



RESEARCH SUMMARY

Second Step® High School

| The program helps: | By teaching students to: |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivate a sense of social and school belonging so students feel accepted, respected, and known • Create learning conditions that build students' beliefs in their ability • Support students in taking ownership over their learning by providing opportunities for student choice and voice and student-centered learning • Develop students' stress-management and social skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and sustain healthy relationships at school and beyond • Overcome challenges and achieve personal and academic success • Build and apply their strengths and explore purposeful interests • Contribute to their individual well-being and the well-being of the school community |
| The program is designed to increase: | The program is designed to decrease: |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive school climate • Academic engagement • Positive relationships • Prosocial behavior • Academic perseverance • School safety • Psychological and physical well-being • Effective coping and stress-management skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absenteeism • Disciplinary and classroom management issues • Peer conflict • Peer rejection • Emotional and interpersonal stress |

Pathway 1: Belonging & Connection

• Feeling a sense of social belonging and connectedness is a fundamental human need¹ and an important contributor to students' school success.² Students feel a sense of belonging at school when they are known, accepted, respected, and supported by those in their school community.^{3,4} Students who feel a strong sense of belonging at school generally have better psychological well-being,⁵ emotional health,⁶ academic engagement and motivation,^{7,8} self-management and self-awareness skills,⁹ and academic performance,¹⁰ as well as lower absence and dropout rates.⁹

• This pathway's schoolwide practices are aimed at creating a welcoming and inclusive school climate that supports the development of warm, positive relationships between adults and adolescents. Educator practices provide opportunities for students and teachers to co-create a positive classroom culture and build strong teacher-student relationships by utilizing effective communication practices and opportunities for meaningful connection. Student activities further support belonging by providing opportunities for positive peer interactions and trust-building between students, and for explorations of key psychological concepts that influence belonging.

- Pathway 1: Belonging & Connection is designed to help students develop a sense of social and school belonging so they'll think, "I belong here."

Pathway 2: Confidence & Capability

- The learning experiences in this pathway are designed to create conditions that build students' beliefs in their ability to achieve outcomes and succeed in school and life. Confidence refers to students' judgments of their self-worth, while capability refers to their judgments about their abilities.¹¹ Both beliefs are instrumental in helping students achieve personal, social, and academic goals, stay resilient in the face of challenges, and develop adaptive approaches to learning such as a growth mindset and a mastery-goal orientation.^{12,13} Adolescents' capability beliefs are positively associated with key social-emotional competencies including prosocial behavior,¹⁴ effective coping and problem-solving,¹⁵ current and later life satisfaction,¹⁶ and aspirations and career success.¹⁷
- This pathway's schoolwide practices explore varied routes to success, communicate high expectations for all students, and foster a shared belief in students' ability to improve with effort and support. Educator practices provide students with mastery learning experiences, which give students multiple opportunities to demonstrate understanding and competence. Educators also present students with clear, consistent, and attainable expectations, as well as constructive feedback, reinforcement, and support. These practices help students discover achievable paths to success and have confidence in their ability to be successful. Student activities provide additional targeted skill-building exercises for setting, monitoring, and achieving goals, and for navigating roadblocks.
- Pathway 2: Confidence & Capability is designed to strengthen students' confidence and give them ways to feel able to pursue personal and academic goals, so they'll say, "I can do it."

Pathway 3: Agency & Opportunity

- This pathway helps students build a sense of agency and ownership over their learning and development by giving them choice and voice, opportunities to influence their school experiences, and freedom to explore their

personal interests and optimal learning styles. Agency (also called autonomy) is especially important during adolescence as youth become more independent and self-directed.¹⁸ Research shows that when schools and learning experiences are structured in ways that honor adolescents' increasing needs for agency and independence, students generally have higher academic engagement and achievement;^{19,20} increased self-regulated learning, well-being, and vitality; more caring and prosocial behavior; and lower levels of bullying and problematic relationships.²¹

- This pathway's schoolwide practices provide opportunities to recognize students' and educators' unique contributions, support participation in student-led extracurricular activities, help students inform school improvement initiatives, and encourage educators to consider students' individual perspectives and needs. Educator practices use autonomy-supportive teaching practices that emphasize providing students with choice, relevance, rationale, and scaffolding to support successful student-led learning. By supporting students in identifying their strengths and providing opportunities to discover personally relevant interests, the student activities support healthy identity exploration and the search for purpose and meaning.
- Pathway 3: Agency & Opportunity provides students with choices and ways to own their learning, so they'll say, "I made it mine."

Pathway 4: Well-Being & Community

- The learning experiences in this pathway are designed to increase students' psychosocial well-being to better support themselves and their communities. Strong well-being and mental health are beneficial for everyone, but they may be especially important during high school when the adolescent brain is in a critical period of development. During this time, the brain is particularly malleable as foundations for future functioning are established.²² Adolescents with positive well-being at the beginning of high school generally have fewer relationship problems, lower levels of depression and anxiety, higher career satisfaction and job capability, and increased self-worth in adulthood compared to their less well-adjusted peers.²³ Being part of a community may provide powerful assets

related to psychosocial well-being, such as coping resources for effective stress management, emotional support, and a sense of connection and purpose.²⁴

- This pathway's schoolwide practices harness positive leadership skills to improve collective well-being by infusing recognition and appreciation throughout staff and student activities, creating much-needed opportunities for humor and joy, emphasizing respect for others, and celebrating community. Educator practices are designed to foster positive emotions in the classroom and help students build emotion-management skills, such as gratitude and positive self-talk, and social-awareness

skills like empathy and respect for diversity. Student activities provide additional opportunities to learn strategies for emotional well-being, such as mindfulness and self-compassion, and strategies to cultivate their relationships with others. These skills give students the tools to better care for themselves and other members of their school community.

- Pathway 4: Well-Being & Community is designed to create an understanding that each person is responsible for establishing individual and collective well-being, so students know, "What I do matters."

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