launched in western New York before being spread to Head Starts and pre-schools in central New York. The program also identifies children with additional needs to ensure accommodations and appropriate referrals are made for them and increases teachers' skills to provide the optimal environment for a child's success.

PEDALS uses the evidence-based *Second Step* curriculum to teach social and emotional skills; however, the most critical component of the PEDALS program is the in-classroom coaching provided to all PEDALS teachers. This coaching provides additional support to teachers, as well as allowing the coach to model the program, provide implementation feedback and troubleshoot issues that may arise. PEDALS WNY has successfully used a "hub" model to streamline the process of onboarding new classrooms and delivering coaching, and PEDALS CNY is currently in the process of identifying potential hub organizations that could provide implementation support throughout the region.

Other work: The Health Foundation has supported several exploratory pilots of interventions in addition to Help Me Grow and PEDALS. As part of the *Innovations* Request for Proposals released in 2018, the Health Foundation provided support to the Madison County Department of Health to receive training in the Pyramid model. The Pyramid model is an evidence-based framework for supporting healthy child development and promoting social and emotional learning; the Pyramid model is being promoted by New York State to facilitate better social and emotional learning and education.

Many children, especially children from lower-income families, do not attend formal preschool or licensed childcare centers. They receive care from informal caregivers, such as friends, family or neighbors, in unlicensed, exempt childcare settings. Many of these caregivers lack formal training in childcare or social and emotional learning. To address this gap, Child Care Solutions proposed a playgroup program that would bring these informal caregivers together, with the children they care for, to provide education and resources on child development and social and emotional learning. The Health Foundation provided support for this pilot; however, the program was paused due to COVID-19 and funds were repurposed to provide anti-racism materials to families and caregivers.

Another pilot that was designed to address the needs of informal caregivers was a program run by the YMCA. Early Learning Readiness is a national model developed by the YMCA to engage caregivers and children over the course of a year. The program educates caregivers on developmental milestones and the importance of talking, playing and engaging with young children to facilitate their development and social and emotional learning.

Strategies Moving Forward

The current strategic plan reflects a continuation and deepening of the Health Foundation's focus on ensuring high-quality social and emotional learning supports for children. The Health Foundation will continue to support the growth of PEDALS and Help Me Grow while also exploring the potential need for additional, or more tailored, social and emotional learning supports for marginalized communities.

Expand Evidence-Based SEL programs

PEDALS: The Health Foundation is continuing to support the spread of PEDALS in both western and central New York. PEDALS has traditionally served children 3-4 years old, but there is interest in expanding PEDALS to reach children 0-3 years. This will allow the program to be spread beyond preschools and Head Starts into childcare programs. Work is currently underway to identify an appropriate evidence-based curriculum for this age group.

In western New York, the Health Foundation has partnered with the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation to advance work on PEDALS. The Wilson Foundation supported PEDALS and Help Me Grow undertaking strategic planning, and the resulting plan called for hiring one executive director to oversee both programs in western New York. Currently, the Health Foundation is working in partnership with CCNY and the Wilson Foundation to develop a 10-year strategic plan for continued implementation and sustainability of PEDALS in WNY. This effort will explore ways that PEDALS can be fully integrated into the system and potential funding streams for ongoing implementation support.

While PEDALS WNY has a focus on continued implementation and sustainability over the next ten years, PEDALS Central New York continues to focus on increasing the program's reach and spread beyond Onondaga County. Future work in central New York will focus on establishing a hub organization to make connections with school districts, Head Starts and childcare centers, oversee implementation and provide the coaching. Additionally, Health Foundation staff will work to identify philanthropic partners to support the ongoing expansion of PEDALS throughout central New York.

Help Me Grow: The Health Foundation is also partnering with the Wilson Foundation on Help Me Grow in western New York. As noted above, the Wilson Foundation provided support for Help Me Grow WNY to undertake strategic planning and Help Me Grow WNY will be sharing an executive director with PEDALS WNY. Help Me Grow WNY had been focused on conducting developmental screenings and making referrals; under the new strategic plan they will be emphasizing data collection that can be used to support policy and advocacy efforts. The Health Foundation will continue to partner with the Wilson Foundation to support Help Me Grow in the western New York region.

In central New York, Help Me Grow is supported by the Early Childhood Alliance as the backbone organization. They are expanding the program's reach, adding staff, and working with other New York State affiliates to build out the website and coordinate referral strategies. Their strategy is a "train the trainers" model to increase the number of providers trained in

developmental screenings and making referrals. Their team provides screenings when needed, but their focus will continue to be on training childcare providers, pediatricians and their care partners, and other child-focused professionals to screen children for developmental milestones. Health Foundation staff will continue to participate in the Early Childhood Alliance and Help Me Grow committee while exploring the need and feasibility of expanding Help Me Grow beyond Onondaga County into the other central New York counties.

Additionally, Help Me Grow WNY and Help Me Grow CNY are collaborating on efforts to spread Help Me Grow across New York State and potentially identify a statewide coordinating agency. They will be meeting with funders downstate who support Help Me Grow across multiple regions to discuss potential challenges and opportunities.

KEY PERSONNEL

[Marnie Annese](#)

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Additional Reading:

Taylor, R.D., Oberle, E., Durlak, J.A., & Weissberg, R.P. (2017) [Promoting Positive Youth Development Through School-Based Social and Emotional Learning Interventions: A Meta-Analysis of Follow-Up Effects](#). *Child Development*, 88(4): 1156–1171.

CASEL (2021): [What is SEL?](#)

[Edutopia: Why Social and Emotional Learning is Essential for Students](#)

[Second Step](#)

National University [“Social Emotional Learning \(SEL\) & Why It Matters for Educators”](#)

Belfield, C., Bowden, B., Klapp, A., Levin, H., Shand, R., & Zander, S. (2015). [The economic value of social and emotional learning](#). New York: Center for Benefit-Cost Studies in Education, Teachers College, Columbia University.

Jones, D. E., Greenberg, M., and Crowley, M. (2015). [Early social-emotional functioning and public health: The relationship between kindergarten social competence and future wellness](#). *American Journal of Public Health*, 105(11): 2283–2290. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2015.302630