“The research is clear: If you want to know whether a child is on a path toward graduating or dropping out, standardized test scores are not very useful. Far more telling is whether that child comes to school regularly, behaves in class and earns passing grades.”

—Washington Post, summarizing results from Early Warning Systems

**Academic Behaviors**

**Brief description:**
- This MyWays competency is defined as “going to school and going to class; participating fully; completing homework and projects; and managing time and resources.”
- Addressing this competency includes helping students:
  - Attend school and class regularly and avoid chronic absence. Small differences in attendance can have big impacts on engagement and grades.
  - Participate fully in instructional activities and class discussions, without behaving in ways disruptive to others and their own learning.
  - Complete homework and projects, managing out-of-school time and resources to complete courses and support academic achievement.
  - Note: “Virtually all other factors that affect school performance... exercise their effect through students’ academic behavior.” That is, academic behaviors need to be addressed not only through direct monitoring and intervention, but also by working on other factors, including mindsets, learning strategies, and responsibility.

**Where to look for ideas:**
- Early Warning Indicator systems (EWI or EWS) use real-time data to identify students who are off track and provide appropriate interventions, such as “check and connect,” and the use of near-peer mentors. These systems have been highly successful in identifying students at risk of falling behind or dropping out. Two leading examples include the following (see more in resources below):
  - Bob Balfanz and colleagues at The Everyone Graduates Center were among the first to show the predictive power of the ABCs (attendance, behavior, and classwork), and have used the approach in their Talent Development and Diplomas Now schools.
  - Brown University’s Annenberg Institute, Stanford’s Gardner Center, and the UChicago Consortium developed a College Readiness Indicator System (CRIS) that tracks academic behaviors (tenacity), coursework (preparedness), and college knowledge.
  - While acknowledging the great value of academic ABCs as a starting point, Karen Pittman mused early about Alternative ABCs (adding youth development indicators), leading to the creation of Ready by Design.
  - Early warning systems can also highlight learners who have multiple adverse childhood experiences (ACEs); for these students, trauma-informed strategies will likely improve results. For more, see Key Principle 3 in this report, Report 4, and the excellent Hechinger Report article on the use of such an approach in New Orleans. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) references trauma-informed strategies, and 20 states have implemented trauma-sensitive strategies.
  - For a broader approach to improving Academic Behaviors, see the primers for the four other Habits of Success, which all contribute significantly to Academic Behaviors.

**Additional resources as food for thought:**
- See the academic behavior sections in UChicago Consortium’s Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners.
- AIR’s Early Warning Systems in Education website features a free online EWS tool, research, indicators, and other resources. Also, this US Department of Education Issue Brief covers key findings from a national survey on EWS use.

For more resources, see the MyWays website.
Self-Direction & Perseverance

“If we value independence, if we are disturbed by the growing conformity of knowledge, of values, of attitudes, which our present system induces, then we may wish to set up conditions of learning which make for uniqueness, for self-direction, and for self-initiated learning.”

– Psychologist Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*

**Brief description:**

- This MyWays competency is defined as “initiative and goal-setting; self-management; self-monitoring and flexibility; grit and tenacity; self-control.”

- Addressing this competency includes helping students:
  - Develop self-direction, including: initiative and goal-setting (curiosity and challenge-seeking); self-management (self-efficacy and executive functioning); self-monitoring and flexibility (progress-checking, reflection, seeking feedback, strategy-shifting, and responding to setbacks); and effective use of resources to pursue and attain goals (including appropriate help-seeking).
  - Cultivate perseverance, including: grit and tenacity, self-discipline, self-control, and resilience.
  - Note: the mindsets necessary for self-direction and perseverance are covered in the next competency. Research shows that the best way to influence perseverance is not directly but through positive mindsets and the development of effective learning strategies (see the following two primers).

**Where to look for ideas:**

- **On self-direction:** This FSG report on *Self-Directed Learning at Summit Public Schools* outlines roles for students and adults, as well as five important lessons learned at Summit. Self-direction is a major driver of other schools as well; see, for example, Vista Unified’s personal learning pathway (see 5m video) and Thrive Public Schools’ student-led conferences.

- **On self-direction and “student agency”:** Recent work on agency provides a rich take on self-direction. See this exploration of how the Aveson Charter Schools approach is founded on agency; the important work of Carnegie Foundation’s Student Agency Improvement Community; and the models and copious links provided in Next Generation Learning Challenges’ excellent set of blogs on “How Next Gen Learning Can Support Student Agency,” parts one and two; as well as WestEd’s “Student Agency in Learning and Assessment.”

- **On perseverance:** See Angela Duckworth’s Character Lab, which offers a *Growth Card* that features eight elements including grit, self-control, curiosity, and other factors related to this competency. One of the most high-profile models, Duckworth’s *Grit* has also attracted criticism; see Jal Mehta’s “The Problem with Grit” and this Slate article, “Is ‘Grit’ Really the Key to Success?”

- For an alternative approach to perseverance, see the Carnegie Foundation’s *Productive Persistence Network*, which focuses on improving developmental math (see this outstanding 2m video). This approach harnesses learning strategies (skills) plus mindsets (tenacity) to build persistence.

- **On persistence:** see the persistence sections in UChicago Consortium’s *Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners* and the sections on self-regulation, self-awareness, and self-control in *Foundations for Young Adult Success*.

- **On self-direction:** See Report 8’s Practice Resources for the 4Cs box (items 5 and 6), which include rubrics and progressions on self-direction and agency; and Transforming Education’s *MESH Self-management Toolkit*.

- **On perseverance:** See Starr Sackstein’s “What Makes Struggle Productive?” and Edutopia’s *resource collection* on grit and perseverance.

**Additional resources as food for thought:**

**Leaders of Their Own Learning**

**FOR MORE RESOURCES,** see the *MyWays website.*
Positive Mindsets

“Learning that the brain is like a muscle that grows with effort motivates students to continue working hard to learn despite setbacks or early failures. But this message may lose its persuasive power if a student’s school relies largely either on competitive, one-shot summative assessments to evaluate her performance or on other similar practices that reinforce the value of natural ability over persistent work.”

— Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners

**Brief description:**

- This MyWays competency incorporates four mindsets:
  - “I belong in this learning community.” Those who feel they belong perceive themselves to be more competent and autonomous, and have a stronger sense of identity. A student’s sense of belonging has a strong impact on academic performance.
  - “My ability and competence grow with my effort.” Students who believe this are more likely to work hard and persist. Beliefs about intelligence and the reasons for success/failure are a bigger influence on school performance than is measured ability.
  - “I can succeed at this task.” Beliefs about the likelihood of completing a given task are a prerequisite for putting forth sustained effort.
  - “This work has value for me.” The degree to which students value an academic task strongly influences their perseverance and performance, and makes them more likely to connect with their own future goals.

- Mindsets are malleable at the individual level, but also strongly shaped by school and classroom context.

**Where to look for ideas:**

- Positive mindsets are a focus in whole-school SEL programs like Responsive Classroom and Turnaround for Children; the latter serves students facing poverty and other adversities.
- Carol Dweck’s work on growth mindset and her blended-learning mindset program Brainology is at Mindset Works. For recent evaluations and cautions, see her article “Growth mindset is on a firm foundation, but we’re still building the house.”
- Besides direct instruction on how growth and other mindsets work, positive mindsets are fostered by giving students supportive feedback on meaningful and challenging work. A sense of belonging is often addressed through advisories and with adult or near-peer mentors. See this NGLC blog by Sarah Luchs, which discusses joy at Valor Collegiate, growth mindset at Alpha Middle School, and mindfulness at Generation Schools Network.
- This Edweek article describes Mayerson Academy’s Thriving Learning Communities, which use the Happify app (created using the VIA Institute on Character’s 24 character strengths) to help students self-reflect as part of a broader character education program.
- InspirED, designed by teens, Facebook, and the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, offers a five-step process to empower students and educators, along with tools and resources.
- As researchers note, educators need to explore their own mindsets to successfully help their students. For more on this, see Key Principle 2 in this report.

**Additional resources as food for thought:**

- For more on the four mindsets listed to the left, see the reports on academic mindsets in the UChicago Consortium’s Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners.
- Also see the new Mindset Scholars Network’s “What We Know” summary; Transforming Education’s growth mindset toolkit; and Larry Ferlazzo’s resource overview, including links to great videos such as “Growth Mindset” (2m).
- For a broader set of 16 mindsets, including curiosity, humility, and pragmatism, see Ready by Design.

**For more resources, see the MyWays website.**
“Learning strategies... [are] part of a cycle of increased performance. Having strategies leads to persistence and engagement in the face of challenge, which leads to academic growth and achievement.”

—Summit Public Schools

“The concepts of learning through failure and the ability to iterate and evolve were central. The materials we used in this traditional wooden boatbuilding process provide their own feedback loop. The construction techniques inherent to this type of construction — 10 planks to hand on each side of the boat, and 40 frames to hold the shape together — provide the student builder the opportunity to participate in a process, make mistakes, and improve in the next round.

—Brett Hart, Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory

**Brief description:**

- This MyWays competency is defined as “study skills and strategies, goal-setting, self-regulated learning, help-seeking, and metacognition.”
- Addressing this competency includes helping students: Learn study skills, processes, and strategies, including the ability to follow multiple steps and amend efforts that don’t work.

  - Engage in goal-setting for learning.
  - Develop the ability to self-regulate, including the enactment of executive functioning skills.
  - Seek help as necessary to progress in learning objectives.
  - Develop metacognition, including the ability to clearly explain why, how, and when to use learning strategies, and to reflect on one’s own progress.

**Where to look for ideas:**

- **Summit Public Schools** includes learning strategies as one of its five Habits of Success. Summit focuses on time management, note-taking, studying, and reading comprehension. The schools assess through badging, and students are required to show use of strategies successfully across contexts. For a candid assessment of how a leading next gen model is experimenting with this and other Habits of Success, see this blog by Summit’s Chief Academic Officer, Adam Carter.

- **Make it Stick** provides an excellent introduction to the most effective study strategies identified by learning science. The graphic to the right summarizes the key concepts. For a brief overview, see this review of key takeaways for teachers. See also references within this report series to strategies from Make it Stick, in the Levers part of Report 11 on learning design, and the shift to authenticity part of Report 12 on assessment design.

**Additional resources as food for thought:**

- The UChicago Consortium’s Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners has chapters and sections on learning strategies and study skills.
- **Foundations for Young Adult Success** has chapters and sections on learning strategies and study skills.
- **Neurologist and teacher Judy Willis’ series of Edutopia blogs on executive function, cognitive flexibility, and other brain-science informed strategies are instructive, as are Edutopia’s Resources on Learning and the Brain.**

**FOR MORE RESOURCES, see the MyWays website.**
Social Skills & Responsibility

“Emotional vulnerability (courage), for example, is essentially a state of open-heartedness that anyone can access in the right context. These skills are often about taking off armor and we quickly realize that children often have significantly less of this armor than do adults.”

—Daren Dickson, Valor Collegiate Academies

**Brief description:**

- This MyWays competency is defined as “interpersonal skills, empathy, cooperation, leadership, ethics, and ability to build social networks.”
- Addressing this competency includes helping students:
  - Progress on interpersonal skills, including assertion, empathy, perspective-taking, compassion, open-mindedness, cultural competency, and cooperative learning.
  - Develop responsibility and leadership abilities, including conscientiousness, delegation, negotiation, and humility.
  - Develop moral reasoning and understand and act on ethical considerations with integrity and courage.
  - Build social networks
- Equity/diversity considerations: given racial and gender disparity in patterns of disciplinary action, need to consider whether certain aspects of social skills are interpreted differently for different groups of students.

**Where to look for ideas:**

- Learn from early childhood and elementary educators, such as those described in the vignette on Sanborn NH’s work with Responsive Classroom CARES (Cooperation, Assertion, Responsibility, Empathy, and Self-control) in the box on page 2 of Report 7.
- Whole-school SEL programs like Responsive Classroom, Turnaround for Children (designed to serve students facing poverty and other adversities), Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and restorative justice and circles, all support social skills.
- Most studies of social skills come from SEL research; see the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) practitioner resources and its Collaborating Districts initiative, including work in Austin, Cleveland, Nashville, and Oakland.
- For other school models that emphasize SEL and social skills, including Grandview High School’s culture of kindness, see Getting Smart’s Increase Social Awareness: Action Steps from 4 Schools. See also the box earlier in this report on Valor Collegiate Academy’s Compass model, which has four dimensions ranged around True North: Noble Purpose, Sharp Mind, Big Heart, and Aligned Action.
- For views on whether technology can help, see Hechinger Report’s Can Virtual Reality “Teach” Empathy? (on Stanford’s Virtual Human Interaction Lab Empathy at Scale project), as well as the Building Assets, Reducing Risks (BARR) program, a relationship-centered SEL program that also uses tech.
- For ideas on leadership, see this Getting Smart blog on a New Tech Network school’s use of student ambassadors.
- For building social networks, see this Gen DIY blog on building networks and brand through collective impact.
- Out-of-school-time learning also offers rich opportunities for developing social and leadership skills. For one take, see Ready for Work? How Afterschool Programs Can Support Employability Through SEL.

**Additional resources as food for thought:**

- UChicago Consortium’s Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners has chapters and sections on social skills, including responsibility.
- For summaries of SEL work, see the Aspen Institute’s 2017 report on integrating SEL into college and career readiness, and Edutopia’s SEL series on how to implement, fund, and assess SEL at your school.
- Tools available for elements of SEL implementation include Transforming Education’s Social Awareness toolkit, which features a helpful video, strategies for the classroom, and a facilitator’s guide.

**For more resources, see the MyWays website.**
Endnotes


2 The Academic Behaviors competency description draws on treatments of academic behaviors in the UChicago Consortium noncognitive framework described in Camille Farrington, Mellissa Roderick, Elaine Allensworth, Jenny Nagaoka, Tasha Seneca Keyes, David W. Johnson, and Nicole O. Beechum, *Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners: The role of noncognitive factors in shaping school performance: a critical literature review*, 2012, from which we adapted the MyWays Habits of Success, as well as in the Johns Hopkins Everyone Graduates Center’s *work on ABCs* and the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, Annenberg Institute for School Reform, and UChicago Consortium’s *College Readiness Indicator System (CRIS) Resources*, 2014.


5 The Self-Direction & Perseverance competency description was developed as follows. The *self-direction* competency description draws on: the definition of self-direction in Stephanie Krauss, Karen Pitman, and Caitlin Johnson, *Ready by Design: The Art (and Science) of Youth Readiness*, The Youth Investment Forum, 2016; Summit Public Schools’ elements of self-directed learning discussed in FSG’s *Self-Directed Learning at Summit Public Schools, 2014*; the self-management skills element of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)’s five-part framework; and Catalina Foothills School District’s *Self-Direction Rubric*. The *perseverance* competency description draws on the research the UChicago Consortium’s noncognitive framework in Farrington, et al., *Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners* framework (from which we adapted Habits of Success); the sections on resilience in Fadel, Bialik, and Trilling’s *Four-Dimensional Education*, and other sources.


7 The Positive Mindsets competency description draws on the research behind the UChicago Consortium’s noncognitive framework in Farrington, et al., *Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners* (from which we adapted Habits of Success), as well as other sources.


12 The Social Skills & Responsibility competency description draws on the research behind the UChicago Consortium’s noncognitive framework in Farrington, et al., *Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners* (from which we adapted Habits of Success); the self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationships skills elements of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)’s five-part framework; and on the self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills in Fadel, Bialik, and Trilling, *Four-Dimensional Education*.