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GB: Welcome to Building Social Emotional Learning Evaluation Capacity in an educational nonprofit context. Before we get started, I'd love to get a sense of who is in the room. Raise your hand if you are currently evaluating social emotional learning. Raise your hand if you've ever faced challenges in choosing an assessment tool. Raise your hand if you are currently working within a school or for a school-based program.

GB: Great! Before we get started, let me introduce our speakers today. I'm Gretchen Biesecker, a developmental psychologist and program evaluator. Until recently, I served for nearly 7.5 years as the VP of Evaluation at the nonprofit, City Year. I'm excited to share some of City Year's work today with my colleague, Bethiel…

Bethiel Holton, MSW
National Director of Student Engagement

BH: I'm Bethiel Holton, National Director of Student Engagement for City Year Headquarters, and I lead the design City Year's SEL work in schools.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)

GB: What is social emotional learning? Social emotional learning or SEL is the process of developing self-management and interpersonal skills in caring, well managed, and engaging environments. Things like emotion regulation and self-awareness are among the kinds of skills we're talking about, and that we are all always developing.

SEL and ACADEMIC SUCCESS
RESEARCH

GB: A growing body of research shows that SEL is an important part of youth development, facilitating academic growth, positive school climate, and preparing students to become responsible citizens. A meta-analysis by Durlak, Weissberg, and colleagues (2011) of 213 school-based SEL programs, including over 270,000 students in kindergarten through high school, found that: 1) SEL programming enhanced students' attitudes about self and others, increased prosocial behaviors, and reduced negative behavior or conduct incidents; and 2) improved academic performance on tests and grades, compared to control groups. Interest in SEL is strong among nonprofits, foundations, educators, and economists. And recently, economist Belfield et al (2015) conducted a study on the economic value of SEL concluding that on average, for every dollar invested, there was a return of $11 through benefits such as academic achievement and health.

GB: Although the importance of SEL is clear, the "how" of building capacity to evaluate SEL growth among thousands of students across the U.S. is challenging. Many funders, service providers, and evaluators struggle to take a concept that seems "squishy" and imagine how it could be measured well.

GB: So in this session, we're going to share some strategic steps we took at City Year to figure out how to measure it.

WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

Paper 2

BH: We'll also share some lessons we learned and are learning and some next steps. We've combined two papers really into one more integrated presentation, and we'll have time at the end for questions and discussion. Now, let's dive in.

BH: To begin, it may be helpful to know more about the context for our work. City Year is an education nonprofit that works in high poverty urban schools to help students succeed and prevent students from dropping out of high school.

BH: This year, nearly 3,000 full-time AmeriCorps volunteers, ages 17-24, are working full-time for 11 months with students in grades 3-9 in over 260 schools. AmeriCorps members support individual students and groups of students through tutoring, SEL programming, and afterschool activities.

BH: Corps members also work to create a positive culture and climate throughout the whole school, greeting students in the morning, hosting appreciation and recognition events, calling parents, and helping teachers with whole classroom behavior supports.

BH: City Year is unique its dual commitment to helping students and AmeriCorps members become learners and leaders. We've seen that the culture and strategies we've used throughout our history really relate to SEL, and SEL skills, as we've noted, are important to positive youth development.

GB: It became important to us to be able to measure the development of SEL skills, and so our quest began to identify the right tool or set of tools that would help us do this. And we needed tools that would help us do a few things….

GB: (goals on slide)

GB: We took an iterative approach, over several years. I'm not saying that you need to take as many years, but I do think you need to be prepared to iterate. And, I think there were 5 enabling factors that helped us choose and scale the tools we did well.

Partnership with key thought leaders in SEL

GB: First…like Roger Weissberg, Rich Lerner, Gil Noam,

Capacity-building grant from foundation
who understood our developmental approach

GB: Second, we were fortunate to have a funder who understood our approach, welcomed the use of a combo of qualitative and quantitative data, and who connected us to additional experts and peers doing SEL work.
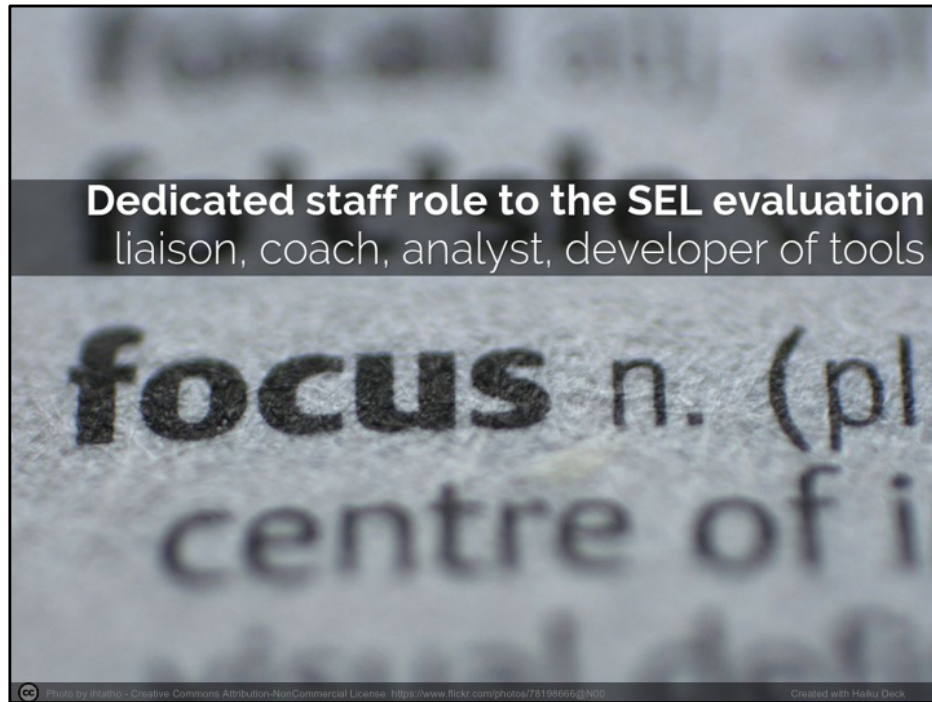
GB: Through this funding, we were able to focus one member of my team fully on the SEL evaluation. He served as a liaison and buddy to Bethiel and to the publishers of tools we considered, he was a coach to our sites, he prepared and analyzed data, and he helped develop training and other resources.

Strong interest among educators & school districts
relevance, timing, demand

GB: And the policy window was open. Now even if you aren't so lucky in this regard, it's still important to show the relevance of the assessment tool you are choosing to key stakeholders like schools.

GB: And integration—from the beginning, the program design and evaluation teams worked as partners. That way my team and I understood what the program was and what program design wanted to learn. We could design training materials and resources that felt a part of the program. And program design was also then able to champion the use of the tools we tried and help make their purpose clear.

QUESTIONS & GOALS
lead the way

GB: It was important to keep in mind our questions and goals. What did program design need to learn about as we piloted a tool? We needed data from the assessments for sure, but we also needed to get input and feedback from AmeriCorps members and staff using the the tools.
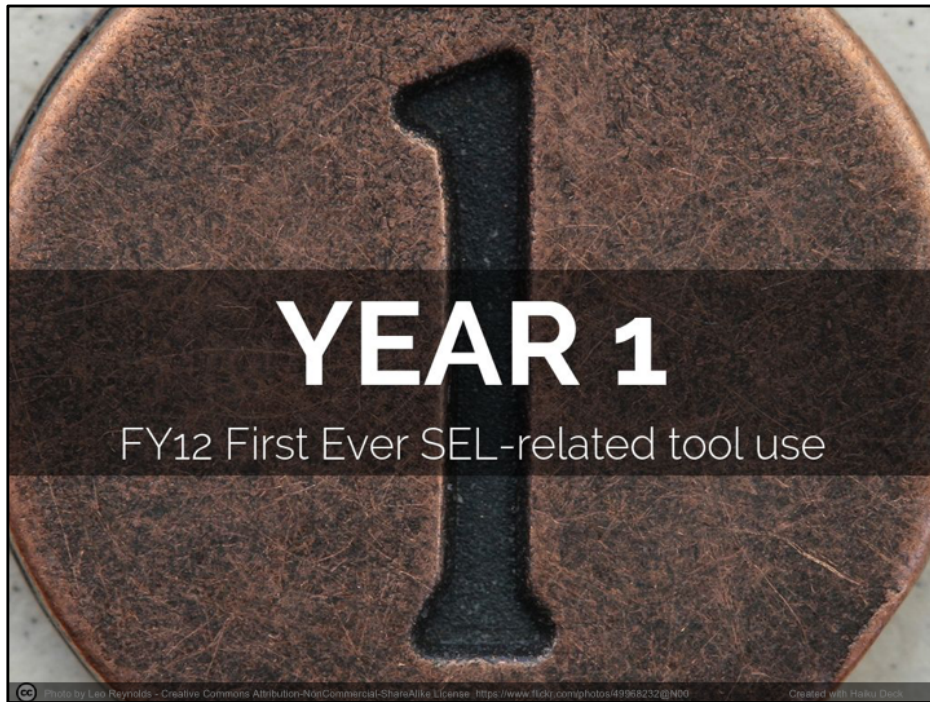
Sample guiding questions

- How can AmeriCorps members recognize student social emotional development and observe any changes?
- Can an observational tool or checklist work for us?
- What changes do we see?

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GB: Here were some of our initial questions

YEAR 1

FY12 First Ever SEL-related tool use

GB: So we made a start. In our first year, FY12, we'd learned about a tool that Angela Duckworth, a professor at U. Penn, best known for her grit scale, was piloting for KIPP charter schools. It was a character trait checklist, which an adult, like a teacher, or our AmeriCorps members could complete. We tried it out at 7 schools, across 5 cities.

METHODS

- KIPP Report Card (used at least 2 times per student)
- Observations
- Focus groups

GB: We collected data on over 300 students across multiple cities. Just as important as looking at the quality of the data coming in, we also needed to learn more about how implementation of the tool and program worked, so a team including Bethiel, me, other members of my department, and an external evaluator also conducted some observations in schools and held some focus groups with AmeriCorps members and their managers.

EARLY LEARNING

- tool gave language and focus to the squishy
- norms needed
- hard to put the data into action

BH: We learned a lot that first year. We heard from corps members that they better understood the skills we wanted them to build with students. Using an assessment tool helped provide a common language for them. However, because the KIPP report card had no norms, it was hard to know what was a "good" score or when improvement was meaningful. Corps members found it hard to put the data into action because the report card measured traits, rather than behaviors they could reinforce.

Sample guiding questions

- How can we connect data from an assessment tool to our interventions?
- Can an online tool like DESSA be used by our AmeriCorps members?
- What additional resources are needed?
- What changes in student SEL, if any, do AmeriCorps members observe?

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BH: This led us to some new questions like these [see slide]

BH: We realized we needed a new tool, and we had a better sense of the criteria we would use to decide. In year 2 we learned about a tool called the DESSA from Roger Weissberg, a leading expert in SEL
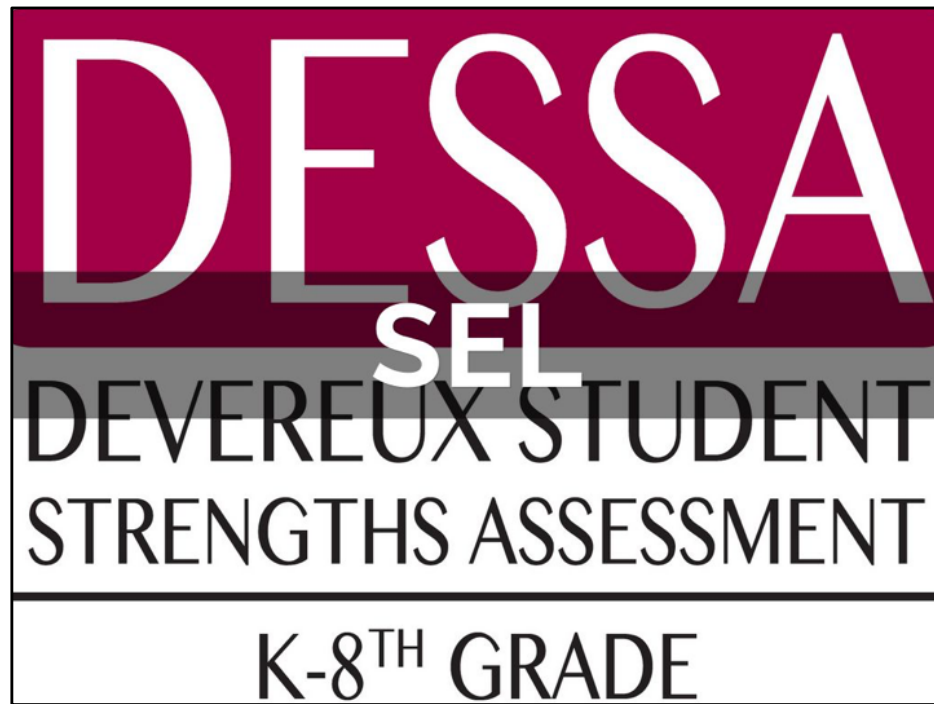
GB: at the time, DESSA was a tool for use by adults like teachers who have spent time with students for at least 30 days. When we started, it was published by Kaplan, but now it's published by Apperson,

This 72 question form describes a number of behaviors seen in some children. Read the statements that follow the phrase: During the past 4 weeks, how often did the child... and click on the button underneath the word that tells how often you saw the behavior. Please answer each question carefully. There are no right or wrong answers. If you wish to change your answer, just click on the button for your new choice. Please do not skip any items.

DESSA
DEVEREUX STUDENT
STRENGTHS ASSESSMENT
K-8th GRADE

Item #	During the past 4 weeks, how often did the child...	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Very Frequently
1	remember important information?	○	○	○	○	○
2	carry herself/himself with confidence?	○	○	○	○	○
3	keep trying when unsuccessful?	○	○	○	○	○
4	handle his/her belongings with care?	○	○	○	○	○
5	say good things about herself/himself?	○	○	○	○	○
6	serve an important role at home or school?	○	○	○	○	○
7	speak about positive things?	○	○	○	○	○
8	cope well with insults and mean comments?	○	○	○	○	○
9	take steps to achieve goals?	○	○	○	○	○
10	look forward to classes or activities at school?	○	○	○	○	○

- Optimistic Thinking
- Relationship Skills
- Self-Awareness
- Personal Responsibility
- Self-Management
- Goal-Directed Behavior
- Social-Awareness
- Decision Making

GB: there are 2 versions mini and full. The mini helps give an overall social emotional competency score, helpful for screening students into interventions or looking at overall progress. The full gives subscores for specific SEL skills, which makes it more useful for then planning specific interventions for specific students and monitoring progress.

WHY DESSA?

- Externally validated and normed

- Behavior-based

- Designed for use in schools, relevant grades

- Aligned with CASEL and experts on SEL

- Pinpoints specific skill areas and assets

GB: Why did we choose it?

WHY DESSA?

- Web-based, secure
- Reports instantly available
- Exportable, transferable
- Can examine change
- Different groups/levels can be set up
- Cost worked for us
- Can be used by teachers (and our AmeriCorps members)

GB: more on why

METHODS

- DESSA
- Visits
- Calls with points at sites and evaluation representatives

GB: Given this was our first year with the DESSA, we looked both at the completeness and quality of the data coming in, but we also collected qualitative data to help us understand how implementation was going.
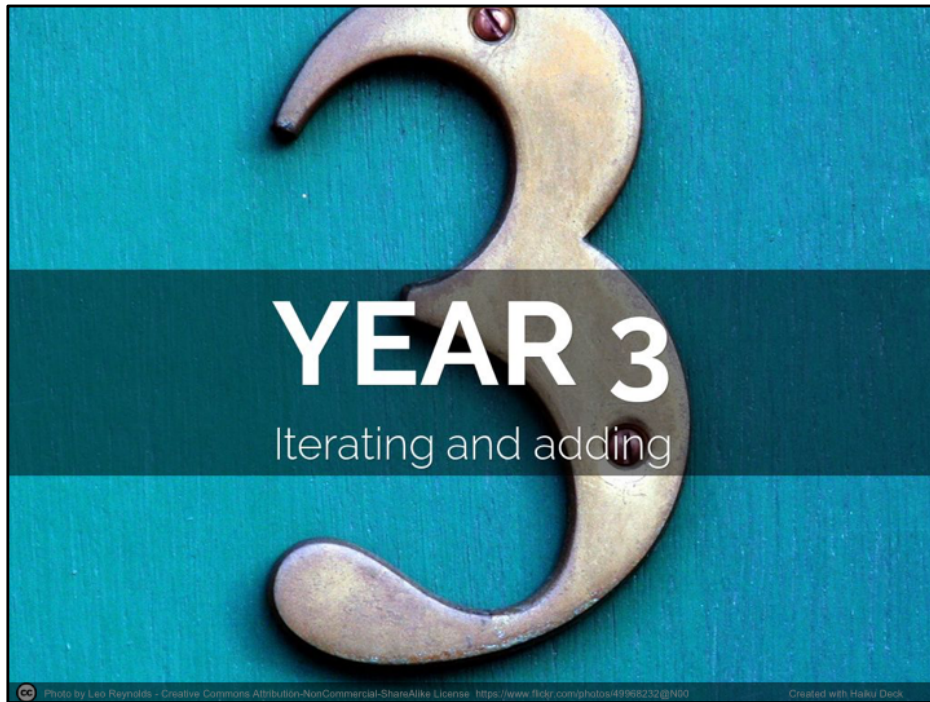
GB: We saw that DESSA worked better for us, and now corps members could name SEL skills and focus on behaviors with students. We cross-walked CY lesson plans and activities with the DESSA skills and data, to make the reports more actionable.

Sample guiding questions

- Can we use the DESSA-mini as a screening tool?
- How can we improve the quality and interpretation of the data in the field?

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GB: We also continued to investigate some of the previous questions but added more.

YEAR 4
Scaling and embedding

BH: Year 4 or last year, we really focused on scaling the use of the DESSA to a much larger group of schools and students. We saw over multiple years that students seemed to improve the most on skills that our curriculum focuses on. But, we also heard from corps members that they wanted opportunities to coach students on other skills, so we added some new resources and program activities to do so.

BH: Here are some of the new questions we began and continue to explore.

TIMELINE

Year	Cities	Schools	Students
FY12	5	7	317
FY13	8	16	809
FY14	9	45	3,409
FY15	13	117	6,755
FY16	26	266	19,000

BH: Now, I know we've been talking about scaling, so you may have been wondering what that looked like specifically over time, so here's a snapshot. FY16 is the school year we are in now, and 91% of all CY schools are using the DESSA.

FINDINGS

- 52% of students showed significant growth in overall SEL competence
- Greatest growth in self-management, self-awareness, and relationship skills
- 68% in "need of instruction" move to typical or strong in 1 year

GB: With bigger sample sizes and more students with complete data, we were able to dig deeper into analyses. We've looked at the data from multiple years, we've seen some consistent findings like the ones showed here. Within one school year, just over half of the students receiving CY SEL interventions are showing significant growth in overall SEL competence. The greatest skill growth seems to be for those skills that our programs focus on. The third bullet, from just last year, shows that 68% of students who start the year struggling in SEL have moved to typical or strong by the end of the year.

GB: Here are some of the key lessons we learned...

LOOKING AHEAD
Rounding out the toolkit, enhancements

BH: CY is going to continue to expand its use of the DESSA. This year, CY is piloting an additional tool to round out the toolkit. It's a student self-report tool that measures a combination of SEL skill development and student engagement in school It's called the SAYO, and it was created by the National Institute on Out-of-School Time and has been used by our colleagues at the American Institutes for Research. The addition of this tool will help CY understand how students perceive their own SEL development and engagement in school and will help triangulate our other data.

Thank you!
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GB: Thanks, Bethiel! We want to thank all of you for joining us today. Please continue to share your ideas, challenges, and approaches to selecting and scaling assessments. You can reach us by email. Now, we'll open it up for questions.