



SKILLS AND DISPOSITIONS THAT SUPPORT YOUTH SUCCESS IN SCHOOL

Executive Summary of Parts 1 and 2

Research points to several interrelated domains of learning: **knowledge** (acquired information), **skills** (the ability to demonstrate a particular behavioral repertoire), and **dispositions** (mindsets that become internalized, such as curiosity or persistence). Katz defines a disposition as “a pattern of behavior exhibited frequently and in the absence of coercion, and constituting a habit of mind under some conscious and voluntary control, and that is intentional and oriented to broad goals” (1993, p. 16).

As a nation, we have placed high value on measuring knowledge through standardized testing, but devoted less attention to skills, and especially to dispositions. The skills and dispositions that underlie **motivation and engagement** are critical to youth success in all domains, but are difficult to define and measure. However, defining and measuring these skills and dispositions in a consistent, meaningful way can guide us as we develop strategies for building motivation and engagement in young people.

The first part of our series, *Skills and Dispositions that Support Youth Success in School*, proposes a working **definition** of motivation and engagement, and suggests possible approaches to **measurement**. The second part describes a number of **strategies** for building motivation and engagement in schools and in out-of-school-time settings.

WHY MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT?

We have devoted particular attention to motivation and engagement because of their strong relationship to youth success in school, work and life. According to a recent research review, dimensions of motivation and engagement are strongly associated with improved academic performance; furthermore, a strong focus on developing skills and dispositions in young people could help to reduce racial and gender disparities in performance (Farrington, 2012). The Road Map Project, a collective action project aimed at dramatically increasing student achievement and decreasing disparities based on race and income in South King County, will be successful only if more students of color and low-income students are better engaged at school and intentional strategies to build motivation are employed.

DEFINITION OF STUDENT MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

The skills and dispositions featured in this series were identified based on both research and practice. We convened educators and youth development professionals to share insights, and conducted a thorough review of the literature on student motivation and engagement, primarily within the fields of education and psychology. We found motivation to be a set of internal resources that enable young people to connect deeply to future goals, and to work toward their attainment over time. Students who are motivated accept challenge and persist through difficulty. Engagement is context-dependent. It is based on adult and peer connections, and on one’s sense of belonging and acceptance in a learning environment. Both motivation and engagement vary across tasks and settings, and may therefore be malleable in young people.

The framework presented on the following page identifies and describes the specific skills and dispositions that comprise our definition of motivation and engagement: **future orientation, self-management, self-efficacy and mindsets, perseverance/grit, and belonging and identity**. Key 21st century skills are also featured. Specifically, **interpersonal skills** and those thinking and learning skills that students most need to navigate increasingly complex environments: **creativity** and **critical thinking**.



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OUTCOME DOMAINS		SKILLS & DISPOSITIONS
Motivation & Engagement	FUTURE ORIENTATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal management: Setting short- and long-term goals and monitoring progress toward their achievement • Hope and optimism: Positive beliefs regarding one’s future potential, goals and choices
	SELF MANAGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional regulation: Assessing and regulating one’s feelings and emotions • Self-discipline: Ability to focus on a task in spite of distractions
	PERSEVERANCE (GRIT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perseverance: Tendency to persist in spite of obstacles or setbacks • Goal orientation: Commitment to the achievement of goals over time
	SELF EFFICACY & MINDSETS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-efficacy: Belief in one’s own capabilities and capacity to learn and succeed • Growth mindset: Belief that intelligence and ability can increase through effort • Mastery orientation: Enjoyment of learning and desire to master new skills; willingness to try new things • Relevance: Belief that work done in school is related to personal aspirations
	BELONGING & IDENTITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of belonging: Perception of acceptance and support in a learning community • Relationship building: Establishing and maintaining positive relationships with adults and peers in a school setting • Personal identity: Understanding and valuing one’s own culture and beliefs • Social capital: Recognizing and using family, school, and community resources; asking for help when needed
21st Century Skills	INTERPERSONAL SKILLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration: Negotiating and compromising when working in groups or pairs • Communication: Communicating effectively for a variety of purposes and audiences • Cultural competence: Ability to work effectively with people from different backgrounds; appreciation of diversity • Conflict resolution: Preventing, managing, and resolving interpersonal conflict • Compassion: Taking the perspective of and empathizing with others
	CREATIVITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideation: Using a wide range of idea creation techniques • Imagination: Using intellectual inventiveness to generate, discover, and restructure ideas or imagine alternatives • Innovation implementation: Acting on creative ideas to make a new contribution
	CRITICAL THINKING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metacognition: Ability to reflect on one’s assumptions and thinking for the purposes of deeper understanding and self-evaluation. • Problem solving: Generating and selecting from alternatives based on desired outcomes • Analytical thinking: Separating problems or issues into their constituent parts



MEASUREMENT OF STUDENT MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Student motivation and engagement are rarely measured directly; rather, we tend to view academic outcomes such as grades and test scores as proxies for underlying skills and dispositions. While academic mindsets and behaviors contribute strongly to grades, measuring skills and dispositions directly has the potential to guide practice at the classroom, school, or youth development program level. In 2012, the Youth Development for Education Results (YDER) work group of the Road Map Project, in partnership with the Center for Educational Effectiveness (CEE), developed and piloted a **Student Engagement and Motivation (SEMS) Survey** to measure the ways that students' skills and dispositions relate to their school attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes. A revised version of the SEMS survey is currently being used in several school districts in the Road Map region, and a version adapted for use in youth development programs is also in development.

STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING STUDENT MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Motivation and engagement can be built in a number of different ways, both in and out of school. Some strategies are discrete programs or curriculums, while others are general approaches. All are most effective when strategies are integrated and reinforced by multiple partners working together for student success.

In Part Two of our Skills and Dispositions that Support Youth Success in School, we outline strategies to build student engagement and motivation. We begin with "Foundational Practices" that are essential strategies that are necessary for all schools and youth-serving organizations to adopt. These are: 1) active and continuous pursuit of **cultural responsiveness** in settings, curricula, and individuals; 2) ongoing development of a **positive school or program climate**; 3) **high-quality practices** in instructional and enrichment settings. In addition to these foundational practices, we have identified other mutually reinforcing strategies. While many of these are cross-cutting, they fall into the following general categories:

- **Deepening Relationships:** Research points to the importance of positive youth-adult relationships in promoting and sustaining healthy development. **Mentoring programs** have shown a range of positive outcomes for all youth, while **trauma-informed approaches** help those who have had adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) to form attachments with adults and peers.
- **Transforming Discipline:** Traditional approaches to school discipline are increasingly ineffective in promoting student success, and can widen opportunity gaps when applied disproportionately. Alternative approaches work to build respectful relationships and use solution-focused problem solving with students and each other. One such approach is **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)**, a tiered system of behavior management used in many schools locally. **Restorative justice** is another approach that emphasizes the redress of harm over punitive discipline.
- **Developing Skills:** Some skills and dispositions can be taught directly (e.g. **growth mindset, social and emotional learning**) or cultivated in particular kinds of skill-building activities. **Arts integration** programs, for example, build a sense of belonging and teach creativity and critical thinking through the arts. **College and career readiness programs** teach academic behaviors (study skills, time management, etc.) while also promoting future orientation and self-management skills.
- **Leveraging Partnerships:** We believe that all strategies described in this paper are best implemented in a school or program setting with strong partnerships. Mutually reinforcing activities depend on partners using their strengths to support youth in their areas of need. In this section, we discuss several models that include partnerships as a fundamental component: **expanded learning opportunities, project based and service learning** and the **community schools model**.



MOVING FORWARD WITH PARTNERSHIPS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

None of the strategies we consider are likely to be successful in isolation. Rather they are intended to be “mutually reinforcing;” or, to encourage each stakeholder committed to youth success to “undertake the specific set of activities at which it excels in a way that supports and is coordinated with the actions of others” (Kania & Kramer, 2011, p. 40). Vibrant partnerships between schools, community organizations, students and families can increase both institutional capacity and the capability of young people to achieve healthy, happy, productive lives.

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ABOUT US

Youth Development Executives of King County (YDEKC)

The mission of YDEKC is *to build and organize the youth development field in King County*. Our vision is that every young person has the opportunity to learn, lead, work, thrive, contribute and connect with active support from organized, networked and unified youth development efforts in King County. We are Executive Directors, CEOs and other key leaders of non-profit organizations directly serving youth ages 5 through young adulthood within King County. We are focused on developing shared outcomes and measurement tools; adopting high-quality common standards of practice; and speaking with a common voice. For more information: ydekc.org

The Road Map Project (staffed by Community Center for Education Results)

The “Road Map Project” is a collective impact effort aimed at getting dramatic improvement in student achievement in South Seattle and South King County. The Road Map Project goal is to double the number of students in the region who are on track to graduate from college or earn a career credential by 2020. The Road Map Project is committed to nothing less than closing the unacceptable achievement gaps for low-income students and children of color and increasing achievement for all students from cradle to college and career. For more information: roadmapproject.org