ACHIEVE, CONNECT, THRIVE
Preparing Youth for College, Career, and Life

Boston After School & Beyond

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June 5, 2017

The Achieve, Connect, Thrive Skills Framework

Dear friends,

More than ever, success in our economy depends on a set of skills that enable us to collaborate and solve problems. Boston's youth development community is coming together with schools, higher education, and employers to address this challenge.

With a focus on innovation, nearly 200 programs serving 15,000 students are using the afterschool hours and summer months productively. Together, they are scaling evidence-based summer learning, applying social and emotional learning strategies, deepening STEM practices, and breaking new ground on skill badges.

In the spirit of this collaboration, Boston After School & Beyond is excited to share an updated Achieve, Connect, Thrive Skills Framework. This new version incorporates a wealth of new practical experience and research. The skills outlined in the framework help youth navigate the demands of school, college, career, and life. Whether overcoming obstacles, seizing new opportunities, or accomplishing goals with others, young people must draw on their skills in different situations.

Youth learn the ACT skills not only in a classroom, but also on the field, on stage, and in the workplace. All young people should have access to these kinds of opportunities, which help them learn, practice, and apply these skills. Yet not all do. This is where Boston's network of afterschool and summer programs is uniquely positioned. By shaping and testing ideas together, we can equip students with the skills and experiences necessary for success.

We look forward to working with you on this citywide agenda. Please read on to learn more about the updated ACT Skills Framework, and visit our online Insight Center (insight.bostonbeyond.org) for examples of how to build these skills.

Sincerely,

Chris Smith
Executive Director, Boston After School & Beyond

Achieve: How do you achieve tasks or goals?

These skills help young people process information, assess situations and potential outcomes, and connect actions to future goals. When young people Achieve, they engage in disciplined thinking that is rational, open-minded, and informed by evidence; consider consequences and alternatives; and evaluate information to reach a conclusion. They demonstrate imagination and originality, and stay focused on their goals despite obstacles or distractions.

CRITICAL THINKING

DEFINITION

Conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information to reach an answer or conclusion. Involves disciplined thinking that is clear, rational, open-minded, and informed by evidence.

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS

- ✓ Identifies connections and analyzes relationships between ideas or concepts
- ✓ Considers perspectives other than their own and identifies their own biases
- ✓ Explores different solutions when encountering difficulties
- ✓ Provides evidence/examples to support conclusions

CREATIVITY

DEFINITION

Exhibiting originality, imagination, inventiveness, or ingenuity.

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS

- ✓ Generates multiple solutions to a problem and looks at situations in different ways
- ✓ Shows originality when solving problems
- ✓ Asks questions, demonstrates curiosity

PERSEVERANCE

DEFINITION

Focusing on a long-term goal despite challenges, consistently performing required or important tasks and demonstrating initiative in spite of obstacles or distractions.

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS

- ✓ Sets goals and identifies steps to achieve goals
- ✓ Persists in completing a task or goal, even when challenges arise or it takes longer than anticipated
- ✓ Connects a current task to future goals
- ✓ Tries again when fails at doing something

RESEARCH IN PRACTICE

The Achieve skills are most closely associated with academic outcomes, including college and career readiness. Critical thinking is one of the most crucial competencies for job preparedness (American Management Association, 2012; Kress et al., 2005). Creativity is important for classroom engagement, which in turn can impact academic achievement (Boxx et al., 2013), and is also a crucial skill for the workforce (Hadani & Jaeger, 2015). Perseverance is associated with academic success, including higher educational attainment and higher class grades (Farrington et al., 2012; Duckworth et al., 2007; Vandell et al., 2007).

Connect: How do you connect to others?

These skills help young people make contributions to their community, and develop healthy, supportive relationships with peers and adults, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. When young people Connect, they work constructively and cooperatively with others, empathizing with and taking the perspective of peers, advocating for their views respectfully, understanding social and ethical norms for behavior, and sharing ideas clearly and compellingly.

SOCIAL AWARENESS & RELATIONSHIPS

DEFINITION

Empathizing with and taking the perspective of others; understanding social and ethical norms for behavior; and cultivating positive, supportive connections with friends, classmates, and adults.

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS

- ✓ Shows respect and consideration for peers, including those who may differ by gender, age, race, or peer group, and acknowledges their experiences and viewpoints
- ✓ Forms friendships with peers
- ✓ Shares interests and initiates interactions with adults
- ✓ Disagrees with or questions peers and adults in a respectful manner

COMMUNICATION

DEFINITION

Making clear and compelling oral presentations, sharing ideas, clarifying information as needed, and adapting communication styles to meet audience needs.

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS

- ✓ Communicates ideas or information to others effectively by presenting information in logical sequence with main points clearly articulated
- ✓ Asks and/or answers questions
- ✓ Listens actively and can summarize key points

TEAMWORK

DEFINITION

Working constructively and cooperatively with others in pursuit of a common cause or objective.

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS

- ✓ Works well in pairs/groups on shared tasks
- ✓ Contributes ideas and information when in a group
- ✓ Recognizes when to compromise during disagreements or conflicts and when to advocate for themselves
- ✓ Articulates their point of view and also listens to different opinions during cooperative tasks and disagreements

RESEARCH IN PRACTICE

Not only are Connect skills useful for a young person's ability to interact with others, but these skills have also been shown to influence academic success and engagement in the classroom (Pierce et al., 2010; Caprara et al., 2000; Furrer & Skinner 2003). Teamwork and communication are considered two of the most important skills by employers (American Management Association, 2012). Relationship-building is an important aspect of achievement in school for all ages (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Arbreton et al., 2009).

Thrive: How do you help yourself thrive?

These skills help young people recognize and manage their emotions, anticipate the impact of their behaviors on others, and take ownership over their actions. When young people Thrive, they believe that their abilities can grow with effort; have confidence in their ability to accomplish an outcome or goal; and are able to manage their emotions, thoughts and behaviors as appropriate to different situations. This first requires an awareness of self – the recognition of their emotions, thoughts, motivations, strengths and weaknesses.

GROWTH MINDSET

DEFINITION

Believing that talent and intelligence can be developed and improved through continued learning, practice, and effort.

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS

- ✓ Understands that mastery comes through effort
- ✓ Embraces feedback and constructive criticism
- ✓ Seeks to learn from experiences and setbacks

SELF-EFFICACY

DEFINITION

Believing in one's ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task; is often task or situation dependent.

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS

- ✓ Shows confidence in their own abilities
- ✓ Knows they are in control of their motivation and behavior and, by extension, their success
- ✓ Is open to risks and challenges

SELF-REGULATION

DEFINITION

Managing one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations.

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS

- ✓ Reflects, plans, and thinks ahead
- ✓ Considers the impact and consequences of their behaviors before acting or reacting
- ✓ Gains control or adjusts behavior as needed
- ✓ Manages stress and delays gratification
- ✓ Works well independently, focuses on tasks

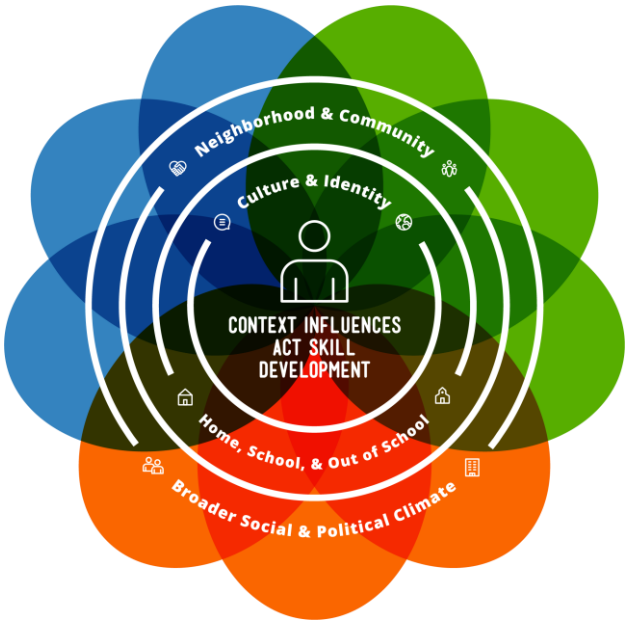
RESEARCH IN PRACTICE

Research demonstrates that the Thrive skills can impact a variety of behavioral outcomes, including health, safety, and good habits (Roeser et al,. 2002; de Riddler et al., 2012; Moffitt et al., 2011; Galla & Duckworth, 2015). Growth mindset has been shown to improve achievement test scores in mathematics (Dweck, 2006; OECD, 2015). Self-efficacy influences school grades and classroom engagement (Bandura et al., 1996). Self-regulation influences academic achievement, including test scores and grades (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005).

Context Influences ACT Skills

Context plays a critical role in shaping young people's development. Young people are both creators of and influenced by their experiences and social interactions, as well as broader factors like cultural values, linguistic norms, and the sociopolitical climate (Jones et al., 2017; Nagaoka et al., 2015). These settings and factors contribute to how young people learn ACT skills, which may manifest in different ways depending on young people's developmental stages and multiple aspects of their identity.

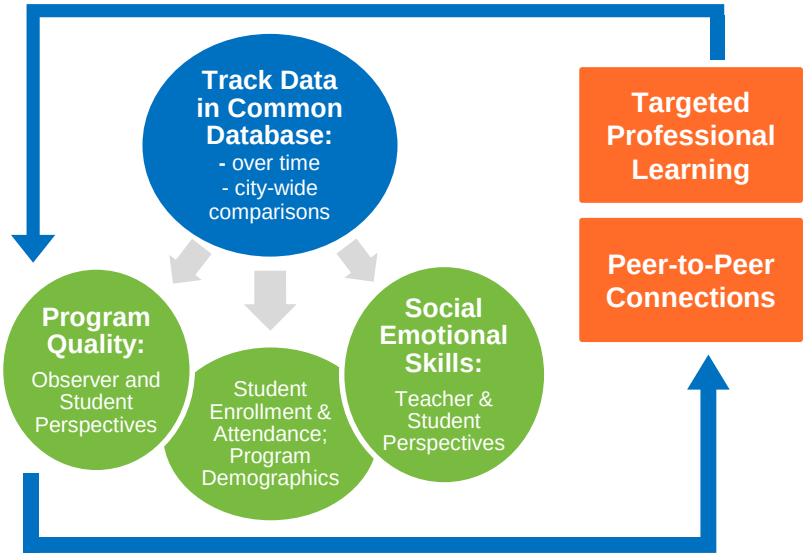
Despite this complexity, the opportunity for the out-of-school time sector is clear. Young people spend 80% of their waking hours outside of school, and summer and afterschool programs are ideal settings in which to learn and practice ACT skills. These skills are all identifiable, measurable, and malleable, making them accessible and meaningful to the adults who can influence skill development.



Our Approach

Boston After School & Beyond has linked each skill to research-based program practices that are observable and measurable, enabling adults to intentionally support young people's ACT skill development. There are skill-specific strategies as well as cross-cutting practices that develop all ACT skills.

Our growing network of program partners use a common database and uniform, valid and reliable measurement tools to collect data on program practice and youth skill development.[1] This shared approach across diverse programs enables rich learning communities and provides a city-wide comparison for program improvement.



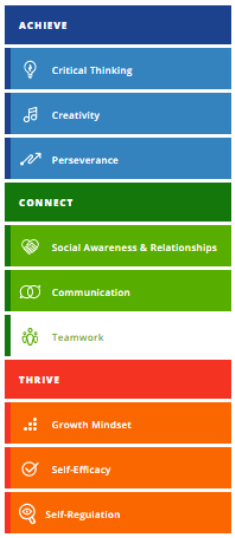
Boston After School & Beyond, using these data, identifies and highlights high-performing programs through case studies that feature the program's unique strategies and approaches. Data and measurement also inform the content of our professional development for program staff. This coordinated, data-driven approach allows out-of-school time providers to assess, reflect, and refine their programming to improve youth experiences and ACT skill development.

[1]BASB uses measurement tools from The PEAR Institute, the National Institute on Out-of-School Time/MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and The Youth Experiences Survey. The shared database is through Cityspan Technologies, Inc.

Jones, S., Brush, K., Bailey, R., Brion-Meisels, G., McIntyre, J., Kahn, J., Nelson, B., & Stickle, L. (2017). Navigating Social and Emotional Learning from the Inside Out. Looking Inside and Across 25 Leading SEL Programs: A Practical Resource for Schools and OST Providers. Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Nagaoka, J., Farrington, C. A., Ehrlich, S. B., & Heath, R. D. (2015). Foundations for Young Adult Success: A Developmental Framework. Concept Paper for Research and Practice. University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research.

The ACT Framework Goes Digital

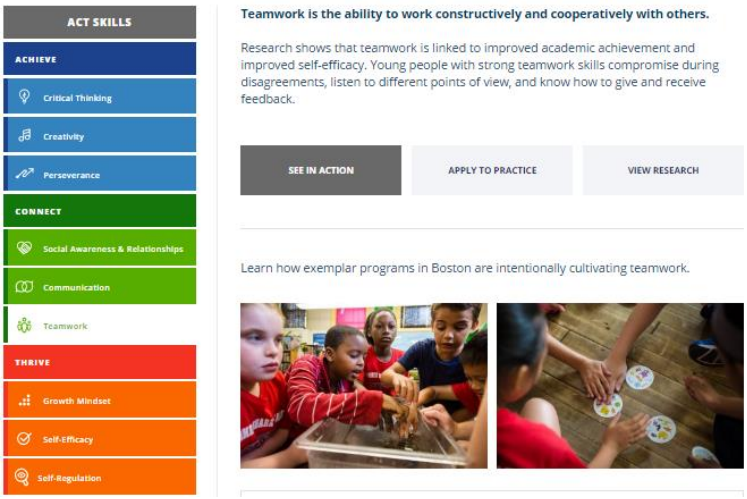


BRIDGING RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

We invite you to make the move with us online. Visit the Insight Center to learn more about the ACT Framework and access practitioner-driven resources on cultivating these skills (insight.bostonbeyond.org).

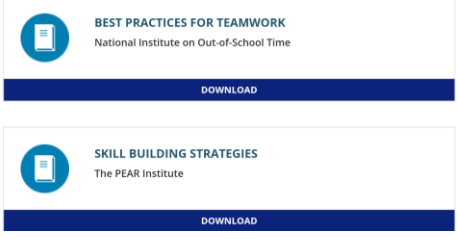
OTHER RESOURCES

- ✓ Best Practices in 7 key areas of programming
- ✓ Case Studies on all 23 measured program quality domains
- ✓ How-to-Guide for measurement and data collection
- ✓ Documents and materials from all past BASB events

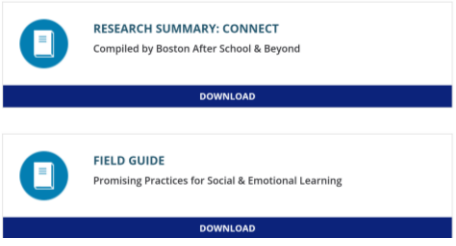


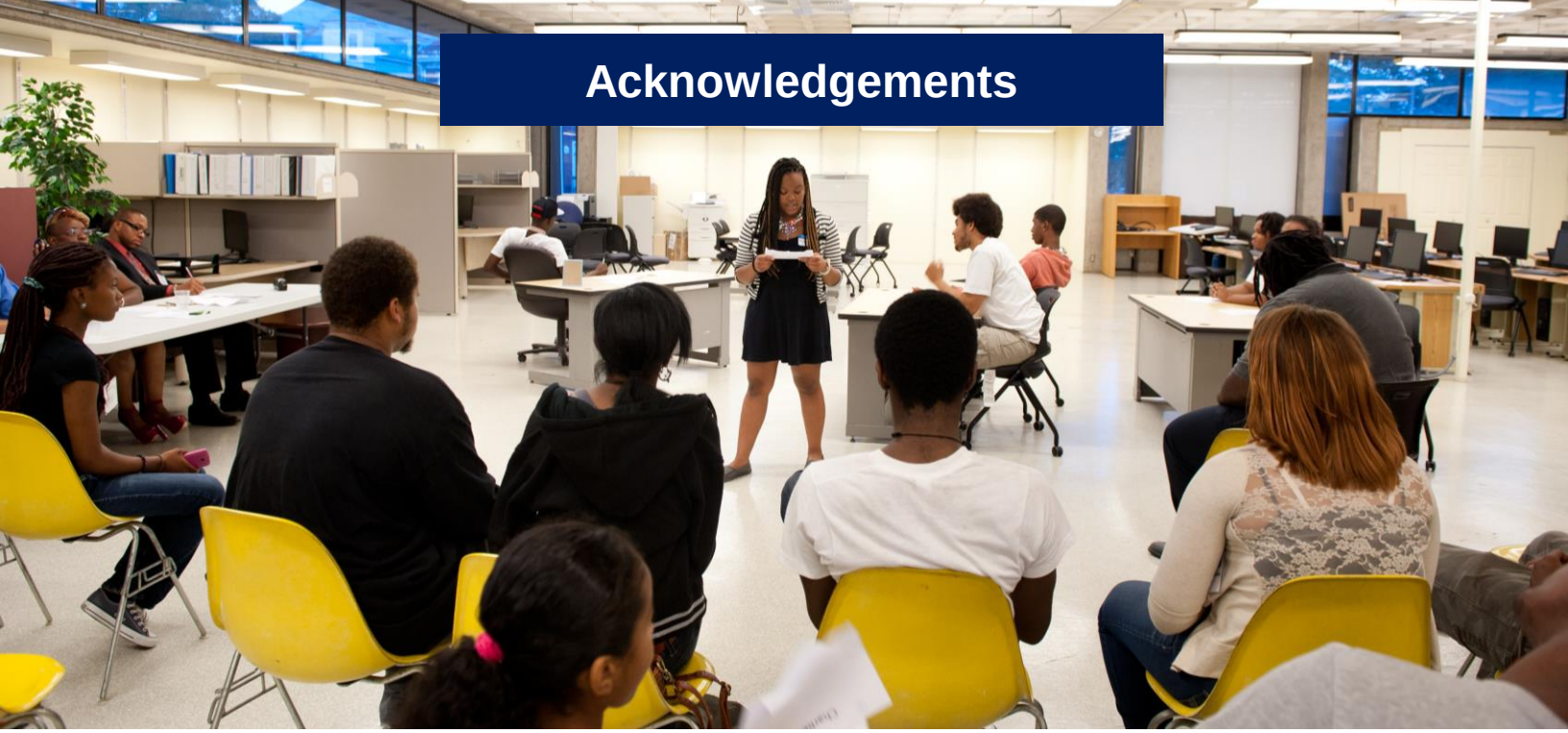
SEE IT IN ACTION
Case Studies from Exemplar Programs

APPLY TO PRACTICE
Strategies to Support Teamwork



VIEW RESEARCH
Empirical Evidence on Teamwork





Acknowledgements

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Forum for Youth Investment
Hale Reservation
Harvard MEDScience
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