AmeriCorps LEAP Initiative

Year 1 Evaluation Report

October 2017 - January 2018

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report reviews the Year 1 findings of a multi-year evaluation of the AmeriCorps Learning Early Achieves Potential (LEAP) initiative, administered through the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF) Early Childhood Development division. The LEAP initiative focuses on improving the social-emotional development of preschool children within SMIF's 20-county region of southern Minnesota to improve their school readiness by engaging AmeriCorps members (LEAP members). Throughout the school year, LEAP members interface with all children in the classroom, totaling almost 800 children through role modeling, skill-building, and instruction. Of those children, LEAP engages 20 full-time AmeriCorps members to work closely with 200 preschool children and families attending Head Start centers and other early childhood preschool programs who have been identified as falling in the gap of this school-readiness skillset.

The following report reviews the goals of the LEAP program, evaluation methodology, fidelity to the LEAP program, and opportunities for further development to enhance children's social-emotional learning (SEL) skills.

The SMIF Early Childhood Development division sought external evaluators to evaluate the AmeriCorps LEAP Program. SMIF contracted with an external evaluation firm, ACET, Inc., to provide evaluation services exploring program operations, implementation, and service delivery. The following report details evaluation activities from November 1, 2017, through January 31, 2018.

Key tasks for this project involved:

- A review of program materials;
- Four half-day preschool classroom site observations;
- Four interviews with preschool teachers from selected sites; and
- Four interviews with LEAP members from the selected sites.

Results were determined by identifying common themes from interviewees and site visit observations that align with the program's logic model and theory. Key findings include:

- The classroom observations demonstrated that all of the LEAP core strategies or tools were implemented, with direct intervention and modeling being the most common technique;
- Interviewed LEAP members and classroom teachers valued the LEAP program and linked children's growth in social and emotional skills to the LEAP program;
- Experience in the LEAP program seemed to strengthen the extent to which the LEAP member implemented the program;
- While all core strategies were observed, MindUp lesson implementation was inconsistent across sites;
- The lack of understanding about LEAP members' and teachers' roles interfered with the integration of SEL into the classroom;
- Building positive relationships is essential for success; and
- The value of the MindUp lesson implementation could be enhanced by improving the language and classroom activities to be age appropriate.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Developing SEL skills provides foundational building blocks for children's future success. Proper development also prepares children for school by reducing negative effects of risk factors, such as poverty and stress, that inhibit social and cognitive development. However, there is a wide gap in school readiness, particularly with regards to income inequality. Approximately 50% of children from low-income families enter school with the necessary and fundamental skills to be successful, or school ready, compared to 75% of children from higher-income families (Isaacs, 2012).[1] In addition, when exploring school readiness locally, approximately six in ten preschool children in Minnesota are not proficient in social development when entering kindergarten.[2]

The AmeriCorps LEAP initiative, administered through SMIF, strives to improve the social-emotional development of young children to improve school readiness for children. Guided by firsthand accounts from teachers and site supervisors, who report seeing an increase of dysregulated children in classrooms, the LEAP program works to increase children's social-emotional skills to produce both immediate- and long-term benefits to every child. These skills provide children with a foundational platform from which they can process their experiences, learn, and grow to increase academic and future success.

To address this growing concern, the LEAP program engages AmeriCorps members to work alongside classroom teachers during classroom periods throughout southern Minnesota. Working to reduce these gaps, LEAP members implement evidence-based strategies while incorporating various SEL skill-building tools and connected lessons to reduce risk factors and adverse childhood experiences that inhibit a child's development, school-readiness, and success. These include:

- Breathing/yoga exercises;
- Cue cards to learn emotions;
- MindUp lessons and activities;
- Modeling behaviors;
- Reading books with expanded SEL conversation; and
- Teachable moments/intervention.

> *"I just really like that language that they use. It brings so much more awareness to them, and awareness to their body, which I think helps create that empathy factor with the things around them."*
> *—Preschool teacher*

In an effort to determine the effectiveness of their LEAP program, SMIF contracted with ACET, Inc., to conduct a process evaluation as a first step to explore the program model, operations, implementation, and service delivery (see Appendix A for the methodology). Key findings from a review of the program follow.

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[1] Isaacs, J. B. (2012). Starting School at a Disadvantage: The School Readiness of Poor Children. The Social Genome Project. Center on Children and Families at Brookings.

[2] Minnesota Department of Education. (2013). Minnesota School Readiness Study: Developmental Assessment at Kindergarten Entrance Fall 2012. Roseville: Minnesota Department of Education.

FIDELITY

The process evaluation revealed that the LEAP core strategies and tools were utilized (see Appendix B) by all observed LEAP members. LEAP members' experience in the program appears to improve implementation in the classroom. In addition, both LEAP members and classroom teachers were excited about the work of the LEAP program and the program's positive impact on children.

The evaluation assessed program fidelity and alignment with the LEAP logic model through conducting four site observations and eight interviews of LEAP members and preschool teachers. While the evaluation sample is small, the results are strengthened because the classroom observations and interviews were aligned, revealing similar results and themes that provide insight into the application of SEL tools in the classroom and implementation of the program.

The LEAP logic model (see Appendix C) identifies six core strategies or tools in the LEAP program, all intended to strengthen children's SEL skills. All program strategies described in the LEAP logic model were observed in the four classrooms. The key elements include:

- Breathing/yoga exercises;
- Using cue cards to learn emotions;
- Implementing MindUp lessons;
- Reading books with expanded SEL conversation;
- Directly intervening during teachable moments; and
- Modeling behaviors.

Interviewees stressed the importance of each tool or strategy to enhance the effectiveness of the LEAP program. From the interviews and review of the program logic model and materials, the following findings were identified regarding fidelity of the LEAP program.

Intervention Strategies and Tools

Breathing. Breathing exercises were observed in all four classrooms and mentioned as being implemented each day with the children (see Table 1 in Appendix B). All LEAP members and teachers believed that the breathing exercises and tools helped students calm their bodies and focus their attention. LEAP members provided examples of the effectiveness of breathing. One LEAP member noted the importance of the breathing bottles in calming children:

> *The breathing bottles. The kids love those. I really like using them, because it's like, we need to take a break, and that's one of the tools that we offer for them to take a break, and more times than not, they want to use that because it's fun.*

> *Using the breath and using the tools that they've given, talking about the brain and the aspect of it, reiterating the verbiage like the being mindful and unmindful and things like that. Those are how, when you have those more difficult kids, or the at-risk kids, that's your toolbox.*

MindUp lessons. All LEAP members were observed using the MindUp lessons in the classrooms (see Table 1in Appendix B). The MindUp lessons were identified as helpful in giving LEAP members a guide to follow and resources to use to build SEL skills with their students. The following quote demonstrates the value LEAP members and teachers placed on using the lessons:

> *I think with having this MindUp (lessons) that we're doing this year, that helps out a lot. Because we read each lesson and then try to work on that lesson, and I think that's been working out really great with the kiddos. Before that we didn't really do the MindUp (lessons), so it was a kind of think of ideas on your own kind of deal.*

However, the extent of the MindUp implementation varied in the observed classrooms (see Table 1). Interviews suggested that implementation depends on several factors, including the working relationship between the LEAP member and the classroom teacher and the LEAP member's teaching experience and actual knowledge of the MindUp lessons.

Reading books with expanded SEL conversation. Reading books were utilized frequently in the classroom, most notably during small group sessions (see Table 1). LEAP members and teachers both echoed similar appreciation for the books used by LEAP members in helping build SEL skills. All LEAP members and preschool teachers spoke to the value of the books in connecting with children while also teaching SEL skills. As one interviewee shared:

> *And they like the books that we read that go along with it, because that just gives them another perspective to think of things.*

> *I think the books, the ABDO books, are awesome in building the school-to-home bridge…. [The children are] so proud to bring in that bookmark when they're done. It teaches a lot of self stuff, as well.*

Children receive the books in the classroom to take home to read with parents. Notes to parents and bookmarks for tracking reading are included with each book as incentives. LEAP members also utilize other incentives to encourage reading at home. While the reading books were identified as useful and a positive resource by all LEAP members and preschool teachers, it is yet unclear as to the extent to which these gift books are used within the homes.

Direct intervention. Direct intervention was the most commonly used strategy by LEAP members in working with children. Direct intervention is used to encourage children to use behaviors that support, rather than disrupt, the classroom to help self-sooth, control impulses, and regulate emotions during teachable moments. All LEAP members were observed interacting and reinforcing behaviors several times with individual children during the classroom period (see Table 1). Interviewed teachers explained that LEAP members directly intervene with children regularly throughout a classroom period. The direct intervention was highly valued by the interviewed teachers. All of the interviewed preschool teachers appreciated having another person in the classroom to interact and intervene with children. Teachers frequently spoke about how busy they are during a class period that they often missed children's reactions or could not stop instruction time to help a child. The teachers recognized that these missed

opportunities limited social-emotional skill-building. One teacher's reflection mirrored the experience of the other teachers:

> *The [LEAP member] has brought to my attention a few different things, like different students that maybe I wasn't even seeing.*

> *Just providing that guidance and support and that conversational ability to kind of pull the students in and get them engaged in whatever we have out.*

Modeling. LEAP members and teachers were observed modeling cooperative and positive social-emotional behaviors throughout the observed classroom period (see Table 1 in Appendix B). In particular, modeling was seen the most frequently during free play and during transition periods between classroom activities. LEAP members and teachers credited modeling with improving both the classroom environment but also to reinforce SEL skills throughout the class period. Being able to show behaviors and provide language for how children may be feeling was cited as a significant factor in seeing positive growth in children. Teachers and LEAP members spoke to the value they saw in modeling with children:

> *Extra encouragement along the way, modeling from another person, us being able to model with one another.*

> *Because you're not just telling them to do something.*

Pre-assessment and training materials. All LEAP members assessed the social and emotional developmental stages of each child during the beginning of the year. The assessments were then used by LEAP members to guide SEL skill-builidng in the classroom, particularly with identified children. The pre-assessments and training materials were used by all LEAP members to identify at-risk children in need of further one-on-one support. These assessments served as a critical learning tool for the LEAP members. Interviewees explained that the assessment helped the LEAP members learn what to watch for and be aware of when identifying and working with children in need of further SEL support. As one LEAP member conveyed:

> *So, I feel like it's just kind of watching and then using the assessments to kind of—if you're not sure about, like, certain ones, you can do the assessment to say, "Okay, this is where they need work and this is where they're okay."*

While the pre-assessment was helpful to LEAP members in identifying children in further need of SEL skill-building support, it is still unclear as to the extent to which the pre-assessments are used to guide instruction and classroom practices.

Successful Implementation Strategies

Many program strategies were noted by LEAP members as successful indicators for successful program implementation but were missing from the program's logic model and goals. Implementing these strategies was seen as successfully strengthening the utilization of program tools and strategies that are currently outlined in the program logic model. These included:

- Preschool and LEAP member recruitment;
- LEAP member orientation training (three days) on brain development and self-regulation;
- LEAP members being in the classroom for the first month of the program building relationships with children and teachers;
- Requiring LEAP members write monthly reflections on implementation progress;
- LEAP member monthly peer meetings and ongoing communication with one another; and
- The importance of SEL to school readiness to clarify LEAP program goals.

OPPORTUNITIES TO STRENGTHEN IMPLEMENTATION

Information from the interviews also revealed opportunities for further development of the LEAP program to assist in building SEL skills in children to improve school readiness. Several opportunities were identified by LEAP members and teachers.

Consistency of implementation. Implementation challenges have led some site teachers to allocate little time toward the MindUp lessons and SEL skill-building small-group time. Both LEAP members and teachers stressed how preschool teachers have a lot of material to cover in a short amount of time every day, which can result in decreasing the amount of time spent on SEL skill building. One LEAP member reflected that:

> *It's just, like, harder to implement or to, like, even try to do what you have to do and integrate it into their classroom.*

As a result, LEAP members reflected on how they are administering MindUp lesson material or SEL skill building inconsistently and differently across sites. As one LEAP member summarized:

> *There's a lot of inconsistency among all the sites…. Some members don't even get any time. Like, I get a station which is when I know a lot of members don't get any time at all, alone with any other students…otherwise they're having to, like, pull them from pre-choice and that's not effective, like, at all. Because they don't—first of all, they don't want to leave because all their friends are playing.*

To address this concern, many LEAP members and teachers suggested receiving more time to review the lessons to better understand it and strengthen implementation. As one summarized:

> *Maybe I wouldn't mind, like in the future, having a little more specific information about (MindUp lessons), how it would best serve her to teach it and how I could—if I could have that information ahead of time, on how to tie that into our specific day.*

Communicate protocols. Both preschool teachers and LEAP members voiced uncertainty regarding roles and expectations in the classroom. Preschool teachers mentioned that, especially initially, LEAP members and teachers were confused about their roles and expectations. Preschool teachers expressed interest in receiving further clarification about roles and expectations regarding supporting a national-service AmeriCorps LEAP member as well as the LEAP program goals than currently received. The teachers' quotes below exemplify the confusion.

> *And I think it was more like—it was left, kind of, up in the air as to exactly what role that person would fill besides the (lessons and tools) that she was going to teach.*

So, if—I guess if I had to say anything, the realistic expectations and be specific, pick three things, this is what I want. Two to three things because this is the little block of time you're getting in that two and a half hours, you don't get my whole two and a half hours, you have this little bit of time to get something done.

Similarly, LEAP members also expressed uncertainty as to their roles in the classroom. One LEAP member discussed how "*I just feel like [the training] was a lot of information. But I left not really knowing what I was going to be doing.*" Another LEAP member supported this by saying, "*The very first year that I was here, so, it would have been three years ago, there was just little guidance.*"

And so, maybe if there's something that we could do, like, before the school year started for us to like…meet with your teachers and just kind of…understand, like, what your role is. Because I feel like we just go to school and we're supposed to tell them, but at the beginning I wasn't even sure, so it was just a lot of uncertainty.

Incorporate training on teaching practices. LEAP members and preschool teachers repeatedly expressed interest in having LEAP members receive training on implementing the MindUp lessons. The LEAP members' comments below describe suggestions for enhancing the training:

Actually teaching the lesson, because some people don't have those skills…a lot of people that come into this, they've never worked with kids before. They don't know any of that type of terminology or knowledge base stuff.

The orientation was mostly about what the goal is, to help with social, emotional learning and why it's important…. So, I feel like it wasn't really helpful in preparing us for what we're going to be doing—or it wasn't really helpful in telling us how to do, how to help, it was just more the basis of why they want us to do it.

Continue to promote relationship-building. LEAP members and teachers frequently mentioned how important establishing relationships between each other, as well as with the children, is to the program's success. Interviewees explained that positive gains with children were seen by LEAP members and teachers after relationships were built, especially over the course of multiple years. Teachers expressed how the longer they worked with a LEAP member, the more they trusted the LEAP member to implement the lessons. With trust built the teacher was more inclined to allocate additional time to SEL skill-building. One LEAP member's comment reflects those of other interviewees:

But now with being in a program for three years I feel more comfortable and more like I can do things, and also by getting to know the teachers. It has also allowed me to do more.

Once [the LEAP member and teacher] built that relationship, I was able to help [the child] learn the four basic emotions. The happy, sad, scared, and mad. Once he learned those, he was able to communicate more about how he was feeling.

Revise MindUp lessons to be age appropriate. Most LEAP members and teachers shared concerns over the appropriateness of the MindUp lessons for preschool children. While many believed the concepts are age-appropriate, the language and terminlogiy used in the MindUp lessons seemed better suited for older children than preschool children. One LEAP member gave an example of how when teaching the concept of self talk, the LEAP member using the lesson language could not get the children to understand the concept after repeated attempts. Many LEAP members noted the difficulty in directly following the lessons. The quotes below exemplify the LEAP members' challenges with the lessons:

> *The MindUP (lessons have) been difficult for me….I find myself having to really, really go to the basic, basic of it.*

> *[The MindUp lessons] makes it difficult that it's more focused I think on older children. Some of the things or the examples of things that it has to do with the children, it's like, "Oh yeah, we're not going to be able to do that. That's not age appropriate."*

> *Maybe some more training on [teaching a lesson], or maybe a way that we could develop something where it is more preschool appropriate, as far as a LEAP team.*

CONCLUSION

This process evaluation found that all of the LEAP core strategies or tools outlined in the program's logic model were being implemented (see Table 1 in Appendix B). The most common strategy observed was direct intervention and modeling. Key strategies observed included:

- Breathing/yoga exercises;
- Using cue cards to learn emotions;
- Implementing MindUp lessons;
- Reading books with SEL conversation;
- Directly intervening during teachable moments; and
- Modeling behaviors.

Overall, many of the LEAP members and classroom teachers who were interviewed linked children's growth in social and emotional skills to the LEAP program. As one interviewee summarized:

> *I see them having conversations with each other, like if someone is not feeling good or if they're having a problem. They start coming to you and being like, so and so is crying. They're really mad.*

LEAP members and teachers identified a number of areas that could strengthen the program's implementation, including ensuring the consistency of SEL tool and activity use across classrooms, increasing the understanding of roles between LEAP members and teachers, continuing to emphasize building positive relationships between the LEAP member and teacher, as well as with children, and enhancing the MindUp lessons by modifying the language and classroom activities to be age appropriate.

To further strengthen the implementation of the LEAP program in classrooms, LEAP members and teachers identified many strategies. Most notably, this included time to build relationships in the classroom with both children and teachers. Relationship-building was recognized by both LEAP members and teachers as fostering trust and comfort with each other, as well as with children. These factors were viewed as important elements in achieving LEAP program goals.

Appendix A

METHODOLOGY

Purpose. This evaluation was the first stage of a three-part evaluation to explore the effectiveness of the LEAP model. The purpose of the Year 1 evaluation was to determine fidelity to the LEAP program's theory of change and implementation of program materials, as well as opportunities for further development of the program.

Research Questions. The following research questions guided the evaluation:

- What are the essential elements of the LEAP model?
- What SEL tools and strategies are being used by LEAP members?
- How are tools employed?
- How effective are tools in building SEL skills in children?

Data Analysis. Findings from collected data derive from four selected sites and eight interviews (four preschool teachers and four LEAP members) from 16 sites. Findings may not be a true representation across the entire LEAP program. Data for the current evaluation stage was collected during three phases:

Site observations. Four classroom sites were selected to be observed to gather data on utilization of identified SEL tools and materials by LEAP members during teachable moments in preschool classrooms as well as how LEAP members support preschool teachers. The preschool sites were selected that were believed to have the highest levels of fidelity to the LEAP program theory. Site visits were done for an entire classroom period of preschool children. See Appendix B for the observation summary. The observation protocol may be found in Appendix D.

Preschool teacher interviews. Interviews were conducted with preschool teachers at each of the four selected observation sites. Questions were asked regarding the preschool teacher's experiences with the LEAP program to identify potential areas for further development of the program. Interview questions may be found in Appendix F.

LEAP member interviews. Interviews were conducted with the LEAP members at each of the four selected observation sites. Questions were asked regarding the LEAP member's experiences with the program to also identify potential areas for further development of the program. Interview questions may be found in Appendix E

Notes from observation site visits were categorized by activities outlined in the LEAP program logic model and strategies used by LEAP members across sites for preschool classrooms. A thematic analysis was performed with interview responses to identify findings related to program fidelity and opportunities for further development of the LEAP program.

Appendix B

Site observations were conducted in LEAP classrooms to determine the level of fidelity to program theory and implementation of program tools in building SEL skills in preschoolers. The selected LEAP sites followed similar instruction sequences, incorporating free play time, structured lessons, and small-group work stations. Preschool teachers incorporated a variety of learning techniques, ranging from hands-on activities, songs, reading aloud, and reflection questions. Observation notes were made over the course of a whole classroom period. Notes taken focused on how LEAP members and preschool teachers were following the MindUp lessons and program theory of change. Table 1 shows a summary of the site observation notes, organized by program inputs and activities outlined in the program's logic model. The most common SEL tools and strategies observed included:

- Reading books with SEL conversation;
- breathing/yoga exercises;
- cue cards to learn emotions;
- emotional check-ins;
- find a buddy and read;
- greet children by name;
- MindUp lessons;
- modeling behaviors;
- positive feedback; and
- teachable moments/intervention.

Table 1. Site Observation Summary

Core Strategies	Site A	Site B	Site C	Site D	Comments
Core Strategies	X	X	X	X	• All 4 sites used the Core Practice, ranging from 1 to 5 times a day • Breaths ranged from 2 to 5 deep breaths with 2 sites incorporating yoga exercises • Breaths were taken at the beginning of class at 3 sites and during small-group sessions at 3 sites • All 4 sites used reading books throughout the class period, including during large group, small group, and free play
Direct Instruction/ Intervention	X	X	X	X	• LEAP members and teachers used modeling throughout the classroom period at all sites. Both LEAP members and teachers praised positive behaviors and consistently redirected children to engage in class and corrected negative behavior

					• During free time, LEAP members played with children and moved around the room to play 1:1 with certain children • Children respond positively and look up to LEAP members
Implement small-group instruction	X			X	• 1 site reviewed emotions during small group (happy, mad) and learned 2 new emotions (scared, surprised). The LEAP member explained the new emotions, why we get them, and how we know we are feeling them, using cue cards and examples. There were 3 small groups (4 to 5 children) lasting 15 minutes each
Implement MindUp lessons and activity materials	X	X	X	X	• 2 sites used bubbles-in-mouth and "eyes on me" to encourage mindful listening throughout the class • 1 site reviewed the senses and taught smelling to children, reading *Ferdinand* during small group • 1 site reviewed the lion and the brain and taught mindful vs. unmindful, using examples of each and having children choose whether the example was mindful vs. unmindful (5-minute, large-group session) • 1 site played "jack-in-the-box" and chimes to practice listening • 1 site sang a song that encouraged the use of gestures and facial expressions • 1 site sang a song about being a mindful listener • 1 site used a glitter bottle during free play
Class environment	X	X	X	X	• Posters portraying emotions were visible at all sites. 2 sites used an emotions check-in board at the beginning of class • 1 site displayed a poster on how to play together and how to calm your body • 1 site displayed a poster with the various parts of the brain

Appendix C

Logic Model

Problem	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes	Mid-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
The community problem that the program activities (interventions) are designed to address.	Resources that are necessary to deliver the program activities (interventions), including the number of locations/sites and number/type of AmeriCorps members.	The core activities that define the intervention or program model that members will implement or deliver, including duration, dosage and target population.	Direct products from program activities.	Changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes and opinions. These outcomes, if applicable to the program design, will almost always be measurable during the grant year.	Changes in behavior or action. Depending on program design, these outcomes may or may not be measurable during the grant year.	Changes in condition or status in life. Depending on program design, these outcomes may or may not be measurable during the grant year. Some programs, such as environmental or capacity-building programs, may measure changes in condition over a period as short as one year.
Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is a critical component of children's development. Many children – especially those from low-income households facing poverty, disadvantage and related stress – are exposed to life experiences that can be detrimental to their social and cognitive development, and thus limit their SEL skills. Once these children get to	16 early-education sites – Head Start and other programs serving disadvantaged children. 20 FTE LEAP Members Member observation and training in SEL skills and strategies. Supervision by 1 LEAP Director assisted by 1 Early Childhood Associate and 16 Site Supervisors	Students screened through a combination of member observations and teacher ratings with sound instruments (Teaching Strategies GOLD Creative Curriculum Assessment) Members use TACSEI and MindUP curricula tools to deliver 150 minutes of SEL support each week across 6 months. That support includes teaching, practicing and	200 preschool children begin services (ED20) 170 (85%) of the 200 preschool children complete their participation after 6 months (ED21) Members engage with 200 families to promote positive interactions via at-home reading activities (i.e. Reading Rocks!) 150 (75%) of 200 families will engage in at least four of six family reading and	160 (80%)of 200 preschool children receiving LEAP interventions will demonstrate growth toward meeting school readiness targets in social-emotional development on the Teaching Strategies GOLD Proficiency Assessment Scorecard (ED23). 150 (75%)of 200 parents report on a post-program family survey that the reading Rocks! book activities (e.g., 1:1 reading) in the home have	160 (80%) of 200 preschool children receiving LEAP interventions will demonstrate a decrease in oppositional, distracting and disruptive classroom behaviors, as evidenced by teacher and site supervisor survey feedback. As a result of LEAP members' efforts, teachers and site supervisors will report on a post-program survey that the learning environment	Preschool children served by LEAP members will leave their preschool programs socially and emotionally prepared for Kindergarten.

Logic Model

Problem	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes	Mid-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
preschool they are at a developmental disadvantage relative to their more affluent peers. Preschool teachers may not have the resources to provide focused, intentional support to develop children's SEL skills. Research shows that children's early development of SEL skills support their school readiness, transition to Kindergarten and academic performance well into adolescence.	Research-based SEL and child development curricula and tools (i.e., TACSEI and MindUP). Member SEL instruction provided for at least 20 minutes of 1:1 daily (80 minutes a week) and another 90 minutes of small group (2–3 children) instruction. 60 community volunteers. Federal, State, Local and Private Funding	developing skills needed to regulate emotions and behaviors; establish and sustain positive relationships; and gain confidence to participate cooperatively and constructively in group situations. In addition to direct instruction on social–emotional skills and coping strategies, members provide daily and consistent support in real–time (e.g., use of cue cards during play time, breath to calm bodies) to reinforce concepts from the curricula. Developmentally appropriate preschool books are gifted to children 6 x a year and sent home with related SEL activities to encourage families to read together and to increase high quality interactions between parents	bonding activities, as evidenced by Family Reading Logs. Members will plan 3–4 site Family Fun Nights and family service events. Members will recruit 60 community volunteers to assist in Family Fun Nights and family service events.	increased the frequency and quality of their interactions with their child.	improved for all children in the classroom.	

Logic Model

Problem	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes	Mid-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
		and their children.				

Appendix D

The following information is noted by evaluators during meetings and visits to be included in follow-up reports.

Internal Use Only	
Time In/Out:	Total # of children:
Date:	Age of children:
Location:	Topic(s):

1. **Who was present (member/child characteristics)?**

2. **What MindUp lesson material were used?**

    a. **What SEL skills were covered (include number of breathing times)?**

3. **What activities/strategies were done?**

4. **Interaction levels:**
   a. **LEAP member:**

b. Child:

c. Teacher:

5. **How did the member/teacher handle challenging behavior from children?**

6. What questions were asked?

Appendix E

SOUTHERN MINNESOTA INITIATIVE FOUNDATION
Collaborating for Regional Vitality

Hi, my name is _____. I work with ACET, Inc. as a program evaluator, contracted by the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation to assess the Learning Early Achieves Potential (LEAP) program to determine program fidelity and identify any potential areas that need further development to improve children's social-emotional skills. Thank you for agreeing to talk to me today. I would like to spend our time learning about your thoughts and experiences with the LEAP program. The information learned will help to improve this program in the future. With your permission, I would like to record this session. Your responses will be anonymous and combined with others who are interviewed. Your name will not be tied to your responses.

I would like to begin by thinking back to when you first decided to join this program.

1. Why did you decide to join this program?
   a. What were you hoping to gain by participating in this program?

I would like to now reflect on your experiences with the training session materials.

2. How did the orientation and monthly team meetings prepare you for working with children?
3. How did the training help you better understand children's social-emotional skills?
4. How has the training helped you establish and build positive relationships with children?
5. How did the training help you identify at-risk children/children in need of one-on-one support?
6. What else would you have liked covered during your training to better help you address the needs of your students?

I would like to now reflect on your experiences with the MindUp curriculum materials.

1. How did the MindUp curriculum materials prepare you for working with children?
   a. Please describe which materials were most helpful.
2. How, if any, did the curriculum materials help you better understand children's social-emotional skills?
   a. Did you follow the same lesson structure provided in the MindUp curriculum for every lesson? If no, why not?
   b. Did you do the Core Practice every day? If no, why not?
3. How have the MindUp curriculum materials helped you establish and build positive relationships with children?
4. Did the MindUp curriculum materials help you identify at-risk children/children in need of one-on-one support? How?
5. How did the MindUp curriculum materials help you handle behavioral misconducts/adverse experiences?
6. Were you able to stick to the curriculum materials while working with students?
   a. If so, how? If not, why not?
7. What made it difficult to follow the curriculum?

I would like to now reflect on children's social-emotional skills.
8.   What gains have you seen from your students?
9.   What other measures should be tracked?

I would like to conclude with your thoughts regarding the LEAP initiative in general.
10. What works well with the LEAP program to meet students' needs?
11. What would you change about your experience with this program?
12. What was challenging with the program?
     a.   Reporting? Curriculum? Communication? Teachers?
13. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your experience that will better inform the Foundation for continuous improvement of the LEAP initiative?

Appendix F

Hi, my name is _____. I work with ACET, Inc. as a program evaluator, contracted by the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation to assess the Learning Early Achieves Potential (LEAP) program. The LEAP program's goal is to determine program fidelity and identify any potential areas that need further development to improve children's social-emotional skills. Thank you for agreeing to talk to me today. I would like to spend our time learning about your thoughts and experiences with the LEAP program. The information learned will help to improve this program in the future. With your permission, I would like to record this session. Your responses will be anonymous and combined with others who are interviewed. Your name will not be tied to your responses.

I would like to reflect on your experiences with the LEAP members and program.
1. How have the Americorps LEAP members helped establish and build positive relationships with children?
2. Were you prepared about the role of having an Americorps member in your classroom from the site supervisor? Please explain.
3. How does your partnership with a LEAP member help build SEL skills in students?
4. How, if any, is the LEAP member helping to improve the overall classroom environment?
5. How have you and your staff grown in capacity for identifying children who need SEL skill building due to involvement with the LEAP program?

I would like to now reflect on children's social-emotional skills.
6. What growth in SEL skills are you seeing from your students?
7. Are the SEL skills taught by LEAP members communicated clearly so you are aware of the measurements that are being tracked?
8. What intervention activities were particularly helpful for students to practice behaviors?

I would like to conclude with your thoughts regarding the LEAP initiative in general.
9. What else could the LEAP program provide that would assist you to meet students' needs?
10. What would you change about your experience with this program?
11. What was challenging with the program?
    a. Curriculum? Communication? Members?
12. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your experience?