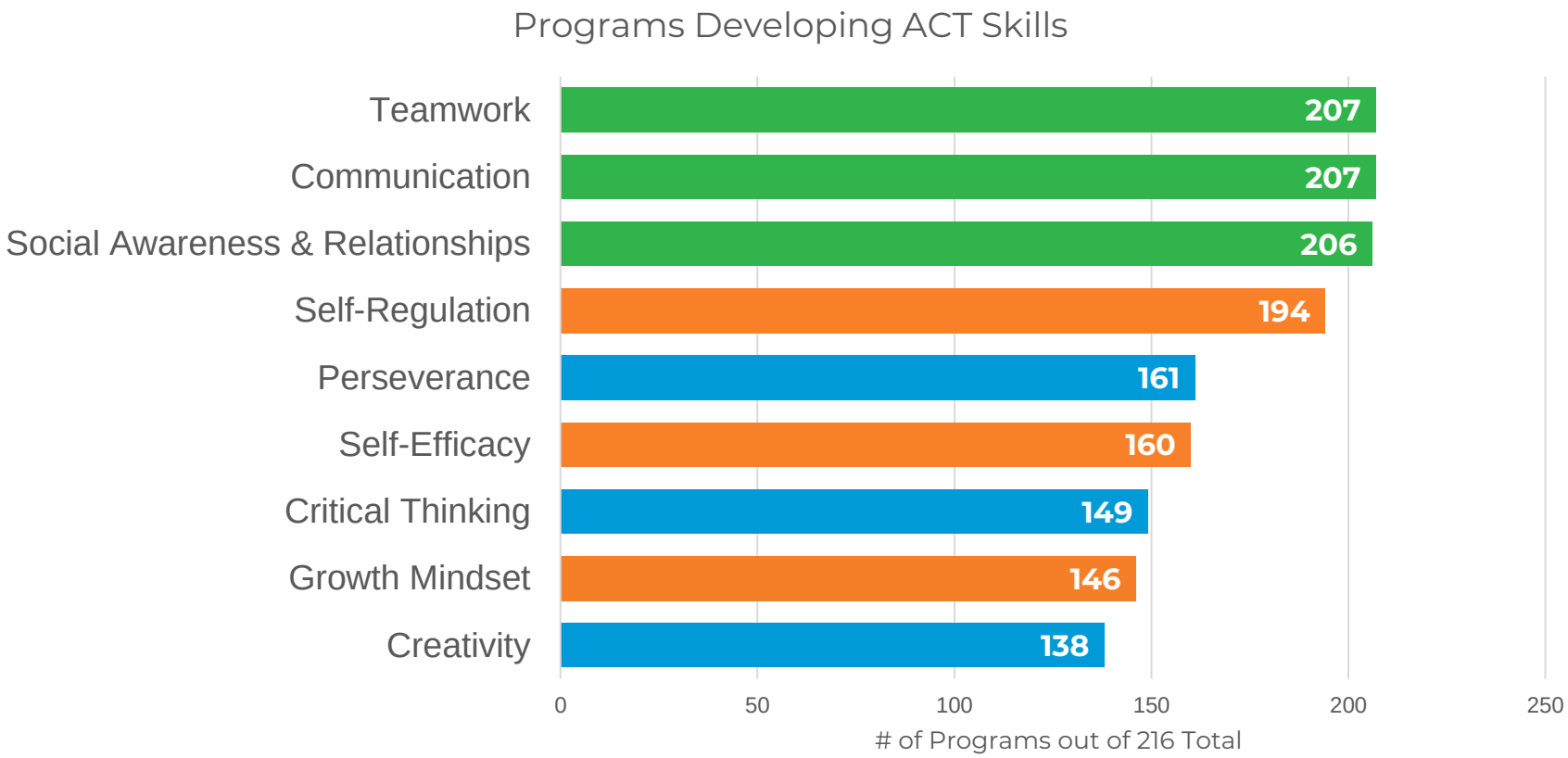
Boston
After School
& Beyond

The ACT Skills: Social Awareness & Relationships

The Achieve-Connect-Thrive Skills

Connect Skills are the most widely taught



Representative of 2023-2024 School Year

What is Social Awareness & Relationships?

Social awareness and relationships involves 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.

Research shows that social awareness and relationships are important for academic achievement and engagement in the classroom at all age levels. Young people with strong social awareness and relationship skills will show respect and consideration for their peers, form friendships with peers, share interests and ideas with adults, and demonstrate disagreement or ask questions in a respectful manner.

Why Social Awareness & Relationships?

- Positive relationships (w/ teachers, adults) linked to improved grades and social skills
  Pierce et al., 2010; Hamre and Pianta, 2001; Murray and Greenberg, 2000

- Sense of relatedness linked to better academic outcomes via improved classroom engagement
  Furrer and Skinner, 2003

- Relationships with after-school program staff more positive than those with teachers and neighborhood adults
  Paisley and Ferrari, 2005

What does Social Awareness & Relationships look like?

- Supportive and respectful connections with peers
- Cooperation, sharing, compromise
- Empathy, listening
- Conflict resolution

PEAR, Perseverance Rubric
PEAR, Perseverance 2 Rubric

Camp Harbor View, Mark Curreri Photography

What does a lack of Social Awareness & Relationships look like?

- Isolated or lonely
- Difficulty trusting others
- Bragging, put-downs, fighting
- Gossiping and bullying
- No attempt to resolve conflict on their own, need staff to intervene

PEAR, Perseverance Rubric
PEAR, Perseverance 2 Rubric

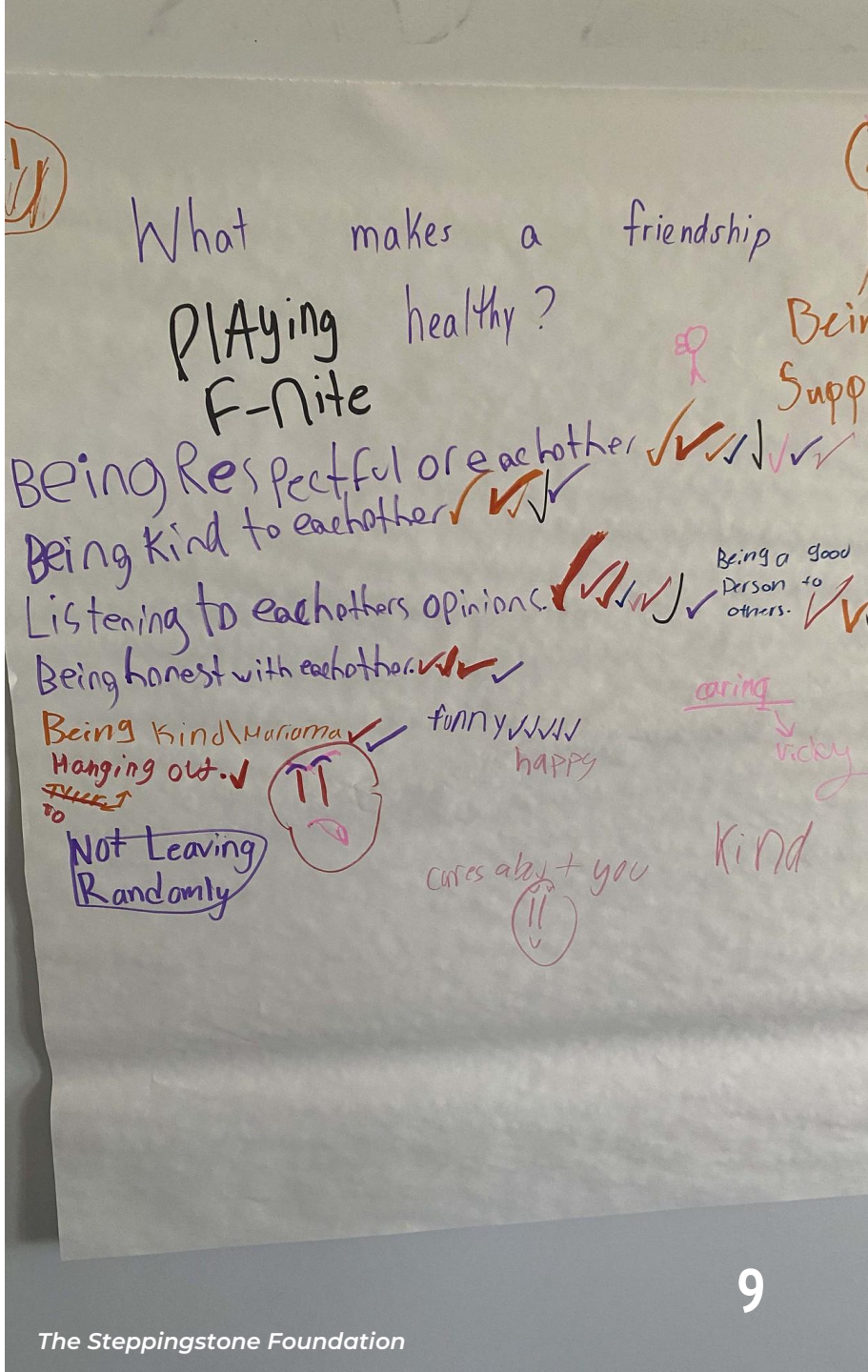
Sociedad Latina, Casey Atkins Photography

How to Encourage Social Awareness & Relationships

1. Norms & Positive Reinforcement
2. Perspective-Taking
3. Respectful Disagreement

1) Norms & Positive Reinforcement

- Set group norms
- Positive reinforcement when group norms are followed
- Individual check-ins and acknowledgement (e.g. arrival)

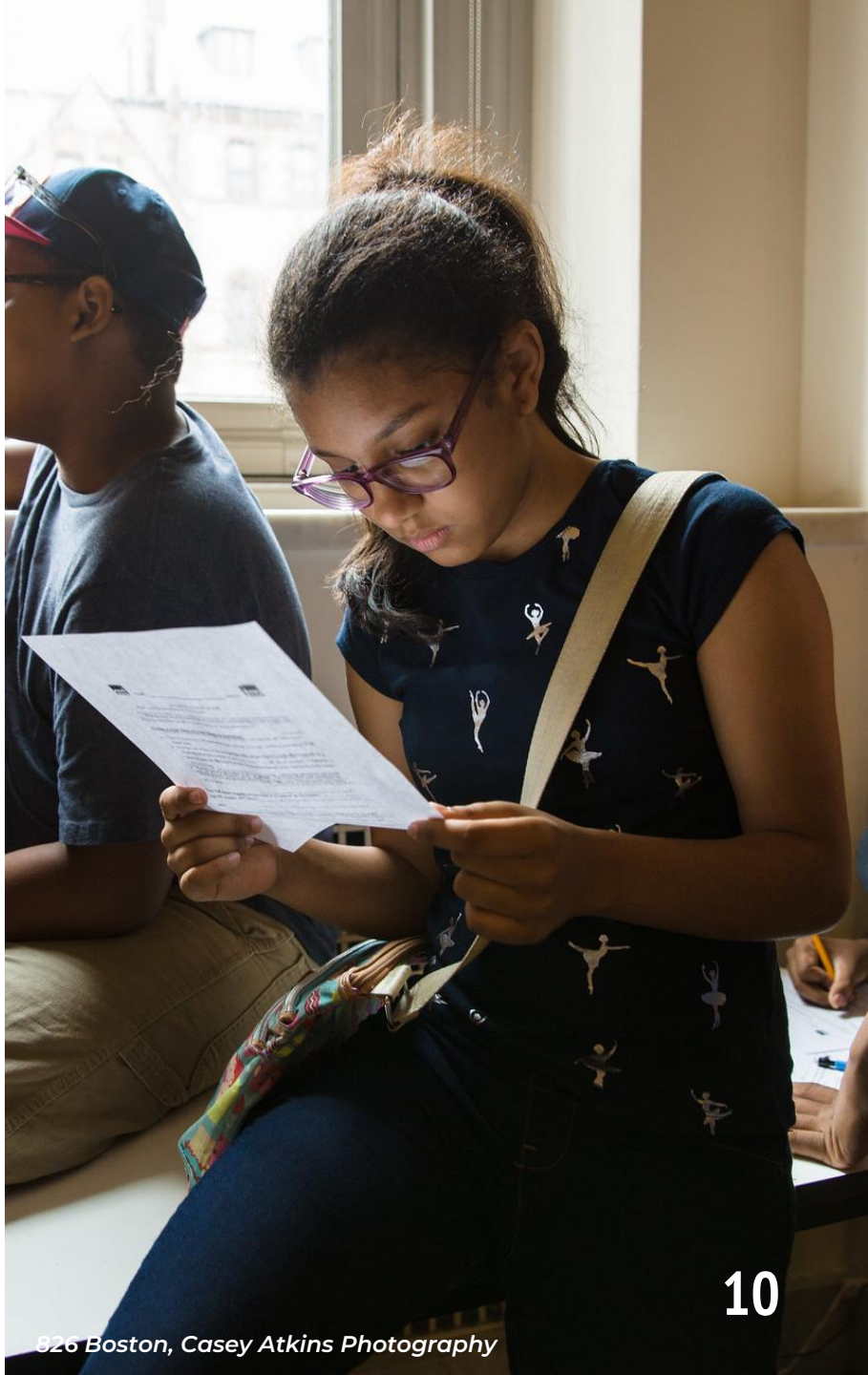


2) Perspective-Taking

- Analyze a character's feelings, thoughts, motivations, influences

- Resolve conflict by allowing each student to voice their feelings

PEAR, Peer Relationships Rubric
Speech and Language KiDS, 2025



826 Boston, Casey Atkins Photography

3) Respectful Disagreement

- Teach how to disagree: Not “I think that was stupid” but “I disagree with that”
- Staff challenge students: “How else can you say that without being hurtful?”
- Dissect disagreement: why, how would you handle it next time, could there be more than one right answer?

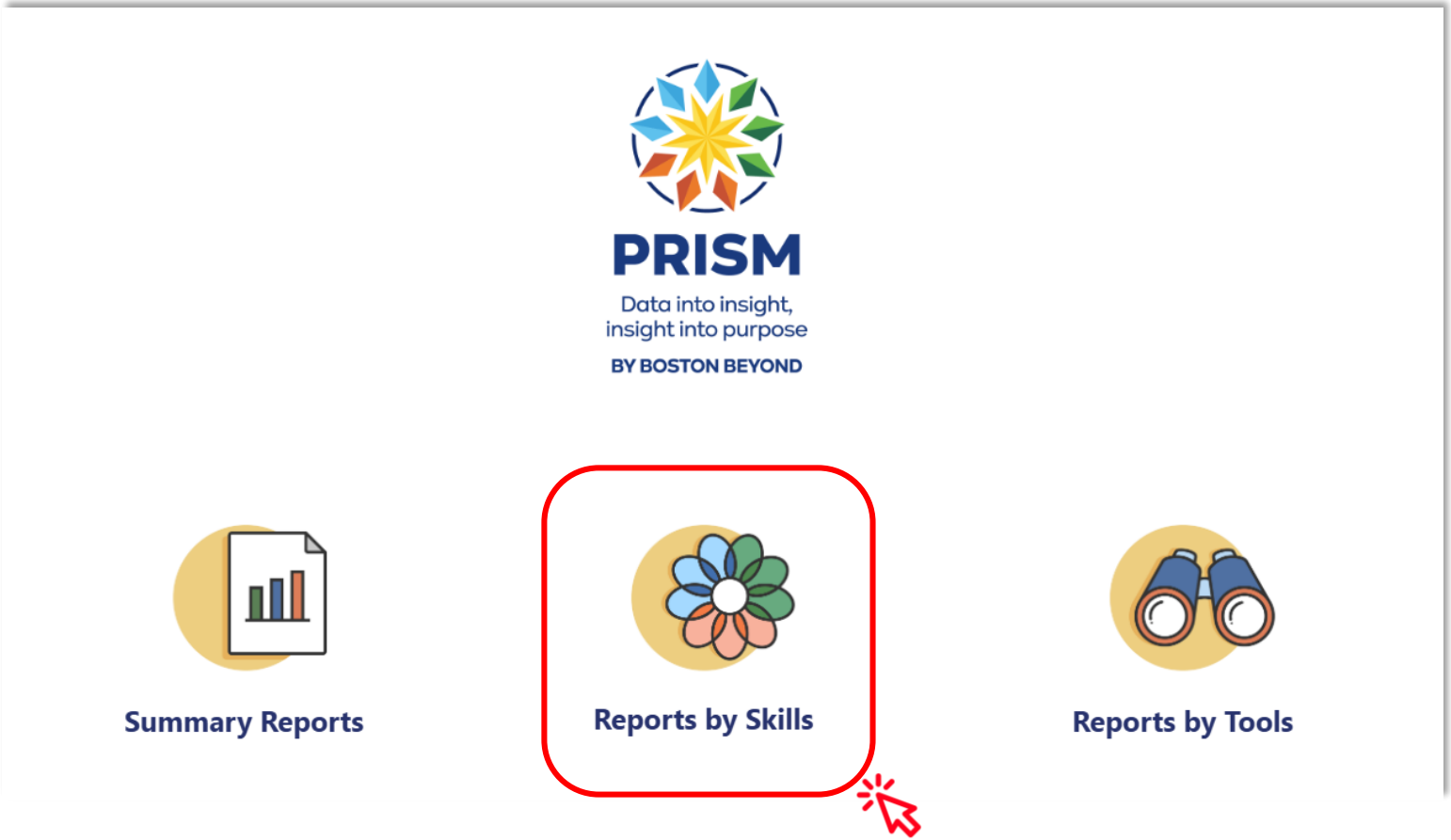
Mendler, 2013

Girls' LEAP

Building Social Awareness & Relationships beyond school

WriteBoston
Building a Community of Writers

Don’t forget the Reports by Skills in the PRISM



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