**The Big EIGHT**

**Preface:** The Big Eight project began with the premise that there is a small number of critical ‘life skills’ or personal attributes that students need to practice and that educators need to include as an essential part of learner development. ‘Life Skills’ improve access to learning, success in career, and formulate an individual’s engagement as a fictional member of a community.

**Design:** This project spans four Rural Alliance conferences.

1. February 2017: general brainstorming in table groups with the guiding question of what ‘life skills’ do students need to be successful in school, career, and as community members. Information was gathered via poster pages and assembled into common concepts. From this initial data-gathering process the Big Eight life skills emerged.
2. October 2017: the Big Eight life skills were annotated in table groups. Groups chose one of the eight and brainstormed attributes of that life skill and recorded their feedback via feedback sheets that were collected and examined for common themes.
3. February 2018: Big Eight attributes were posted via poster pages around the conference hall with a timeline prompt to identify a general timeline for important activities. The assembled contributed ideas as individuals or groups concerning timelines for previously identified common themes. The poster pages were collected and assembled into a report.
4. October 2018: a Big Eight report provides a snap shot of the project and an accumulation of the input from conference attendees from the previous three conferences. While these results are not inclusive or complete, they do provide a general identification of attributes of the identified life skills. This report represents a beginning of the discussion, not a final report.

**Big Eight Life Skills Attributes and Timeline**

1. **Communication: What does verbal communication look like in a P-12 system?**

P 12

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1. Early Education: Show and Tell, Question and Answer, and Rephrasing what was said.
2. Socratic Seminar
3. Active Listening (coaching and practice)
4. Practicing Communication Without Words
5. Philosophical Chairs
6. Costa’s Levels of Thinking/Inquiry
7. **Leadership: What does leadership development/opportunity look like in a P-12 system?**

P 12

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1. In Class Roles, School roles/Jobs (announcer).
2. K-6 Camps, Leadership Assemblies, Empathetic Stories.
3. K-6 Student Council with Student Voice in Decisions.
4. Reading Buddy Program
5. Internships
6. Extracurricular sports, clubs, and activities.
7. 6-9 Leadership Camps and Assemblies
8. Project-based Experiences ( i.e. Senior Projects)
9. ASB: Leadership of Peers/collaboration/outreach. Emphasis inclusion from diversity within the school (i.e. all socio-economic levels) and ethics of leadership.
10. Leadership Camps and Assemblies.
11. **Problem Solving: What does problem-solving and inquiry look like in a P-12 system?**

P 12

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1. Creating an atmosphere of Rick-taking; No questions are stupid, etc.
2. Collaborative, active, project-based learning with teachers acting as facilitators more than instructors.
3. Partnerships (collaborative learning).
4. Research Opportunities - defining questions, finding evidence, making conclusions.
5. Opportunities for Mistakes.
6. Word Problems.
7. Listening Exercises/Nonjudgmental.
8. Mediation Training and Practice.
9. Identify Conflict.
10. **Emotional Stability: What does empathy, self-confidence, and self-control look like in a P-12 system?**

P 12

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1. Empathy - emotional recognition.
2. Kindness.
3. Self-monitoring (I need a timeout, countdown, breathe).
4. Adults Model all attributes (PBIS, MTSS, AVID, Restorative Practices)
5. Acceptance (comfortable in own skin).
6. Leadership Basics: student jobs, ASB starts, positive habit building, listening skills, goal-setting.
7. Grit
8. Relationships, acceptance, sense of community, team-building, ASB Goal-setting (support for future goals), creative challenges.
9. Goal-setting, self-assessing (identify strengths and weaknesses), forward thinking, create culture, and celebrate differences.
10. Growth Mindset (praise effort)
11. **Technology User: What does the development of a user of technology look like in a P-12 system?**

P 12

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1. Technology Literacy/Information Literacy.
2. Exposure to Age/Grade Level Technologies.
3. Conducting research appropriately online.
4. Online bullying/resilience.
5. Recognize authentic sources (fake news, bias) in all curriculum areas.
6. Self-awareness and balance of time with and without technology.
7. Elementary coding.
8. High School programming.
9. Identify primary, secondary, and tertiary references and sources.
10. **Teamwork: What does teamwork and working in a team look like in a P-12 system?**

P 12

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1. Project-based learning.
2. Cooperative learning.
3. Philosophical Chairs.
4. Socratic Seminars.
5. Student ran programs (journalism, yearbook).
6. Athletics, Debate, Plays, and Band/Choir (required participation).
7. Open, honest communication/eliminate fear of mild confrontation.
8. Listening/Nonjudgmental activities.
9. Student leadership activities/camps/leadership training in how to lead and be in a team.
10. Emphasize sharing and caring.
11. **Resiliency/Grit: What does resiliency/grit training look like in a P-12 system?**

P 12

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1. Family and Community Engagement (i.e. anecdotes/stories/examples)
2. Focus on Strengths and Weaknesses.
3. Immersion in Mindset Training (away from “I’m not good at . . .”)
4. Participating in dual credit option.
5. College-level coursework in high school.
6. Complete online courses.
7. Class discussion/presentation/sharing of how a student made it through a difficult assignment, athletic event, math problem, or social difficulty.
8. **Goal-setting and Self-advocacy: What does goal-setting and self-advocacy look like in a P-12 system?**

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1. Real world experience to identify passion and interests.
2. Written plan for goal-setting.
3. High School and Beyond Plan - beginning 6th and 7th Grades.
4. Student-led conferences.
5. Goals for assessing feedback.
6. Ability to talk to teachers effectively about strengths, ways of learning, interests, careers, etc.
7. Solving conflict issues between students.
8. Identifying short-term and long-term goals.
9. Advisory activities.
10. Circle/Rug/Center time for student conversations.
11. Personal Portfolio

**Implications:**

1. The literature and common vernacular for Life Skills is the term ‘Soft Skills’. The opposite of ‘soft skills is hard skills; however, a greater emphasis is being placed on life skills from students in the P-12 system to college education and business and industry training.
2. The focus of P-12 systems is to balance expected student outcomes between content (hard skills and knowledge), career planning and community engagement, and life skills. Furthermore, educational institutions should place these student outcomes at the center of decisions concerning instruction, staffing, curriculum, and fiscal activities.
3. “Soft skills [life skills] are very critical in the workplace today. These skills mirror the ability to communicate and interact with others. They are unique because they emphasize on action. They have become indispensable for every person in the present context. This paper deals with the significance of soft skills for getting a job and for further promotions and progress in the workplace. People who are flexible and have the zeal to understand and learn new technologies are sought after by organizations as part of their growth process. The need to provide training in soft skills is seriously being considered today. This study is an attempt to find out the importance that middle to top level executives, who are involved in recruiting employees, attach to soft skills.” (Deepa and Manisha, 2013)
4. “Achievement tests miss, or perhaps more accurately, do not adequately capture, soft skills—personality traits, goals, motivations, and preferences that are valued in the labor market, in school, and in many other domains. The larger message of this paper is that soft skills predict success in life, that they causally produce that success, and that programs that enhance soft skills have an important place in an effective portfolio of public policies.” (Heckman, 2012)
5. This report is only a beginning of the conversation and is intended to ignite discussions concerning missing elements, disagreements concerning timing of activities, and measurement of outcomes.

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