

Youth Development: 2023 Data Shows Peer Networking Supports SEL Development in Y Afterschool Programs

Across our state, YMCAs supported **86%** of young people in their social and emotional learning (SEL) development during the 2022-2023 school year, as shown by our statewide Hello Insight (HI) SEL data. What's more, **42%** of young people were successful in three or more SEL capacities.

What exactly does that mean? It means that the positive youth development practices implemented by our YMCA Youth Development staff helped youth in afterschool programs increase their capacity for stronger academic achievement, health and wellness, and future readiness for college and/or jobs. ([CASEL](#), 2021)

In particular, **80%** of young people developed in **Engage Authentically** (compared to 73% last school year) and **72%** developed in **Promote Peer Bonds**.

The Alliance's Youth Development Peer Community focused on further development of best practices in Engage Authentically and Promote Peer Bonds experiences during this past year because they are so critical in overall SEL growth for grades three through five. The new data shows this intentionality had positive outcomes for the youth we served! And it provides a statewide benchmark for our local Ys.

Engage Authentically is a young person's experience with an adult who takes the time to get to know them by listening and understanding who they are—their cultural and lived experiences, their interests, and their passions.

This past school year:

- 89% (compared to 85% the prior year) of young people reported they were frequently reminded of their Y staff's expectation to try hard and do their best,
- 77% (compared to 71% last year) reported that Y staff took the time to really understand them and their lives outside the program, and
- 72% (compared to 64% last year) reported that Y staff carved out time in their day to learn about and listen to them.

Promote Peer Bonds is a young person's experience with an adult who helps them work with peers in teams and groups, creating a safe space to learn with and from one another, exploring similarities and differences, and developing deep bonds and relationships. This is a foundational experience for young people, bolstering all other positive youth development practices measured by Hello Insight.

This past school year:

- 75% (compared to 69% the prior year) of young people reported the Y included opportunities for young people to engage with people who are different from themselves,

- 72% (compared to 69% the prior year) reported the Y created opportunities for them to work together and help each other,
- 72% (compared to 67%) reported the Y created safe spaces for them to work with or learn about people who are different from themselves, and
- 69% (compared to 63% the prior year) reported the Y created a sense of team or group identity.

Our Ys on the HI platform are equipped with data they can use for fundraising as well as to continually make process improvements for further SEL growth. The Youth Development Peer Community Group will reconvene in the fall to continue to share best practices around SEL and youth development broadly, but in the meantime, the statewide SEL Training for NC Ys and the accompanying Facilitator's Guide area available to Y staff on the Alliance [website](#) in the members only section.

The Alliance hopes to secure state funding this summer that will enable us to continue to provide HI access to all our Y associations...stay tuned, and kudos to our youth-serving staff for their progress in developing SEL!

(June 2023)