



**Special
Olympics**

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools:

Social and Emotional Learning in Unified Sports 2021-2022

Center for Social Development and Education



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Executive Summary

For many years, findings from the national evaluation of Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools (UCS) have consistently demonstrated that Special Olympics' inclusive schoolwide programming is successful in providing opportunities for social and emotional learning (SEL) and for students with and without intellectual disability (ID) to learn or strengthen a variety of SEL skills. Unified Sports coaches and Unified Club advisors have reported these activities provide opportunities for skill development in all five SEL domains (as defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)). Moreover, students without ID have consistently self-reported growth and development in the areas of social awareness, relationship skills, self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making after participating in these and other UCS activities.

The past three years of the annual evaluation have significantly expanded understanding around SEL in UCS through a targeted exploration of SEL in high school Unified Sports. During this time, the Center for Social Development and Education at the University of Massachusetts Boston has worked collaboratively with Special Olympics North America, a national group of advisors across multiple related fields (SEL, disability, sports), and several high schools in New England to observe SEL as it naturally occurs in high school Unified Sports, develop a Theory of Change for SEL in Unified Sports, and develop and pilot test a set of SEL resources for UCS schools (a four-part professional development seminar and a card deck of 33 sport-based SEL activities (the "SEL Activity Cards")). In light of this work to date, the 2021-22 evaluation comprised a feasibility pilot of the SEL Activity Cards in advance of an initial impact evaluation for students in the coming year. This report presents the findings from coach implementation fidelity, coach and student engagement, successes and challenges with implementation, feedback and suggested revisions to the SEL Activity Cards, and coach and student perceptions of the professional development and SEL Activity Cards including emerging impacts on coaches and students.

Methods

The 2021-22 evaluation involved observing Unified Sports teams at five New England high schools, collecting implementation data from coaches, and interviewing coaches and student participants. Across the five schools, a total of 17 coaches and 108 students participated in data collection. Data were collected five different ways. The evaluation team observed at least one practice per week at each school and completed a fidelity observation log for the SEL Activity Card used in that practice. In addition, coaches filled out an implementation log after each practice where an SEL Activity Card was used (whether the evaluation team had observed that practice or not). Coaches were also interviewed at the beginning and end of each season and students were interviewed at the end of each season. Student focus groups were also conducted at the end of the school year with select schools.

The schools implemented four different Unified Sports over the course of the year (basketball, soccer, track and field, and volleyball). Coaches participated in the professional development

seminar prior to the first sport season they coached, and each coach participated in booster sessions mid-season and for each subsequent season they coached. Each school received a subset of the SEL Activity Cards each season to help ensure that each SEL Activity Card was tested across different Unified Sports.

Results

Coach Perceptions of SEL Professional Development

- Through participation in the professional development seminar, coaches felt they were able to develop a deeper understanding of SEL and learn why intentional SEL is important for Unified Sports.
- Coaches also expressed that the professional development provided them with valuable opportunities to connect with and learn from one another, which they said they do not do enough.
- Coaches shared that the professional development was critical for understanding the SEL Activity Cards and knowing how to implement them in ways that will positively impact the team.
- Post-participation feedback from coaches revealed they would benefit from more “in the moment” feedback from the trainers delivering the professional development as well as more resources and support throughout the season (e.g., additional booster sessions).

Coach Implementation of SEL Activity Cards

- Coaches used the timing within the sport season to guide the choice of what SEL Activity Cards from their subset to use and when; team building activities were done in the beginning of the season while reflection activities were often implemented toward the end of the season.
- Coaches felt the SEL Activity Cards helped add structure to the practices as they aimed to align certain SEL Activity Cards with sport-based skills the team was working on or dedicate a specific part of every practice to implementation (e.g., the first 10 minutes of practice).
- Coaches also expressed that they valued how comprehensive the resource was as it helped them more clearly define the goals of each practice and did not require them to develop anything on their own for the team.
- Coach collaboration also factored into implementation, in that the coaching team at each school met prior to practices to plan the SEL Activity Card implementation. Coaches felt that collaborating to plan the activities was a vital component to their success.
- Coaches also used the SEL Activity Cards to stay on track with season or team goals. The SEL Activity Cards helped add continuity across the season when goals set at the beginning were revisited or repeated and reflection after practices and games became a regular occurrence on the teams.
- Overall fidelity of implementing the SEL Activity Cards was high. The average fidelity score across SEL Activity Cards and coaches was 4.59 out of 6.

Implementation Successes

- Coaches felt that the SEL Activity Cards were successful in teaching students SEL skills they could use outside of the Unified Sports context, which is an important part of any school's approach to SEL.
- Another perceived success of the SEL Activity Cards was that it helped students take on leadership roles and develop leadership skills in new ways or in different ways than elsewhere in school activities.
- Student engagement in the SEL Activity Cards was high, as evidenced by coach implementation log data and evaluation team observation data (4.52 out of 6). Coaches attributed this high level of engagement to the high level of commitment students have to all aspects of the Unified Sports team.
- Finally, coaches saw the enhanced opportunities for team building as another success, in that the SEL skills targeted by the SEL Activity Cards, such as teamwork, helped coaches develop more cohesive teams.

Implementation Challenges and Solutions

- One of the main challenges coaches identified was ensuring the SEL Activity Cards were accessible for all students. Preparing students ahead of time (e.g., rehearsing answers to questions before practice) and reviewing each SEL Activity Card for necessary modifications that ensured all teammates could participate helped coaches overcome this challenge.
- Some coaches found it challenging to integrate the SEL Activity Cards into certain practices because, at times, it was challenging to find an SEL Activity Card that matched the practice they planned to do. In response to this, some coaches made the SEL Activity Card its own station as part of an activity rotation, while others dedicated a set amount of time at the beginning or end of every practice for the SEL Activity Cards.
- Group size also came up as a challenge within several of the teams, in particular the idea that a single large group for activities made implementation of some of the SEL Activity Cards difficult. To work through this, some coaches split their team up into several small groups or set up discussion pairs, which made it easier for all students to participate and feel comfortable doing so.
- A final challenge that was discussed across coaches was fitting the SEL Activity Cards within the practice schedule and, more importantly, the time limits of the practice. Thus, coaches would occasionally extend an SEL Activity Card over multiple practices or repeat an SEL Activity Card multiple times throughout the season.

Changes in Coaching Style

- Reflecting on how participation in the professional development and implementation of the SEL Activity Cards may have changed their approach to coaching, coaches felt they could now teach SEL concepts in more concrete ways and intentionally apply SEL concepts to certain situations, rather than having SEL feel abstract for them and their students.

- Coaches felt that they had become more purposeful in their approach to SEL in sports and the SEL Activity Cards were more impactful for themselves and their students than other approaches they had tried.
- A final way coaches identified that their coaching had developed was through their emphasis on student self- and social awareness and having students be more mindful of how they and others on their team were feeling.

Emerging Impact on Students

- Relationship Skills Domain
 - One SEL skill that students and coaches felt the SEL Activity Cards promoted was developing positive relationships. SEL Activity Cards like “The Name Game” and “Question of the Day” were particularly helpful for learning about one another and building friendships. Students shared during interviews that making new friends and getting to know their teammates was one of their favorite parts of participating in Unified Sports.
 - Students and coaches also felt the SEL Activity Cards promoted teamwork, collaborative problem solving, and effective communication. SEL Activity Cards like “Check Your Buddy,” “Focus of Play,” “Silent Drills,” and “Human Knot” were mentioned frequently when students discussed teamwork and communication. Coaches agreed that the SEL Activity Cards enhanced these aspects of Unified Sports.
 - Offering support, help, and peer-to-peer coaching were also skills that students and coaches felt the SEL Activity Cards promoted in ways that would not have existed otherwise. SEL Activity Cards like “Focus of Play,” “Post-Competition Reflection,” and “Goal Setting” were mentioned when students were asked if they had the opportunity to help a teammate during the season. Coaches agreed that these activities created a framework for students to support one another.
 - Finally, across schools and teams, the coaches noted various ways that the SEL Activity Cards provided leadership opportunities for students and felt these were a natural fit for the students and the team. Importantly, one-quarter of the SEL Activity Cards offer explicit ideas for student leadership.
- Social Awareness Domain
 - The main skills that students and coaches felt the SEL Activity Cards promoted were demonstrating empathy and compassion and recognizing strengths in others. SEL Activity Cards like “Choose Your Challenge,” “One Step at a Time,” and “Focus of Play” were mentioned in connection with learning to be more mindful of teammates and recognizing what each person brings to the team.
- Responsible Decision-Making Domain
 - Proper team sports etiquette was the main skill that students and coaches discussed. Students on the Unified Sports teams demonstrated that they learned good sportsmanship through comforting, cheering for, and encouraging each other, even when someone missed a shot or lost a race. Coaches also noticed that students learned to create a positive environment by developing a more positive view of team sports etiquette and what it means to be a good sport.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The feedback the evaluation team received from coaches regarding the SEL Activity Cards was overwhelmingly positive, and each coach stated they are planning to continue with the same or similar activities following their participation in the 2021-22 evaluation. Due in large part to the professional development coaches received prior to the Unified Sports season, overall implementation of the SEL Activity Cards in this feasibility pilot was a success. The SEL Activity Cards were also seen as successful in having a positive impact on coaches and students. Coaches reflected that they had developed a deeper understanding of core SEL concepts, learned how (and why) to intentionally support SEL skill development among students on the team, and became more deliberate in focusing students' attention on self- and social awareness skills. Importantly, all coaches reflected that they had been positively changed by their experience. Similarly, students with and without ID reflected on numerous SEL skills they felt the SEL Activity Cards had helped them learn, most prominently in the SEL domains of relationship skills (e.g., effective communication, offering support, showing leadership), social awareness (e.g., empathy, recognizing others' strengths), and responsible decision-making (e.g., proper team sports etiquette).

Ultimately, this work demonstrated that intentionally incorporating small kernels of SEL (Jones et al., 2017) into Unified Sports can be an effective way to address SEL skill development among students with and without ID, expand school settings in which SEL instruction can take place, and enhance coaching practices in inclusive sports. Thus, as Special Olympics continues its focus on enhancing intentional SEL practices in UCS and Unified Sports, the following recommendations for programming and evaluation are offered:

- Build more flexibility for Unified Sports coaches into the next evaluation study, for example by offering more options for professional development or more options for implementing the SEL Activity Cards.
- Make integration of the SEL Activity Cards into Unified Sports as seamless as possible for coaches, thus increasing buy-in and engagement with the resource on a national scale.
- Include the SEL Activity Cards professional development seminar as part of the hierarchy of certification Special Olympics North America offers to Unified Sports coaches.
- Explore adaptations for the SEL Activity Cards in other UCS experiences, such as Unified Club and Unified PE, or for younger students on Unified Sports teams at the middle or elementary school level.

Introduction

To date, findings from the national evaluation of Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools (UCS) have established that Special Olympics' inclusive schoolwide programming is successful in promoting social and emotional development for participating students. Going back half a decade, findings from the 2016-17 evaluation demonstrated that students without intellectual disability (ID) who participated in UCS felt they gained or enhanced skills in several areas related to social and emotional learning (SEL), including self-confidence and self-esteem, leadership skills, interpersonal relationships, and teamwork and social skills, which were more pronounced in small group activities like Unified Sports. Furthermore, the 2017-18 evaluation found that Unified Sports teams, Unified Club, and Whole School Engagement all had an indirect effect on the SEL domains of relationship skills and social awareness among high school students without ID through increased social interactions with peers with ID. That is, participation in any of these activities brought students with and without ID together, through which students without ID perceived growth in their own SEL skills. Continuing the investigation of SEL in UCS, the 2019-20 evaluation revealed that students with and without ID participating in Unified Sports had opportunities to practice social and emotional skills. For instance, during observations conducted by the Center for Social Development and Education (CSDE) evaluation team, students showcased social awareness by being aware of their teammates' perspectives and abilities. Students also had opportunities to practice relationship skills through exchanging positive affirmations in support of their team members, such as "You got this!" These findings corroborate past research indicating that, through sport, young people develop skills within all five CASEL Domains (Danish et al., 2004; Heke, 2001; Hellison, 1995; Holt et al., 2008).

The Collaborative for Academic Social Emotional Learning (CASEL), the leading organization in the field of SEL, defines SEL as the process through which people develop healthy identities in the areas of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationships skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, n.d.). As noted above, the annual UCS evaluation conducted by CSDE has consistently found that UCS provides opportunities for students with and without ID to practice and enhance their social and emotional skills. As seen in Figure 1, social and emotional skills are developed through peoples' experiences in classrooms, schools, families, and their larger communities. UCS is present in each of these different environments, and thus presents an ideal opportunity to expand SEL development for middle and high school students.

Using the CASEL SEL framework alongside past evaluation findings and findings from the broader SEL field on the positive impacts of deliberate SEL instruction (Given et al., 2010; Blyth et al., 2017; Durlak et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2018), CSDE worked alongside Special Olympics and an advisory group of experts in the fields of SEL, Unified Sports, and disability, to develop "the SEL Activity Cards." This resource serves as a targeted support for Unified Sports coaches to intentionally integrate SEL development into Unified Sports practices through a series of 33 activities. When asking educators to implement SEL curricula into their regularly scheduled teaching and coaching plans, there are a few potential challenges one should be aware of, such

as frustration from teachers at adding to their already full plates and student buy in (Jones et al., 2017). Therefore, the SEL Activity Cards were developed in accordance with Jones and colleagues' (2017) "kernels of practice." These "low-cost, low-burden strategies" are evidence-based, adaptable SEL activities that require less time and fewer resources than a traditional SEL curriculum. This offers school staff, in this case Unified Sports coaches, flexibility and autonomy within implementation based on their students' needs.

Figure 1. CASEL SEL framework



Self-awareness: identifying emotions, self-confidence, recognizing strengths and weaknesses

Self-management: impulse control, stress management, goal setting

Social awareness: perspective-taking, empathy, respecting others

Relationship skills: communication, relationship building, teamwork

Responsible decision-making: evaluating situations, problem solving, reflecting

Along with the SEL Activity Cards, Unified Sports coaches were also provided with a four-hour professional development seminar prior to the sport season and a booster session midway through the season. This professional development is just as important, if not more important, than the SEL Activity Cards resource. This is because having a foundation in SEL, and understanding the benefits of intentional SEL, builds confidence and competence in delivering SEL instruction (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2018) and can lead to more frequent use of new SEL strategies (Desimone et al., 2002; Yoon et al., 2007). Thus, the professional development component provided the necessary training and scaffolding for Unified Sports coaches to buy in to facilitating SEL development for their players. It also provided training and scaffolding necessary to support their use of the SEL Activity Cards effectively, to feel confident in doing so, and to understand the long-term benefits of strong SEL skills in youth.

With both of these components (the SEL Activity Cards and coach professional development) fully developed and pilot tested during the 2020-21 evaluation, the 2021-22 evaluation sought to:

- Assess SEL Activity Card implementation fidelity and coach and student engagement
- Identify common barriers and successes of implementation and variability across teams, coaching styles, and type of Unified Sport

- Determine necessary revisions to the SEL Activity Cards and coach professional development based on coach and student feedback and fidelity data
- Examine students’ and coaches’ perceptions on the SEL Activity Cards and intentional incorporation of SEL in Unified Sports

Methods

Participants

Schools

The SEL team worked closely with five high schools implementing Unified Sports during the 2021-22 school year. The Unified Sports coaches committed to attending CSDE Professional Development training and booster sessions, permitting in-person observation and data collection, and piloting the SEL Activity Cards. These schools were chosen because they are Full-implementation UCS schools, meaning each of the participating schools implements at least one activity from all three core experiences (Unified Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership, Whole School Engagement). The specific breakdown of the number of activities included within each core experience can be seen in Table 1. DHS and DSHS were both awarded UCS National Banner Recognition in 2022 as well.¹ All five schools are located in the New England area (NH and MA), which made weekly observations by the evaluation team possible. The pilot schools are all suburban high schools with predominantly white student populations. A more in-depth breakdown of the school demographics can be found in Table 2. These five schools also offer a mixture of special education programming, which includes self-contained special education classes, inclusive non-academic classes, resource rooms, and vocational programs. Additionally, all five schools have well-established Unified Sports Programs which have been in effect for between three and 12 years, depending on the school (see Table 1). NHS and WHS were both new to the SEL Project for the 2021-22 school year. See [Appendix A](#) for school descriptions.

Table 1. UCS implementation data for 2021-22

	First year as a UCS	# Unified Sports activities offered	# Inclusive Youth Leadership activities offered	# Whole School Engagement activities offered
DHS	2018	2	2	2
DSHS	2010	2	2	2
NHS	2018	5	2	3
PHS	2016	2	2	1
WHS	2019	3	2	2

¹ <https://www.specialolympics.org/what-we-do/unified-champion-schools/banner-recognition-program>

Table 2. School characteristic data (from the National Center for Education Statistics)

Characteristic	DHS	DSHS	NHS	PHS	WHS
Title I School	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Total Enrollment	1,045	1,527	1,664	1,078	1,180
Gender					
Male	49%	51%	49%	49%	50%
Female	51%	49%	51%	51%	50%
Race/Ethnicity					
White	84%	84%	78%	84%	56%
Black	3%	2%	2%	1%	1%
Asian	<1%	7%	8%	4%	32%
Hispanic	5%	2%	7%	5%	8%
American Indian / Alaska Native	0%	<1%	<1%	0%	0%
Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	0%	<1%	<1%	0%	<1%
Two or more races	8%	5%	5%	7%	4%

Unified Sports Implementation

Across the schools, the evaluation team observed four Unified Track teams, four Unified Basketball teams, two Unified Soccer teams, and one Unified Volleyball team. Teams practiced between one to three times per week each season. On average, schools practiced 24 times over the course of the year, with an average of 11 practices in the fall season, an average of 8 practices in the winter season, and an average of 12 practices in the spring season. Overall, there was an average of 22 practices per school for the school year. The evaluation team typically visited each school once per week, with some variation depending on cancellations or staff availability. Overall, the evaluation team visited each school an average of 14 times over the school year. The full breakdown of practices and visits per school is included in Figure 2. Each team had between 17 to 41 students, the number of athletes (students with ID) between nine to 12, and the number of partners (students without ID) between eight to 30.

Coaches

Each school had between one and five staff members on their coaching team, with an average of three staff members per team and a total of 17 across all schools and seasons. Across all five schools, the age of the coaches ranged from 25 to 74 years old, were evenly split between males and females, and were majority white. The coaching staff also had varying levels of education with the majority of staff holding a master's degree. Most of the coaches also had full time positions at the school, from special education teachers to school resource officers, with the majority being a special or general education teacher. The breakdown of coach demographics is shown in Table 3.

Figure 2. Total number of practices by school and by season

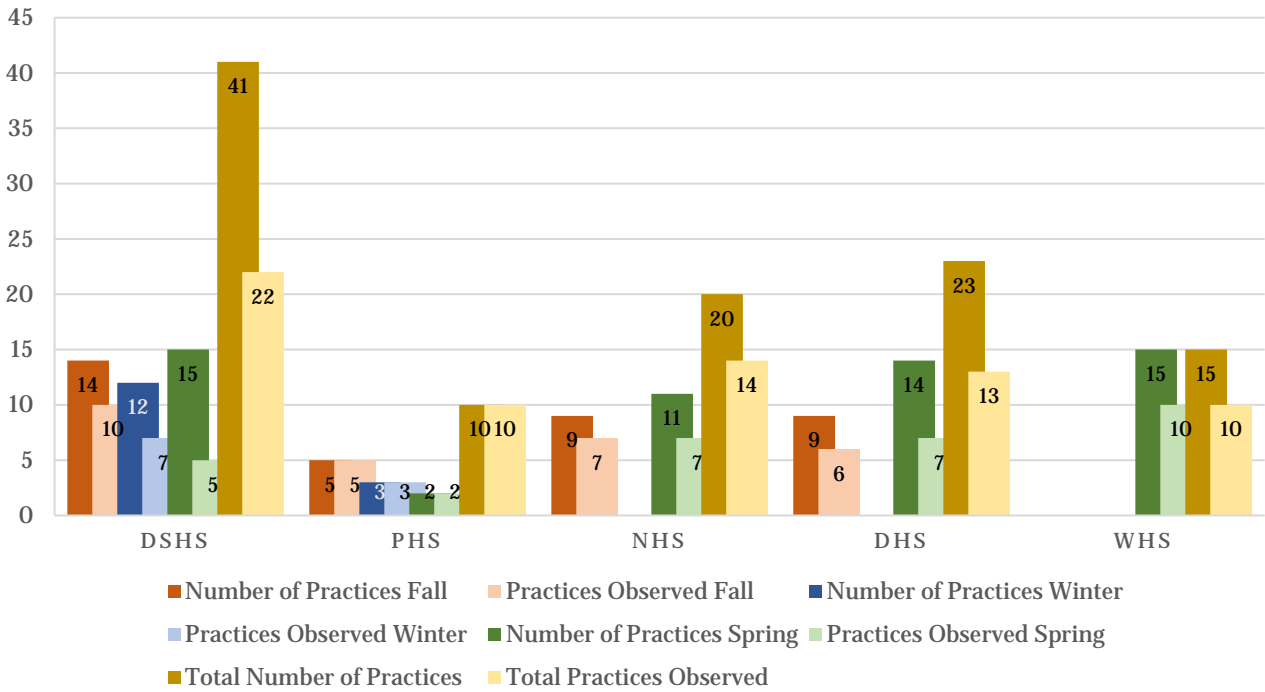


Table 3. Coach demographic data

Characteristic	<i>n</i>
Age	
25-34 years	4
35-44 years	7
45+ years	6
Gender	
Male	8
Female	9
Race/Ethnicity	
Asian	1
Native American/Alaskan Native	1
White	15
Education Level	
Bachelor's Degree	5
Master's Degree	9
Doctoral Degree	1
Other	2
Current Role at School	
Special Education Teacher/Paraprofessional	7
General Education Teacher	5
Athletics/PE	2
Other	3

Students

Across all five schools, there were a total of 130 participating students, with team sizes ranging from 17 to 41 students, with an average of 26 students per team. Across all schools, there were a total of 51 athletes and 79 partners. A total of 108 students completed post season interviews, with 40 athletes and 68 partners. This represents an average of 78% of each team participating in the data collection. (See Table 4). The participation of students in interviews for WHS was significantly lower than for the other four schools; this was a result of difficulty scheduling the interviews at the end of the school year and with competing demands of Unified Track meets at the end of the season.

Table 4. Student participants, by school

	DHS	DSHS	NHS	PHS	WHS	Total
ON TEAMS						
Total	41	32	20	20	17	130
Athletes	11	12	9	10	9	51
Partners	30	20	11	10	8	79
INTERVIEWED						
Total	40	28	15	19	6	108
Athletes	11	11	8	9	1	40
Partners	29	17	7	10	5	68
% INTERVIEWED						Avg. %
Total	98%	88%	75%	95%	35%	78%
Athletes	100%	92%	89%	90%	11%	76%
Partners	97%	85%	64%	100%	63%	82%

Procedures

Professional Development

To support the implementation of the SEL Activity Cards, all participating coaching staff attended a professional development consisting of four one-hour trainings, held over Zoom: Video Conferencing prior to the beginning of the sport season. This professional development is foundational to introducing SEL in the Unified Sports context because research has shown that bolstering coaches' own SEL skills leads to more effective SEL development in students (Brackett et al., 2009; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Steed et al., 2022). The professional development was also developed with a focus on intentional SEL and was aimed towards teaching coaches why this is more meaningful for students than practicing SEL without intentionality. Intentional SEL instruction can support higher achievement in school, improve behavior and mental health, and allows students to develop better attitudes towards their peers and themselves (Yap et al., 2022); these results are not as attainable when SEL instruction is not incorporated intentionally (Chen & Adams, 2022).

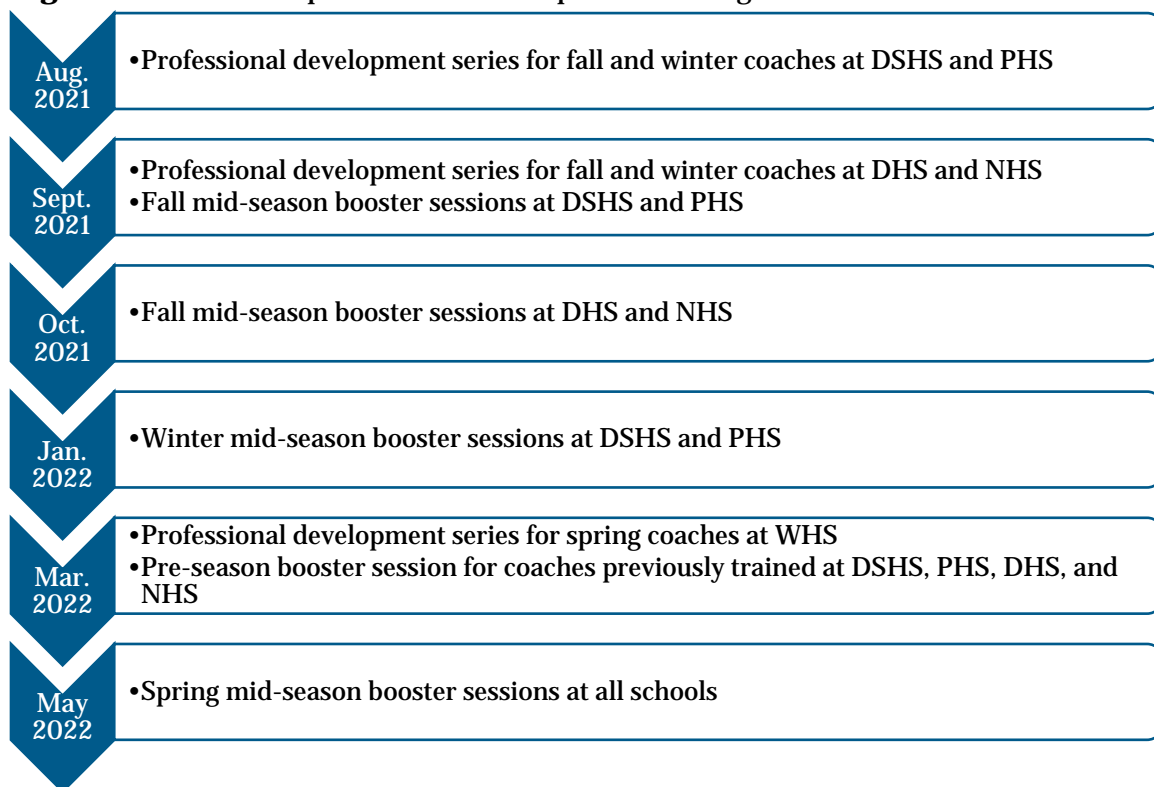
Each member of the coaching staff attended the professional development training prior to the first sports season they coached. Based on coach feedback from the fall, sessions one and two

were combined into one two-hour long session, and the same was done with sessions three and four. Coaches reported that they enjoyed having two two-hour sessions more than the format of four one-hour sessions or one four-hour session. One of the benefits of the way the professional development was set up and delivered virtually is that it can easily be modified to coach preferences and accommodate busy school schedules. The professional development used a mix of virtual group activities and paired breakouts, covering the following topics:

- Session 1: Introduction to SEL
 - Coaches learned about intentional SEL and the five CASEL domains
 - Coaches learned how to identify SEL skills in sports
- Session 2: SEL & You
 - Coaches learned about their own SEL competencies and areas for growth
 - Coaches set SEL goals for their upcoming season
- Session 3: Intro to SEL Activity Cards
 - Coaches practiced integrating the SEL Activity Cards into their practice plan
 - Coaches practiced choosing SEL Activity Cards based on student needs
- Session 4: SEL Activity Cards in Practice
 - Coaches learned how to identify ways that SEL education can fit within their coaching mission

All coaching staff participated in the initial four Professional Development sessions prior to coaching their first season. If coaches were involved in multiple sports seasons, following their first season, they participated in a pre-season booster session as well as a mid-season booster session each season. See Figure 3 for a timeline of the professional development.

Figure 3. Timeline of professional development trainings



SEL Activity Cards

The SEL Activity Cards are a set of 33 activities focused on SEL, which the coaches were asked to use with their teams to intentionally incorporate SEL into their Unified Sports teams each season during the 2021-2022 school year. Each SEL Activity Card includes a 10-15-minute-long activity, and targets one of the following SEL skills: self-reflection, goal setting, mindfulness, perseverance, respect, team building, and problem solving. The SEL Activity Cards are designed to be easy to use and flexible enough for the coaches to personalize them for their teams. For the fall season, coaching teams were given a subset of the SEL Activity Cards that included twice as many SEL Activity Cards as they had practices. The coaches were asked to use at least one SEL Activity Card per practice with their teams. The SEL Activity Cards were not assigned to specific practices or times, rather coaches had the flexibility to choose which activities from their subset were relevant to their team/practice and when to use them. The “choice within a structure” design was recommended by the Advisory Group in 2020-21. This flexibility is important and intentional as the SEL field acknowledges that schools are more likely to see flexible programs and curricula as feasible and thus deliver said programs more consistently (Bailey et al., 2019). Going into the winter season, the evaluation team found that coaches gravitated towards specific SEL Activity Cards, so the testing distribution was skewed towards certain SEL Activity Cards, while others remained untested (even though all had been distributed). To ensure all 33 of the SEL Activity Cards were tested at least twice, moving into the winter season, schools were given a subset that matched up with the number of practices they had scheduled for their season. The evaluation team created a unique subset of SEL Activity Cards for each school, in order to ensure as even a distribution as possible and to account for activities each school had already tested in the fall season. The coaches received two fewer SEL Activity Cards in their subsets than they had practices, which was done to account for canceled practices, last minute schedule changes, or other situations when coaches may be unable to incorporate an SEL Activity Card into their practice. Exact distribution of the SEL Activity Cards and categories are included in [Appendix B](#). A revised version of the SEL Activity Cards (modified based on data and observations from the project year) is included as Appendix I.

Data Collection & Analysis

Coach Implementation Logs

Coaches completed implementation logs (Teacher Evaluation Implementation Log (TEIL); Favazza et al., 2013) after each practice where an SEL Activity Card was implemented. This log included questions about when and how coaches used the SEL Activity Card, whether they made any adaptations, any challenges they faced with implementation, and feedback for improvement. See [Appendix C](#) for the coach implementation log. Over the course of the year, coaches were expected to submit 42 implementation logs in the Fall, 15 implementation logs in the Winter, and 62 implementation logs in the Spring, for a total of 119 implementation logs over the entire year; this is equivalent to one implementation log per scheduled Unified Sports practice. Over the entire year, coaches submitted a total of 78 implementation logs; 18 coach implementation logs were collected in the Fall season, 10 logs in the Winter season, and 50 logs in the Spring season. As a result of the significant number of missing implementation logs in the Fall season, the evaluation team added more information about the importance of the

implementation logs to the professional development in the winter and spring, which resulted in a significant improvement in the completion of implementation logs in those seasons.

Observer Fidelity Logs

Observations that focused on the overall structure and dynamics of the practice, as well as opportunities for SEL reinforcement, were used for examining SEL Activity Card fidelity. Two observers attended each practice, and each staff member attended an average of three practices per week each season. The exact breakdown of the number of practices per school can be found back in [Figure 2](#). The SEL Activity Cards were evaluated on how strictly the coaches adhered to the activity as it was presented on the card and how much they adapted it from the instructions on the card, and coach and student engagement with the activity components. These components were evaluated for both the activity itself and the student debriefing/discussion that followed implementation. See [Appendix D](#) for the fidelity observation protocol.

Fidelity was scored on a scale of one to three for each component; the specific parameters for the scores in each area are shown in Tables 5-8. This three-point scoring system with criteria and examples was modeled on the Social and Emotional Learning Program Quality Assessment (SEL PQA) scoring system (The Forum for Youth Investment, 2021), which evaluation staff were trained on during the summer and fall of 2021. The total implementation fidelity score was a sum of one to three on adherence to the activity plus a score of one to three on adherence to the goals check, resulting in an implementation fidelity score between two and six (note that fidelity scoring for adaptation was the inverse of adherence and was not included in the overall fidelity score). Fidelity scores for engagement are included in [Appendix E](#).

In addition, the average fidelity scores were calculated for each card, across the data collected between schools and sports seasons (see Table 9). The average fidelity score from each of the SEL Activity Cards across all five schools was 4.59 out of a possible 6. Some of the SEL Activity Cards with higher fidelity scores across schools and seasons included “Be A Good Sport,” “Appreciation, Apology, Aha,” and “Reset, Restart.” Some of the cards with lower fidelity scores included “Team Rotation” and “Practice Plan.” Note that the fidelity data is only from the practices the evaluation team was able to observe, so not all cards used over the past year can be represented this way.

Table 5. Fidelity scoring for adherence

	3	2	1
Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adhere to step-by-step instructions as presented on card (no adaptation) Can add new elements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Omit parts of the activity One part of activity is adhered to while another is not 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An activity takes place but is unrecognizable as the card activity No activity takes place
Goals check	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coach asks a reflection question that facilitates discussion (discussion occurs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coach asks a non-reflection question Coach asks a reflection question, but no discussion occurs (and is not facilitated) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coach does not ask a question

Note: Higher scores = more adherence

Table 6. Fidelity scoring for adaptation

	3	2	1
Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapted beyond limits/impacted structure of activity Not all students participated Multiple cards were combined 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coaching Tips were used Other adaptations that did not impact original structure of activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No adaptations were made
Goals check	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adaptations beyond the limits given to coaches No goals check 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coaching tips were used Additional component was used (ex: picking goals for someone else) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No adaptations were made

Note: Higher scores = more adaptation

Table 7. Fidelity scoring for engagement, coaches

	3	2	1
Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coach explains activity Coach participates and supervises Coach facilitates student engagement All coaches participating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One or more coaches are not supporting activity Lack of coach communication Coach allows students to run activity on their own 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students get off track and coach does not redirect An activity is not completed
Goals check	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least one coach asks a Goals Check question Coach facilitates student engagement (ex: redirecting, prompting) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A question is asked but coach does not attempt to facilitate a discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coach does not attempt to re-engage a distracted group A question is not asked

Note: Higher scores = more engagement

Table 8. Fidelity scoring for engagement, students

	3	2	1
Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All or nearly all students listen to instructions and participate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Half of students are distracted/ disengaged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very few students are listening to instructions/ participating in activity
Goals check	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most students are making eye contact with speaker and following instructions Two or more students attempt to answer the question 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most students are making eye contact with speaker and following instructions One student attempts to answer question Coach needs to ask multiple questions to get a response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Majority of students are not engaged and are not focused on the speaker No students attempt to answer the question

Note: Higher scores = more engagement

Table 9. Fidelity scores by card and school, of cards observed by evaluation team

Activity Card	DHS fidelity score	WHS fidelity score	NHS fidelity score	PHS fidelity score	DSHS fidelity score	Avg. fidelity score	
Be A Good Sport	5 5	5 5			5 6	5.17	
Goal Setting	2 2	6 6		6 4	6 5	4.63	
Team Breathing	6 6	3 3			6 6	5	
Sportsmanship Cheer	5 5				5 3	4.5	
Silent Drills	5 6			6 6		5.75	
Last One, Best One	5 6			6 6		5.75	
Post Competition Reflection	4 4					4	
Name Game	5 6		6 6		4 2	3 3	4.38
Spot the Difference			6 6				6
Slow Your Roll	5 2		6 6				4.75
Appreciation, Apology, Aha			6 6	6 6	5 5		5.66
3 Stars and a Wish			5 6	6 6			5.75
Stop, Breathe, Reflect		6 6	6 6				6
Slow-Mo Movement				4 3			3.5
How to Coach	2 2	6 6			4		4
Positive Self-Talk		6 6	6 6				6
Reset, Restart		6 6		3 4	5 5		4.83
Common Goal		4 4			4 4		4
Overcoming Obstacles		4 5			6 6		5.25
Peer Coaching	2 2	6 6					4
Focus of Play	5 4			4 3	6 6		4.67
Check Your Buddy	2 2						2
Choose Your Challenge	2 2						2
Recreate a Scenario	2 2						2
Question of the Day			6 4	3 3	6 5		4.5
Practice Plan			3 2		4 4		3.25
Shout Outs			6 6		4 6	3 4	4.83

One Step at a Time			5			5
			5			
Team Rotation				4	4	3.5
				3	3	
Gratitude Web				6	6	6
				6	6	
Goal Board					4 4	4.67
					6 3	
					6 5	
Human Knot					6	5.5
					5	

Interviews and Focus Groups

Pre- and Post-Season Coach Interviews

At the beginning of each sport season, coaches participated in an interview focused on their experience with SEL, expectations for the season, and coaching style. This included two measures assessing the coach’s perception of SEL as well as their own abilities to promote SEL in sports contexts. These two measures are described in more detail below.

- The SEL Beliefs Scale (Brackett et al., 2012; Poulou, 2017) was used to assess coaches’ perceptions of their competence teaching SEL. This 12-item scale evaluated the coaches’ attitudes towards SEL and included items such as “I am comfortable providing instruction on social and emotional skills to my students.” Each coach ranked how strongly they agreed with each statement on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The sum scores ranged from 42 to 55 across all three seasons. The Cronbach’s alpha for internal reliability was adequate ($\alpha = .65$ in the fall).
- The Coaching Self-Efficacy Survey (Myers et al., 2008) was used to assess coaches’ confidence in promoting sport-related SE skills such as building self-esteem in players, respect for others, and sportsmanship. Coaches rated their confidence for each of the 24 items on a nine-point scale (0 = not at all confident, 9 = extremely confident). The sum scores ranged from 167 to 212 across all three seasons. The Cronbach’s alpha for internal reliability was high ($\alpha = .91$ in the fall).

Post-season interviews included additional questions about implementation and the impact of the SEL Activity Cards. This included questions encouraged reflection and elicited feedback (e.g., “Can you walk me through what it was like to implement these lessons in your practices this Unified [SPORT] season?”) and future directions for connecting Unified Sports and SEL. See [Appendix F](#) for the full pre- and post-season coach interview protocols.

End-of-Year Coach SEL Activity Card Interviews

At the end of the school year, coaches participated in an additional interview where they went through each of their implementation logs containing concerns or modifications on the SEL Activity Cards. This allowed the evaluation team to collect additional feedback on how specific cards may need to be changed for the following year. Since each coach created their own unique adaptations, and not all coaches adapted the same cards, there was not a standard set of questions used across schools. However, all coaches were asked to define what the word “adaptations” meant to them and were asked to reflect on their overall approach to adapting the

SEL Activity Cards over the year. In total, between the pre- and post-season interviews and these end-of-year interviews, the evaluation team conducted a total of 63 interviews with coaches over the course of all three sports seasons.

Post-Season Student Interviews

At the conclusion of each season, students participated in one-on-one interviews about their participation in Unified Sports and about SE skills such as social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making, self-awareness, and self-management. These interviews also included questions about their experience with the SEL Activity Cards, such as “Do you think you learned anything from participating in these activities during [UNIFIED SPORT]?” Over the course of all three sports seasons, the evaluation team conducted a total of 108 student interviews. Some example questions asked during the student interviews include “Was there a time when you noticed how someone else was feeling during Unified [SPORT]?”, “Was there a time when you felt you were good at something during Unified [SPORT]?” and “Was there a time when you had to work with others to solve a problem during Unified [SPORT]?” See [Appendix G](#) for the full post-season student interview protocol.

Post-Season Student Focus Groups

At the conclusion of the spring Unified Sports season, some students participated in a focus group about their participation in SEL Activity Card activities. Focus group prompts centered on what participants noticed about their teammates during the clip, what they remember about the activity that was not shown in the clip, what they liked or disliked about the activity, learning the specific SEL skill targeted in the activity, the accessibility of the activity, general reflections on having SEL Activity Cards as part of their sport season, and how the activities could be improved for other teams. Five students from two schools participated. The focus group participants were mixed athletes and partners and stimulated recall techniques (Bruner et al., 2017; Dempsey, 2010) using clips from videotaped practices were used to aid student recall about the SEL Activity Cards. See [Appendix H](#) for the post-season student focus group protocol.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Drawing upon methodology CSDE has previously employed (e.g., May et al., 2021), the evaluation team thematically analyzed coach and student interview data using the procedures detailed in Braun & Clark (2012). The evaluation team reviewed a sample of transcripts for coaches and students (step 1) prior to coding transcripts from each group (step 2). Coding was completed in three phases. First, coders created initial coding schemas for coaches and students based on the analysis of sample transcripts from each group. Further development and refinement of coding guides was accomplished through discussions among the coders until all agreed that the codes accurately captured the data, at which time the codes were finalized (conclusion of phase 1). Using the finalized coding guides, coders then worked in pairs to code a sample of transcripts to establish inter-coder agreement (phase 2). After inter-coder agreement was confirmed, coders independently coded the remaining data for coaches and students (phase 3).

Results

Over the course of 2021-22, the evaluation team conducted a total of 60 staff and 110 student interviews. The team used these interviews to gain insight into how students and coaches felt the implementation of the SEL Activity Cards worked for their teams, what they liked and disliked, and what could be improved. From the coach interviews, some of the most common themes included feedback on the professional development trainings coaches had attended, descriptions on how they went about implementing the SEL Activity Cards into practice, successes and challenges coaches faced, as well as modifications made to address challenges, changes they noticed in their own coaching style, and their perspectives on what students gained from intentionally focusing on SEL in Unified Sports. From the student interviews, some common themes regarding impact of the SEL Activity Cards included developing relationships, teamwork and communication skills, empathy and awareness of others, leadership skills, and good sportsmanship. The feedback the evaluation team gained from the staff and student interviews will be instrumental in further advancing SEL as an intentional part of Unified Sports.

Coach Perceptions of SEL Professional Development

To gain feedback about the professional development sessions, coaches were asked to comment on how the sessions impacted their implementation of the SEL Activity Cards and which parts of the professional development sessions they found the most useful. Analysis of the coach interviews produced several themes which indicated that the professional development supported implementation of the SEL Activity Cards. These themes include brainstorming for new ideas with other schools, gaining a deeper understanding of SEL and applying it more intentionally in their practice, and opportunities to reflect on their own practices.

Brainstorming for New Ideas

It was found that when coaches engaged in brainstorming about the implementation of the SEL Activity Cards it helped their coaching approach by helping them implement new ideas from coaches at other schools. In reflecting on the benefit of having a group of coaches from multiple schools to work with during the spring Unified Track season, a coach from PHS shared, “I definitely think it was nice to hear from other coaches, that sometimes they had harder times trying to do certain cards, and it just made us not feel so bad if we were feeling the same way” (PHS C5). Similarly, a coach from DHS expressed after the fall Unified Basketball season, “...the people from [other school name] were such cool people. They had awesome ideas that we were able to bring back here. And it just made our program even stronger after the point” (DHS C20). Many coaches emphasized that the breakout rooms during the professional development sessions helped them engage in the brainstorming. After the fall Unified Soccer season, a coach from PHS shared, “the breakout sessions are helpful just to be able to talk it through with others because it always sticks more in your brain when you're talking with somebody and trying to implement it” (PHS C26). Another coach from the fall soccer season at PHS expressed, “I think having information and then being able to go to a breakout room to discuss it with other people, that was helpful. It's a good way to break it up” (PHS C5). From the above statements, it is clear that coaches viewed the opportunity to brainstorm new ideas with coaches from other schools as

beneficial to their coaching approach and to implementing the SEL Activity Cards specifically. This indicates that the professional development sessions were viewed as helpful in terms of facilitating a supportive space for exchanging ideas, which then translated into stronger implementation practices.

Deeper Understanding, Intentionality, and Reflection

Additionally, some coaches shared that the professional development sessions provided them with the opportunity to reflect on their SEL implementation strategies. A coach from NHS mentioned after the fall Unified Basketball season, “It was kind of interesting to reflect on, okay, what are we doing? How effectively is this working?” Similarly, at the end of DSHS’s fall Unified Soccer season a coach shared, “You guys [CSDE evaluation team] were great handing [the professional development components] out and being general, and you would always have us reflect...or having us make up an example of something. So yes, certainly the pairing, the reflection” (DSHS C4). Further, and as intended, coaches also stated that the professional

“I’d say, if anything, the training, especially at the end of summer, that was very helpful as a social-emotional learning crash course. And that’s helpful for me as a teacher and for everything for myself.”

(DSHS C4, fall Unified Soccer postseason)

development sessions helped them gain a deeper understanding about SEL and each SEL Activity Card. At the conclusion of the fall Unified Basketball season, a coach from DHS reflected, “it just gave me more background on what we were trying to get out of these cards. And what the foundations were that we

were truly trying to see” (DHS C20). As these coaches and others described, the training portions of the professional development series was particularly helpful in reinforcing SEL concepts and provided an orientation to the SEL Activity Cards. After the fall Unified Soccer season at PHS, a coach shared, “The first four-hour training, I think, was helpful, because again, I needed to beef up my knowledge about SEL and the activities and to learn the cards and practicing the cards were great” (PHS C19). Collectively, these reflections from the coaches revealed an overwhelmingly positive perception of the professional development. The thoughts they shared as part of the post-season interviews echoed their responses to the SEL Beliefs Scale, namely items such as “I would like to attend a workshop to learn how to develop my students’ social and emotional skills,” in which two-thirds of the coaches “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with this statement prior to the fall season, demonstrating that coaches understood the benefits of learning more about SEL so they could become better coaches.

Ensuring Effective Implementation

Coaches were also asked what other resources and support they needed during the professional development sessions to ensure effective implementation of the SEL Activity Cards. Coaches expressed interest in more booster sessions where they could check in with the evaluation team and reflect on their implementation or otherwise receive more resources and support post-training. After the spring Unified Track season at WHS the coach said:

I also think if someone were to say, “Oh, let’s do one or two [booster] sessions within the track season,” that’s just check-in points, and that would be perfect in my opinion in the

middle and almost towards the end to just get more resources or help in the SEL areas. (WHS C1140)

Similarly, after the fall soccer season at PHS, a coach shared: If you guys [CSDE evaluation team] have additional resources that you feel like you could share in an email or a video that somehow demonstrates some of the things that we're doing that maybe wasn't included in the training but then now you came across it, I would certainly appreciate any of that, and I would definitely take the time to read it or watch the video. (PHS C26)

These suggestions from coaches align with self-improvement items on the SEL Belief Scale, such as “I want to improve my ability to teach social and emotional skills to students.” This was especially the case for the DSHS coach cited above, whose overall SEL Beliefs Scale score increased between her first and second season of coaching, indicating more positive perceptions of SEL during participation. Clearly, the coaches were eager to get more feedback on their implementation and how to best facilitate SEL development for the students.

Summary

Overall, coaches found the professional development series to be vital for their understanding of the SEL Activity Cards and proper implementation. These trainings also helped them deepen their own understanding of SEL and why intentional SEL through the use of the SEL Activity Cards is important for Unified Sports. However, an additional unexpected benefit from training attendance was what the coaches believed they gained from one another; the professional development sessions provided several opportunities for coaches to debrief with each other, which they later reflected helped them through the pilot study. As expected, there were a few suggestions for improvement within the professional development, such as wanting feedback from the evaluation team, as well as additional resources and more check-ins and support throughout the season.

Coach Implementation of SEL Activity Cards

To explore how coaches used the SEL Activity Cards in practice, coaches were asked to explain their approach to incorporating the cards into their Unified Sports practices during the pilot study. The coaches had a variety of ways they planned out practice with the SEL Activity Cards in mind,

ENSURING EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

Another suggestion that some of the coaches made was that they be given further feedback or examples from the evaluation team about their implementation and practices. Following the winter Unified Basketball season at DSHS, a coach reflected:

“Maybe after we do the [implementation log] after a practice, maybe an email or just a quick note [from the CSDE evaluation team], "Hey, maybe try this." Or just that one, we understand that people are doing it correctly. Or maybe you guys can think of some way to better tweak what we had done. I don't know. Feedback is always good. And it's great for coaches too.” (DSHS C2123)



however timing within the season, pacing and structure of practice, collaboration, and season/team goals were the most common themes among all 17 coaches.

Timing within the Unified Sports Season

The first concept most coaches mentioned when planning how to incorporate the SEL Activity Cards was the timing within the season. Many coaches planned to implement the SEL Activity Cards based on when they would be the most beneficial to the team. For example, coaches typically chose to do more introductory and team building activities in the beginning of the season, while reflection-based activities were more often implemented towards the end of the season. A coach at PHS explained about the fall Unified Soccer season, “My first step would be to look for a card that I thought would be a good fit for where we were at the season.” (PHS C19).

“I just looked at the whole collection of [SEL Activity Cards] at the beginning when you gave them to us and kind of sorted them into beginning of the season, midseason, end of season. What makes sense? And the stuff at the end of the season was more reflective or how can we improve? How can we prepare for states? Beginning was like getting-to-know-you kind of activities.” (NHS C9)

Similarly, a coach reflected after the spring Unified Track season at NHS: These comments serve as important examples of how the coaches took the timing of the sport season into account when planning which SEL Activity Cards to use and when.

Pacing and Structure of Practice

Some coaches also focused on the structure of the practice itself and tried to implement the SEL Activity Cards at specific points during each practice. A coach at PHS stated during the spring Unified Track season that she “liked implementing [the SEL Activity Cards] towards the beginning of each practice because it was purposeful what the focus was on” (PHS C15). By implementing them at the beginning of practice, she was able to use the SEL Activity Cards to add structure and intent to her practice plan. Additionally, another spring track coach at this school agreed that this would be an effective way to add structure and guide coaches during practices:

It would be helpful because it's a built-in activity on the beginning and on the end. So, it's not something I have to completely invent on my own. So, it's nice to have that structure and that guidance from the SEL [Activity Cards] in order to come up with something that would be meaningful for the students. (PHS C26)

Another way that coaches explained planning the use of the SEL Activity Cards was by directly incorporating them into their practice plan. Coaches would create a practice plan for each Unified Sports practice in advance, in which they would lay out a schedule of what the team would accomplish. By doing this, SEL was embedded into practice and was not implemented as a separate component. The coach at WHS explained that during the spring Unified Track season she:

...would write the practice out and then see where it fit in and change it if needed as necessary. And that's kind of just how I planned it and would use the card based off of the area we were in within our season. (WHS C1140)

By doing this, she and other coaches were able to fit the SEL Activity Cards more seamlessly into their practices. A coach at DHS commented about the spring Unified Track season that the cards “aided our practice plan and it's aided by implementing because it allows us to—or forces us coaches to be a little bit more structured in the delivery and the intent” (DHS C2220). He and other coaches believed that the SEL Activity Cards improved intentional SEL and added more structure to their practices, rather than taking something away.

In some cases, coaches would think about the drills or skills they needed students to work on during practice and would choose cards that corresponded to that specific type of activity. A coach from PHS explained after the fall Unified Soccer season that it was “a matter of coming up with the practice plan with what we needed to focus on and then kind of going through the cards and seeing what the focus of the practice was and picking one that relatively related” (PHS C15). In this case, the coach prioritized the sports skills that students needed to work on but was still able to incorporate an SEL Activity Card that would also be applicable to the drills being done during practice. It is encouraging that coaches were able to conduct Unified Sports practices as usual and were still able to lead an SEL Activity Card without taking away from the sports-related goals of the practice.

Coach Collaboration

Many coaches also noted that they would collaborate with their fellow coaching staff when planning how to implement an activity. For example, a coach from PHS explained how they

“Depending on where we were at in the season and what kind of activity I thought we needed I would actually send out a mock practice plan to all the coaches with the idea of what card we were going to use and get feedback.”

(PHS C19, fall Unified Soccer postseason)

Additionally...

Some coaches would take student feedback into account, asking students which drills they wanted to focus on, and tailoring the execution of the SEL Activity Cards to what students saw as important. A coach at NHS explained after the spring Unified Track season that at practices she would “chat really quick or even ask the kids, ‘Hey, what do you want to work on today?’ And then kind of incorporate the activity card into either beginning, middle, or end of practice, depending on what was appropriate” (NHS C9). This coach specifically focused on ensuring the SEL Activity Cards did not take away from students’ needs, and still effectively incorporated them into the sports practice.

would work with the rest of the coaching staff during the spring track season to determine how to implement each SEL Activity Card, and how to accommodate for all students based on their ability levels. The coach stated, “I'd meet with the other coaches. We'd talk about where we'd implement them. And then certain students, if they

were going to help kind of reinforce everything, we would prepare them ahead of time” (PHS C15). Some coaches would also meet in person during the school day prior to Unified Sports practices to plan out how to use the SEL Activity Cards. A coach from DHS explained after the spring Unified Track season, “We spend a lot of time together during the day so often times that's when we would discuss what card we were going to use and how we were going to implement it, any modifications, that kind of stuff” (DHS C2221). Regardless of whether discussions took place in person or over email, coaches felt strongly that collaborating to plan the activities within practice was a vital component to the success of the SEL Activity Cards.

Season/Team Goals

In most cases, coaches explained that they used the SEL Activity Cards to achieve or support a goal they had for the team. For example, as a coach at NHS put it after the fall Unified Basketball season, “We were picking cards that were connected with what we were trying to accomplish” (NHS C14). In this way, the coach was able to use the SEL Activity Cards to work towards goals the team had set. Later in the year, after the spring Unified Track season, this coach further contributed that, “We particularly like the objectives that get set out at the beginning. Like, this is our hope for the practice; this is what we're going to accomplish for the practice and season” (NHS C14).

In general, goal setting was a topic that coaches felt warranted repetition in order for students to really benefit from the SEL Activity Cards targeting that skill. In the end-of-year SEL Activity Card interviews, a coach from DSHS reflected:

I just felt that, with [goal setting], it was impossible not to follow up on it. Every Thursday, you're reexploring, just quickly, it's kind of like a quick checkup, ‘What's going on with your three goals or your three wishes? How are you doing in achieving those? What do you have to do to support that, or what can we do to support that?’ So, I just thought it was one that really needed to have a follow up. (DSHS C4)

Here, the coach is explaining that they were able to use the SEL Activity Cards repeatedly during practices, and by doing some of the cards multiple times (“Team Breathing” was another SEL Activity Card coaches talked about returning to regularly), they were able to further the intent and results with the students.

In addition to this, in some cases, coaches would also choose cards that they could use to reflect upon experiences from a previous game or practice, rather than something more immediate. At the end of the fall Unified Basketball season at DHS, a coach explained:

We would go through the cards, and the two of us would sort of talk about like if there was anything during the day that we think would be related to the activity card or at a previous practice or a previous game. And we would try and choose an activity card that we think would best fit into our practice. (DHS C13)

In this way, if something significant had happened at a game or a practice, coaches were able to use the SEL Activity Cards to help students reflect back on those events, thus practicing more long-term reflection skills. Relatedly, the coach from DSHS reflected at the end of the year:

“I think a lot of [the SEL Activity Cards] are game-specific. So, they could be really beneficial when it's fresh in your mind to do a reflection card or a shoutout card or those huddle-type cards right after [a game] versus then skipping a few days and coming back and saying, ‘Hey, let's think back to that game on Monday. What can you do for a shoutout for so-and-so?’” (DSHS C4)

This coach provides an important example of how sometimes coaches used the SEL Activity Cards after games, even though that was not an explicit part of the fidelity testing, in order to practice reflection in the moment. In this case, the coach did one of the activities on the bus back from a game to allow students to debrief more immediately, rather than making the activity part of their practice several days later. A final example of repetition over the course of the season comes from a coach at PHS, who said after the fall Unified Soccer season:

[Using the SEL Activity Card Reset/Restart] actually was a suggestion from [coach name], because I had sent out the [practice] plan and I think she was like, ‘Oh, I think this would be really good,’ and it was. We used reset/restart probably 50 times. (PHS C19)

Summary

Taken together, the above reflections on implementation connected to several of the items in the SEL Beliefs Scale and Coaching Self-Efficacy Scale. For example, coaches described approaches that demonstrated self-efficacy in that they “mentally prepare athletes for game/meet strategies,” or “instill an attitude of respect for others,” as they made an effort to prepare students for the overall season by choosing certain SEL Activity Cards at the beginning, checking in with the students about the agenda ahead of individual practices, reflecting back on situations that arose at games so they could prepare to handle the situation differently next time, and cheering each other on and shouting out teammates after games. The coach reflections on implementation also connected to items from the SEL Beliefs Scale, such as “taking care of my students’ social and emotional needs comes naturally to me” and “I am comfortable providing instruction on social and emotional skills to my students,” when coaches discussed incorporating what their students want to work on into the practice plan, a desire to choose cards for each practice that maximized what students get out of the activities, recognizing that some skills needed repetition over the course of the season, and valuing having a clear and dedicated approach to SEL that they do not need to develop on their own. Finally, and perhaps most notably, the coach reflections almost universally demonstrated they “want to improve my ability to teach social and emotional skills to students” through their positive perceptions of the professional development and their high ratings of its usefulness.

Implementation Successes

At the conclusion of each sport season and again at the end of the year, coaches identified some of the biggest successes they had experienced incorporating the SEL Activity Cards into their teams. These perceived successes included having concrete ways to focus on SEL in the sports

context, opportunities for SEL generalization beyond sports, student leadership opportunities, high student engagement, and team building.

Learning and Generalization

Coaches also stated that they saw value in the SEL Activity Cards as a way to prompt students to think about the skills they were learning outside of the Unified Sports context, and that this learning and generalization was a success on their teams. For example, a coach from PHS reflected at the end of the fall Unified Soccer season that “recognizing in yourself and others things that are important and skills you can use beyond the team, and building deeper connections with the partners was a big [success]” (PHS C15). Another coach from this school felt this generalization was especially important for the partners on the Unified Soccer team to understand that they could benefit from the SEL Activity Cards too:

And it was really good, I think, for our partners to experience that and see how they can apply those skills also to their own life. Because there's a lot of those skills in there that you can apply to outside of sports. (PHS C27)

Also in the fall, a coach from DHS shared that they felt one of the biggest successes of the Unified Basketball season was “just being able to generalize a lot of the things that we had been doing in school [for SEL] and applying it to new [sports] scenarios” (DHS C13). These sentiments carried over throughout the year as well. After the winter Unified Basketball season at PHS, a coach shared:

I would say the carryover and, again, trying to not only focus on those skills in practice and necessarily in the sports avenue, but also classroom, and hallways, and lunchtimes, and stuff like that. Different social aspects and what not. (PHS C19)

And at the end of the year, a coach from NHS reflecting after the spring Unified Track season, “[the students] made a lot of connections, even prompting them to try and make that connection because they might not naturally assume, ‘How do I connect this,’ just this sports lesson to other aspects of life” (NHS C1).

Clearly, from these coach perspectives on successes, they viewed the SEL Activity Cards as having the potential to

IMPLEMENTATION SUCCESS: INTENTIONAL SEL IN UNIFIED SPORTS

The benefit of having targeted lessons and activities for SEL in Unified Sports was captured at the end of the year from a coach at DHS, who reflected:

“This feels like a lot of [the SEL Activity Cards] is the goal of Unified anyway. So, it does feel like a seamless transition [to use the cards], but if anything, maybe a more concrete way to teach those type of inherent social-emotional skills.”
(DHS C2221)

This statement captures the essence of the SEL Activity Cards and why Special Olympics has dedicated part of the annual evaluation of Unified Champion Schools to developing and pilot testing this resource. Although many Unified Sports coaches likely naturally, even unintentionally, incorporate SEL into their Unified Sports teams, the SEL Activity Cards can enhance this focus and allow coaches to be intentional and explicit about developing SEL skills through sports. This sentiment also relates to the SEL Beliefs Scale, where coaches agreed and recognized that “informal lessons in social and emotional learning are part of my regular teaching practice.”

impact students' SEL skills beyond the Unified Sports team, which is an important part of any school approach to SEL. Coaches also firmly believed that students were not only able to understand SEL concepts, but they were able to translate them into other settings as well.

Student Leadership

Another perceived success of the SEL Activity Cards was that it helped students take on leadership roles and develop leadership skills. Importantly, about a quarter of the SEL Activity Cards indicate specific ways students can be a leader for that card activity. On the topic of student leadership, a coach from DHS stated after the spring Unified Track season:

[One of the players] has a shoulder injury, so he can't participate that much. So, it's like having another coach out there. And we had him lead several of the cards, almost by himself at times. He just did a really good job with that. And then from there, other students, especially seniors, would take on the role...And so I thought that it naturally brought out leadership qualities in a lot of our kids. (DHS C2221)

In this way, coaches were able to prompt students to take on a leadership role through the SEL Activity Cards, and, in some cases, student use of this resource meant they could participate and stay engaged with the team in new ways or in ways they may not otherwise be able to (e.g., with an injury).

High Student Engagement

Furthermore, coaches identified that student engagement was consistently high throughout implementation each season, which is consistent with observation data on student engagement levels collected by the evaluation team, as the average student engagement was 4.52 (out of 6) (see [Appendix E](#)). Coach reflections on this topic touched on the idea of commitment as a big factor in the level of student engagement with the SEL Activity Cards. For example, the coach from WHS reflected at the end of the spring Unified Track season:

I do think that most of the students were usually engaged because it was an activity at practice that they were there for. And most of the time there was questions or ways of observing a partner or talking about a goal...like athletes and partners would turn and talk. (WHS C1140)

Additionally, a coach from NHS reflected after their spring Unified Track season, “[Some students] still understood the value of it for some of the other kids. They might already

“It was so powerful seeing [the students] make the connections themselves without us [coaches] having to talk about it after and say, “Well, this was the point of it today, and we got that through some of your goal checks, but we want to make sure that all of you got it.” Just seeing them do it naturally and individually was really cool.”

(DSHS C4, end of year reflection)

understand what it is to be a good teammate and be on a team, but they still participated” (NHS C14). It is clear from these examples that students were committed to being on their schools' Unified Sports team, no matter what that entailed, and thus were committed to participating in the SEL Activity Cards.

Team Building

Finally, coaches saw the enhanced opportunities for team building as another success of the SEL Activity Cards. As an NHS coach reflected at the end of the fall Unified Basketball season:

“I think the biggest success was to get the kids thinking in terms of team chemistry, again, a really intangible thing and really difficult for students who struggle with social pragmatics and socialization. But getting them thinking about working together. And we've seen that directly translated onto the court, where they were starting to think about, ‘okay, so if you're stuck and you don't know what play to make, look for a teammate, look for a friend, pass the ball.’ That was really helpful for the students, for sure, for the players.” (NHS C14)

As evidenced by this example and reflections from the other coaches, having the SEL Activity Cards focus on skills such as teamwork helped coaches develop stronger, more cohesive teams. And this was noted as being especially helpful for students needing extra support with socialization and social skills. This idea is aligned with the “build team cohesion” aspect of the Coaching Self-Efficacy Scale and could be a valuable way for coaches to build this skill and ability within themselves moving forward.

Summary

Coach reflections indicated they found success with the SEL Activity Cards through the opportunities for SEL generalization beyond sports, student leadership opportunities and development of leadership skills, high student engagement and commitment to the team, and team building and team cohesion. These perceptions indicate an overall positive impact of the SEL Activity Cards for Unified Sports teams at these pilot schools and offer encouraging insights for potential successes on a larger scale.

Implementation Challenges and Solutions

Although there were many successes that coaches identified throughout the implementation of the SEL Activity Cards, there were some challenges that presented across the teams and sports. These included ability and accessibility, integration into practice, team size, and time/pacing. Encouragingly, coaches offered insights into how they attempted to address these challenges along the way.

Ability and Accessibility

One of the main challenges coaches identified were the abilities of the students on the team and ensuring that the SEL Activity Cards were accessible for all students. Coaches mentioned that since the team has students with varying abilities, some activities were difficult to implement. Specific SEL Activity Cards like “Team Rotation,” “Silent Drills,” and “Goal Setting” were identified as challenging for some students to participate in because they required them to use skills like writing and speaking. For example, a coach from PHS reflected after the fall Unified

Soccer season, “because we have such a varying level of ability on our team, again, even the communication and getting to know you one at the beginning was tough” (PHS C19). A coach from NHS also talked about communication skills at the end of the fall Unified Basketball season:

I saw the goal behind [Silent Drills], but for our students, that one wasn't especially effective just because we're working on ways to communicate. And then too, we also layer on the aspect of masks and whatnot and the communication deficits with the pandemic. That kind of made that one not as effective. (NHS C14)

Coupled with varying communication abilities on the team, this coach noted the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the safety measures in place at this school as creating some additional challenges for implementing communication-focused SEL Activity Cards. However, coaches were resourceful and noted several ways they attempted to implement the SEL Activity Cards in the best way that made sense for their team. One of the adaptations noted by several coaches was preparation. Coaches described rehearsing answers to questions with students before practice, so they were prepared for the activities like “Shoutouts” and “Appreciation, Apology, Aha.” After the fall Unified Basketball season, the coach above from NHS explained one of their modifications, saying, “a couple students struggle to express themselves verbally. Some are just one-word responses. So, we kind of had to prompt them a little bit more and kind of scaffold it, structure it, have a teammate help them out” (NHS C14). Similarly, after the spring Unified Track season, a coach from PHS shared:

I think prepping the kids that have trouble communicating. It's really hard to ask them questions like, ‘What's your goal?’ Or ‘What are you good at?’ I think it really needed some prep time for them, and even writing it down on cards for them. (PHS C26)

Coaches were clearly motivated and dedicated to ensuring all students could participate in the SEL Activity Cards and the modifications they described will ensure the resource is stronger and better for the next group of schools that use it. On that idea of ensuring all students could participate, another coach from NHS reflected at the end of the year, “[we considered it an adaptation] if there was anything that we thought of, ‘Ah, this might be hard for somebody. What do we got to change so that it is accessible for as many of the players?’” (NHS C1). In the selected cases highlighted here, the coaches were able to set up additional supports for students, whether that was on the team or within the larger school community, and overall approach each SEL Activity Card with the mindset that the entire team needed to be able to participate. This ensures all students can take part in the activity because there are supports in place to meet them where they are at. These types of modifications relate to items that improved over the course of the

On student preparation...

At the very beginning of the school year, prior to the Unified Soccer season at PHS, a coach described enlisting the help of school specialists to support students to participate:

“I worked with his speech therapist and asked her if she could just have him come up with ten fun facts that he could share. And I think that really helped a lot whereas, in the past, we might have been trying to answer for him just to help move it along...” (PHS C5)

year on the Coaching Self-Efficacy Scale, such as “adapt to different game/meet situations,” “develop athletes’ ability,” and “building team cohesion,” thus indicating the coaches became increasingly comfortable working with the SEL Activity Cards in this capacity.

Integration into Practice

Another challenge identified by the coaches was difficulty integrating the SEL Activity Cards into the practice. Coaches mention how it could be challenging to find an SEL Activity Card that matched the practice they planned to do. At the end of the fall Unified Soccer season, a coach from PHS reflected, “I guess if there were any challenge, it might have been just trying to match the card with the moment, if you will, picking a card that would highlight something that we wanted to work on in practice” (PHS C26). With a slightly different take on integration challenges, a coach at NHS explained prior to the spring Unified Track season, “So I think that can be maybe a little bit of a challenge is just making sure I know where I can fit it in [to the practice] and not interrupt other events or stations that are going on” (NHS C14). The coaches here described situations that were not uncommon among the teams, whether that was trying to find good alignment between their testing subset of the SEL Activity Cards (see [Appendix B](#)) or structuring their practices as stations that students rotated through. These situations made implementing the SEL Activity Cards more difficult at times. In response to these challenges, coaches described making the SEL Activity Card its own station as part of a rotation while others have dedicated a set amount of time at the beginning or end of practice (so as to disrupt less of the “main practice”) if the SEL Activity Card did not fit in seamlessly to their practice plan. For example, during the spring Unified Track season at NHS, the coaches incorporated “Last One, Best One” into the very end of practice after the 100-meter dash, and since they blocked out that time specifically for that activity, the students could be more engaged:

I was like, “This is the last thing we’re doing today,” and they all tried their best and did a really good job. And it was funny, I remember asking them the goals check questions, and they were all panting and out of breath [from running the 100-meter dash], but they’re still answering and saying what they think and emphatic about their answers. (NHS C9)

Team Size

The idea of group size also came up as a challenge within several of the teams, in particular the idea that a single large group for SEL Activity Cards made implementation of some of the activities difficult. A coach from NHS shared after the spring Unified Track season, “I think [doing “Team Rotation”] was the day we probably had the most kids there, and so having that many people maybe made [the SEL Activity Card] a little more chaotic” (NHS C1). Relatedly, a coach from DSHS reflected after the spring Unified Volleyball season, “I would have to do two groups. They have so many kids. It’s just too hard to do it in large groups” (DSHS C2123). In these cases, getting a large group of students to all focus on the same activity was challenging because some students got distracted. Since large group size was a challenge, many coaches described splitting the team into smaller groups for certain SEL Activity Cards, and often after an activity for the reflection/goals-check. Coaches felt that this approach helped ensure students could participate equitably and helped shy or less verbal students feel more comfortable participating in a smaller group. Furthermore, some coaches described scenarios in which they

would divide students into pairs for discussion over the season. As a coach from PHS shared at the end of the year:

“It also helps because they're able to share something with one or two other people, as opposed to ten or twelve other people. So, if they're uncomfortable or nervous, it also kind of builds [a consistent] group, as opposed to just being twelve individuals talking to people they don't even know.” (PHS C15)

For students who are intimidated by sharing out to a large team, being split into smaller groups, or even smaller pairs, is beneficial for discussions. The coaches were able to recognize that their students may need this and put this structure and support in place. These accommodations relate to items in the Coaching Self-Efficacy Scale for “build the self-esteem of your athletes,” and build the self-confidence of your athletes” and it is clear that coaches had their students’ needs in mind during implementation.

Time/Pacing

A final challenge that was discussed across coaches was pacing/timing; that is, fitting the SEL Activity Card within the practice schedule and, more importantly, the time limits of the practice. Although coaches felt it made sense, at times, to implement an SEL Activity Card at the end of practice, this meant they were competing with the end of the practice period and students’ transition to their next class (or to go home). For example, a coach from DHS shared at the end of the fall Unified Basketball season, “we would then have to try to come together right at the end as people were leaving for work or getting on a bus or a van. And it was just kind of forced to do the goal check” (DHS C2220). Prior to the spring Unified Track season, this coach further reflected on time constraints:

It could be just time because school gets out at 2:35, and then they have to get to the track, which isn't at the school, so it could be a little more difficult getting everybody there because basketball is easy because it's just in the gym here. And practice is only an hour, so if people are coming late, then it really shortens it, so I would just say time. (DHS C2220)

In these two examples, the coach described two related, but different, issues with timing—when the SEL Activity Cards happens during the practice and the amount of time available overall for practice. Both were noted as potential issues for student engagement with the SEL Activity Cards. Since timing was an issue for some teams, a few coaches decided to extend certain SEL Activity Cards over the course of multiple days.

Relatedly, repetition was an implementation approach seen at most of the schools (as previously noted in [Season/Team Goals](#)). Here, in this case, repetition is seen as a solution to a challenge coaches faced with time. Some of the SEL Activity Cards coaches felt they needed to repeat included “Goal Setting,” “Name Game,” “Common Goal,” “3 Stars and a Wish,” and “Reset, Restart.” As a coach from DSHS explained at the end of the winter Unified Basketball season, “Repetition is the key, especially in any drill. I mean, you practice a layup, you're not going to

just do it once. It's the same thing with SEL" (DSHS C2123). Here the coach very wisely described approaching SEL skill development in the same way she would any sports related skill, thus emphasizing the idea that practice makes progress no matter what students are trying to learn. Relatedly, a coach from PHS reflected on the idea of repetition at the end of the fall Unified Soccer season, saying:

We would refer back to our discussion about goal setting and I think that could be something that all students, and us coaches, anybody, can use. It almost could be used to reset and restart, right? It's like, 'Reset, all right, what are we trying to focus on? What are we trying to do, whether it's short-term or long-term?' And then refer back to it. So, I do think that would be helpful. (PHS C19)

Summary

Although there were many successes that coaches identified throughout the implementation of the SEL Activity Cards, there were some challenges that presented across the teams and sports. These included ability and accessibility, integration into practice, team size, and time/pacing. Encouragingly, coaches offered insights into how they attempted to address these challenges along the way. These solutions included preparing students in advance for certain activities, modifying activities to ensure accessibility, collaborating with other school staff to provide additional supports during activities, rotating students through activity stations to ensure all can complete the activity over the practice period, dedicating the beginning or end of practice to the SEL Activity Card every practice, splitting the team into smaller groups for activities or pairs for discussion/reflection, extending activities over multiple practices, and repeating activities that happened at the beginning of the season again at the end of the season. The challenges and solutions encountered at the pilot schools provide important insights for what coaches on a larger scale might encounter when using the SEL Activity Cards.

Changes in Coaching Style

A final reflection topic that coaches shared centered on changes to their coaching style because of participating in the professional development and implementing the SEL Activity Cards. The main ways coaches discussed the impacts to them

DEALING WITH LIMITED TIME: EXTENDING SEL ACTIVITY CARDS OVER MULTIPLE PRACTICES

During the spring Unified Volleyball season at DSHS, a coach explained why she implemented the "Goal Board" SEL Activity Card over two practices:

"The Goal Board was a two-dayer. I had some kids who were absent, and I wanted them to use it also. And then, a lot of times too, you tell a kid, "Okay, do it now" [but] they need time to process. So, a few kids wanted to add the next day because they thought about it. So, sometimes giving them that time to think helps out too." (DSHS C23)

Because some of the students needed more time to think of a goal they wanted to work towards, this coach allowed them an extra day to brainstorm their goal ideas. This also benefitted students who were absent on the first day since they could still participate in the activity if they were present for the second practice.



personally were through being able to more intentionally focus on SEL as a coach moving forward, being more mindful of how practices are structured to promote SEL skills, and emphasizing student self- and social awareness skill development.

Intentionally Focusing on SEL

One reflection heard from several of the coaches was that they felt they could now teach SEL concepts in more concrete ways and intentionally apply concepts to certain situation, rather than having SEL feel so “abstract.” For example, after the fall Unified Soccer season at PHS a coach shared, “we definitely were much more purposeful with [SEL], and I think that was a big way that we changed the coaching” (PHS C19). Expanding on this point, another coach from this school shared, “it just makes me focus on [SEL] more and be more mindful of incorporating it than just saying if there were no cards, it was just the concept of it, I don't think it would have been as effective” (PHS C15). Here, the coaches talk about how they were more purposeful in their approach to SEL in Unified Sports and felt using the SEL Activity Cards helped them be more focused and intentional in their approach. Importantly, they also felt this intentionality was more effective than what they had been doing previously (if they had been doing anything at all). For a final reflection from this school on intentionality after the fall Unified Soccer season, the coach shared a summary of a conversation he had with another one of the pilot school coaches:

We're hearing from others that are going through the same thing, and learning what works and what doesn't work, and like I said, I found a lot of similarities when [coach name] and I are talking. The word that kept coming up was intent. And we were both intending to use this [the SEL Activity Cards], we want these skills to be built. (PHS C19)

These reflections, indicate that teaching Unified Sports coaches to be more intentional about SEL in Unified Sports is possible through the professional development and SEL Activity Cards, and, more importantly, that intentional SEL skill development is something they want to be able

“I just appreciated having a couple different ways of, or some new ways of including SEL, which I think is really important...what's the word I want to use here? Not thoughtful, but more deliberate, I guess, in how we do it. Providing more structure.”

(NHS C9, spring Unified Track postseason)

to do. This aligns with items on the SEL Beliefs Scale for concepts such as “I want to improve my ability to teach social and emotional skills to students,” and “all teachers should receive training on how to teach social and emotional skills to students.”

Structure and Format of Practice

The idea of structure, and indeed the overall format of how coaches ran their practices, was something else that they mentioned had changed due to their use of the SEL Activity Cards. After the conclusion of the fall Unified Soccer season at PHS, a coach expressed, “... [the SEL Activity Cards] provided more structure and showed us that it's better for us to have a more structured practice versus we're just getting out there to have some fun” (PHS C27). Along those same lines, a coach at DHS reflected at the end of the fall Unified Basketball season:

We kind of changed the way we formatted practice after listening to them [NHS] and seeing how much of an impact it had on their team when their students took the ownership for the cards. And it really did make an impact here. We found that there was

much more responsible decision-making, there was a lot more self-awareness and awareness of others. (DHS C2220)

Emphasizing Student Self- and Social Awareness

A final way that coaches felt their coaching style changed through their involvement was by emphasizing student self- and social awareness and having students be more mindful of how they and others on the team are feeling. For example, one of the coaches from NHS reflected on this topic multiple times over the course of the year. Following the fall Unified Basketball season he reflected, “I’ve been working more on, ‘okay, let’s talk about how are we feeling, how are the emotions affecting the game? How are we being good teammates?’” (NHS C14). Then, after the spring Unified Track season, he mentioned:

“We’ve always encouraged the students and the teammates to be a good teammate, to encourage your fellow competitors. And I think that all of these activities really contributed to that, not only cheering for members of our own team but members of the opposing teams, too.” (NHS C14)

Here, the coach is highlighting how using the SEL Activity Cards helped him and his team be more intentional than they had been about supporting their own emotional well-being and supporting one another, including other students who were not on their team. This connects to items on the Coaching Self-Efficacy Scale around the ideas of “promote good sportspersonship” and “instill an attitude of respect for others.” One specific way that coached noted the SEL Activity Cards helped them better address self- and social awareness on the team was through the debriefing exercises. Many coaches also stated that they started to implement more goals check/debriefing moments during practice, not just at the end of practice, because they saw how much students learned from them. An example of this was shared by a coach at DSHS after the spring Unified Volleyball season:

Being able to check in kind of on the fly when they were running a lap and pull a group aside and ask them a couple of those goal check [debriefing] questions or start the conversation within their group that then they could go and continue while they did another lap. (DSHS C4)

Summary

From the feedback the pilot coaches provided on changes to their own coaching style, it is clear they felt they became better coaches through their expanded SEL knowledge and understanding its importance for Unified Sports. They reflected that the professional development and SEL Activity Cards equipped them with concrete strategies for being an intentional SEL coach and that this sense of intentionality carried over to how they structured their practices to ensure they better promoted SEL skill development, especially skills within the self- and social awareness domains. The personal impacts that the pilot coaches experienced have important insights for how more Unified Sports coaches and become better coaches with the professional development and SEL Activity Cards as supports for intentionality.

Emerging Impact on Students

In addition to gathering data on the feasibility of implementing the SEL Activity Cards and examining fidelity and engagement, the 2021-22 evaluation also collected coach and student perspectives, via the end-of-season interviews and focus groups, on the potential impacts the SEL Activity Cards have on Unified Sports participants. These emerging impacts centered mainly on the SEL domains of relationship skills, social awareness, and responsible decision-making, although all five SEL domains were discussed in some capacity by coaches and/or students. Notably, coach and student reflections indicated the high level of overlap among SEL skills and domains, and it is clear from their responses that the SEL Activity Cards have the potential to focus on multiple skills with each activity. Below, the ten most prominently discussed SEL skills are highlighted alongside the specific SEL Activity Cards the coaches and students mentioned most in relationship to these skills.

Relationship Skills Domain

Developing Positive Relationships

Building relationships within a team allows students to work together efficiently and function cohesively. These skills give students tools to understand one another, establish and maintain healthy relationships, communicate effectively, and resolve conflicts. Good relationship skills are necessary for playing any sport and, specifically in Unified Sports, these skills are especially important because of the inclusive nature of the teams. Multiple students shared during interviews that making new friends and getting to know their teammates was their favorite part of participating in Unified Sports over the course of the school year, similar to what other studies of Unified Sports have documented about friendships (McConkey et al., 2013; McConkey et al., 2019; Wilski et al., 2012). Importantly, this past year, students and coaches felt the SEL Activity Cards helped to facilitate athletes and partners building relationships with each other, as is one of the intended goals of the SEL Activity Cards. For example, one athlete from DSHS shared that the SEL Activity Card “The Name Game” helped them build relationships with teammates during the fall Unified Soccer season. When asked why that was their favorite SEL Activity Card, the athlete shared it was because they were “passing to another teammate and saying their name...and getting to know the person better” (DSHS A9). Another athlete from DSHS also mentioned “The Name Game” when asked if they learned anything from the SEL Activity Cards during the winter Unified Basketball season. The athlete shared, “I learned to be outgoing and learn about people’s interests. In the Name Game, you'd introduce yourself, start a conversation, learn about the other person, and build a relationship (DSHS A667). Clearly, “The Name Game” helped students, in particular athletes, build relationships with their teammates across different Unified Sports.

Another SEL Activity Card that students felt helped them build relationships was “Question of the Day.” An athlete from DHS shared that this activity was their favorite during the spring Unified Track season because “getting to know each other gives me a happy feeling... it's just nice to get to know your team very well” (DHS A36). Elaborating on this idea, a partner from PHS reflected on the fall Unified Soccer season:

I think it's a lot of fun to get to know other people that I wouldn't normally see in school. And we all just have a really good time playing together because it's not like we're in the classroom... so it's a lot less structured. I think that that's a lot of fun. (PHS P92)

Overall, the Unified Sports environment was one that students felt positively about and the relationships they built as a team with the assistance of the SEL Activity Cards were a driving force behind that. For example, an athlete from NHS shared that their favorite part of the spring Unified Track season was "being together as a team and working together to make a big community" (NHS A1703). The coaches also recognized the developing relationships and the role the SEL Activity Cards played in encouraging relationship building. In the case of developing positive relationships as a skill within the relationship skills domain, the coach and student feedback is aligned and indicates quite clearly that the SEL Activity Cards promoted relationships in Unified Sports.

Practicing Teamwork, Collaborative Problem Solving, and Communicating Effectively

On most sports teams, strong teamwork maximizes the chance of achieving team goals, such as earning high scores, winning, and advancing in competition. In the end-of-season interviews, students reflected that teamwork and team building over the course of the season went beyond simply optimizing game play, and instead helped students build relationships, strengthen communication skills, and learn how to use those skills to work together more closely and effectively in practices and games. They noted that they preferred being on a team and interacting with teammates while practicing communication skills for collaborative problem solving. SEL Activity Cards like "Check Your Buddy," "Focus of Play," "Silent Drills," and "Human Knot," were mentioned frequently when students discussed teamwork and communication and students noted that they were able to practice using verbal and nonverbal skills in these activities.

When students reflected on the "Human Knot" they talked about being able to develop their

"And then I think that, again, the team-building aspect of it all and being a positive teammate and supportive teammate has really increased with the series of cards."

(NHS C14, spring Unified Track postseason)

teamwork, collaborative problem solving, and communication skills simultaneously. After the spring Unified Track season, a partner from WHS shared "...we got to work together and kind of like laugh about it, and we realized that it was hard to make the different shapes" (WHS P2706). Similarly, a partner

from DSHS expressed after the fall Unified Soccer season that, "the Human Knot was kind of fun to work together...and communicate. And I just find that's kind of cool" (DSHS P89).

Expanding on this idea, another partner from DSHS shared following the fall Unified Soccer season that the "Human Knot" was their favorite activity because it was a group activity, which promoted communication and teamwork:

I really liked the [Human] Knot one because it was a lot of fun to be in a group and then talk with each other. And we kept getting caught up with each other, and it was just fun. And we had to work on communication too, which always helps. (DSHS P41)

“Check Your Buddy” and “Focus of Play” were additional SEL Activity Cards students felt supported communication skill building and interaction among the team. In an interview after the spring Unified Volleyball season at DSHS, an athlete shared, “with the Check Your Buddy [SEL Activity Card], I learned the importance of asking your buddy how they’re doing and what they thought of everything because it would just foster better communication...throughout the team” (DSHS A667). When reflecting on “Focus of Play,” another partner from the same school in the same season said, “...it was good to see how to interact with someone and work together as a team. You have to use different communication styles...being more flexible was interesting” (DSHS P1710). Coaches also noted that after practicing SEL skills through the SEL Activity Cards, students learned about teamwork and how to communicate better with each other; two coaches from PHS highlighted this sentiment. Following the spring Unified Track season, one shared, “The kids were really thinking about the interaction, which was really nice to see.” (PHS C5). And at the conclusion of the winter Unified Basketball season, another said, “[The SEL Activity Cards] seemed to really focus them on teamwork and to respect each other and to consider each other's needs and style of play” (PHS C27).



SEL ACTIVITY CARD SPOTLIGHT: SILENT DRILLS



WHEN ASKED WHAT THEY LEARNED DURING THE WINTER UNIFIED BASKETBALL SEASON, A PARTNER FROM PHS SHARED:

I THINK THE SILENT DRILLS [SEL ACTIVITY CARD] WAS REALLY EFFECTIVE AT WORKING ON OUR COMMUNICATION. DURING THE GAME, THERE ARE ONLY FIVE PEOPLE ON THE COURT, SO IT'S REALLY IMPORTANT TO MAKE SURE THAT WE'RE ALL PLAYING AS A TEAM AND COMMUNICATING TO TRY TO FIGURE STUFF OUT...WITH SILENT DRILLS, THE COMMUNICATION, WE KIND OF GOT TO UNDERSTAND WHAT WE NEEDED TO DO TO MAKE SURE WE ALL COULD FIGURE OUT OUR GAME PLAN AND WHAT TO DO WHILE PLAYING. I THINK THERE WAS A LOT TO LEARN, ESPECIALLY JUST A BIG PART OF WORKING AS A TEAM. (PHS P22)

VERBAL AND NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION BOTH CONVEY INFORMATION AND ARE SKILLS THAT WERE ADDRESSED THROUGHOUT THE YEAR WITH THE SEL ACTIVITY CARDS. HOWEVER, SOME STUDENTS (AND, AS NOTED EARLIER, COACHES) REPORTED STRUGGLING WITH “SILENT DRILLS” BECAUSE IT REQUIRED USING NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND SOME STUDENTS WERE UNCOMFORTABLE WITH THAT SKILLSET. WHEN ASKED ABOUT “SILENT DRILLS” AFTER THE FALL UNIFIED SOCCER SEASON, A PARTNER FROM DSHS SHARED, “...TALKING AND VERBAL COMMUNICATION IS PROBABLY THE BEST [FORM OF COMMUNICATION]” (DSHS P89). EXPANDING ON THAT IDEA, AFTER THE SPRING UNIFIED TRACK SEASON AT WHS, A PARTNER SHARED:

[SILENT DRILLS] WAS DIFFICULT AND IT FELT WEIRD BECAUSE YOU LEARN THAT COMMUNICATION IS SUCH A BIG PART OF IT, BUT I GUESS I ASSUME THAT THE GOAL WAS TO COMMUNICATE WITHOUT [TALKING]; IT IS MORE THAN JUST TALKING. THERE'S DIFFERENT WAYS TO COMMUNICATE BUT THAT ONE WAS HARDER FOR ME. (WHS P1717)

Overall, students noting the wide variety of SEL Activity Cards that supported SEL skills like teamwork, collaborative problem solving, and communication are evidence that the resource supports the SEL skills that it targets. In addition, student (and coach) feedback that some SEL Activity Cards focused on skills that were harder for students indicates that these may be especially important SEL Activity Cards for Unified Sports teams to have access to.

Offering Support and Help, Peer-to-Peer Coaching

The idea of helping is one that permeates throughout Unified Sports and has been well documented in the literature as a critical aspect of these teams [CITATIONS]. SEL Activity Cards such as “Focus of Play,” “Post-Competition Reflection,” and “Goal Setting” were mentioned when students were asked if they had the opportunity to help a teammate during the season. For “Focus of Play,” a partner from DSHS mentioned that they helped teammates control their emotions during practice during the spring Unified Volleyball season:

I think focusing on play and restarting or restabilize. Just sometimes in practice if [other students] were doing some of these and someone was getting frustrated or just not focused on playing, they were just goofing off. Kind of remind them [to focus]. (DSHS P1668)

An athlete from WHS referred to “Post Competition Reflection” as a way to help teammates reflect about their game. After the spring Unified Track season, they shared:

When we were doing our reflection pieces with the group, one of them was talking with the group about yourself, but you could also help other people reflect. And I think during that time, I helped someone reflect on something that they did that they weren't thinking about in the moment. (WHS A1698)

A partner from this same school shared that the “Goal Setting” SEL Activity Card provided an opportunity for teammates to motivate and help each other reach their individual goals. After the spring Unified Track season, the partner shared:

“I feel like with the whole goal setting, we kind of motivate everyone to have a goal, and then we hold each other knowledgeable and accountable. When we see that someone has a goal to jump further, we really help them, push them. So, I think that's a huge part of it.” (WHS P1717)

Echoing these student reflections that the SEL Activity Cards provided opportunities to help each other that may not have otherwise existed, coaches also shared more generally how they observed students starting to coach their fellow teammates during practices. At the end of the spring Unified Volleyball season at DSHS, a coach explained:

A lot of times kids will listen to each other more than the coach. So, the peer coaching is extremely important. I had the luxury of having very experienced volleyball players. So, it really helped. And again, they'll listen to each other more than they'll listen to me. (DSHS C2123)

Additionally, a coach at NHS also observed his students helping each other out during the season due to SEL Activity Cards like “How to Coach.” He stated, “I think it was a good skill for them, practicing that. I feel like a number of them kind of internalized it. They started thinking

like, 'Okay, positive feedback. How can we coach up a fellow teammate?'" (NHS C1). Supporting students to support one another is one way that coaches can maximize their team's strengths and build team cohesion and it was clear that the SEL Activity Cards provided coaches with an avenue in which to do just that.

Showing Leadership in Groups

Related to the above skills of providing support and help and peer coaching, leadership skills were also something that coaches felt the SEL Activity Cards helped to promote among their teams. After the spring Unified Track season at WHS, the coach shared, "I felt like there were

"...and he became a real leader with the kids. He would help kids up that were sitting on the ground. He'd give them a hand up. He would help with kids who were having a rough time, getting a little over-emotionally stimulated, step in and ask them how they were doing."

(NHS C14, spring Unified Track postseason)

definitely times when there were bigger leadership roles for certain students to take on" (WHS C1140). A coach from DSHS echoed similar views after the winter Unified Basketball season, saying, "It's great because we definitely had not only partner mentors, but athletes who would also take on that leadership role, but were still very

respectful of each other, of others' thoughts, ideas, opinions" (DSHS C6). Along the same lines, a coach from DHS students, especially older students, demonstrating leadership skills. After the spring Unified Track season, he reflected:

...especially seniors, would take on the role of, prodding some of the athletes to answer the [Goals Check] questions and get them to think about it in different ways if maybe they didn't understand the prompt. And so, I thought that it naturally brought out leadership qualities in a lot of our kids." (DHS C2221)

Across schools and teams, the coaches noted various ways that the SEL Activity Cards provided leadership opportunities for athletes and partners and noted that these were a natural fit for the students and the team.

Social Awareness Domain

Demonstrating Empathy and Compassion, Recognizing Strengths in Others

Being a good teammate means supporting your peers' training goals and performance ability no matter what they bring to the team. Through the SEL Activity Cards, students and coaches described learning to be more mindful of their teammate, recognize what each person brings to the team, and show concern, empathy, and compassion. When asked what they learned from the SEL Activity Cards after the winter Unified Basketball season, a partner from DSHS shared:

I'd say I learned that everyone has their strengths and weaknesses. And the cool thing about a lot of these [SEL Activity Cards] is they work on allowing people to understand those strengths and weaknesses so that you can help someone who can't necessarily get all the way to the basket to score or has trouble getting the ball to court. (DSHS P668)

Coaches also noticed that the students learned to be more aware of others due to the skill drills on some of the SEL Activity Cards. As a coach from PHS put it following the fall Unified Soccer season:

And I think also, with some of the drills that we ran, it just made them cognizant of they're not the only athlete out there, that they need to use their teammates to get down the field and score a goal versus, 'I'm just going to take this ball, and I'm going to run with my super speed, and I'm going to score a goal myself.' (PHS C27)

SEL ACTIVITY CARD SPOTLIGHT: FOCUS OF PLAY



“FOCUS OF PLAY” PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN SUPPORTING STUDENTS TO DEVELOP AN AWARENESS OF OTHERS’ ABILITIES AND HOW TO ACCOMMODATE THIS AS A TEAM. THIS SEL ACTIVITY CARD FOCUSES ON HAVING STUDENTS CHANGE HOW HARD OR FAST THEY ARE PLAYING TO MATCH THEIR TEAMMATES’ LEVELS SO THEY CAN PRACTICE STAYING IN SYNC WITH ONE ANOTHER. WHEN ASKED WHAT THEY LEARNED DURING THIS ACTIVITY IN THE SPRING UNIFIED VOLLEYBALL SEASON, A PARTNER FROM DSHS SHARED:

I THINK FOCUS OF PLAY WAS HELPFUL BECAUSE, WITH UNIFIED [SPORTS], YOU HAVE TO BE VERY MINDFUL OF PLAYING COMPETITIVELY AND PLAYING WITH PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY IN PRACTICE WHERE IT'S MORE OF A TEAM THING. SO, I THINK THAT ALSO HELPED ME TO KIND OF REMEMBER THAT. BUT ALSO, AS A TEAM, I THINK WE HAVE SOME PLAYERS THAT ARE VERY “GO, GO, GO” AND THEN SOME PLAYERS THAT NEED A LITTLE BIT OF HELP. (DSHS P1713).

ANOTHER PARTNER FROM THE SAME SCHOOL SPOKE ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCE WITH THIS SEL ACTIVITY CARD, SHARING:

I LEARNED FOR THE FOCUS OF PLAY [SEL ACTIVITY CARD] TO BE MORE MINDFUL AND NOT JUST THINK OF IT AS VERY COMPETITIVE FOR EVERYONE BECAUSE THEY MIGHT NOT HAVE AS MUCH EXPERIENCE WITH IT. SO, KIND OF TONE IT DOWN AND JUST REALLY THINK ABOUT IT AND TAKE TIME WITH IT. (DSHS P1725)

SIMILAR TO “CHOOSE YOUR CHALLENGE,” “FOCUS OF PLAY” HELPED STUDENTS BECOME AWARE OF OTHER’S ABILITIES AND UNDERSTAND THAT PLAYERS HAVE DIFFERENT SKILLS THEY BRING TO THE TEAM. AWARENESS OF OTHERS’ ABILITIES HELPS STUDENTS TO WORK TOGETHER AS A TEAM AND BUILD RELATIONSHIPS BECAUSE NO TEAM MEMBER IS LEFT FEELING LIKE THEY CANNOT CONTRIBUTE TO THE TEAM. AWARENESS IS AN IMPORTANT SKILL FOR PLAYERS TO DEVELOP TO BUILD POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS AND RECOGNIZE AND UNDERSTAND HOW TO WORK EFFECTIVELY AND COHESIVELY AS A TEAM. AT LEAST ONE COACH, FROM PHS, RECOGNIZED THIS AS WELL, SHARING AFTER THE FALL UNIFIED SOCCER SEASON, “I WANT TO SAY THAT [THE SEL ACTIVITY CARD] HELPED WITH EMPATHY AND UNDERSTANDING WHO THEY'RE PLAYING AGAINST AS WELL AS WHO THEY ARE PLAYING WITH AND TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE NEEDS OF OTHERS” (PHS C27).

Specific SEL Activity Cards like “Choose Your Challenge,” “One Step at a Time,” and “Focus of Play” helped students individually practice their skills and recognize the skills in others at the same time. Reflecting on the spring Unified Volleyball season, an athlete from DSHS shared “I

liked the Choose Your Challenge [SEL Activity Card] because it just allowed our team to get a lot better skill-wise because people have different strengths” (DSHS A667). Similarly, when asked if they remembered participating in the SEL Activity Card “One Step at a Time” during the spring Unified Volleyball season at DSHS, a partner shared:

If I'm better at serving than someone next to me, I would go all the way back while they're up there...they may feel bad. We [decided to] all start at the same point, which was helpful. If we all start at the same position, we're all going no matter what skill level you are. (DSHS P1710)

“One Step at a Time” allowed students to be mindful of each other’s ability levels. In the example provided here, the students showed empathy for one another by deciding to all start at the same point to ensure that everyone could participate on an equal footing.

Responsible Decision-Making

Proper Team Sports Etiquette

Good sportsmanship, particularly fair play, is an important quality for individual players to bring to team sports. Students on the Unified Sports teams demonstrated good sportsmanship when comforting, cheering for, and encouraging each other, even when someone missed a shot or lost a race. Reflecting on the spring Unified Volleyball season, a partner from DSHS said, “I like how everyone was so supportive, and even if someone messed up, everyone was still happy and cheering” (DSHS P1695). Another partner from the same school reflected on what they learned during the spring Unified Volleyball season with the SEL Activity Cards, stating, “I think I learned to be a good sport, and it also taught me that not everyone’s good at everything, so don’t worry about it all the time and just have fun” (DSHS P1716). Sportsmanship comes in many forms and being a good sport makes games and practices more fun and enjoyable for everyone. When asked what they learned during fall Unified Soccer season, a partner from PHS specifically talked about the “Focus of Play” SEL Activity Card. The partner shared:

I think I learned from the Focus of Play [SEL Activity Card] how we can, as a team, teach everyone how to focus the play on students who may have a harder time scoring and want to get that goal. So, I think I learned a lot from that one and how to teach sportsmanship. And I learned about sportsmanship on our team, competing together and being able to have that communication where we're like, "All right, we're going to do this for this goal and we're going to play more defense here." (PHS P92)

When asked if they learned anything from those activities, a partner at DSHS shared:

“I learned how to be a better teammate, how to lead, how to be led, how to think positively, and ultimately be a good sport. The team atmosphere is very positive, and we’re very set on playing our game, and I think these [SEL Activity Cards] helped... solidify that for us this year. It was really good.” (DSHS P1668)

Coaches also noticed that students learned to create a positive environment by having a positive view of team sports etiquette and what it meant to be a good sport. After the fall Unified Basketball season, a coach from NHS reflected on the development of his students when

supported by the SEL Activity Cards, noting, “I think that it was extremely helpful in getting across those ideas of good teamwork, keeping positive attitudes, teaching the skill of overcoming adversity, or falling behind, or struggling in a game” (NHS C14). Similarly, after the spring Unified Track season at DHS, a coach reflected, “I feel like all of that [the SEL Activity Cards] just promotes a positive mindset and a resilient mindset, which really is the goal of high school athletics and doesn't always necessarily tie into Unified [Sports]...” (DHS C2221).

Summary

Student and coach reflections on the impact of the SEL Activity Cards indicate that across schools, sports, athletes, and partners, the SEL Activity Cards were a positive addition to Unified Sports in these pilot high schools. Student and coach perspectives complemented one another and illustrated the wide variety of SEL skills they felt participants on the teams were able to learn and/or develop when the SEL Activity Cards were part of their team. These skills were most notable in the relationship skills domain, including developing positive relationships, practicing teamwork, collaborative problem solving, communicating effectively, offering support and help, peer-to-peer coaching, and showing leadership in groups. Skills within the social awareness domain were also evident, most notably demonstrating empathy and compassion, and recognizing strengths in others. Finally, students and coaches also discussed proper team sports etiquette, within the responsible decision-making domain. These emerging findings from participants in this pilot study offer strong preliminary evidence that the SEL Activity Cards can have a positive impact on a larger scale, within a variety of Unified Sports, and across school contexts.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The past three years of the annual evaluation have significantly expanded understanding around SEL in UCS through a targeted exploration of SEL in high school Unified Sports. During this time, the evaluation team has worked collaboratively with Special Olympics North America, a national group of advisors across multiple related fields (SEL, disability, sports), and several high schools in New England to observe SEL as it naturally occurs in high school Unified Sports, develop a Theory of Change for SEL in Unified Sports, and develop and pilot test a set of SEL resources for UCS schools. These resources—a four-part professional development seminar and a card deck of 33 sport-based SEL activities (the “SEL Activity Cards”)—were the focus of the 2021-22 evaluation. Through a feasibility pilot, the evaluation team documented how Unified Sports coaches integrated the SEL Activity Cards into Unified Sports at the high school level and the successes and challenges they faced with implementation. The feasibility pilot also included documentation of how the professional development impacted coaches’ approach to and success with implementation, overall coach and student engagement with the resources, recommendations for modifications to the SEL Activity Cards, and preliminary impacts on coaches and students.

Overall, the evaluation team found that it was not only possible to integrate the SEL Activity Cards into Unified Sports practices on a regular basis for an entire sport season across multiple sports, but that everyone involved felt it had a positive impact on SEL skills for students with

and without ID. The feedback the evaluation team received from coaches regarding the SEL Activity Cards was overwhelmingly positive, and each coach stated they are planning to continue with the same or similar activities following their participation in the 2021-22 evaluation. Coaches were especially positive about the professional development seminar and felt it was a crucial component to using the SEL Activity Cards effectively as it deepened their understanding of intentional SEL and how to promote it in the inclusive sports context. Moreover, the professional development seminar provided in-depth training on the SEL Activity Cards and allowed coaches to work with the cards in advance of the feasibility pilot, which coaches said was critical to their success. These findings align with the field in that training adults on how to use SEL interventions builds their own competence with SEL (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019) and predicts an increased use of these techniques (Desimone et al., 2002; Yoon et al., 2007). Finally, coaches also felt the professional development provided important and much needed opportunities to connect with peer coaches, which they would not have had otherwise.

Due in large part to the professional development coaches received prior to the Unified Sports season, overall implementation of the SEL Activity Cards in this feasibility pilot was a success. Fidelity observation scores were high across coaches (4.59 out of 6, on average), with some SEL Activity Cards receiving perfect scores across multiple coaches and observers (e.g., “Gratitude Web,” “Positive Self-Talk,” and “Stop, Breathe, Reflect”) (see again [Table 9](#)). This contrasts with SEL Activity Cards with lower fidelity observation scores, such as “Team Rotation” and “Practice Plan” (3.5 and 3.25 out of 6, respectively, on average).² Importantly, while lower fidelity scores indicate SEL Activity Cards the coaches had more difficulty implementing, this difficulty often stemmed from adaptations each coach made to the activities so they would work best for their team. As one of the main goals in developing the SEL Activity Cards was flexibility, the fidelity observation scores (along with coach implementation logs) provide critical guidance for improving the resource in a more generalizable way moving forward. A revised version of the SEL Activity Cards that takes into account fidelity observation data, coach implementation log data, and coach interview reflection data, is included as Appendix I. Please also see Appendix J for a summary of coach feedback on the SEL Activity Cards.

Improvement to the SEL Activity Cards was not the only outcome of this feasibility pilot. Coaches and students alike felt they improved personally and professionally because of the SEL resources they were asked to engage with this past year. Coaches reflected that they had developed a deeper understanding of core SEL concepts, learned how (and why) to intentionally support SEL skill development among students on the team, and became more deliberate in focusing students’ attention on self- and social awareness skills. Importantly, all coaches reflected that they had been positively changed by their experience. Similarly, students reflected on numerous SEL skills they felt the SEL Activity Cards had helped them learn, most prominently in the SEL domains of relationship skills (e.g., effective communication, offering support, showing leadership), social awareness (e.g., empathy, recognizing others’ strengths), and responsible decision-making (e.g., proper team sports etiquette).

² Note that some SEL Activity Cards had fidelity observation scores lower than 3.25 but these activities were observed at just one school and so are not considered here.

Ultimately, this work demonstrated that intentionally incorporating small kernels of SEL (Jones et al., 2017) into Unified Sports can be an effective way to address SEL skill development among students with and without ID, expand school settings in which SEL instruction can take place, and enhance coaching practices in inclusive sports. Thus, as Special Olympics continues its focus on enhancing intentional SEL practices in UCS and Unified Sports, the following recommendations for programming and evaluation are offered:

- 1) **Build more flexibility for Unified Sports coaches into the next evaluation study, for example by offering more options for professional development or more options for implementing the SEL Activity Cards.**

This report documented coaches' experiences implementing the SEL Activity Cards, including success and challenges. Most feedback from this pilot study was positive; however, coaches had suggestions for how to make implementation easier or more effective in the future and took it upon themselves to modify some SEL Activity Cards to better suit their teams. Based on these suggestions and adaptations, it is recommended that the next evaluation study using the SEL Activity Cards and coach professional development seminar include more flexibility.

Some potential flexibility modifications for the professional development include more options for delivering the seminar, such as combining multiple sessions into longer sessions or offering the seminar in-person or in a hybrid format. In the present pilot, coaches preferred the format of two two-hour training sessions, which they received in the spring, as opposed to four one-hour training sessions, which they received in the fall. One four-hour training session may also be a viable option, although it was not delivered in this evaluation. Thus, it may be beneficial to offer coaches multiple training structures so they can choose the one that works best for them. Making the professional development more accessible in this way may encourage more coaches to attend and engage more intentionally with the content since they are doing it in a way that works best for them. Coaches also enjoyed the breakout rooms offered during the virtual professional development, where they joined other coaches to collaborate or debrief training activities. The added value of coaches being able to work on training activities together, brainstorm for their upcoming season with other coaches, and get new perspectives and ideas from other schools is critical. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that the breakout rooms continue in future iterations of the professional development and perhaps be given more emphasis. In addition, offering the professional development in an in-person or hybrid format could enhance these collaborative effects for coaches. Finally, the idea of added flexibility can be supported through more consistent feedback from evaluators during and after the professional development sessions (and after practice observations if those take place) or by including additional booster sessions during the season ("more regular check-ins," as one coach put it). The coaches in this pilot study expressed how helpful feedback was for their successful implementation of the SEL Activity Cards and it is likely that other Unified Sports coaches will be eager to receive feedback whenever possible.

Some potential flexibility modifications for implementing the SEL Activity Cards include allowing certain activities to span multiple practices (or, relatedly, allowing for repetition of activities during the course of a season), preparing students ahead of time for certain activities,

and giving students access to visual aids for certain activities. These practices were some of the most common adaptations coaches made to ensure the SEL Activity Cards worked as best as possible for their team. Understandably, when the activity worked well for the team, it was easier for the coach. These approaches can be introduced in the professional development to better ensure uptake by the coaches and empower them to make choices like these when it best suits their Unified Sports team.

2) **Make integration of the SEL Activity Cards into Unified Sports as seamless as possible for coaches, thus increasing buy-in and engagement with the resource on a national scale.**

In order to maximize buy-in and engagement among Unified Sports coaches implementing the SEL Activity Cards in the future, it is imperative that the challenges the pilot coaches faced this past year are addressed and minimized as the resource is rolled out on a larger scale. The challenges documented among the pilot coaches ranged from needing to find a way for every student on the team to participate in SEL Activity Card activities, to having teams that were too large to implement an activity as one group, to not having a logical place or time within the practice to implement the SEL Activity Card, to not having enough time during practices to fully complete some SEL Activity Card activities. As there was wide variation of these challenges among the different pilot schools and different Unified Sports, it is perhaps unrealistic to expect that these challenges can be addressed in a way that solves all barriers for every coach. However, these challenges can at least be mitigated through intentional and deliberate training on how to use the SEL Activity Cards, including potential challenges, such as those described above, that coaches may encounter. The professional development seminar that the pilot coaches participated in this past year included hands on activities with the SEL Activity Cards and a component to brainstorm potential challenges and how to address them. However, it is recommended that this focus on challenges is increased in future trainings and that the training materials are updated to reflect the specific challenges documented in this evaluation (as well as any others Special Olympics deems relevant).

Taken together with the reflections provided in the first recommendation on flexibility, it is strongly recommended that no Unified Sports coach receive the SEL Activity Cards unless they have completed the accompanying professional development seminar. When coaches feel they have a strong understanding of foundational SEL concepts, feel competent in applying these concepts to inclusive sports, and feel confident in their ability to support SEL skill development among students on their team, they will be more engaged with the resource and more willing to troubleshoot challenges along the way to ensure success for themselves and their students.

3) **Include the SEL Activity Cards professional development seminar as part of the hierarchy of certification Special Olympics North America offers to Unified Sports coaches.**

As the findings of this evaluation demonstrate, the SEL Activity Cards professional development seminar was a critical component of the feasibility pilot and of perceived success among the Unified Sports coaches. In addition, the previous two recommendations emphasize the

importance of the seminar for effective SEL in Unified Sports moving forward. Thus, it is strongly recommended that the professional development seminar be made available to, at minimum, all high school Unified Sports coaches in UCS schools and all coaches for community Unified Sports teams with high school age players. Given the overwhelmingly positive experiences of the coaches in this feasibility pilot, and their reflections of how they have been changed personally and professionally through the training they received (and use of the SEL Activity Cards), it is logical that other Unified Sports coaches can receive these same benefits. And, as noted previously, it is especially important, even essential, that any Unified Sports coach seeking to use the SEL Activity Cards with their team(s) complete this training first.

While the seminar for this feasibility pilot was delivered live virtually, for any high school Unified Sports coach anywhere in the country to be able to access and complete training, different modalities of the seminar will need to be developed and disseminated. One option is for the training to be reimagined as a self-paced online course on the Special Olympics Learning Management System, where Unified Sports coaches can log in to the training sessions and complete components as their schedules allow. This option offers the most flexibility, which may mean that it will reach the most coaches, but it would bring with it some potential challenges. These include a lack of collaborative coach activities and group discussions, which the coaches in the feasibility pilot found to be one of the best aspects of the seminar. Another option is to offer the seminar live and virtually on a regular basis for a certain period of time, such as holding the seminar twice a month for a year. This would allow coaches to attend at a pre-determined time that works best with their schedule and also take advantage of the collaborative aspects of having multiple coaches attend a live training.

4) Explore adaptations for the SEL Activity Cards in other UCS experiences, such as Unified Club and Unified PE, or for younger students on Unified Sports teams at the middle or elementary school level.

With the SEL Activity Cards and accompanying professional development seminar having undergone development and initial pilot testing in 2020-2021 and more formal feasibility testing across multiple Unified Sports in 2021-22, the next step in the expansion of intentional SEL in UCS is to determine how the set of resources can be adapted for other UCS contexts. Incorporating the SEL Activity Cards at younger grade levels would permit students to build SEL and leadership skills throughout their Unified Sports experience. Moreover, expanding the reach of the SEL Activity Cards beyond high school Unified Sports will increase opportunities for student SEL within all aspects of UCS. It is therefore recommended that a process similar to the one undertaken over the last three years in high school Unified Sports also be conducted in high school Unified Club, high school Unified PE, and a variety of middle and/or elementary Unified Sports teams. This should include a period of naturalistic observation in these settings to determine how and how many SEL opportunities are already present, development of a Theory of Change for SEL in each of these settings, and adaptations to the existing SEL Activity Cards and/or development of new SEL Activity Cards to complement the specific environments of these inclusive activities.

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Appendix A: Pilot School Descriptions

Each of the five pilot schools is a public suburban high school located in the New England area, with a predominantly white student population. Each school was chosen because it has a history of being a UCS school with a well-established program. Additionally, these schools were chosen because they offer a mixture of special education programming, including self-contained classrooms, special education classes, inclusive non-academic classes, resource rooms, and vocational programming.

DHS

DHS is a public high school with approximately 1,050 students (National Center for Education Statistics, retrieved 2022). In 2021-22, the UCS liaison reported that three students with ID were enrolled. DHS has been a UCS school for four years and was a Full-implementation UCS school this year, with two activities offered in each of the three core experiences: Unified Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership, and Whole School Engagement. During the pilot study, DHS implemented two Unified Sports teams (basketball and track) and the liaison reported 41 students participated on the Unified Sports teams, which included students both with and without ID. The liaison had been coaching Unified Sports for eight years, and there were three coaches at DHS across both seasons.

DSHS

DSHS is a public high school with approximately 1,500 students (National Center for Education Statistics, retrieved 2022). In 2021-22, the UCS liaison reported that six students with ID were enrolled. DSHS has been a UCS school for 12 years and was a Full-implementation school this year, with two activities offered in each of the three core experiences: Unified Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership, and Whole School Engagement. During the pilot study, DSHS implemented three Unified Sports teams (soccer, basketball, and volleyball) and the liaison reported 32 students participated on the Unified Sports teams, which included students both with and without ID. The liaison had been coaching Unified Sports for 12 years, and there were four coaches at DSHS across all three seasons.

NHS

NHS is a public high school with approximately 1,700 students (National Center for Education Statistics, retrieved 2022). In 2021-22, the UCS liaison reported that five students with ID were enrolled. NHS has been a UCS school for four years and was a Full-implementation school this year, with five activities offered in the Unified Sports experience, two activities offered in the Inclusive Youth Leadership experience, and three activities offered in the Whole School Engagement experience. During the pilot study, the school implemented two Unified Sports teams (basketball and track) and the liaison reported 20 students participated on the Unified Sports teams, which included students both with and without ID. The liaison had been coaching Unified Sports for five years, and there were three coaches at NHS across both seasons.

PHS

PHS is a public high school with approximately 1,000 students (National Center for Education Statistics, retrieved 2022). In 2021-22, the UCS liaison reported that two students with ID were enrolled. PHS has been a UCS school for six years and was a Full-implementation school this year, with two activities offered in both the Unified Sports and Inclusive Youth Leadership experiences and one activity offered in the Whole School Engagement experience. During the pilot study, the school implemented three Unified Sports teams (soccer, basketball, and track) and the liaison reported 19 students participating on the Unified Sports teams, which included students both with and without ID. The liaison had been coaching Unified Sports for seven years, and there were five coaches at PHS across all three seasons.

WHS

WHS is a public high school with approximately 1,200 students (National Center for Education Statistics, retrieved 2022). In 2021-22, the UCS liaison reported that four students with ID were enrolled. DHS has been a UCS school for three years, and was a Full-implementation school this year, with three activities offered in the Unified Sports experience, and two activities offered in both the Inclusive Youth Leadership and Whole School Engagement experiences. During the pilot study, the school implemented two Unified Sports teams (basketball and track), although the evaluation team only worked with WHS during the Unified Track season. The liaison reported 17 students participated on the Unified Sports teams, which included students both with and without ID. The liaison had been coaching Unified Sports for five years and was the only coach the evaluation team worked with for the Unified Track season at WHS.

Appendix B: SEL Activity Card Distribution Lists

Key: Unified Soccer = S; Unified Basketball = B; Unified Volleyball = V; Unified Track = T

List 1. SEL Activity Card distribution for each school and Unified Sport, by type of SEL Activity Card

Card	School	DSHS			PHS			DHS		NHS		WHS	Total times tested
	Sport	S	B	V	S	B	T	B	T	B	T	T	
Question of the Day		1							1	2			4
Goal Setting		1			1				1			1	4
Team Breathing		1							1	1			3
One Step at a Time				1						1			2
Be a Good Sport				1					1			1	3
Focus of Play				2	1			1					4
Name Game			2					1			1		4
Team Rotation			1		1								2
How to Coach		1						1				1	3
Human Knot		1							1			1	3
TOTAL KICK OFF CARDS		5	3	4	3	0	0	3	5	4	1	4	32
Positive Self-Talk		1								1		1	3
Appreciation, Apology, Aha				1	1			2			1		5
Post Competition Reflection		1							1	1			3
Goal Board		1		2						1		1	5
3 Stars and A Wish							1		1		1		3
Reset/ Restart				1	1							1	3
Stop, Breathe, Reflect									1			1	2
Choose Your Challenge				1				1				1	3
Sportsmanship Cheer			1						1				2
Check Your Buddy				1				1				2	4
Shout Outs		2							1	1			4
Gratitude Web				1		1							2
Recreate a Scenario								1			1	1	3
Practice Plan		1								1			2
TOTAL HUDDLE CARDS		6	1	7	2	1	1	5	5	5	3	8	44

School	DSHS			PHS			DHS		NHS		WHS	Total times tested
Sport	S	B	V	S	B	T	B	T	B	T	T	
Card												
Spot the Difference		1								1	1	3
Common Goal		2									1	3
Slow-Mo Movement						1		1			1	3
Overcoming Obstacles		1								1	1	3
Last One, Best One					1			1		1		3
You Can do It!		1									1	2
Slow Your Roll							1			1		3
Peer Coaching			1				1				1	3
Silent Drills					1			1			1	3
TOTAL DRILL CARDS	0	5	1	0	2	1	2	3	0	4	7	25

List 2. SEL Activity Card distribution for each school and Unified Sport, by SEL skill

Card	School	DSHS			PHS			DHS		NHS		WHS	Total times tested
	Sport	S	B	V	S	B	T	B	T	B	T	T	
Question of the Day		1							1	2			4
Positive Self-Talk		1								1		1	3
Appreciation, Apology, Aha				1	1			2			1		5
Post Competition Reflection		1							1	1			3
Spot the Difference			1								1	1	3
SELF-REFLECTION TOTALS		3	1	1	1	0	0	2	2	4	2	2	18
Goal Setting		1			1				1			1	4
Goal Board		1		2						1		1	5
3 Stars and A Wish							1		1		1		3
Common Goal			2									1	3
GOAL SETTING TOTALS		2	2	2	1	0	1	0	2	1	1	3	15
Team Breathing		1							1	1			3
Reset/ Restart				1	1							1	3
Stop, Breathe, Reflect									1			1	2
Slow-Mo Movement							1		1			1	3
MINDFULNESS TOTALS		1	0	1	1	0	1	0	3	1	0	3	11
One Step at a Time				1						1			2
Choose Your Challenge				1				1				1	3
Overcoming Obstacles			1								1	1	3
Last One, Best One						1			1		1		3
You Can do It!			1									1	2
PERSEVERANCE TOTALS		0	2	2	0	1	0	1	1	1	2	3	13
Be a Good Sport				1					1			1	3
Focus of Play				2	1			1					4
Sportsmanship Cheer			1						1				2
Check Your Buddy				1				1					2
Slow Your Roll								1				2	3
RESPECT TOTALS		0	1	4	1	1	0	3	2	0	0	3	15

Card	School	DSHS			PHS			DHS		NHS		WHS	Total times tested
	Sport	S	B	V	S	B	T	B	T	B	T	T	
Name Game			2					1			1		4
Team Rotation			1		1								2
How to Coach		1						1					2
Shout Outs		2							1	1			4
Gratitude Web				1		1							2
Peer Coaching				1				1				1	3
TEAM BUILDING TOTALS		3	3	2	1	1	0	4	1	1	1	1	18
Human Knot		1							1			1	3
Recreate a Scenario								1			1	1	3
Practice Plan		1								1			2
Silent Drills						1			1			1	3
PROBLEM SOLVING TOTALS		2	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	1	1	3	11

Appendix C: Coach Implementation Log

School: _____ **Coach:** _____ **Date:** _____

Unified Sport: _____

adults present (including self): _____

athletes present: _____ **# partners present:** _____

Where did you run practice? Inside – gym / Inside – other location / Outside

PART A. Implementation Checklist

Please select the SEL Activity Card(s) you implemented on the date you indicated earlier:			How many <i>minutes</i> did you spend on each Activity card you used?	Adaptations made or suggestions
Question of the day				
Goal setting				
Team breathing				
One step at a time				
Be a good sport				
Focus of play				
Team rotation				
How to coach				
Name game				
Human knot				
Positive self-talk				
Appreciation, apology, aha				
Post-competition reflection				
Goal board				
3 stars & a wish				
Stop, breathe, reflect				
Reset, restart				
Choose your challenge				
Check your buddy				
Sportsmanship cheer				
Shout outs				
Gratitude web				
Recreate a scenario				

Practice plan				
Spot the difference				
Common goal				
Slow-mo movement				
Last one best one				
Overcoming obstacles				
You can do it!				
Slow your roll				
Peer coaching				
Silent drills				
No Activity Card				

Q: For each card implemented, check all that apply:

- Did you implement it on its own (i.e., not combined with another activity card)? Y/N
- Did all students – partners and athletes – participate in it during practice? Y/N
- Did the entire Activity Card (activity + goals check question) take place within practice? Y/N
- Did you maintain the step-by-step instructions of the activity and card? Y/N
- Did you ask a reflection question at the end, related to the activity and SEL skill targeted by the card? Y/N

Card Domain	Skills	N/A	Present	Absent
SA	Cheering/Clapping or Raising arms in celebration			
SM	Phys Management; Perseverance; Managing Emotional Responses; Goal Setting			
SoCA	Phys Awareness of Group; Awareness of Proper Gameplay;			
RS	Emotional Support; Coaching; Camaraderie; Teamwork			
RDM	Sportsmanship; Responsibility			

Q: Did you incorporate student leadership into the SEL Activity Card activity? If yes, how?

PART B. Program Observations

School and Program Environment Variables

+ Variables that Supported or Enhanced Program Implementation	- Variables that Interfered with Program Implementation or Diminished Quality of Program
<i>Example: Our setting is the ideal place to introduce SEL.</i>	<i>Example: Space was too small for activity</i>
Suggestions:	

Techniques or Strategies

+ Technique/Strategy that Supported or Enhanced Program Implementation	- Technique/Strategy that Interfered with Program Implementation/Diminished Quality of Program
<i>Example: Adaptations were made for students that needed them.</i>	<i>Example: It is difficult to run this with the whole class with only one adult.</i>
Suggestions:	

Program Elements

+ Factors that Supported or Enhanced Program Implementation	- Factors that Interfered with Program Implementation/Diminished Quality of Program
<i>Example: Very engaging activities! We loved _____ card</i>	<i>Example: The activity did not work well in this class today</i>
Suggestions:	

Appendix D: Fidelity Observation Protocol

Date: _____ **Observer Name:** _____
School: _____ **Unified Sport:** _____

of adults present: _____
of athletes present: _____
of partners present: _____

Which activity card(s) were used today? _____

During which part of practice was the card used? (Circle one)
Warm-Ups Opening Huddle Drills Closing Huddle Other: _____

Did Coach introduce Activity Card at the beginning of practice? Y/N

Did Coach provide the name the Activity Card before starting the activity? Y/N

Did Coach label targeted SE skill(s)? Y/N
If so, which? _____

Did Coach show students the Activity Card? Y/N

*****For each activity card used, fill out below (multiple forms may be needed). See codes below table.**

Card:						
	Adherence (1-3)	Degree of adaptation (1-3)	If LOW (1) adherence, note adaptations:	Dose (minutes on section)	Student Engagement (1-3)	Teacher Engagement (1-3)
SEL Activity						
Goals Check						
TOTALS (add scores/minutes)						
Did teacher use any of the coaching tips for this card (Y/N)? Which ones?						

1 = LOW (poor adherence, disengaged, no adaptations), 2 = MEDIUM (some adherence, some engagement, some adaptations), 3 = HIGH (high adherence, high engagement, excessive adaptations)

Check all that apply:

1. Coach did ONE card at a time
2. ALL students participated (As & Ps)
3. Goals Check occurred
4. Goals Check was a reflection question
5. Activity followed the step-by-step structure of the cards
- 6.

Card Domain	Skills	N/A	Present	Absent
SA	Cheering/Clapping or Raising arms in celebration			
SM	Phys Management; Perseverance; Managing Emotional Responses; Goal Setting			
SoCA	Phys Awareness of Group; Awareness of Proper Gameplay;			
RS	Emotional Support; Coaching; Camaraderie; Teamwork			
RDM	Sportsmanship; Responsibility			

Q: Did you observe any student leadership? By whom, at what part of the activity, spontaneous or assigned?

Q: Did discussions of SEL/ SE skills permeate practice or were they self-contained to the activity and goals check questions?

COMMENTS:

School and Class Environment Variables

+ Variables that Supported or Enhanced Program Implementation	- Variables that Interfered with Program Implementation or Diminished Quality of Program
<i>Example: Class setting was appropriate and conducive to activity</i>	<i>Example: Space was too small for activity</i>
Suggestions:	

Techniques or Strategies

+ Technique/Strategy that Supported or Enhanced Program Implementation	- Technique/Strategy that Interfered with Program Implementation/Diminished Quality of Program
<i>Example: Adaptations were made for students that needed them.</i>	<i>Example: Difficult to run with only one adult.</i>
Suggestions:	

Card Elements

+ Factors that Supported or Enhanced Program Implementation	- Factors that Interfered with Program Implementation/Diminished Quality of Program
<i>Example: Very engaging activity! We loved having teammates interact with one another.</i>	<i>Example: The goals check questions did not work well for our team.</i>
Suggestions:	

Q: Were any other Activity Cards referenced during practice? If so, which?

COMMENTS:

Appendix E: Average Coach and Student Engagement, by School and Unified Sport Season

Fall

School	Coach Engagement	Student Engagement
Dartmouth	3.06	2.94
Dover	5.26	4.80
Needham	5.08	4.42
Portsmouth	5.30	4.44

Winter

School	Coach Engagement	Student Engagement
Dover	4.33	4.33
Portsmouth	4.5	4.5

Spring

School	Coach Engagement	Student Engagement
Dartmouth	4.79	4.71
Dover	5.40	5.20
Needham	5.71	5.57
Portsmouth	5.35	5.55
Westborough	5.00	5.00

Appendix F: Coach Pre- and Post-Season Interview Protocols

PRE-SEASON

INTERVIEWER READ: Thank you for talking to me today! My name is [YOUR NAME] and I am from the University of Massachusetts Boston. My colleague and I are interviewing you today in order to learn more about the Special Olympics Unified Sports program and your plans for the upcoming spring sport season. You have already filled out and submitted a consent form to participate in this interview today. Basically, the consent form says that we are interviewing school staff and students to learn about the benefits and impacts of Unified Sports on students' social and emotional development. In particular, we are interested in your impressions of the SEL professional development you attended and the SEL resource shared with you, the "SEL Activity Cards." This interview will take about 45-60 minutes. Your responses will remain confidential and nothing you say will be shared with parents, students, or staff at [SCHOOL NAME]. Your answers will be used only for evaluation purposes of the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program on a national scale. We do not anticipate that any of these questions will be upsetting; however, you may choose to skip questions or stop the interview at any point.

I would like to record this interview today in order to help me better understand what was said when it is time to analyze all of the interviews together. Again, your responses will remain confidential, and no information gathered from you will be presented in a way that could identify you.

S1. Is it okay if I record this interview?

- YES
- NO

INTERVIEWER READ: If you have any questions, you can contact Despoina Lioliou, the Project Coordinator at the Center for Social Development and Education. Her contact information is listed on your copy of the consent form. Do you have any questions before we get started?

[IF S1 = YES, TURN ON RECORDER NOW]

BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND COACHING

GOAL: Establish rapport and gain background information.

First, I'd like to begin by getting some basic background information on what led you to coaching Unified Sports, and your beliefs about coaching.

IF NEW COACH PARTICIPANT:

1. Can you tell me about your background as a Unified coach?
 - PROBE: What led you to start coaching Unified?
 - PROBE: How long have you been coaching Unified Sports?

2. Have you completed the online Unified Sports coaches training “Coaching Unified Sports” (offered through SO/the National Federation of State High School Associations)?

BOTH NEW COACH PARTICIPANT AND RETURNING COACH PARTICIPANT:

3. In your opinion, what is the fundamental role of a Unified [SPORT] coach?
4. How would you describe your coaching style when it comes to [SPORT]? What do you try to “get out of your players?”
 - PROBE: What do you try to teach your players through their participation?
 - PROBE: What outcomes do you see as the most important?
 - PROBE: What knowledge do you need in order to bring about these outcomes successfully?
 - PROBE: How do students see you as a coach? How would the prior athletes you’ve coached describe you?
5. In your role as a Unified coach, in what ways do you see yourself as a leader?
 - PROBE: How do you see your students as leaders?
6. How do you make a [UNIFIED SPORT] team feel like a team?
 - PROBE: How do you facilitate building bonds between the Athletes and the Partners?
7. Are there specific goals you have for the spring sport season? What are they and how do you plan to meet them?
8. How do you plan [UNIFIED SPORT] practices? / What’s your approach to planning them?
 - PROBE: How will your practice planning be impacted by implementing the SEL Activity Cards in [UNIFIED SPORT]?

SEL KNOWLEDGE

GOAL: Gather information on coaches’ training and knowledge of social and emotional learning.

IF NEW COACH PARTICIPANT:

Earlier this fall, you attended a four-hour professional development training to prepare you in using the SEL Activity Cards and being intentional in supporting SEL development among your players. In the following few questions, we are curious to gather your feedback on it.

1. I’d first like you to think back to before you attended this SEL PD. How familiar were you with social and emotional learning (SEL)?
2. As a teacher or coach, have you attended other training courses on SEL?
3. (IF ATTENDED PD) Can you give me your overall impression of the professional development?
 - PROBE: Is there anything that you’d like to expand on from your PD feedback survey? (Session topics, timing, activities, coach collaboration, homework)

PROBE: What is something from the PD that you're still grappling with?

4. What challenges, if any, do you anticipate when implementing the SEL Activity Cards?
 PROBE: [IF UNIFIED TRACK] Do you anticipate any challenges with implementing them in an individual sport, compared to a team sport like basketball?

IF RETURNING COACH PARTICIPANT:

1. After having already implemented the SEL Activity Cards, does that influence how you'll implement them during this season? If that's the case, how so?
 PROBE: Are there any things in terms of implementation that you are still grappling with?
2. What challenges, if any, do you anticipate when implementing the SEL Activity Cards this season?
 PROBE: [IF UNIFIED TRACK] Do you anticipate any challenges with implementing them in an individual sport, compared to a team sport like basketball?
3. How do you think the Spring PD/Spring Pre-Season PD Booster session will impact how you implement the Activity Cards in [UNIFIED SPORT], if at all?

TEACHER SEL BELIEFS SCALE

GOAL: Insight on coaches' beliefs about SEL in general and teaching SE skills to their students.

Next, I'd like to learn more about your attitudes towards, and school support for, social and emotional learning. For the next few statements, please rate how much you agree with each statement from 1 to 5. *[share screen with scale visual depiction]*. As you can see, 1 means "Strongly Disagree," 2 means "Disagree," 3 means "Neutral," 4 means "Agree," and 5 means "Strongly Agree." Do you have any questions before we begin?

SEL BELIEFS ITEM	RATING
I feel confident in my ability to provide instruction on social and emotional learning.	
I am comfortable providing instruction on social and emotional skills to my students.	
Taking care of my students' social and emotional needs comes naturally to me	
Informal lessons in social and emotional learning are part of my regular teaching practice.	
I would like to attend a workshop to learn how to develop my students' social and emotional skills	
I would like to attend a workshop to develop my own social and emotional skills.	
I want to improve my ability to teach social and emotional skills to students.	
All teachers should receive training on how to teach social and emotional skills to students.	

My principal creates an environment that promotes social and emotional learning for our students.	
The culture in my school supports the development of children's social and emotional skills.	
My principal does not encourage the teaching of social and emotional skills to students.	
My school expects teachers to address children's social and emotional needs.	

COACH SENSE OF EFFICACY SCALE

GOAL: Insight on coaches' sense of efficacy in the classroom and with their teams.

Thank you for your answers! We are going to wrap up today's interview with some questions to get a better understanding of how confident you are as a coach. For the following statements, please rate your confidence with the number that best describes your thoughts, from 0 (not at all confident) to 9 (extremely confident).

That said, how confident are you in your ability to....

CSES ITEM	RATING
Maintain confidence in your athletes?	
Recognize opposing team's strengths during competitions?	
Mentally prepare athletes for game/meet strategies?	
Understand competitive strategies?	
Instill an attitude of good moral behavior?	
Build the self-esteem of your athletes?	
Demonstrate the skills of your sport?	
Adapt to different game/meet situations?	
Recognize opposing teams' weakness during competition?	
Motivate your athletes?	
Make critical decisions during competition?	
Build team cohesion?	
Instill an attitude of fair play among your athletes?	
Coach individual athletes on technique?	
Build the self-confidence of your athletes?	
Develop athletes' ability?	
Maximize your team's strengths during competition?	
Recognize talent in athletes?	
Promote good sportspersonship?	
Detect skill errors?	
Adjust your game/meet strategy to fit your team's talent?	
Teach the skills of your sport?	
Build team confidence?	
Instill an attitude of respect for others?	

Demo Survey: [LINK]

PD feedback survey: [LINK]

End of Interview

INTERVIEWER READ: Those are all the questions I have for you today. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about [NAME OF UCS PROGRAM] or anything else that comes to mind based on everything we've just talked about?

INTERVIEWER READ: Alright, well thank you for talking with me. Your willingness to share your expertise and help us design these lessons by trying them out in practice and providing feedback will help many other schools in connecting SEL to their Unified Sports. If you have any questions after today, please feel free to call the Project Coordinator at the Center for Social Development and Education. Her contact information is on your consent form. She will be happy to answer any questions you have about this study or any of the research and evaluation we do for the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program.

POST-SEASON

INTERVIEWER READ: Thank you for talking to me today! As with past interviews, we are interviewing you today in order to learn more about using the SEL Activity Cards in practice. You have already done a few interviews with us earlier this year, so some of our questions may be familiar to you. We will be asking similar questions to the ones from last [SPORT SEASON]'s post interviews. However, this time, the questions will be pertaining to the Spring season and the cards you received for the spring. In addition, we have some new questions for you- these will be broader big picture questions, asking you to reflect on past sports seasons and the year as a whole. This will help us better understand what your participation in this SEL pilot has been like and help us wrap up the pilot year! This interview will take about 30-60 minutes. Your responses will remain confidential and nothing you say will be shared with parents, students, or staff at [SCHOOL NAME]. Your answers will be used only for evaluation purposes of the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program on a national scale. We do not anticipate that any of these questions will be upsetting; however, you may choose to skip questions or stop the interview at any point.

[IF NEW COACH READ]: Thank you for talking to me today! You have also already done an interview with us earlier this season, so the interview format may be familiar to you already. You have already filled out and submitted a consent form to participate in this interview today. As a reminder, the consent form says that we are interviewing school staff and students to learn about the benefits and impacts of Unified Sports on students' social and emotional development. This interview will be more geared towards us wrapping up the pilot, so we will be asking some similar questions to the ones in previous interviews you've done with us, in addition to some newer and broader reflection questions regarding the Spring Sports season! This interview will take about 30-60 minutes. Your responses will remain confidential and nothing you say will be shared with parents, students, or staff at [SCHOOL NAME]. Your answers will be used only for evaluation purposes of the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program on a national scale. We do not anticipate that any of these questions will be upsetting; however, you may choose to skip questions or stop the interview at any point.

READ FOR ALL:

I would like to record this interview today in order to help me better understand what was said when it is time to analyze all of the interviews together. This recording will be transcribed by a professional transcript service and then CSDE staff will read through the transcript to remove any identifiable information about you, your school, your town, etc. What will remain is a permanently de-identified transcript that will not contain your name or any information about you. Your responses will remain confidential, and no information gathered from you will be presented in a way that could identify you.

S1. Is it okay if I record this interview?

- YES
- NO

INTERVIEWER READ: If you have any questions, you can contact Margaret Mackin, the Project Coordinator at the Center for Social Development and Education. Her contact information is listed on your copy of the consent form. Do you have any questions before we get started?

[IF S1 = YES, TURN ON RECORDER NOW]

SEL INTERVENTION

GOAL: Feedback about intervention content and implementation, future directions for connecting UCS and SEL

INTERVIEWER READ: This [SEASON], you implemented a new set of SEL lessons during your weekly practices for your Unified [SPORT] teams. You have already given us extremely helpful feedback earlier this year during [LIST SPORT season(s)], and all throughout this season with your preseason-interview, implementation log submissions, and booster session attendance. You have done so much and continue to be a critical part of the process of designing and adapting these lessons to help schools directly tie SEL concepts to their Unified programming. Your feedback is so important for helping us to understand the implementation on the ground and improve these lessons for so many other coaches and students.

1. Can you walk me through what it was like to implement these lessons in your practices this Unified [SPORT] season?

PROBE: How did you prepare for the practices where there were SEL Activity Cards to incorporate?

[IF RETURNER]: Did this process differ at all from past seasons?

PROBE: How easy were the Activity Cards themselves to understand?

[IF RETURNER]: Were they easier or more difficult to understand than the cards you've used in previous seasons?

PROBE: What were the biggest challenges you faced when implementing the Activity Cards this season?

[IF RETURNER]: **How** does this compare to the other Unified Sports you did this year?

PROBE: Do you think the time estimates for the activities you implemented were about right, or should we adjust them?

PROBE: What were the biggest successes from the lessons in Unified [SPORT]?

[IF RETURNER]: Thinking about the year as a whole [LIST SPORTS], what were some big picture successes from using the Activity Cards in multiple seasons?

2. **[IF UNIFIED TRACK]**, are there any activities that were particularly hard to implement in Unified Track compared to [OTHER SPORTS THEY DID]?

[IF RETURNER], were there any cards you felt were more difficult to complete, when compared to using them [OTHER SPORTS THEY DID]?

3. **[IF NEW COACH ONLY]** Do you think that there are any differences between the way you used to prepare for [SPORT] BEFORE the SEL Activity Cards and the way that you prepared for practices while you were implementing these new lessons?

4. **[IF RETURNING COACH ONLY]** After implementing this specific set of SEL Activity Cards this [UNIFIED SPORT] season, do you think you incorporated anything new into your coaching approach, compared to last [SPORT SEASON]?

5. Looking back, what do you think students in [SPORT] learned from the lessons, if anything?
 - a. Do you think implementing the SEL lessons benefited students, over and above what students would typically gain from participating in [SPORT]?
 - b. Do you believe your players understood the SEL skills that were promoted via the SEL Activity Cards?

[IF RETURNER]: How does this compare to [LIST PREVIOUS SPORTS SEASONS]? Were any skills more challenging for students to grasp?

[IF RETURNER]: Do you feel one of the sports you did this year was best suited to the SEL Activity Cards? Which one, and why?

6. How did the students respond to the SEL Activity Cards this [SPORT] season?
 - a. In your opinion, how engaged were your students in participating in the SEL Activity Cards?

[IF RETURNING]: Was there any difference in student engagement over the different sport seasons?
 - b. Did students take on any leadership roles while participating in the SEL Activity Cards in [SPORT]?

7. **[IF NEW COACH ONLY]** Now that you have tried out the cards with your team, what would you do if you could design these lessons any way you wanted?

8. After implementing this set of cards, were there topics/skills missing that you felt should be addressed? Were there types of activities you wanted to see more of? Less of?
 - a. **[IF RETURNING]:** Are there any cards you had in pervious sport seasons, you wish you had been able to do again in [SPORT]? Why?

9. **[IF TEAM REPEATED ACTIVITIES]** During the season, we noticed that you repeated lessons. Can you walk us through your decision to implement an SEL Activity Card more than once?

10. Are there any SEL Activity Cards that felt repetitive to you, or activities across cards that were too similar to one another?

PROBE: [IF YES] Is there one activity you would keep in the final card set over another? Would you keep them both in the final set?

11. Now we would like to ask you about the different color categories of the SEL Activity Cards: [LIST CARD COLORS RECEIVED FOR THE SPRING SEASON] purple (kick off), yellow (huddle), drill (blue)].
 - a. Is there one category you prefer or gravitate toward using with your [SPORT] team?

[IF RETURNING] Is this similar or different to the other sports you did this year?

- b. Did one type of card take more pre-practice preparation on your part than another?
[IF RETURNING] How does that compare to other sports this year?
- c. How have your students responded to the different card types?
[IF RETURNING]: Have you noticed any differences between [SPORT] and other sports this year?

12. For this season, we gave you a subset of cards, as many cards as you had practices. What did you think of this approach?

- a. Is there something you would have preferred we do differently or that you think would have worked better for you in [SPORT]? Any feedback you have for us here will help us design a better pilot with new schools next year.

SEL INTERVENTION SUPPORTS

GOAL: Feedback about existing and potential support structures to aid intervention implementation.

RETURNING COACHES:

Now, we'd like to hear more about how the PD Booster session you attended a few weeks ago may have impacted your coaching.

- 1. How did the pre- and mid-season booster sessions impact your coaching and implementation of the SEL Activity Cards during the [UNIFIED SPORT] season, if at all?

NEW COACHES:

Now, we'd like to hear more about how the PD you attended at the beginning of the season may have impacted your coaching.

- 2. How did the professional development training impact your coaching and implementation of the SEL Activity Cards during the [UNIFIED SPORT] season?

PROBE: How did the 5th booster session impact your coaching and SEL Activity Card implementation?

- 3. Which parts of the PD were the most useful to you in helping you implement the SEL Activity Cards?

- 4. What kinds of further resources and support would be helpful for incorporating SEL into Unified [SPORT], such as from Special Olympics [STATE] or at the national level?

PROBE: Format (webinar, live session, pamphlet)?

PROBE: Frequency (weekly, monthly, yearly, as needed)? Timing (before the school year, each semester)?

ALL COACHES

- 5. If you were not participating in this pilot, and did not have to follow our guidelines (e.g., trying 1 new card per day) how would you be using the Activity Cards?

- a. How do you see yourself using the cards in future seasons?
6. We are planning to recruit new schools to work with us next year. What advice would you have for those coaches who will be attending the PD and using the SEL Activity Cards for the first time?
7. Do you have any final thoughts on the cards, the PD, or the pilot experience as a whole?

End of Interview

INTERVIEWER READ: Those are all the questions I have for you today. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about this [SPORT] season or anything else that comes to mind based on everything we've just talked about?

INTERVIEWER READ: Alright, well thank you for talking with me. Your willingness to share your expertise and help us design these lessons by trying them out in practice and providing feedback will help many other schools in connecting SEL to their Unified Sports. We would also like to thank you for all of your help over this past school year! We greatly appreciate all you have taken on to pilot test these activity cards for us!

If you have any questions after today, please feel free to call the Project Coordinator at the Center for Social Development and Education. Her contact information is on your consent form. She will be happy to answer any questions you have about this study or any of the research and evaluation we do for the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program.

Appendix G: Student Post-Season Interview Protocol

INTERVIEWER READ: My name is [YOUR NAME]. I would like to ask you a few questions about you and your Unified Sports team. We are doing this to find ways to make Unified Sports even better next year. It will only take a few minutes and then you can go back to your classes. We may have already talked to you earlier this year, after [SPORTS SEASONS]. This interview will be very similar to those earlier interviews. We will ask you many of the same questions, but some new ones too!

S1. Is that okay?

- YES
- NO *[END INTERVIEW AND BRING STUDENT BACK TO CLASS]*

INTERVIEWER READ: There are no right or wrong answers and if you don't want to answer a question, just tell me and we will go on to the next question. I would like to record this interview. This will help me listen to you better and I won't have to take as many notes. I also want you to know that your answers are private and will not be shared with anyone at school. Does that make sense?

S2. Is it okay if I record this interview? [ASK STUDENT FOR CONSENT]

- YES
- NO *[MAKE SURE TO TAKE VERY GOOD NOTES!]*

INTERVIEWER READ: Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

[IF S2 = YES, TURN ON RECORDER NOW]

INTRODUCTION

GOAL: Develop rapport

INTERVIEWER READ: Alright, first I just want to know a little bit more about you and your participation in [UNIFIED SPORT].

1. Is this your first year participating in [UNIFIED SPORT]?
 - IF NO, PROBE: How many years have you done [UNIFIED SPORT]?
 - IF YES, PROBE: Do you play any other sports at school? Which ones? What's your favorite sport?

INTERVIEWER READ: Like I mentioned, I know you are also part of the Unified [SPORT] team, and you just finished the spring [SPORT] season. As you know, the spring sport season started at the end of march and went on until this week/week ago. So, congratulations for wrapping up the season!

2. [NAME], what was your favorite part of the [UNIFIED SPORT] this year (field events? meets? practices? teammates)? It could be anything from the start of the season until now.

ACTIVITY CARDS

GOAL: Gain student feedback on the SEL Activity Cards

INTERVIEWER READ: During the sport season, your coach led a series of activities with your team, and we are excited to hear what you liked or didn't like about doing these activities with your [SPORT] team this year. You can see the activities here on this page. Let's read them together. **[show printout of activities and briefly summarize each one]**. Let's read them together.

3. I know that was a lot of information we just went through, but out of the activities that you see here; can you point out which ones you remember doing? [Interviewer: say them out loud for audio capture]
 PROBE: Can you point out which ones you liked? [interviewer: recall out loud] Do you have a favorite one?
 PROBE: Why do you like that activity?
 PROBE: How did you feel while doing this activity?
4. Now, let's talk a little more about the rest of the activities that you remember. Were there any activities you didn't like? [Interviewer: say anything they point to out loud]
 PROBE: How did you feel while doing this activity?
5. I'm glad you liked some of these activities. They can be a lot of fun. Sometimes, it can be possible to have fun and also learn new things at the same time, like teamwork, being a good sport, or setting goals. I wonder whether you think you learned anything from participating in these activities during [UNIFIED SPORT]?
 - a. IF YES, PROBE: Can you tell me a little bit more about what you learned?
 - b. IF YES, FURTHER PROBE: I know that, in your Unified [SPORT] team, you play with other students from your school who may be in different grades and take different classes than you. Do you think you helped your teammates learn new things (like teamwork or being a good sport) during the [SPORT] season? How did it feel to help them?
6. Is there anything you would change about these activities you did with your [Unified Sport] team? Anything you think would make them better, more fun, or more helpful to you or the team?

SE COMPETENCIES IN UCS

GOAL: How students practiced SEL

INTERVIEWER READ: Now I'd like to talk to you about different things that can happen in [UNIFIED SPORTS]. I'm going to ask you if you remember any of these things happening in your team, and then we can talk more about them. Remember, there are no right or wrong

answers, and it is OK if you don't remember these things happening or if they didn't happen at all! I'm just curious to see which specific things happened for you.

1. From the beginning of [SPORT SEASON] until now, was there ever a time where you helped your Unified [SPORT] teammates?
 - a. IF YES, PROBE: Can you give me an example of that? How did that make you feel?
 - b. Is there a time where you have helped someone (friends, family classmates) outside of Unified Sports (maybe during class, school clubs, at home)?
2. Was there ever a time where you noticed how someone else was feeling during [UNIFIED SPORT] season?
 - a. IF YES, PROBE: Can you give me an example of that?
 - b. Is there a time where you noticed how someone (friends, family classmates) was feeling outside of Unified Sports (maybe during class, school clubs, at home)
3. Was there ever a time where you set goals (such as passing, dribbling) to work on during [UNIFIED SPORT]? Something you wanted to achieve or accomplish?
 - a. IF YES, PROBE: How did you work on that goal? Did anyone help you?
 - b. Is there a time where you have set goals outside of Unified Sports (maybe during class, school clubs, at home)?
4. Was there ever a time where something was difficult, but you didn't give up and kept trying during [UNIFIED SPORT]?
 - a. IF YES, PROBE: Can you give me an example of that? How did that make you feel?
 - b. Is there a time where you never gave up on something outside of Unified Sports (maybe during class, school clubs, at home)?
5. Was there ever a time when you felt you were good at something during [UNIFIED SPORT] season?
 - a. IF YES, PROBE: Can you give me an example of that? How did that make you feel?
 - b. Is there a time where you felt you were good at something outside of Unified Sports (maybe during class, school clubs, at home)?
6. Was there ever a time when you had to work with others to solve a problem during [UNIFIED SPORT]? This could be something like trying to figure out how to score on the opposing team or changing a play that is not working.
 - a. IF YES, PROBE: Can you give me an example of that?
 - b. Is there a time where you felt you had to work with others (friends, family, classmates), outside of Unified Sports (maybe during class, school clubs, at home) to solve a problem?

End of Interview

INTERVIEWER READ: That's it! Thank you for talking to me today! Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

INTERVIEWER READ: Thank you for all of your help. Your answers will help us find ways to make your school better next year for you and other students. You did a great job, and if there are no other questions for me, you can go back to your class.

INTERVIEW DEBRIEF

Check whether the child's verbal behavior was:
(if anything is NOT checked, please briefly note why)

- Clear and understandable to the listener
- Of appropriate duration
 - used single words
 - used phrases
 - used sentences
 - appropriate use of pronouns
- Relevant and on-topic
- Reality-based

Setting of the interview: *(Please note where you were, whether there were others present, etc.)*

General notes: *(Please not any interferences that may have occurred during the interview, like loud noises, distractions, presence of others, etc.)*

Appendix H: Focus Group Moderator Guide

INTRODUCTIONS AND HOUSEKEEPING (7 mins)

(Moderators introduce themselves)

Assent

We're here to today to talk about you and what you think about these new activities you tried out this spring on your [UNIFIED SPORT] team. We already talked about some of these activities with you when we did one-on-one interviews earlier today/this week. Now, we'd like to talk to you as a group.

During this interview, we will watch 2-3 video clips of your [UNIFIED SPORT] team participating in some of these activities. We'll watch a clip all together, then, we'll ask you a few questions about the activity we just watched.

Describe how the focus group will run/Ground rules

- **There are no right or wrong answers.** We want to know what you think. We don't expect you to agree with one another, and that's okay; everyone has different opinions—we are really interested to hear everyone's opinions, that's why we're all meeting as a group.
- **If you don't want to talk about any question** – that's OK, just say pass.
- **We will keep everything you discuss private,** and we won't share it with anyone at the school. Please don't talk about anything that we discuss here outside of this room.
- We're going to be recording this discussion. This helps us listen better to what everyone has to say and not take as many notes.
 - **Is it okay if I record this interview?**
- **Please only speak one at a time.** Since we're recording, it's very important for us to have only one person speaking at a time. So please take turns—let's give everyone a chance to share their opinions.
- Please turn off and put away your cell phones.
- Does everyone understand what is going to happen? (Go around hand have everyone say "yes")
- Does anyone have any questions?

STUDENT INTRODUCTIONS (5 mins)

[DRAW A MAP OF THE LAYOUT OF THE GROUP AND WHERE PEOPLE ARE SITTING]

- What is your name?
- What grade are you in?
- What is one sport you always wanted to learn how to play?

ACTIVITY CARD 1 (12 mins)

- We are going to show you a few video clips of some of the activities you did this spring, to help you jog your memory. We'll start with **[ACTIVITY NAME]**. *Show clip*
- What did you notice about your teammates during **[ACTIVITY NAME]**? What did you see in this video clip?
 - PROBE: What did it seem like people were doing or learning?
 - PROBE: What do you remember from doing this activity at practice that maybe you can't see from the video clip?

Likes/Dislikes

- What did you like or dislike about participating in **[ACTIVITY NAME]**?
 - PROBE: Was it helpful when Coach **[NAME]** **[Coach Modifications]**?
 - PROBE: Is there anything you would change about this activity?

SE Skills

- Do you think the team learned anything about **[SE SKILL]** while participating in **[ACTIVITY NAME]**?
 - PROBE: Did any of you learn anything about **[SE SKILL]** while participating in this activity?
 - PROBE: Could you tell me a little more about how you/the team practiced **[SE SKILL]** during this activity?
 - PROBE: After the activity, Coach **[NAME]** asked you a reflection question: **[GOALS CHECK QUESTION ASKED]**. What did you think of that question? Did it help you reflect on what you learned at practice that day?

Accessibility

- Do you think everyone in your team was able to participate in **[ACTIVITY NAME]**?
 - PROBE: Is there anything about this activity that made it harder for the whole team to participate in? Why? What can we do about that?

ACTIVITY CARD 2 (12 mins)

- Next, we'll watch a clip of **[ACTIVITY NAME]**. *Show clip*
- What did you notice about your teammates during **[ACTIVITY NAME]**? What did you see in this video clip?
 - PROBE: What did it seem like people were doing or learning?
 - PROBE: What do you remember from doing this activity at practice that maybe you can't see from the video clip?

Likes/Dislikes

- What did you like or dislike about participating in **[ACTIVITY NAME]**?
 - PROBE: Was it helpful when Coach **[NAME]** **[Coach Modifications]**?
 - PROBE: Is there anything you would change about this activity?

SE Skills

- Do you think the team learned anything about [SE SKILL] while participating in [ACTIVITY NAME]?
 - PROBE: Did any of you learn anything about [SE SKILL] while participating in this activity?
 - PROBE: Could you tell me a little more about how you/the team practiced [SE SKILL] during this activity?
 - PROBE: After the activity, Coach [NAME] asked you a reflection question: [GOALS CHECK QUESTION ASKED]. What did you think of that question? Did it help you reflect on what you learned at practice that day?

Accessibility

- Do you think everyone in your team was able to participate in [ACTIVITY NAME]?
 - PROBE: Is there anything about this activity that made it harder for the whole team to participate in? Why? What can we do about that?

ACTIVITY CARD 3 (12 mins)

- We have one more video clip to show you. This one is [ACTIVITY NAME]. *Show clip*
- What did you notice about your teammates during [ACTIVITY NAME]? What did you see in this video clip?
 - PROBE: What did it seem like people were doing or learning?
 - PROBE: What do you remember from doing this activity at practice that maybe you can't see from the video clip?

Likes/Dislikes

- What did you like or dislike about participating in [ACTIVITY NAME]?
 - PROBE: Was it helpful when Coach [NAME] [Coach Modifications]?
 - PROBE: Is there anything you would change about this activity?

SE Skills

- Do think the team learned anything about [SE SKILL] while participating in [ACTIVITY NAME]?
 - PROBE: Did any of you learn anything about [SE SKILL] while participating in this activity?
 - PROBE: Could you tell me a little more about how you/the team practiced [SE SKILL] during this activity?
 - PROBE: After the activity, Coach [NAME] asked you a reflection question: [GOALS CHECK QUESTION ASKED]. What did you think of that question? Did it help you reflect on what you learned at practice that day?

Accessibility

- Do you think everyone in your team was able to participate in [ACTIVITY NAME]?
 - PROBE: Is there anything about this activity that made it harder for the whole team to participate in? Why? What can we do about that?

GENERAL REFLECTION (10 mins)

- Before we leave, we have just a few more questions to ask you all. For these we want you to think about all the activities on cards [show cards] Coach [NAME] did with your team this [UNIFIED SPORT] season.
- Thinking about your [SPORT] season, what did you like about these activities being included in your [UNIFIED SPORT] practices?
 - PROBE: What did you dislike?
 - PROBE: What was it like doing these activities with your teammates
- Who has done [UNIFIED SPORT] before this season, raise your hand? So, for those of you who have done [LIST SPORTS] before, do you think these activities helped you learn more about [SE SKILLS FROM 3 CARDS] than your practices last year?
- Do you think these activities took up too much time or got in the way of what normally happens at practices?
- Are there any activities you would like to see again at [UNIFIED SPORT] practice in the future seasons?

WRAP UP

- Anything else you want to say about the discussion we had today?

(FILL OUT DEMO SURVEY)

Appendix I: SEL Activity Cards

SEL ACTIVITY CARDS

Developed by the Center for Social Development and Education in collaboration with Special Olympics

INSTRUCTION CARD

How to use:
It's easy! All you need to do is pick cards that interest you or your team and perform the activity with them. Each card contains:

- The SEL goal of the activity
- Coaching tips
- Activity instructions
- Time estimate
- Goals check questions
- Extra materials needed

Picking Activities by Card Type:

- **Kick-off Cards:** easy, low-effort cards for you and your team to "dip your toes" in SEL activities.
- **Team Huddle Cards:** recurring, adaptable activities that can be performed many times each week, season, or year.
- **Drill Cards:** SEL adaptations for specific drills/activities.

Picking Activities by SEL Skill:

- Self-reflection
- Goal Setting
- Mindfulness
- Perseverance
- Respect for Others
- Team Building
- Problem Solving

Targeted SEL Skill
 Time

Materials

ACTIVITY NAME

*Card color indicates whether the card is a Kick-off, Team Huddle, or Drill Card

- SEL goal
- Activity instructions
- Goals Check:** Questions to prompt a debriefing discussion with students (see Goals Check Card for more information on leading a successful debrief)
- Coaching Tips:** Ways to adapt activities, leadership opportunities, and other helpful insights (see Coaching Tips Card for more suggestions)

Self-reflection 10'

QUESTION OF THE DAY

Create a space to **reflect and develop strong connections** among teammates

1. Ask questions that prompt self-reflection
 - What do you like about being on the team?
 - What can you do individually to make the team better?
 - What do you want to accomplish today?
2. Pass a ball around. The teammate holding the ball answers the question.

Goals Check: What did you learn about yourself? Your teammates?

- Create questions based on the needs of your team.
- **Leadership Opportunity:** Task one or two students with producing their own questions for the team.

Goal Setting 15'

GOAL SETTING

Create the opportunity for teammates to **set realistic goals**

1. Start by defining what goals are. Have a discussion about individual and team goals, short-term (for this practice or an upcoming game) and long-term (season-long or for their whole high school career).
2. Everyone writes down their goals.
3. Pass a ball around. The teammate holding the ball shares a goal with the team.

Goals Check: Why did we say our goals aloud and share them with the team?

- Check-in with team members throughout the season on their goals (What's been achieved? What needs adjustment?)
- Set specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals.

Mindfulness 5'

TEAM BREATHING

Promote **self-regulation** and **stress management**


1. Teammates sit comfortably and close their eyes.
2. Then, they pay attention to their breathing, focusing on each breath by counting in and out for 30s to 2min.
3. After, teammates share what they noticed about their breathing or any thoughts or feelings that came to their mind.
4. End with a collective team breath where the entire team takes one deep breath in and out.

Goals Check: How can this help you manage what you are feeling?

- Start off breathing for 30s and gradually add more time over the course of a season.
- Call out reminders to focus on breathing or use a pre-written script.

Perseverance  10'

ONE STEP AT A TIME

 Teammates learn to **keep working** at something until a **goal is achieved**



1. Place teammates at a distance where it is difficult to shoot or serve the ball.
2. Teammates repeatedly practice shooting or serving, however every time they miss, they take one step closer to the basket/net.
3. Teammates continue this activity until they score or complete a serve.




Goals Check: What skill did we work on? How will this help us at our next practice/game?



- Pair teammates and have them coach each other through achieving their objective.
- For beginner-level students, consider reducing the starting distance.

Respect for Others  10'

BE A GOOD SPORT

 Practice being a **good team player** and **kind competitor**




1. Ask teammates to think about what it means to be a good team player.
2. Help team identify 2-3 skills that make a good team player.
3. For each skill identified, provide an example.
4. During a drill, have 1 or 2 teammates demonstrate how a good team player behaves.




Goals Check: How can you be a good sport outside of Unified?



- Make sure teammates receive shout-outs when they demonstrate good team player skills.

Respect for Others  10'

FOCUS OF PLAY

 Understand how to **respect different abilities** and adjust levels of play



1. Discuss with teammates how their play might change based on their opponents or other teammates.
2. Ask: What ways can we check to see if we should focus on passing rather than scoring (perhaps checking the score or watching the other team)?
3. Start a scrimmage or mock competition to practice adjusting levels of play.
4. Every few minutes call a "time-out" and ask teammates what they think their focus should be on in that moment and why.




Goals Check: How will this change how you play in the next game?



- Provide examples to make the idea of adjusting level of play more concrete.

Team Building  15'

TEAM ROTATION

 Promote **connection** among teammates




1. Divide teammates into two groups and circle up.
2. Have one circle stand inside the other.
3. The outer circle rotates clockwise and the inner circle stays still while you play music.
4. At random intervals, stop the music and have teammates facing each other exchange one fun fact about themselves. Repeat until everyone has met up with each other.




Goals Check: How does getting to know our teammates help the team?



- Come back to this activity later in the season.
- When the music stops, have teammates share something they already know about the other.

Team Building  15'

HOW TO COACH

 Teammates learn to give one another **positive and constructive feedback**




1. Ask: If you were the coach, how would you give coaching corrections to a teammate struggling with a skill or drill? How would you stay positive and avoid hurting their feelings?
2. Provide an example. Have a few teammates execute a skill or drill and give them feedback.
3. Next, have the team practice giving feedback. Incorrectly execute a skill or drill. Have team members give you coaching corrections.



Goals Check: Why did we practice giving positive feedback?



- Ask students to share how they would feel if a fellow teammate gave them negative criticism (you can act this out, too).

Team Building  15'

NAME GAME

 Promote **connection** among teammates



1. Divide the team into groups and have them circle up.
2. Instruct teammates to pass the ball to anyone in the circle, but before doing so they must say the name of the person they are passing to.
3. Once team members have the hang of it, continue to add more balls into the circle for a challenge.



Goals Check: Why is it important to know everyone's name?



- **Note:** students may struggle with names at the beginning of the season. Instead of calling out some one else's name, have students say their own name when they receive the ball.




Problem Solving  15'

HUMAN KNOT

-  Learn to **communicate** with one another and **work together**
1. Everyone stands in a close circle, and grabs hands with two different people from across the circle.
 2. Without losing grip of anyone's hands, the team must untangle the knot they've created.
 3. Encourage everyone to share a method for untangling the knot and discuss any frustration that occurs.
-  **Goals Check:** What helped in getting untangled?
-  • If any teammates are visually impaired, have half of the team wear blindfolds.
• Have teammates with limited mobility sit in a chair/wheelchair. Teammates must untangle the knot with some teammates sitting.
• Have students hold on to pieces of string instead of each other's hands.
• **Bonus Challenge:** Try to complete the activity without talking.

Self-reflection  10'

POSITIVE SELF-TALK

-  Develop **self-confidence** and **reflect** on one's values
1. Huddle up and have every teammate go around and share one thing they did during the practice/day/week that they are proud of or something they are grateful for.
 - This could be anything related to sports, school, or home life.
 2. Pass a ball around. The teammate holding the ball shares what they are proud of or grateful for.
-  **Goals Check:** How did this activity make you feel? Why did we share what we are proud of?
-  • Create pairs where teammates discuss their reflections before sharing out.




Self-reflection  10'

APPRECIATION, APOLOGY, AHA

-  Encourage teammates to **reflect** on their **behavior** and how it affects the team
1. Gather teammates in a circle and ask them to share one or more of the following:
 - Appreciation- I'm so glad X helped me with...
 - Apology- I'm sorry I got angry when...
 - Aha (realization)- I realized I might have hurt X's feelings when I...
 2. Pass a ball around. The teammate holding the ball shares with the group.
-  **Goals Check:** Was this easy? difficult? How will this process make us a stronger team?
-  • Split team into small groups or pairs to ensure everyone has a chance to share and come back as a large group for final reflections.




Self-reflection  15'

POST-COMPETITION REFLECTION

-  Encourage teammates to consider how they **handle challenges** and **successes**
1. Discuss the previous competition, focusing on teammates' emotional experiences throughout.
 - How did you feel before, during, and after the game?
 - Were you excited? Nervous? Happy? Disappointed?
 - Did your emotions impact how you played or behaved?
 2. Encourage teammates to reflect on both personal and team experiences.
-  **Goals Check:** How could this type of reflection help outside of sports?
-  • **Leadership Opportunity:** Ask a Unified pair to lead this discussion.




Goal Setting  15'

GOAL BOARD

-  Team members set **SMART** (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, & time-bound) **goals**
1. Everyone comes up to a white board and writes down a goal they have for the team. This could be a short-term goal (for that practice or upcoming game) or a long-term goal (for the entire season).
 2. AND/OR: Pair up teammates and provide them each with a piece of paper/poster board. They write down and decorate a personalized goal board with their individual goals.
-  **Goals Check:** What is the point of displaying our goals?
-  • Hang up the personalized goal boards in the gym or in the locker room.
• Consider giving students prompts to help making goals.

Goal Setting  15'

3 STARS & A WISH

-  Identify **strengths** and **one goal** those strengths can help them achieve
1. Write down three "Stars"- things that they do well. This can be anything from running fast, to comforting team members when they're down.
 2. Come up with a "Wish" - or something that they want to work on.
 3. In pairs, discuss the connections between the Stars and Wishes - how can their strengths help them develop a new skill?
-  **Goals Check:** How are you going to work on your wish?
-  • Revisit this activity every few weeks to see if students' wishes have become stars; if so, have students pick a new wish.

Mindfulness

5'

STOP, BREATHE, REFLECT



Teammates learn to **manage emotions**



1. Teach teammates to handle anger or anxiety through breathing by instructing students to stop, take 3 deep breaths, and reflect on what they are feeling.
2. Have the team choose a word that will act as their reminder to think about their breathing and inspire them to stay calm.



Goals Check: When else might you use this technique?



- Encourage teammates to use the team word whenever they see their teammates getting stressed or worked up, within or outside sports.

Mindfulness

1'

RESET, RESTART



Teammates learn to **manage emotions and impulses**



1. When the team is having difficulty controlling themselves, call out "Reset!"
2. When heard, everyone stops what they're doing, and stands still for 3-5 seconds (max 10 seconds).
3. Then, call out "Restart!" The team can now move again.
4. Discuss why the team needed a reset and what they can do better in the future.



Goals Check: What do you think about while re-setting? How did it help?



- **Leadership Opportunity:** Set students as "Reset Captains" where they can determine and call out when the team needs a reset.
- Demonstrate the routine if students express difficulty with comprehending instructions.

Perseverance

5'

CHOOSE YOUR CHALLENGE



Teammates **persevere** through a task they find difficult and see their improvement



1. Ask teammates to identify a specific skill they find difficult.
2. Have teammates spend 5 minutes working on their chosen skill.



Goals Check: How did you feel working on your goal again and again?



- Have teammates set goals for improving the skill they chose.
- Return to this activity once a week and have teammates reflect on their progress.
- Pair teammates who struggle with the same skills or teammates who have different strengths and have them work with one another.

Respect for Others

2'

CHECK YOUR BUDDY



Understand others' **perspectives and feelings**



1. Divide the team into pairs and have teammates check in on one another throughout practice, asking how they are doing or how a drill is going.
2. Have team members monitor the emotional well-being of their buddy.
3. During practice, call "time-outs" to give teammates opportunities to check in on one another.



Goals Check: How can this teach us to see others from a new perspective?



- Everyone draws names from a hat and checks in on that teammate.
- Pair buddies for an entire week to help teammates bond with one another.

Respect for Others

7'

SPORTSMANSHIP CHEER



Teammates show **appreciation and respect for others**



1. As a team, create a post-competition cheer to thank the opposing team for their participation.
2. Set expectations for how the team should behave toward an opposing team following a competition, win or lose.
 - Consider how to be gracious hosts and guests.



Goals Check: What did we learn about respecting others?



- **Leadership Opportunity:** Before the game, name one player to oversee the cheer. It will be their responsibility to gather all the team members after the game and start the cheer.

Team Building

10'

SHOUT OUTS



Promote **connection** among team members



1. Gather teammates into a circle and ask everyone to share a positive comment about the player standing next to them.
2. Continue this in a round robin until everyone has given and received a shout out.
3. After everyone has shared, open the floor for teammates to state positive comments for the team as a whole.




Goals Check: When can you give shout outs outside of practice?



- Provide an example for the team by starting with your own shout out to a coach or a team member for their contributions or their positive behavior.

Team Building  10'

GRATITUDE WEB

 Team members see how **they each contribute to the team**


1. Get a ball of yarn and gather teammates in a circle.
2. Hand the ball of yarn to one teammate, ask them to hold on to a strand of it, throw the ball of yarn to another teammate of their choice, and express something that this teammate does well.
3. Repeat this process until everyone is holding onto the yarn, creating a web of yarn.
4. Discuss how everyone "doing something well" creates a strong and interconnected team.

 **Goals Check:** What did we learn about teamwork?


- Set a rule that no one can be thrown the ball of yarn more than once.

Problem Solving  15'


RECREATE A SCENARIO

 **Reflect** on successes and failures and **strategize** ways to improve.

1. Have teammates act out a scenario that occurred during a competition.
2. Discuss what went well and what could have gone better.
3. Next, teammates think of ways they could change/improve their playing during the scenario.
4. After, once again recreate the scenario, this time putting the team's new ideas into practice.

 **Goals Check:** Why did we recreate a past event? What did we learn?


- Acknowledge that there is room for improvement while also highlighting what the team did well.
- Recreate both positive and negative performances/scenarios.

Problem Solving  15'

PRACTICE PLAN

 Team members **analyze skills** that need work and **create a plan for improvement**


1. Task teammates with deciding what practice will look like for the day.
2. Ask teammates what they think they need to work on.
3. After, ask them to select drills/exercises that address what they need to work on.
4. Create a schedule for practice around the drills/exercises selected by the team.

 **Goals Check:** Why did you create the practice plan you did?


- **Note:** This activity works best once students have completed some smaller goal setting and self-reflection activities.

Self-reflection  10'


SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

 **Recognize** good technique and reflect on one's own technique for areas of **improvement**


1. Explain and/or demonstrate how a highly skilled player, such as a professional athlete, would perform a drill, skill, or play.
2. Ask: What do we do as a team? What do you do as an individual?
3. Follow up: What do we need to work on? How can we improve?
4. Everyone tries to complete the drill, skill, or play to the best of their ability.

 **Goals Check:** What did you learn about your own skills? How will this help you in the future?


- Encourage teammates to reflect on both personal experiences and experiences as a team.
- Demonstrate the skill/drill yourself or play a video clip.

Goal Setting  10'

COMMON GOAL

 Teammates work together to achieve **short-term goals**


1. While executing a drill, set a goal for the team to meet before moving on to a different part of practice. For example, the team must complete 5 passes.
2. Continue the drill until the goal is achieved.

 **Goals Check:** Why did we work on this goal until we achieved it?


- Ensure that the goal you're setting is achievable for everyone.
- Next time, make the goal slightly harder to complete.
- **Leadership Opportunity:** Ask a student to decide the goal they want the team to reach.

Mindfulness  10'

SLOW-MO MOVEMENT

 Promote **self-regulation** and **stress management**

1. Complete a movement (walking, stretching) in slow motion, moving as slowly as possible.
2. Team members pay attention to their body (head, arms, legs, and feet) as they move.
3. Teammates must match their movement with their breathing, one breath in and out per movement.


 **Goals Check:** What did you think about? Did you ever lose focus?

- Make the movement small, like clapping and unclapping one's hands, so teammates with limited mobility can participate.
- Incorporate this activity into your warm-up at practices and games.
- Try this activity when teammates seem frustrated with a drill.

Perseverance

15'

LAST ONE BEST ONE

 Push through fatigue and remain focused at the end of a long day



1. Introduce a difficult drill at the very end of practice when teammates are tired and starting to lose focus.
2. Explain that, despite being tired, teammates can execute this last drill well. For example, teammates run an extra lap at the end of track practice and try to make it their fastest time yet.



Goals Check: How did you feel during the drill? What did we learn about perseverance?



- **Leadership Opportunity:** Ask a student to decide the goal they want the team to reach.
- Ensure that the drill chosen meets every student's skill level.

Perseverance

12'

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES



Practice **never giving up**, even under challenging circumstances



1. Perform a routine skill/drill.
2. Introduce an obstacle like uneven teams (5 vs 7), a head start, prevention from using dominate hands or feet.
3. Give teammates a few minutes in groups to strategize how to face the obstacle.



Goals Check: How will we face challenges in the future?



- Introduce the activity by asking teammates to share a time in which they had to persevere.
- **Leadership Opportunity:** Create a "Rally Captain," a person in charge of vocally encouraging their teammates to persevere.

Perseverance

15'

YOU CAN DO IT!



Teammates **encourage** one another to **persevere**



1. Task teammates with a challenge: a difficult drill, pass, shot, or length to run.
2. Each teammate repeats the challenge until they have achieved it.
3. Once a teammate completes the task, it is their responsibility to cheer on others. They must support and rally their teammates as they continue the challenge.



Goals Check: How can we encourage our teammates more in the future?



- Make sure the challenge is achievable for all players.
- Do the activity in pairs or small groups.

Respect for Others

12'

SLOW YOUR ROLL



Prioritize **team play** and learn about the **meaningful involvement** of all teammates



1. Work on playing as a team instead of as an individual.
2. Limit the number of times a teammate can touch the ball, shoot, score, or how fast they can run (For example, every teammate must touch the ball before anyone can try to score).



Goals Check: What did we learn about playing as a team?



- Prioritize passing and ensuring everyone gets a chance to shoot and score.
- **Leadership Opportunity:** Assign teammates to oversee possessions and scoring and direct others on who to get the ball to.

Team Building

10'

PEER COACHING



Learn how to **work together** and **communicate** with others



1. In pairs or small groups, teammates coach each other on a specific skill or drill.
2. Have each member of the group or pair take turns correcting one another on execution and technique.



Goals Check: How can peer coaching make us a stronger team?



- **Note:** Prior to this activity, revisit the How to Coach Activity (giving positive and constructive feedback).
- Before the activity, provide examples of good coaching corrections- feedback that is helpful and complementary.

Problem Solving

10'

SILENT DRILLS



Learn the effects of **communication** on **problem solving**



1. During a drill, split the team into three groups.
2. All team members do the drill once in their respective teams.
3. Do the drill again, but this time team members communicate only by signing/motioning to each other.
4. Give each team 5 minutes to strategize how to complete the drill.



Goals Check: How did we address the challenges we faced?



- Once each team has completed their drills, discuss what they found difficult.
- Discuss how everyone responded to different communication styles.



GOALS CHECK

Following the completion of an activity card, ask your team members follow-up questions to highlight the social and emotional skills they are practicing

Understanding

- What did we do? Why did we do this activity?
- Was the activity hard? Easy? Why?
- What could you have done differently?
- What emotions did you experience while participating in the activity? Were they positive or negative? Was it ever hard to manage your emotions?
- How did you communicate with one another?
- What did you learn?

Application

- What are you going to do next time you feel that way?
- Do you ever feel that way outside of sports?
- How can we communicate better in the future, at practice, during a competition, or outside of sports?
- Did this activity remind you of any real-life situations? In or outside of sports?



COACHING TIPS

1. Draw parallels between SEL skills and the everyday lives of teammates.
2. Carry-out activities in small groups.
3. Pair share.
4. Use different strategies to group teammates so that everyone has an opportunity to work with each other.
5. Pass a ball around when answering questions.
6. Encourage every teammate to answer questions or say pass.
7. Assign leadership roles.
8. Have a teammate lead an entire activity with a small group or have a pair of teammates lead an activity with the whole team.
9. Instill a growth mindset- these activities are meant to help teammates learn and grow.
10. Use visuals (e.g. writing on posters or whiteboards).
11. For those who have trouble communicating, adjust the language you and teammates are using or use picture cards.
12. Implement "time-outs" where you briefly discuss how an activity is going and what folks' next steps should be.
13. **Make these activities your own!** Rename and modify these activities with your players to integrate them into your team culture.

Appendix J: SEL Activity Card Implementation Overview

Based on both the observers' and coaches' logs, there were several factors that supported or interfered with implementation of each SEL Activity Card. These are noted below, along with adaptations and suggestions for future implementation.

Common Goal

Supports: This included having students work in small groups to come up with common goals, implementing the card at the end of practice, and using the card to implement drills that are most accessible for children.

Adaptations: Some of the adaptations that coaches made to this card included making long term goals and working toward them in practice, making one long term goal for each small group, or changing the goals check question, which helped the students reflect on the activity or the goals check questions were not asked at all.

Name Game

Supports: Aspects that worked well with this Activity Card included using it as a beginning activity, coaches modelling the activity, dividing team into multiple groups, using a ball or a javelin to pass while doing the activity, and using strategies like mixing up the student circle so they were not always next to the same person.

Adaptations: Coaches ensured participation of all students by asking those who finished participating to kneel so that others got a chance.

Sportsman Cheer

Supports: The coach altered the cheer and had the team practice it. The coach noted that making the cheer fun and then reflecting on the activity was helpful.

Adaptation: Instead of having students create a cheer, the coach handed out cut out hearts with positive affirmations and asked students to think about how they related to sportsmanship and how it would feel if another team said things like "you got it" to them at a meet. It was also observed that in some instances, the coach used a student as an example of poor sportsmanship (e.g., how would you feel if X yelled and swore at you, and you didn't know him). In another instance, the coach had only the seniors do the cheer.

Suggestions: Have students create a list of expectations for sportsmanship. Don't mention poor sportsmanship; laying out expectations more clearly on the cards and adding potential questions to get students brainstorming.

Overcoming Obstacles

Supports: The students were able to adapt the style of the game based on the skill level of the participants.

Team Rotation

Supports: The coach was equally engaged and took the opportunity to connect with students and learn more about them. Observers noted that the students were engaged despite showing low motivation at the beginning of the activity.

Interference: The rotation activity was hard and inaccessible for children with limited movement. Students found two groups rotating at the same time to be confusing.

Adaptations: One coach replaced clockwise/counterclockwise with "1, 2, 3... FREEZE!"

Suggestions: Having only one group rotate, including fun facts for athletes who have trouble communicating, asking coaches to model activity in the coaching tip card.

You Can Do It!

Supports: Coaches stated that it is helpful to implement this card when new events are being introduced. It is also versatile to complement any drill. According to the coaches, this activity helped build comradery amongst the team members.

Gratitude Web

Supports: The coach stated that large gym space was useful in implementing this Activity Card; Strategies like having the coach start the activity or model it for students helped comprehension of the activity. Some coaches shared that the use of yarn made the activity more engaging. The coaching tip for this Activity Card was identified to be helpful.

Interference: According to coaches, this activity can be challenging in large groups and takes a longer time to complete. It was noticed that some students had trouble staying engaged while waiting for their turn. Sometimes yarn balls fell under the web, and it was difficult to retrieve.

Suggestions: Coaches and observers suggested giving students time to think before beginning the activity. Dividing teams into smaller groups, assisting students who have trouble with communication, having the students reverse order to show gratitude towards the person they received from, and helping to put the ball of string back together, were all suggestions for aiding the implementation of this activity.

Last One, Best One

Supports: According to the coach, this activity was a great way to end on a high note. Reflecting on accomplishments at the end of practice really put the whole group in a good mood because they felt positively about themselves, the team, and their efforts. The coach shared that the collaboration between partners and athletes was ideal for the implementation of this card. It works well with practices/drills that are competitive.

Interference: The drill that was chosen in some teams was not accessible to all children as it had many obstacles and parts.

Reset, Restart

Supports: The coach shared that being in small groups helped with implementing this Activity Card. It was used during scrimmage and gathering the team in a circle also supported implementation. Practicing multiple times helped the students understand the activity and it was noticed that student engagement was increased when the leadership opportunity section of the card was implemented, as well as when coaches personally tried to engage each student.

Interference: The goals check question were either skipped or students were not given enough time to respond.

Adaptation: Coach asked a reflection question that was not in the card.

Silent Drill

Supports: Coach shared that having multiple coaches helped since some athletes needed direct coach support. Some of the techniques that supported implementation included repeating the instructions multiple times. During the goals check, the coach connected the outcome of this card (problem solving) to the previous week's card (perseverance).

Interference: The non-verbal communication and totally quiet groups may have been too tough for some athletes. This resulted in some groups completing the activity earlier than these two groups.

Suggestion: Add a "goals check" question on strategy and how that affected each team's performance.

Slow Your Roll

Supports: This Activity Card worked well with basketball because the coaches could explicitly limit the number of shots each student could take without having to interfere with the drill. It was also helpful to form smaller groups so that coaches could check in on groups.

Interferences: It was hard for students to keep track of who had already had their turn.

Peer Coaching

Supports: This worked well in the beginning of the season. Using field events as their small groups to peer coach was ideal for this Activity card. Combining this card with the Choose Your Challenge card supported implementation.

Interference: It was difficult to complete the goals check when the groups were spread apart. When two SEL Activity Cards were combined, the content on each card was not executed completely. It was noticed that not all students gave feedback to teammates. When feedback was given, it was very generalized and not specific towards an actual drill.

Adaptations: The coaches placed one experienced player in each group to "teach" the others.

Suggestions: Emphasize in the instructions that partners and athletes should both be giving and receiving coaching corrections. Have coaches give examples of coaching corrections.

Appreciation, Apology, Aha

Supports: Coaches tried to connect the Activity Card to the game they played earlier. According to the coaches, doing this the day after a meet or game, or at the end of the week allowed for all students to have events to reflect on. The coaches shared that this Activity Card gave students an opportunity to talk about some of the accomplishments that were achieved and were able to engage emotionally. Some techniques that helped students were peer facilitation for participation in activity, giving students a minute after posing the activity for them to think of responses or discussing in pairs before sharing out in the larger group and coaches modelling the activity. It was also helpful that coaches gave individual attention to help some athletes who may have had trouble coming up with responses. The coach also restated the directions multiple times or rephrased them so that students were able to comprehend.

Suggestions: One of the coaches suggested giving more notice so students could think of responses or comments.

How to Coach and Check Your Buddy (implemented together)

Supports: Higher student engagement was observed when students were divided into smaller training groups and the structure of the practice corresponded well with the activity.

Interference: The Goals check was not implemented.

Suggestions: Provide instructions to coaches about how to implement two cards effectively.

Recreate a Scenario

Supports: Reinforcing the card at two drill stations helped with implementation. It was also observed that some of the Partners took the initiative in coaching and modeling.

Interferences: It was observed that not all Partners were specifically helping peers improve on technique and feedback.

Suggestions: Observers suggested emphasizing the instructions that partners and athletes should both be giving and receiving coaching corrections. Coaches may give examples of coaching corrections.

Practice Plan

Supports: Students were given wait - time; connecting it to previous games/lessons; large space; split the team into pairs; repeated the question and rephrased to encourage response; ensured participation by asking everyone to answer the question.

Interference: not a lot of discussion around things they wanted to improve, but more around what they wanted to do that day; students tend to team up with the same peers; no one monitored the group discussions; students engage in other activities during the activity; no clear instructions.

Suggestions: students come up with the plan in small groups.

Human Knot

Supports: Demonstrating the activity before doing it and connecting it to the practice helped comprehension of the activity. Another strategy that helped was using humor to motivate students to complete the task. Debriefing after the activity also worked well for this card.

Interference: There was some trouble untangling the knot due to the large size of the group.

Suggestions: It was suggested that the coaches allow more time for students to finish the activity.

Adaptations: Physical adaptations were made for a few students with physical impairments. In some cases, coaches did not have the students do an actual human knot. Instead, they used a large rope that was tied in a circle. Everyone held on to part of it and together as a team they made a few shapes. In other practices, due to COVID considerations, coaches did not think it was appropriate to have everyone holding hands. The goals check question was changed to "How did you feel working together with your teammates on a task?"

Goal Setting

Supports: Some of the strategies that worked for this card were writing down goals before discussing them, coaches modeling the activity which gave students time to think about their goals while stretching, and doing the activity in smaller group stations.

Interference: Some coaches did not conduct discussions about individual goals/group goals/short term goals/long term goals. Some athletes were unable to verbally respond or understand the goals check question.

Adaptation: Instead of having students write the goal down the coach had them share in their groups since writing is a challenge for some students.

One Step at a Time

Supports: Students were divided into pairs for the activity.

Interference: There was less engagement and reflection from students during goals check.

Adaptation: The card was flipped to make it more successful from the beginning. The coaches used bigger and lighter balls for those athletes who have never served before.

Shout-Outs

Supports: It helped that students stood in a circle while sharing. Other strategies that helped implementation were supporting students with difficulty sharing and using the card during the warm-up portion of the practice.

Adaptations: The activity was done in smaller groups.

Positive Self-Talk

Supports: Aspects that helped implementation were large space, repeating the question to prompt engagement, adapting the language to make it more accessible; using non-verbal feedback like nodding from coaches. The coaching tip that allows the students to share in pairs allowed almost every group to have a coach supporting them and sharing with them. Some coaches also had students share with a teammate, which supported the implementation.

Question of the Day

Supports: Aspects that helped implementation were large space for practice and reframing the goals check question to make it more accessible for students.

Interference: Some coaches asked three questions at once. Student engagement was low when only one coach was present.

Suggestions: Ask coaches to pick only one question.

Goal Board

Supports: Having an indoor practice really helped support the implementation of the card. Aspects that helped implementation included writing down goals first without being put on the spot, sharing goals and validating the goals, helping students brainstorm goals, ensuring everyone participated, and modelling goal setting. The very beginning of the season was a good time to implement this card. Having the students do this as a three-station rotation was ideal and supported the implementation of the card. It allowed students to work in small groups and gain better support from mentors and staff in discussing and representing a goal.

Interference: Students seemed hesitant to participate as it was the first day and some students did not engage in the activity. The description of the SEL goal (write a SMART Goal) was too challenging of a concept for many of the students.

Adaptation: The activity was split into two days as some students needed more time to think of goals. Coaches modified the SEL goal on this card to fit all students. Instead of describing a goal as a SMART goal they discussed goals and then revised them through peer help and ideas.

Be a Good Sport:

Supports: Activity was done in two groups which helped implementation. It was a good card to introduce at the beginning of the season. Doing the goal check in smaller groups helped implementation. Including a clarifying question for the whole group at the end of the activity also helped. Coaches talked about their experience playing with other teams and brought in examples from their experiences to the activity supported implementation.

Interference: Coaches used the card to call out specific behaviors at practice (e.g., not wanting to run). This could have felt like it was targeting the students who exhibited the behavior being referenced. There were many teams using the track and got in the way of each other. Some coaches did not want to demonstrate drills of poor behavior. This can be challenging for special education students to recognize and not mimic.

Suggestion: Remove providing/ modeling of examples of "being a poor sport/ team player". Keeping it positive and only asking for examples/ modeling of good sportsmanship is suggested.

Stop, Breathe, Reflect

Supports: This activity helped student engagement. Some coaches used a visualization strategy in this SEL activity and that supported the implementation of the activity card.

Interference: The reflection debrief question some coaches asked was "How did you feel?" and "How can you use this in other areas of your life?" which were challenging. It took a long time for student feedback and responses were only from partners.

Adaptation: Having students share out was an adaptation for the goal check.

Team Breathing

Adaptations: Some coaches shortened the breathing to between 1:30 and 2:00 minutes. In other cases, the students circle up and then face outwards, so they weren't distracted by others or felt like others were looking at them. Coaches also had students practice breathing in counts of 4 in and out before starting the 1 minute of mindful breathing.

Check Your Buddy

Adaptation: Some coaches paired the kids so everyone would be with someone they did not previously know, and the students were divided into stations.

3 Stars and a Wish

Support: Students discussed in small groups to support each other in writing their wishes and stars, which allowed them to support one another. The staff moved around to provide more support to students. Coaches used the example of recently completing a meet as an inspiration for student's stars and wishes.

Interference: The students may have had trouble hearing each other due to standing in a wide circle outside and a train passing loudly. The students weren't told that they were supposed to be connecting their stars or strengths to their wishes, or goals. Students had trouble answering the goals check question on the card.

Slow-Mo Movement

Supports: This card was completed in small groups of three to five students.

Interference: The goals check questions did not work well as students did not engage with the questions.

Adaptation: Coach led the cool down Slow-Mo Movement and prompted when to inhale & exhale.

Slow Your Roll

Support: This card was easy to implement into track drills and relay drills. The students liked working together instead of competing. According to some coaches, the goals check question also evoked some thoughtful responses.

Adaptation: Coaches were strategic in how they matched the students up and put students of similar speed and ability together so that they wouldn't have a hard time staying together.

Spot the Difference

Supports: The suggestion tip to demonstrate the activity helped show what the students were expected to do.

Interference: Some coaches tried to use this activity during the 4x100 Relay race. It was very spread out and they were unable to observe or witness many students engaging in proper relay hand offs.

Adaptations: Adaptations were made to the questions for the activity as well as the reflection question.

Focus of Play

Supports: Using this activity card with a scrimmage worked well. It was also helpful that the teammates could work together to decide how they should handle situations. Observers noted that the coach gave examples during introduction and time-outs. The coaches across schools modelled the activity for the students. After a game, it was helpful to review this card.

Interference: Another coach indicated that it was a tough concept for students with special needs. As one student put it, “you’re asking us to play hard and take it easy at the same time.” which the coach agreed with. For students who already struggle with social cues and acting appropriately, this could be a tough concept.

Adaptations: Some coaches did not agree with looking at the score for some students and preferred to focus on team play and what the team was doing. Sometimes athletes worried too much about what the other team was doing and lost focus on what the team needed to concentrate on.

Suggestion: Having examples on the card and adding in the coaching tip section to link the idea of sportsmanship to this activity (e.g., how do we practice sportsmanship through this activity).