WAYFINDER

Putting SEL to Work

Equipping students with employability skills for the workforce and life

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About This Report's Authors

Wayfinder

Wayfinder is the premier Social-Emotional Learning + Future-Ready Skills curriculum provider in the country. Founded at the Stanford d.school in 2015, Wayfinder provides curriculum, professional development, and assessments geared toward helping students design lives of meaning and purpose.

Roadtrip Nation

Roadtrip Nation is a nonprofit organization that humanizes career exploration through storytelling and empowers individuals to connect their interests to fulfilling lives and careers. For over 20 years, Roadtrip Nation has empowered young people from all backgrounds to define their own roads in life and build meaningful careers.

Foreword

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is upon us. The first three industrial revolutions were defined by rapid advancements in technologies—such as factories, steam engines, electricity, and computing—that fundamentally altered the fabric of society. This new industrial revolution is characterized by the convergence of multiple disruptive technologies—ranging from artificial intelligence to the Internet of Things, blockchain to gene editing.

These technologies are developing at an unprecedented pace: It took cars 62 years to reach 50 million users; it took Pokemon Go less than three weeks to exceed that number. They are also impacting all aspects of how we live our lives: how we work, how we play, how we govern, how we interact with others, how we relate to the environment. Given the uneven adoption of these technologies, and the rapid rate of their development, the Fourth Industrial Revolution risks exacerbating the gap between the "haves" and "have nots" if we are not intentional about how these technologies are designed and deployed, and how we prepare the next generation accordingly.

No sector is immune from the potential of key roles and functions being automated. This means that many workers will need to develop new skills to remain competitive in the job market. Employers will increasingly be looking to humans to perform the work that can't be done by robots or computers — at one time dismissed as "soft skills," but increasingly referred to as "durable skills" as an indication of their enduring value. As I've built future-oriented teams in the private sector, government, and civil society, I've seen that employees are increasingly sought after for durable skills as much as for their expertise, if not more.

In education, this cultural shift forces us to reexamine what knowledge is truly essential for students to learn. While reading, writing, and arithmetic are still foundational, students can now use AI to write essays or solve their math homework. What will differentiate school from an online search is the dynamic learning that comes from creating and innovating with teachers and peers, an experience that will mirror workplaces of the future.

To ensure students are prepared for what lies ahead, educators must support young people to develop skills that enable success in and beyond the classroom — skills like empathy, self-awareness, collaboration, adaptability, agency, and purpose. Organizations like Wayfinder will be powerful allies in this work, providing educators with the training, resources, and critical strategies they need to facilitate explicit durable skill-building and ongoing, fully integrated opportunities for social-emotional development across the K-12 journey.

Zvika Kreiger - Former Director of Responsible Innovation at Meta/Facebook and Founding Co-Director of the World Economic Forum's Center for the Fourth Industrial Revolution

∞ Meta

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

Executive Summary

For the first time since World War II, a powerful force impacted the entire world simultaneously. No one was untouched by COVID-19, and we witnessed the institutions that we depend on struggle to rise to the occasion. In addition to an unprecedented interruption in academic education, we've also seen a mounting mental health crisis among children and teens that schools remain unequipped to address.

Simultaneously, we find ourselves entering a new era of industry—the Fourth Industrial Revolution—in which technology will continue to rapidly transform the way we work. Keeping pace with technological advancements is not the main responsibility of our school systems, nor should schools take up the charge. Schools already face monumental tasks: addressing learning loss, supporting student mental health and well-being, and readying students for a fast-changing future.

But empowering school systems to meet and surmount these challenges is possible.

For decades, social-emotional learning (SEL) has offered schools a framework to help students cultivate critical skills needed for success in life that are not explicitly covered in core academic subjects. However, the dual disruptions of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and COVID-19 have necessitated—and created—a once-in-a-generation opportunity. It's time to revamp SEL by infusing it with action-oriented purpose learning and teach students what industry and research tell us will be critical, durable skills for the future.

In short, it's time to put SEL to work.

What Does It Mean to Prepare Students for Success in the 21st Century?

When we think of preparing students for the future, many people think of teaching hard, technical skills for an increasingly digitized world, like coding and digital literacy. Some schools are even incorporating these skills into K-12 curricula. But this approach is an exercise in futility. Technology and the skills required to manage it are evolving at such an exponential pace that it's nearly impossible to create technical curricula that will remain relevant. The wise strategy is to invest resources in preparing students for a future of uncertainty in school, the workplace, and—as recent times continue to demonstrate—in a rapidly shifting social and geopolitical landscape.

As Google's former Chief Education Evangelist Jaime Casap said: "We are preparing students for jobs that don't exist, to use technology that hasn't been invented, to solve problems we don't even know are problems yet."

This statement is not merely an assumption. The World Economic Forum estimates that nearly 70% of jobs students will have after graduating don't exist yet. Without a goalpost to aim for, teachers and curriculum developers cannot possibly know how to prepare students with the full range of technical skills they will need in their future occupations.

What's more, many jobs that do exist today are expected to transform or disappear as they get taken over by automation during what is being called the Fourth Industrial Revolution. While the conversation around automation historically has focused on entry-level positions like call centers and data entry, it's likely that AI and automation will have profound impacts on a wide range of fields. The future of coding and software development, for example, is expected to look completely different in the next ten years, by which time experts expect most programming to be completed by machines rather than humans. Even fields like cardiology and oncology are expected to undergo radical change as technology grows more capable and accurate than humans.

Given all this uncertainty, what today's educators can—and, indeed, must—do is prepare students with the skills they need to successfully live in a world of rapid technological development.

There is one key variable that can significantly affect an individual's ability to navigate uncertainty: a connection to purpose—one's intention to accomplish something that is both meaningful to the self and consequential to the wider world. Purpose learning enables students to meet uncertainty with the knowledge of where they want to go and the confidence in themselves and their abilities to do what they need to get there.

Over the past few decades, social-emotional learning (SEL) has been recognized more and more as a key component of K-12 education. It is used by schools to boost students' academic performance, support their holistic well-being, and guide them to develop the skills needed to thrive in and out of the classroom. Currently, SEL has a key role to play in helping students process the havoc COVID-19 wreaked on the world. More importantly, SEL has the potential to prepare students for the uncertain future. To harness its full potential, we must make SEL more actionable and meaningful.

By integrating traditional social-emotional competencies with future-ready skill-building and purpose education, schools can help students pair essential in-demand skills with a sense of purpose that will help them persevere through the challenges and uncertainty the future guarantees. These are the realities we have considered to create SEL curricula that prepare students to build prosperous, meaningful futures in the 21st century.

Professional Demand Overwhelmingly Favors Social-Emotional Skills Over Technical Skills

With the future of work more uncertain than ever, researchers have been working to identify skills that will remain in demand across professional fields and industries. One McKinsey Institute study of 18,000 people across 15 countries found that 75% of what tomorrow's employers will look for in their employees are cognitive, interpersonal, and self-leading capabilities.

Our research identified 56 foundational skills that will help citizens thrive in the future of work.

Cognitive

Critical Thinking

+ Structured problem solving
+ Logical reasoning
+ Understanding biases
+ Seeking relevant information

Planning and Ways of Working

+ Work-plan development
+ Time management and prioritization
+ Agile thinking

Communication

+ Storytelling and public speaking
+ Asking the right questions
+ Synthesizing messages
+ Active listening

Mental Flexibility

+ Creativity and imagination
+ Translating knowledge to different contexts
+ Adopting a different perspective
+ Adaptability
+ Ability to learn

Interpersonal

Mobilizing Systems

+ Role modeling
+ Win–win negotiations
+ Crafting an inspiring vision
+ Organizational awareness

Developing Relationships

+ Work-plan development
+ Time management and prioritization
+ Agile thinking

Teamwork Effectiveness

+ Fostering inclusiveness
+ Motivating different personalities
+ Resolving conflicts
+ Collaboration
+ Coaching
+ Empowering

Self-Leadership

Self-Awareness and Self-Management

+ Understanding own emotions and triggers
+ Self-control and regulation
+ Understanding own strengths
+ Seeking relevant information

Entrepreneurship

+ Courage and risk-taking
+ Driving change and innovation
+ Energy, passion, and optimism

Goals Achievement

+ Ownership and decisiveness
+ Achievement orientation
+ Grit and persistence
+ Coping with uncertainty
+ Self-development

Digital

Digital Fluency and Citizenship

+ Digital literacy
+ Digital learning
+ Digital collaboration
+ Digital ethics

Software Use and Development

+ Programming literacy
+ Data analysis and statistics
+ Computational and algorithmic thinking

Understanding Digital Systems

+ Data literacy
+ Smart systems
+ Cybersecurity literacy
+ Tech translation and enablement

Data via McKinsey & Company

Nonprofit education advocacy organization America Succeeds has also completed extensive research on the skills today's students will need to find success in the future job market. They call them durable skills—all of them are transferable social-emotional competencies that serve individuals in any number of professional fields.
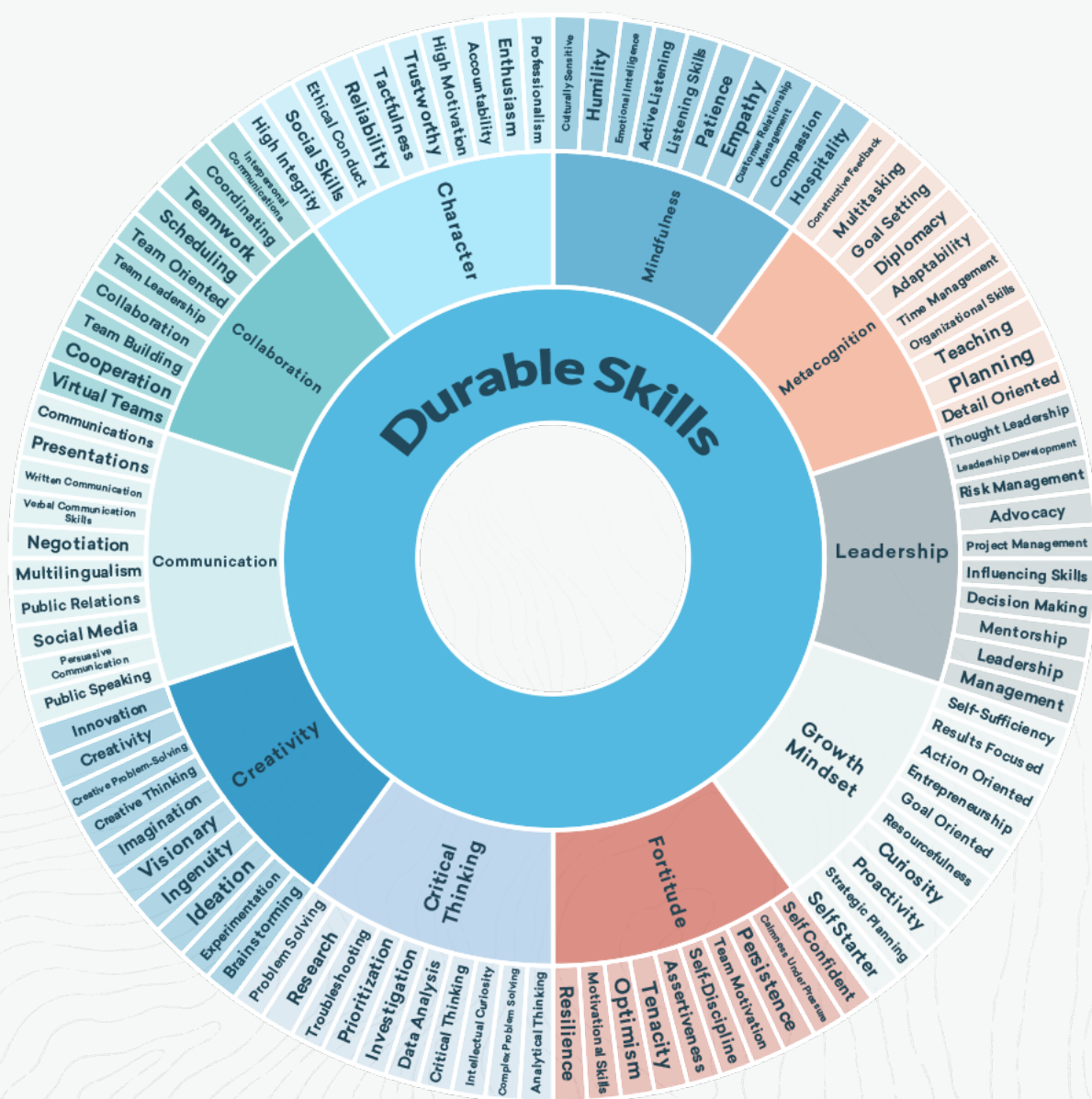
Graphic via America Succeeds

America Succeeds' 2021 Durable Skills Report shows that, even today, 70% of the skills desired by potential employers are durable rather than technical skills. Additionally, these skills are sought out nearly four times more often than the most in-demand technical skills, and are aligned with the types of management, operations, and engineering positions likely to proliferate over the coming decades.

In 2008, Google launched its Project Oxygen to determine the skills that make great managers at their organization. Since its first iteration, the study has consistently found that the most important skills involve communication, collaboration, self-management, and encouragement. As of 2018, only one of the top ten skills named by Project Oxygen is technical, while the other nine more closely resemble durable social emotional skills.

1 **Is a good coach**

2 **Empowers team and does not micromanage**

3 **Creates an inclusive team environment, showing concern for success and well-being**

4 **Is productive and results-oriented**

5 **Is a good communicator — listens and shares information**

6 **Supports career development and discusses performance**

7 **Has a clear vision/strategy for the team**

8 **Has key technical skills to help advise the team**

9 **Collaborates across Google**

10 **Is a strong decision maker**

Data via Google

Harvard Business Review has reiterated this same point. They maintain that when hiring tech talent, technical skills are only one small piece of the puzzle—and not even the most important one. Though necessary, technical skills rank lower in importance than skills like collaboration, stress management, and self-efficacy. These latter skills enable employees to succeed at the tasks assigned to them while also contributing to a positive and productive work environment.

Mental Health and Life Readiness

Recent mental health research has demonstrated that a person's ability to cope with uncertainty is a key predictor of anxiety disorders and clinical depression. Those who feel unable or unsure of how to manage themselves and their emotions in uncertain situations are more likely to suffer from poor mental health than those more confident in their ability to handle ambiguity. Notably, the pandemic, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, global politics, and diminishing trust in institutions have all engendered a time of immense uncertainty. What young people need is to develop skills that can support them through the inevitable uncertainties of their academic, personal, and professional futures.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has identified the five key competencies of SEL, and research has shown that the implementation of SEL in schools functions as a powerful preventative mental health measure.

The adoption of SEL historically has been much higher in elementary schools than in middle and high schools. However, recent years have seen more and more middle and high schools turning to SEL to support engagement and mental health. Particularly after pandemic-related interruptions to schooling, it has become clearer that **having healthy strategies to manage mental wellness is an essential life skill.**

As Founder and Director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence Marc Brackett points out, it is easy to confuse many challenging emotions such as stress, overwhelm, and anxiety. When young people don't have the skills to identify and manage these emotions, they are left to struggle or, worse, turn to maladaptive coping strategies like drug and alcohol use.
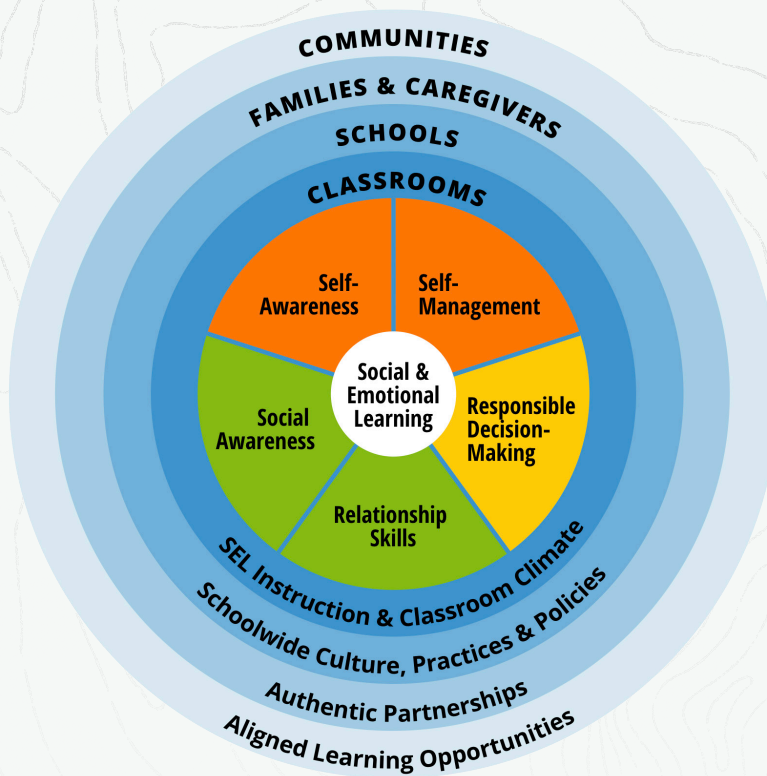
The CASEL 5

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1. Self-Awareness
2. Self-Management
3. Responsible Decision-Making
4. Relationship Skills
5. Social Awareness

Graphic via CASEL

According to the Office of the US Surgeon General, childhood and adolescent mental health has been steadily growing worse in the US. In 2021, it was officially declared a crisis. More than a third of high school students report persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness—an increase of over 40% in recent years. Adolescent suicide rates grew over 57% between 2008 and 2018 and accounted for nearly 7,000 deaths in 2020 among people aged 10-24. Additionally, the CDC reported that the COVID-19 pandemic led to a significant rise in anxiety, depression, traumatic stress, and substance use that was disproportionately concentrated among young people.

To help students cultivate the skills to support their future success, schools must empower students with the skills to understand and manage their emotions in a healthy and productive manner. In this way, supporting students' mental health can be seen as one essential component of preparing students to successfully navigate the workforce and their lives.

States Are Beginning to Link SEL and Career Readiness

Budgets reflect the priorities of schools and districts, and a 2021 EdWeek Market Brief reported that districts' number one budgetary interest is SEL. According to a Market Week Report from February 2022, SEL remained a top priority for the '22-'23 school year. At the district level, over 60% of administrators have committed to spending on SEL resources. With the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic still being felt at schools across the country, it is clear that SEL will remain a priority for years to come.

In fact, Market Week's report also shows that spending to address students' mental health and social-emotional needs is expected to equal the amount budgeted to address academic learning loss incurred during the period of remote instruction. Given that **SEL has been shown to boost academic performance 11 percentile points in hundreds of schools across the US**, this pairing of social-emotional and academic programming makes for a promising remedy for COVID-related learning loss.

Furthermore, this same report asked leaders to rank what they believed to be the areas of highest need in their schools. "Student engagement and motivation" emerged as the top priority for the upcoming school year, beating out foundational academic skills like reading, writing, and communication competencies. In third place, ranking above math, science, and history, was "student mental health." Again, these priorities are backed by research demonstrating that **comprehensive SEL supports engagement and motivation in elementary, middle, and high school students.**

A Fordham Institute Report from 2021 found that families also support their children working on many of the skills commonly addressed in SEL. Though the term "social and emotional learning" itself proved unpopular among parents and guardians of K-12 students, over 90% of respondents

to the Fordham Institute's surveys indicated the belief that schools should be guiding children toward setting goals and working to achieve them, approaching challenges with positivity, and developing self-esteem and self-efficacy. Additionally, 80% or more of respondents said that navigating social situations, responding ethically, building informed citizenship, managing emotions, standing up for people with different backgrounds, and empathizing with others were skills that schools should be focusing on helping students develop.

This study also saw so-called "soft skills" rank higher in priority than any discreet academic skills. "Reasoning and problem solving" ranked highest of all, well above any academic competency. While mathematics, career and technical education, and English skills were also popular among parents, so were taking responsibility, communicating effectively, and building self-confidence.

SEL proponents agree with the findings of Fordham's parent surveys: SEL and academics can coexist in schools, and neither needs to take time away from the other. There are multiple opportunities and methods for incorporating SEL into schooling that don't require detracting from formal instruction. If implemented well, the skills students learn through SEL can also help them succeed and persist as they learn traditional academic and technical skills.

CASEL has also recognized the power of integrating SEL into career and workforce development. They have partnered with the Coalition for Career Development Center and CIVIC to create a framework to support educators in implementing [SEL-informed career development](#) programming. So far, they have collaborated with eight US states to develop a Career and Workforce Community of Practice (CoP): Delaware, Kansas, Nevada, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Utah, and Wisconsin.

[Pennsylvania Career Ready Skills](#), for example, recognize the need to prepare students for tomorrow's workforce with [more than just technical skills](#). Their priorities reflect both the social-emotional focus of CASEL's five competencies as well as the specific social skills research shows to be critical to employability. These skills are scaffolded such that teachers can integrate them into their curricula from kindergarten to twelfth grade. This intention is reflected in their [skills continuum,](#) which shows how career-ready skills can be taught in developmentally appropriate ways to help young students build fundamental competencies that enable them to learn more advanced, career-focused skills in the upper grades.

Pennsylvania Career-Ready Skills

The chart below illustrates the direct connection of the PA Career Ready Skills to those robust employability skills needed for employment and adult life, thus equipping students to pursue their career opportunities with confidence and contribute positively to their communities.

	Career Ready Skills	Related Employability Skills
SELF-AWARENESS & SELF-MANAGEMENT	Recognize and regulate emotions	Respect, Dependability & Reliability, Communication, Professionalism, Teamwork, Integrity, Business Fundamentals, Adaptability, Initiative, Planning & Organizing
ESTABLISHING & MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS	Communicate and collaborate amongst diversity	Problem-Solving, Decision-Making, Critical Thinking, Integrity, Teamwork, Adaptability, Professionalism, Communication, Respect
SOCIAL PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS	Demonstrate empathy and respectful choice	Teamwork, Integrity, Communication, Respect, Customer Focus, Critical Thinking, Professionalism, Reading, Writing, Problem-Solving

Data taken from PA DOE

Kansas has also made great efforts in recent years to ensure students have the academic, cognitive, technical, and employability skills to succeed in their lives after graduation. Individual Plans of Study, coupled with opportunities for students to become civically engaged, support each student in grades eight through 12 to apply academic and social-emotional learning to their real-life interests. Through self-exploration, career exploration, and career planning, Kansas students combine their strengths, interests, and goals to form a guiding roadmap to follow after they graduate.

The other states that participate in CASEL's CoP have set up similar guidelines and graduate profiles to help guide learning across schools statewide. These learning and planning structures combine SEL competencies with career-relevant skills to grow healthy, driven students ready for their college and career paths.

States outside of CASEL's CoP have also implemented their own similar frameworks. Texas' Positive Character Traits Education aims to integrate the development of personal and interpersonal skills throughout students' K-12 experience. In this same vein, Illinois' Essential Employability Skills promote the growth of transferable skills that set students up for success in their education and career paths. While the naming of these frameworks may differ, the visible effort to prioritize transferable SEL skill-building across the country underscores just how essential this work is.

Introducing Wayfinder's Future-Ready Skills

Since its founding at the Stanford d.school, Wayfinder has been committed to helping schools become sites of meaningful learning and development. We ground our lessons in decades of educational, neurological, and developmental research and use human-centered design to create learning experiences that reflect the needs of today's students and educators.

"Schools exist to help young people identify their purposes in life and to gain the skills they need to pursue those purposes…Wayfinder is an effective partner in this important work."

Dr. Kendall Cotton Bronk

Research on education and the future workforce suggests a four-pronged approach for designing curricula and activities that enhance students' SEL skills and career readiness:

1. Take an asset-based approach to support young people in identifying their strengths and analyzing the ways these strengths might serve them in different fields and professions

2. Help students develop explicit SEL skills, as these are important for employability—especially for those positions being created and transformed by the Fourth Industrial Revolution

3. Incorporate trauma-informed practices to make learning accessible to all students

4. Engage students in discussions about the real-world challenges that await them in professional fields like STEM

This research echoes the approach Wayfinder's curriculum developers use to ideate, plan, and

create all of our curricula. Built around uplifting students' strengths and bolstered by Universal Design Language to promote trauma-informed practices, our Foundations, Belonging, and Purpose curricula empower K-12 students to embrace their potential and grow toward self-actualization as they develop the skills and competencies that will support them to flourish.

Aligned with the five CASEL competencies and Common Core State Standards, each of the Wayfinder curricula is structured around six Core Skills: self-awareness, adaptability, empathy, collaboration, agency, and purpose. Lessons and modules are vertically aligned to support students to build these skills through developmentally appropriate activities over the course of their K-12 experience.

Wayfinder's Comprehensive K-12 Curriculum

Foundations

Foundations for
Belonging + Purpose

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

K	1st	2nd
3rd	4th	5th

Belonging

Building a foundation through **connection**

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Belonging: Foundations	Grade 6
Belonging 1: Self	Grade 7
Belonging 2: Community	Grade 8

Purpose

Finding direction through **contribution**

HIGH SCHOOL

Belonging 3: Action	Grade 9
Purpose 1: Self	Grade 10
Purpose 2: Community	Grade 11
Purpose 3: Action	Grade 12

Our Core Skills include both social-emotional competencies and proactive habits of mind. We teach all our Core Skills by connecting and grounding them in students' real-world experiences to help them better move through the world with **purpose**.

Study Finds SEL + Purpose Learning Program Wayfinder Boosts Student Purpose Nearly 75%

Leading educational researcher and author of *Teaching for Purpose* Dr. Heather Malin found that students who completed Wayfinder's Purpose curriculum made significant improvements in all key measured areas.

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Dr. Heather Malin's research findings indicate that students who engaged with Wayfinder's high school Purpose curriculum grew nearly 75% in measures of purpose—11 times greater than the control group.

Comparisons of pre- and post-program surveys also show that 55% of students grew in engagement, and 64% grew in social awareness, over double the growth seen from students in the control group.

Percent of Students Who Improved
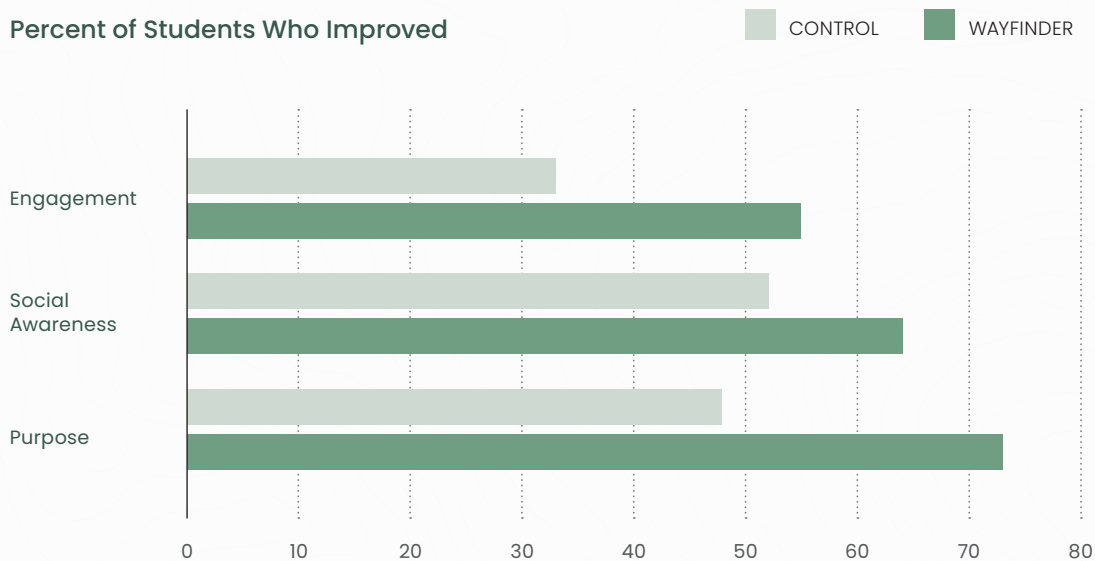
This research study was conducted using a quasi-experimental design

Dr. Malin commented on these findings: "It's unusual and highly encouraging to see such unambiguously positive growth in measures of students' purposefulness. As this study shows, it is clear that implementing comprehensive SEL and purpose learning supports students to thrive in school and build skills to help them navigate the complexities of life."

CORE SKILLS FOR ACADEMICS & LIFE
CASEL-ALIGNED

PURPOSE · SELF-AWARENESS · ADAPTABILITY · EMPATHY · COLLABORATION · AGENCY
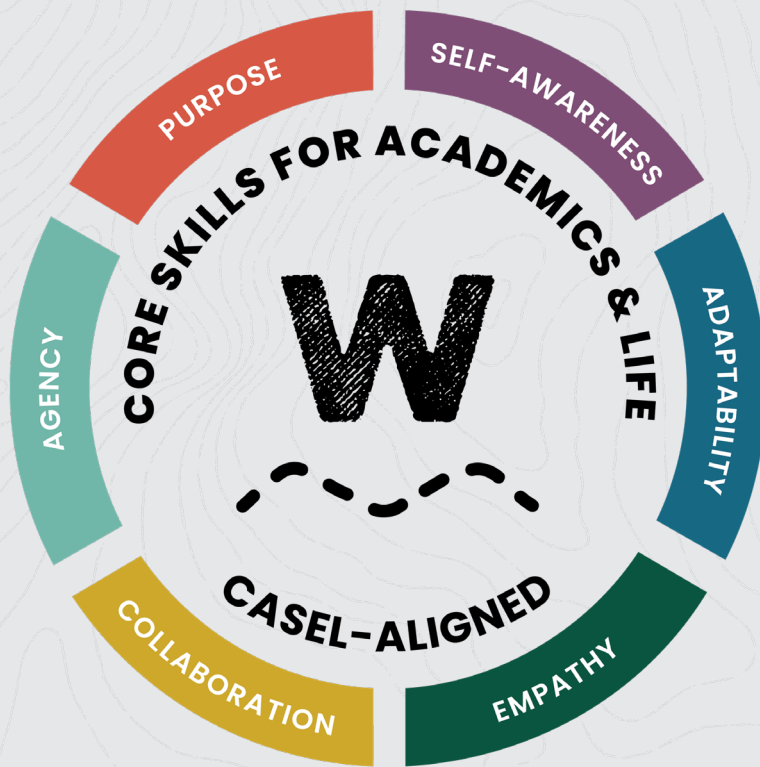
Self-Awareness
Students understand themselves on multiple levels, from how they function to what nourishes + sustains them

CASEL Alignment:
Self-Awareness

Adaptability
Students willingly try again after making mistakes and comfortably navigate uncertainty with flexibility + openness

CASEL Alignment:
Self-Management

Empathy
Students attune to the feelings + needs of others and act to serve a common good

CASEL Alignment:
Social Awareness

Collaboration
Students actively build relationships, partner with others, and facilitate belonging efforts across communities

CASEL Alignment:
Relationship Skills

Agency
Students understand the value of their voices and work to support + advance their communities

CASEL Alignment:
Responsible Decision Making

Purpose
Students deeply connect with their values to guide their decisions + interactions in the world

Wayfinder's Six Core Skills: What the Research Says

SELF-AWARENESS

You understand yourself on many levels, from how you function to what nourishes and sustains you.

Self-awareness puts people in tune with their needs, makes them more aware of their impact on others, and prepares them to deal with disruption and change. It is also recognized as an essential component of effective management and is even used by business schools as a framework for helping students develop managerial skills. Given that it is a skill that benefits all workers and that managerial positions are expected to remain an important part of the future workforce, it makes sense for students to begin building a foundation of reflective thinking and self-assessment as they progress through their education.

ADAPTABILITY

You are willing to try again when you make mistakes and are comfortable navigating uncertain situations with flexibility and openness.

Adaptability is key to navigating uncertainty, which can benefit individuals not just in terms of mental health but also in terms of professional readiness. Future professionals who can maintain self-efficacy when faced with new demands and challenges will be those most poised to succeed. The importance of adaptability will only increase as the workforce continues to change and develop.

EMPATHY

You are in tune with the feelings and needs of others and willing to act for a common good.

Empathy supports healthy relationship-building, which in turn helps create supportive working environments conducive to productivity. In an increasingly globalized workforce, empathy is also important for navigating professional interactions across differences in cultural and organizational practices. It is important for the success of multigenerational workforces and has been shown to improve outcomes in fields like engineering. Empathy is also an important component to ensure businesses grow more environmentally conscious.

COLLABORATION

You are a relationship-builder who actively partners with others and facilitates belonging efforts across communities.

Collaboration in the workforce has been shown to support innovation, creativity, and prudent decision making. Whether co-located or working remotely, collaboration improves organizational performance and results in higher quality products and services.

AGENCY

You understand the value of your voice and seek opportunities to support and advance your communities.

Agency is believed to be the driving force behind self-motivation and satisfaction at school and in the workplace. Conversely, a lack of agency in the workplace contributes to anxiety, which reduces productivity and performance. When young people acknowledge and harness their individual agency, they develop skills that empower them in their learning and make them effective in their future professional lives.

PURPOSE

Your decisions and interactions with the world are guided by a deep connection to your values.

Purpose is important both for entering the workforce with intention and growing successfully as a professional. Seventy percent of people report defining their purpose through work, and it is expected that purpose-driven work will continue to become more common in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. People with purpose are able to align their skills and values with their work, making them more engaged and motivated employees. Purposeful organization leaders are better able to navigate market disruption, and employees are more resilient when faced with work-related stressors. Guiding young people to develop purpose can help them find work and career paths that bring them personal satisfaction and continue to grow and succeed in their fields.

Each of these future-ready skills supports students in their learning as well as their path toward becoming well prepared for their lives after graduation. In particular, purpose puts awareness into action. It gives students a way to apply their social-emotional development to a tangible exploration of ways they can make a difference in their communities and the world at large.

Director of the Stanford Center on Adolescence and Wayfinder advisory board member Dr. Bill Damon emphasizes that purpose learning is imperative in K-12 education:

> "The most common problem for young people growing up today isn't actually stress, it's meaninglessness.
>
> Purpose is the preeminent long-term motivator of learning and achievement. Any school that fails to encourage purpose among its students risks becoming irrelevant for the choices those students will make in their lives. Schools that encourage purpose will see their students become energized, diligent, and resilient in the face of challenges and obstacles."

This is why Wayfinder's curricula build toward a culminating Purpose Project at the end of our high school Purpose curriculum. As students develop future-ready skills, they are guided to envision and plan a project that uses their skills and interests to make a difference on an issue of personal importance to them. Planning takes a great deal of self-awareness and empathy for the needs of others—skills that, by this point, they have been developing for years. Enacting all that students have learned tests their ability to adapt, collaborate, and exercise agency. The students' Purpose Projects serve as tangible artifacts of their social-emotional and purpose development and give them the opportunity to practice the skills they need to succeed professionally before graduating high school.

Wayfinder Partner Highlight: Maria Carrillo High School

Katie Barr,

*MCHS
Principal*

Maria Carrillo High School (MCHS) has partnered with Wayfinder since 2018. Committed to building their students' future-ready skills, they use Wayfinder across all grade levels and are working to adapt the Purpose Project into a capstone their students will present at the end of their 11th grade year, after finishing three years of Wayfinder's Purpose curriculum.

Additionally, by collaborating with community foundations and organizations, MCHS connects students with professionals in industries that align with their vision for the future. Students spend time talking with industry professionals about their purpose development and ideas for future plans. Professional partners then offer their industry-specific advice and guide students to improve their communication skills in preparation for internships and job interviews. Having applied SEL skills to a real-world task, students come away with a clearer vision for their future and the professional experience to give them a start on the path of their choosing.

The Roadtrip Nation Model

The Roadtrip Nation model is built around career conversations that help learners develop confidence, purpose, and agency alongside invaluable 21st century SEL skills like communication, collaboration, and problem-solving. Since 2001, Roadtrip Nation has been sending learners of all ages on road trip experiences across the country to talk to inspiring people in a broad range of careers, then sharing their stories and insights through Roadtrip Nation's award-winning public television series, which reaches 90 million households annually. In classrooms and other learning environments, students model these career conversations through Roadtrip Nation's project-based course—incorporating Roadtrip Nation's story-driven career exploration tools—in five video-based lessons where they discover their interests, explore possibilities for their future, and complete their own Interview Project with someone in their community.

Over 20 years, in numerous third-party evaluations and studies of these programs—conducted by the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities at Stanford University, Inflexion, and others—six key outcomes stand out across these different engagements with Roadtrip Nation's experiences and tools, from the more intensive commitment of being part of Roadtrip Nation's documentary series for several weeks to completing the project-based course. These outcomes also stand out for students engaging with Roadtrip Nation's digital career exploration tools. (Read the full report on these six core outcomes here.) Across Roadtrip Nation programs, participants demonstrated increases in:
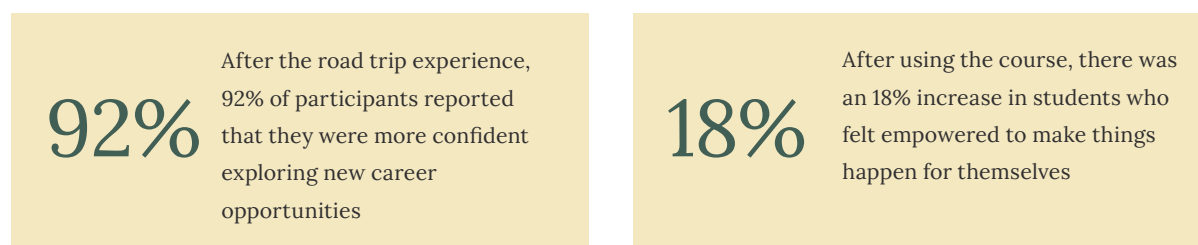
1. Career Engagement: Expanded Career Exposure + Engagement

Learners developed a greater awareness of career possibilities and pathways, and this translated into increased goal-setting and knowledge about how to explore and pursue their career interests. Most importantly, hearing real stories about career journeys humanized the process and made them feel that they aren't alone.

61% 61% of students who used the Roadtrip Nation course said they discovered career paths they hadn't previously considered

21% 21% of students reported increased goal-setting, noting that they know the actions they must take to meet their goals

2. Confidence: Growth in Self-Perception

Learners' confidence, motivation, and sense of agency grew through Roadtrip Nation programs as they gained a greater sense of their own interests and encountered stories of people from similar backgrounds and experiences.

92% After the road trip experience, 92% of participants reported that they were more confident exploring new career opportunities

18% After using the course, there was an 18% increase in students who felt empowered to make things happen for themselves

3. Education Relevance: Stronger Connection to Education

Widening the lens of possible careers helped students feel that school is relevant to their lives and who they want to be—now and in the future. That realization resulted in improved academic performance for learners in Roadtrip Nation programs.

69% 69% of students taking the course agreed that it helped them view their education as relevant to their life

2x Students in the Roadtrip Nation course improved their GPA by a factor of 2 compared to students in a control group

4. Skill Development: Increased Career + Communication Skills

Learners developed new skills, especially through the Interview Project. These critical 21st century skills—adaptability, problem-solving, communication, collaboration, and more—are extremely valuable for learners as they prepare for an unpredictable future of work.

65% 65% of Roadtrip Nation students reported that the course helped them improve their communication skills with adults

86% 86% of students answered affirmatively to the statement, "I can rise to the challenge when I'm presented with challenging work"

5. Social Capital: Increased Social Capital

Providing opportunities to develop social capital can increase access to resources blocked by systemic barriers. Learners developed relationships with mentors and supporters and felt empowered and motivated to continue making connections after the end of their programs.

79% 79% of road trip participants reported that they now know role models and mentors they can look to for guidance and advice

92% 92% agreed that they have the ability to seek out role models and build social capital

6. Well-Being: Greater Sense of Well-Being + Purpose

Learners who took part in Roadtrip Nation programs reported a greater sense of purpose and comfort with who they are. They affirmed that their experiences positively impacted their mental health and gave them more hope for the future.

96% 96% of road trip participants said the road trip had a positive impact on their sense of purpose

15% There was a 15% increase in students who reported that, after using the course, the future appears brighter than the past

All of these outcomes work together to support students in achieving their education and career goals, even as the future of work shifts and changes. However, among these six outcomes, three stand out as specifically strengthening students' ability to adjust and grow to meet an ever-changing future: career and communication skills, social capital, and sense of purpose. The experience of the interview and career conversation was life-changing and eye-opening for road trip participants and students alike—but one of its most important effects was in the development of new SEL skills in problem-solving, in communication, and in building resilience in the face of challenges.

In the Stanford implementation study, researchers noted, "Students used metacognitive strategies to learn the 'big ideas' of academic content; they persevered by using different approaches to overcome obstacles; they incorporated and provided peer feedback to execute group work; and they collectively demonstrated a strong increase in self-efficacy." Even more importantly, these interview experiences helped students and road trip participants see the value of building a network of connections and gave them the skills to continue to build critical social capital that protects against a future they can't predict, as it provides a well of support, resources, and information that grows with them, supporting their evolution and ensuring their continued success and well-being.

Preparing Students to Thrive in the 21st Century

To prepare students for the future that lies ahead of them, schools don't only need SEL; they need SEL in action. With the critical addition of purpose learning, schools can support students to learn more readily and develop future-ready skills they need to thrive.

But what does comprehensive SEL and purpose learning integration look like in application? It starts with training and support. Teachers and school staff need to feel comfortable and able to effectively teach skills outside of their usual content areas. District and school site administrators can facilitate this work, and they can share leadership with staff members who have experience and prior expertise with SEL. With organizations like Wayfinder, schools and districts also receive support with personalized implementation planning and ongoing access to training and development with our staff of SEL experts and former classroom educators.

SEL is also an influential support for educators. Research shows that teachers' social-emotional wellness has a measurable impact on students, and those with more developed SEL skills themselves are better able to support students in their growth. For this reason, many schools make SEL and purpose learning a key piece of schoolwide implementation. Using adapted lessons and activities from Wayfinder, many schools have incorporated exercises like mindfulness to help teachers with stress management, in turn supporting them to build healthy, supportive learning environments for students.

Because bringing future-ready skills to students is the primary objective, successful implementation means comprehensive integration. SEL and purpose learning find natural homes in advisory, homeroom, and grade-level seminar classes. Here, teachers can create safe, regular containers for deep exploration, collaboration, and discussion of personal and occasionally challenging topics.

However, for maximum effect, programming must extend beyond a single classroom. Content area teachers can easily weave SEL and purpose into their classrooms with activities that foster belonging and community-building. This integration not only gives students more places to practice their skills but also creates learning environments where students feel more supported to take the kinds of risks they need to learn and grow. Even coaches and extracurricular program providers can bring Wayfinder into their meetings and practices to improve communication and relationships across campus and throughout their school communities. Through robust and coordinated efforts, schools have seen measurable improvements in student well-being and campus culture.

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The need for new and improved SEL couldn't be clearer. For years, academic literature has touted the utility of SEL and purpose learning in supporting healthy and well-prepared high school graduates. Industry leaders are acknowledging and advertising these transferable skills that will remain in demand even through the radical transformation the workforce is expected to see in the coming years. Meanwhile, school and district leaders are listening. They're turning their attention to SEL to address learning loss from the COVID-19 pandemic, to mitigate the effects of the mental health crisis, and to equip students for the world they will enter upon graduation.

We will all continue to navigate the world's inevitable flux. Wayfinder is here to provide transformational experiences for students and educators and realize SEL's potential. As we continue to partner with schools around the world, we stand firm in our commitment to creating curricula that support students of all ages to build future-ready skills that empower them for lives of purpose and self-determination.

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