



ALIGNMENT CHART

Executive-Function Skills

- **Second Step® Early Learning**
- **Second Step® Elementary Digital Program**
- **Second Step® Middle School Digital Program**
- **Second Step® High School Digital Program**

About Second Step® Programs

Second Step programs for Early Learning through Grade 8 students are evidence-based, universal classroom programs designed to develop human skills, which can help increase students' school success and decrease problem behaviors.^{1,2} The programs help students learn how to cope with challenges, create positive relationships, and succeed both socially and academically. Skills are reviewed and expanded each year, gradually becoming more complex as students get older.

Second Step High School is a research-based program for Grades 9–12. It includes pathways with practices for school leaders and educators designed to help create a positive school climate, strengthen human skills, and encourage students to develop adaptive mindsets for navigating adolescence successfully. Supplemental classroom-based student activities reinforce skills students build from the schoolwide and educator practices and offer them further opportunities to learn and apply emerging human skills.

Introduction to Executive Functioning

Executive functioning refers to a set of cognitive processes essential for controlling behavior, achieving goals, and adapting to new situations. These skills are critical to academic achievement and personal development throughout childhood and adolescence. Research groups these skills into ten key areas: inhibitory control, working

memory, cognitive flexibility, planning and organization, task initiation, self-monitoring, emotional control, sustained attention, goal-directed persistence, and time management.³ A comprehensive educational program can support the development of executive-function skills by embedding them into classroom routines, problem-solving tasks, emotional learning, and goal-setting activities.

How Second Step® Programs Align with Executive-Function Skills

The following table demonstrates how Second Step programs spanning Early Learning through Grade 12 align with research-based executive-function skills. The program explicitly addresses many executive-function skills—such as emotional control, inhibitory control, working memory, and sustained attention—from Early Learning through Grade 12. Skills like planning and organization, self-monitoring, and goal-directed persistence are addressed with increasing depth in upper elementary and secondary grades. Some executive functions, such as task initiation and time management, are more implicitly embedded or may benefit from more explicit focus, especially in later grades. This alignment reflects a developmentally appropriate approach, with foundational executive-function skills scaffolded in the early years and more complex goal-setting and self-regulation strategies introduced as students mature.

1. Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development, 82*(1), 405–432. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x>

2. Taylor, R. D., Oberle, E., Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2017). Promoting positive youth development through school-based social and emotional learning interventions: A meta-analysis of follow-up effects. *Child Development, 88*(4), 1156–1171. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12864>

3. Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2011). *Building the brain's "air traffic control" system: How early experiences shape the development of executive function: Working paper no. 11*. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/How-Early-Experiences-Shape-the-Development-of-Executive-Function.pdf>

Alignment of Second Step® PreK-12 Programs and Executive-Function Skills

Executive-Function Skill	Grade Band				
	PreK	K-2	3-5	6-8	9-12
Inhibitory Control	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Working Memory	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Cognitive Flexibility	0.5	0.5	1.0	1.0	1.0
Planning and Organization	0.5	0.5	1.0	1.0	1.0
Task Initiation	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Self-Monitoring	0.5	0.5	1.0	1.0	1.0
Emotional Control	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Sustained Attention	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Goal-Directed Persistence	0.5	0.5	1.0	1.0	1.0
Time Management	0.0	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5

