

Building a Youth-Led Oral History
Project on Socio-Emotional Well-Being

Elevating Student

Voices



Designing a Youth- Led Oral History Project

- Agenda
 - + Go Over Data
 - + Redesign the Script
 - + Come to Consensus on Ethics & Confidentiality
 - + Oral History Training
 - + Choose a Trusted Partner
 - + Conduct Oral Histories
 - + Analyze Findings

"Bad Draft" of Fall 2023 SEL 8th Grade Oral History Script

Hi, my name is _____. I'm going to ask you a few questions about yourself. **You don't have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable or don't relate to you. These interviews are anonymous meaning nothing you say will be tied to you.** This information will be used to make the school a better place for all students. Today is (DATE). Can you please say your full name and preferred pronouns?

1. How do you want to be seen by others?
 - a. What about yourself do you wish people knew about you?
2. Is there an animal you feel represents your personality now? Why?
 - a. What about when you were younger? Why?
 - b. Is there a different animal you'd like to represent your personality as you grow older?
3. Do you find yourself challenged in school academically? If so, how?
 - a. Does school ever cause you to stress out? If so, how?
4. Do you find yourself challenged socially at school? If so, how?
5. Do you feel comfortable in the S2 community? Why or why not?
 - a. Do you look forward to coming to school most days? Why or why not?
6. If you had a problem at school, who do you go to for help?
 - a. What would it take for you to have more trust in the adults at the school?
7. How do you think COVID affects how you see the world?
 - a. How did the pandemic impact your social life?
8. What parts of your identity (ethnicity, sexuality, etc.) are you proud of?
 - a. Do you ever feel like you're treated unfairly because of who you are?
9. Everyone is a little worried about something. What things are you worried about?
 - a. What helps you overcome your worries?
10. What do you hope changes for you before high school?
 - a. What do you hope stays the same?
 - b. Who do you want to be when you're done with school?



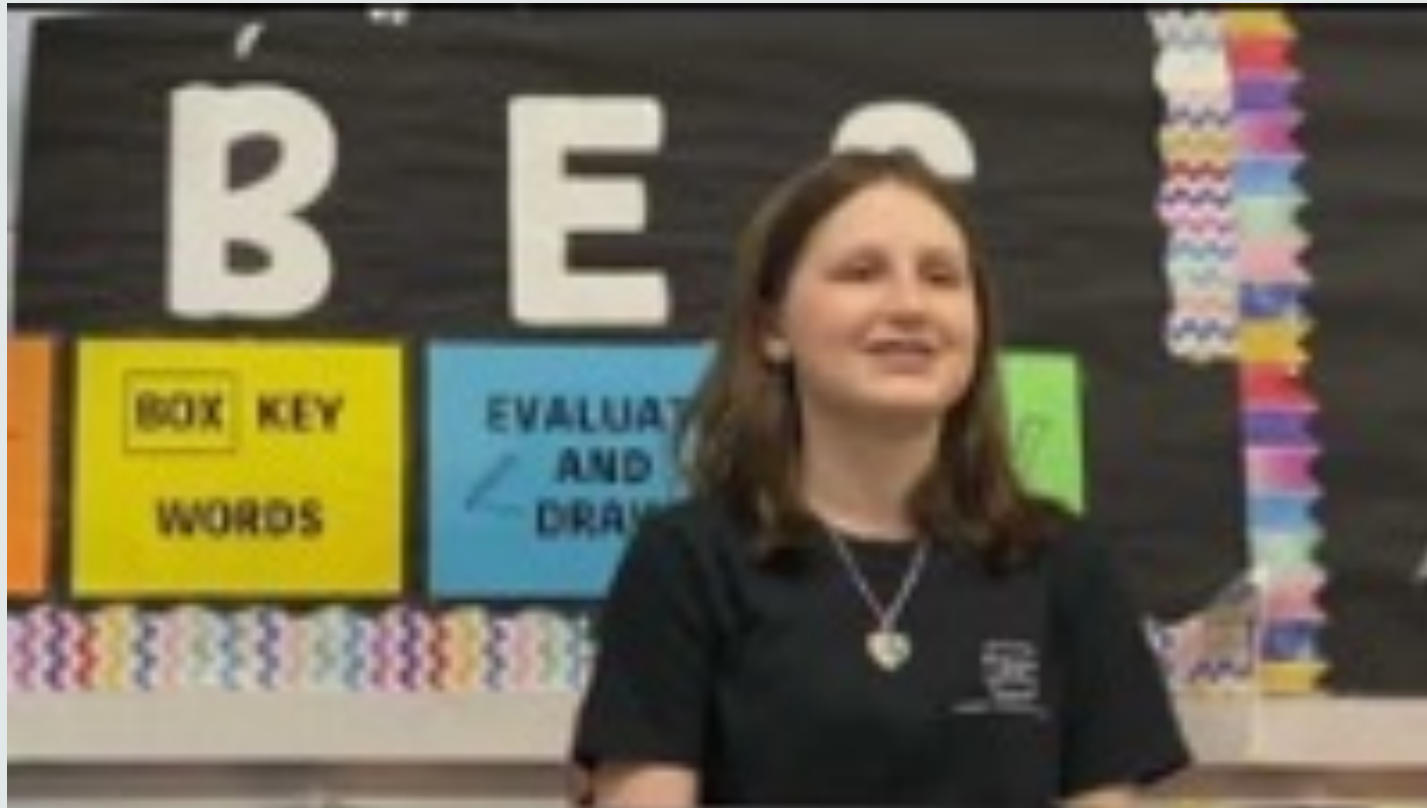


Achieving NY State and NYC SEL Standards

- Sense of Community
- Trust in Adults
- Coping with Anxieties
- Understanding Present Self
- Optimism for Future Self



Elevating Student Voices Presentation





Experiencing A Community of Care


“I feel comfortable in the space... I have a good relationship with the teachers and was able to be myself..”

“If you're sad or something they will notice right away and ask what's wrong.”

“When I first got to S2 everyone was speaking Spanish. I was like 'Everyone is speaking Spanish' this is where I belong.”

“When I first came to this school, when I saw people talking about their gender and sexuality more, I got more comfortable.”





A seventh grader, who stated in Spring 2022, "I talked to Ms. Melendez.... In elementary school I never [talked to anybody]," explained in the Fall of that same year, "Since [Ms. Melendez] left I don't go to anybody. Maybe I'll write my feelings in my notebook or something, so maybe myself."

Losing Trusted Adults

"I feel like the leaving adult should talk to the students beforehand."



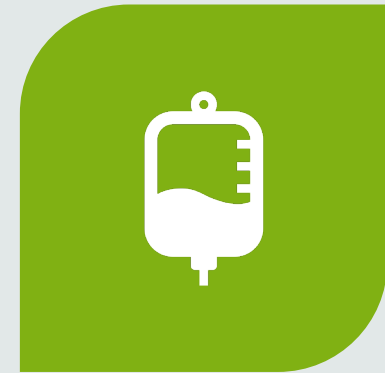
Patterns of Anxiety



SOCIAL



ACADEMIC



COVID-19



Academic Anxieties

"My grandma tells me I need to do good in life so that when she talks about me, she can say how successful I am. When I think about giving up, I think about her and how happy she would be. The opportunity she didn't have.... I think about her and I keep going."

"Yeah, my family gets mad when I don't do well even if I tried my best because they want me to be a person who gets 90s and 100s."

"My mom doesn't really care."



Becoming Mature

Learners

"I feel like I need to work on myself sometimes... In middle school you have to be really on task, in elementary school it didn't really impact you. Middle school is stricter."

"Seventh grade is very hard now. I feel like you have to be more independent now... And no one is going to do something for you...."

"Learn how to be more attentive of my stuff and procrastinate less."

"Take advantage of any opportunities I see."

⊕ "Focus more."

"What's an Animal You Hope to Evolve Into As You Get Older?"

"Beavers go out and build their houses all by themselves. I want to be like that, building knowledge."

"A rabbit... Paying extra attention to the teacher and not talking."

Standardized Test Anxiety

"I have extreme anxiety about [the state tests]. I will wake up the night before and not go to sleep."

"[The state tests are] highly stressful."

"I feel like it's unnecessary to take them every year because if someone gets a bad grade on the state test it doesn't mean they're less smart than anybody who didn't. That's because when taking a test that's seen as such a serious and important thing, they get more anxious and stressed that causes them to miss questions that they probably would have known if the state test wasn't seen as such a big deal."

"I feel like it's crap. I feel like we shouldn't be taking it. I just feel like it's not worth it."



Seeking Help From S2 Staff

"I get confused, but ask for help."

"When I'm confused, I ask a lot."

"I ask friends for help or the teachers...."



COVID-Related

Anxieties

“My mom was working in the medical field. They would go to her if they had COVID so I was worried.”

"My mom says I shouldn't worry about family health, but I do worry."

For recently arrived immigrant students, the struggles of cramped quarters and digital learning proved even starker. An immigrant youth explained that during COVID, "The house was not good for the whole family. It was really hard [to participate in remote learning] because I was still learning English and my family couldn't help me because they didn't know English at all.... There was no space for the whole family."





Initial Difficulty

Making Friends

“I don't really know many people and some people are really intimidating to talk to.”

“I'm not going to try to interact with anyone and if they try to interact with me it's just going to be extremely awkward.”

“I can sometimes feel weird about if I'm going to get rejected by [friends].”



“Friends [would] eventually think I'm uncool.”

“I worry if my friends don't want to be friends with me anymore.”

Fear of Losing Friends

“Being left out, or just forgotten.”

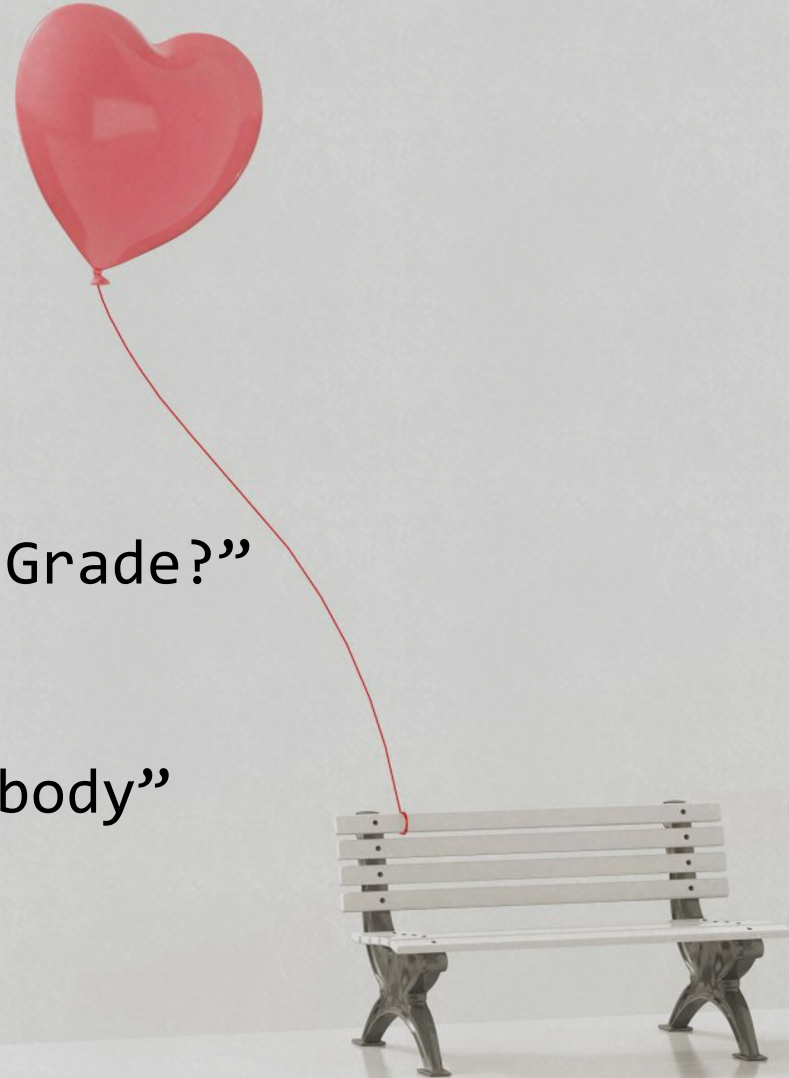
“That people would get distant from me.”



Loving Self

“What Do You Want to Be The Same in 8th Grade?”

- “My personality and how I identify.”
- “My personality and my love for everybody”
- “My ability to help others”
- “Stay caring for people.”





“Is there an animal that you would like to represent your personality as you grow older?”

- “Tigers because they're brave and I want to be able to defend myself like they do.”
- “A lion because they're really fierce and not scared of anything, or if they are, they don't show it.”
- “Lions and Tigers are the type of animals that won't let other animals try to hurt them and they're very brave.”
- “The last time [Fall 2021] I said a bunny, but now I think a lion. I have to change to not be so kind to people.. And stand up for myself.”
- “Elephants as an animal are confident and can approach things the way they want to.”

Desires to be Fierce



Why This Project?

1. Why does it matter that you are involved in the research of your classmates?
2. What was it like to be interviewed by your peers?
3. Why should you have influence over your education?
4. What have you learned about yourself and your peers in this process?



I'm Not Alone

"I've learned that lots of people can relate to each other if we just share our experiences and be not judgmental."

"This process made me understand [my peers] more and my peers now can understand me better."

"I have learned that some of my peers have the same experiences as me which has helped me not feel crazy."

"I have learned that there are more people that can relate to my experiences going to school... It made me feel a part of something good... I had people relate to something that I might never have talked about if I didn't have this space."



Students Want to Be Heard

“It is important that we have an influence over our education because we are the ones that have to live our day-to-day lives from Monday to Friday going to school... When we get to share our opinions on our education it makes going to school more enjoyable.”

“If we don't like a teacher, or don't agree with something they are teaching us, we should be allowed to speak on it.”

“We should have influence over who teaches us because WE are the ones learning.”

“It's our perspectives on our learning, our view of the world, and [educators] can learn how to respond.”




Youth Leadership Makes Project

Possible

“We made jokes about things...we understand each other.”



“To get interviewed by my peer was a good experience getting to share some things with my interviewer. It felt nice being able to share with someone I was already familiar with... It made me feel like a celebrity getting questions all about my life.”



“It was very fun to be interviewed by my friend. I got to learn more about them on a more personal level and also got to see their experiences with the pandemic and school.”



An illustration of two stylized figures sitting at a small table. The figure on the left has reddish-brown hair and is wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and yellow pants. The figure on the right has blue hair and is wearing a yellow long-sleeved shirt and reddish-brown pants. A large blue speech bubble is positioned above them, containing several black scribbles that resemble a mix of letters and symbols. The background is dark grey with a white and black striped pattern in the top-left corner.

The Praxis of Oral History

Collecting, analyzing, and publishing youth-led participatory inquiries alters how young people come to understand their intellectual capacities as they gather, honor, and then become responsible for the testimonies of peers. We have seen ownership of the project by these youth who want to ensure their experience is justly represented.

