

Embedding SEL within YMCA Metro Atlanta culture

PROJECT SNAPSHOT



In the spring of 2021, Wings for Kids and YMCA Metro Atlanta launched a three-year collaborative partnership to provide more than 3,750 children with social emotional learning and real-world skills.

Through strategic planning, professional development, and guided implementation, WINGS supported YMCA staff and youth leaders with the skills and knowledge to model and teach SEL with the youth they serve.

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION



Setting the foundation is the first step in achieving comprehensive SEL implementation. The WINGS approach includes fostering a positive organizational culture, extensive training, integrating social-emotional learning into all activities, and providing explicit curriculum to develop skills across the five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and relationship skills. WINGS methods are rooted in rigorous external evaluation and complement other focus areas such as art, STEM, and Common Core.

A Proud Partnership

Uniting the YMCA's rich history of positive community impact through healthy body, mind, and spirit with WINGS' philosophy and program elements has opened the door to many more opportunities—for both children and adults—to build the skills vital for success in school, work, and life.



OBJECTIVES

Core Objectives

The collaborative effort between WINGS and the YMCA of Metro Atlanta focuses on several key objectives:

- **Adult Development of Social-Emotional Skills:** Professional learning series and workshops to empower YMCA staff with the social-emotional skills necessary to effectively support youth.
- **Fostering a "SET" Culture/Climate:** Creating a culture that is supportive, engaging, and conducive to teaching (SET).
- **Comprehensive Scalable SEL Program:** Developing a scalable SEL program that can be implemented across various age groups and settings.

TIMELINE OF ACTIVITIES

Year 1

The initial phase of our Partner Project included due diligence to identify goals, assess culture and protocols, and understand staff capacity. Meetings were also coordinated with leadership to introduce concepts like a common language, fostering a "SET" culture, and promoting a community unity component to the day.

Following this planning phase, WINGS and YMCA Metro Atlanta collaboratively developed a strategic organizational plan focused on enhancing SEL conceptual knowledge and skills with leadership. The monthly cabinet meetings and workshops allowed the YMCA team to embrace the notion that as adults internalize social emotional skills, they become proficient in teaching and modeling these skills in their roles as leaders, educators and mentors.

Areas of Focus

With an emphasis on equity and cultural competence, our partnership focuses on three core areas:



Creating a
Relationship-
Based Positive
Environment



Focused SEL
Skill Building



Integrating SEL
Components
into Existing
Components

TIMELINE OF ACTIVITIES



Year 2

In the second phase, the focus shifted to the implementation of SEL-focused strategies. An iterative feedback loop was established to continuously assess the strengths and challenges encountered during implementation. Support was provided to sites by offering necessary collateral materials such as printables, resources, and books to facilitate the execution of SEL initiatives.

WINGS conducted site visits and offered observational feedback to staff, leveraging assessment tools to gauge progress and areas of improvement. Furthermore, efforts were made to enhance leadership capacity, ensuring that individuals were effectively supported to oversee, evaluate, and take responsibility for driving SEL implementation. This involved coaching calls with project leadership staff to refine practices and strategies, promoting ongoing improvement and alignment with project goals.

WHAT'S NEXT



Year 3

In the ongoing phase of the project, there is a concerted effort to refine the SEL implementation blueprint, catering to both After-School staff focused on elementary-age students and Youth Development staff working with middle and high school students. This refinement process is dual-pronged, aiming to build skills within staff and their respective teams while also fostering skill development in students.

In August 2021, Chief SEL Officer Nicole and Community and Partner Project Specialist Mallory traveled to Atlanta to facilitate a social emotional learning workshop with over 250 employees from the Y. Held at the beautiful Atlanta Zoo, participants gained a greater understanding of the five core competencies of SEL.



Additionally, consultation, sample provision, and assistance in creating training materials are extended to support the implementation of key resources, such as Conversation Cards, Behavior Support Forms, and Student Recognition awards, in both After-School and Youth Development programs.

POWERFUL IMPACT + REACH

The collaborative partnership between WINGS and YMCA Metro Atlanta exemplifies a powerful approach to creating long-term impacts for Atlanta youth. By leveraging WINGS' SEL expertise, the YMCA is empowered to deepen its impact across its large regional footprint in metro Atlanta.

Through this ongoing collaboration, WINGS and the YMCA demonstrate a commitment to nurturing the holistic growth of youth, ultimately contributing to a more equitable and socially aware community.

ABOUT WINGS

Wings for Kids (WINGS) is a nonprofit organization that equips students, educators, and youth-serving organizations with skills to thrive - in and out of school. WINGS does this through a common language (Words to Live By), a comprehensive curriculum rooted in student character development (like learning from effort, problem-solving, building healthy relationships, compassion and empathy) and more than 25 years of experience. Since its inception in 1996, WINGS has reached over 4.8M students.

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To seamlessly incorporate SEL into the YMCA's summer camp programming, WINGS developed a set of Conversation Cards to help camp staff initiate conversations surrounding social emotional skills. Each deck of cards had activity and conversation prompts to open lines of communication, build relationships, and boost skill-building through critical thinking.

