

Overcoming Obstacles

MAY
2025

*Life Skills Curriculum for
Elementary, Middle, and
High School*

EVALUATION OF CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION AND STUDENT IMPACT

Educator Survey

Academic Years: 2022-2023, 2023-2024, and Fall 2024



Prepared by the Institute for Families:

Ilona Arnold-Berkovits, Ph.D. – Director of Research and Evaluation (Evaluation Co-PI)

Tina Gajda-Crawford, MA, NCC – Senior Research Coordinator

Melissa Garfinkel, M.S.S. – Evaluation Coordinator

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Praise for Overcoming Obstacles Curricula



Freely
Available



Flexible



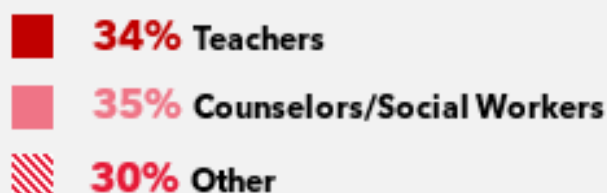
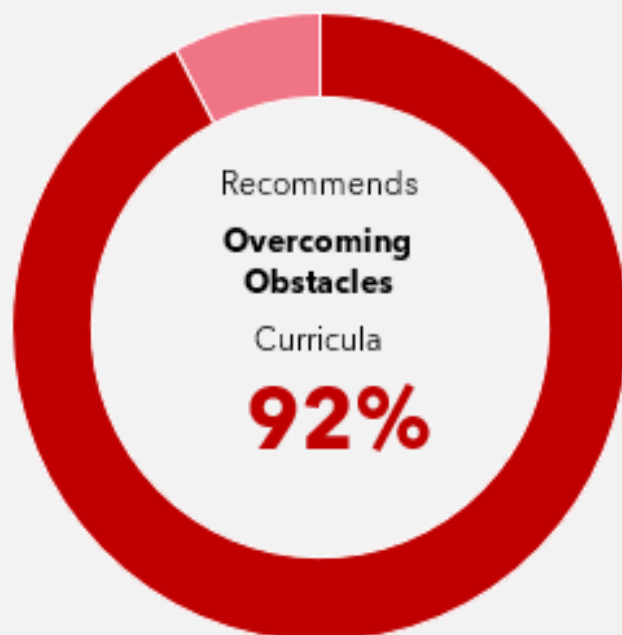
Organized



Generates
Discussion



Engages
Students



Helps Students Develop



90% Communication
Skills



89% Decision Making
Skills



81% Goal Setting
Skills



RUTGERS UNIVERSITY
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School of Social Work

What are Educators Telling us about Overcoming Obstacles?

"I am new to the DOE. Overcoming Obstacles provided a wealth of information to help my students, which meant that I did not have to spend long hours trying to find the information. It is an amazing resource for teachers, counselors, etc., and it was free."



"I am shocked that a curriculum this well done is available for free. Thank you so much."



"I am so grateful for this curriculum. It is incredibly relevant for students transitioning from high school to adult life."



"I have used the curriculum for several years and feel it is adaptable and relevant."



"I love the curriculum and will continue to use it in the classroom. The students have benefited greatly. They love the interactive portions."



"I love the set-up of each daily lesson. I also love the extra suggestions to use at the end of each session. I love how everything is set up for you even the worksheets because they are easy to change or add onto. You're doing a great job and I have told many people about this program."



"I really thought the curriculum was well thought out and assembled. It has everything needed to "plug and play" if you will. I appreciated that I could just select the lessons and everything was there for me."



"It is easy to deliver in a classroom format. It is also easy to modify to reflect the unique needs and student population in my building."



"This is one of the best curricula I have seen in my educational career! It incorporates social skills and addresses transition planning. This was well put together. Excellent concept!"

Survey Highlights

Overcoming Obstacles is a free curriculum that provides educators with the tools to teach life skills for elementary, middle, and high school students (www.overcomingobstacles.org). The curriculum is intended to be delivered in various settings such as stand-alone classes, counseling sessions, advisory periods, after-school programs, character education, in-school suspension, peer mentoring initiatives, and/or infused into core content classes.

This report presents findings from the Educator Survey as part of an independent evaluation of the Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills Curriculum (OO) conducted by the Institute for Families (IFF) at the Rutgers School of Social Work.

The primary questions the survey intended to answer were:

- 1) What are educators' experiences implementing the curriculum?
- 2) How can the curriculum be improved?

The survey invitation was emailed to educators who registered between July 1, 2017, and December 31, 2024, on the Overcoming Obstacles website to download the curriculum. The survey was administered from February 10, 2025, to March 23, 2025, and 1,737 educators responded to the survey, indicating that they are users of the Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills Curriculum. Respondents were directed to different survey paths based on the degree to which they implemented Overcoming Obstacles during the 2022-2023, 2023-2024, and/or Fall 2024 academic years. The end of the survey requested feedback specific to the curricula they implemented. All data were collected anonymously to encourage open and honest feedback.

Highlights:

- While most survey respondents are employed in public schools, there is a wide variety of users of the Overcoming Obstacles curriculum, including teachers, counselors, social workers, and other professionals.
- There were respondents from most U.S. states and respondents who used the curricula internationally.
- Most respondents had a favorable opinion of Life Skills instruction and its impact on students, and indicated that it helped students develop socially, emotionally, and academically.
- Many respondents also indicated that it helped students develop life skills such as communication, decision making, problem solving, resolving conflicts, goal setting, and stress management.
- Most respondents reported that the lessons had positive impacts, such as improved classroom engagement, classroom behavior, and preparation for the future. Fewer respondents reported seeing a positive effect on absences and/or tardiness.
- Overcoming Obstacles is most frequently praised for being freely available, its flexibility/adaptability, organization, ease of use, positive student impact, and ability to generate discussion and keep students engaged.
- A large majority of respondents who implemented Overcoming Obstacles would recommend it to their colleagues.
- Most suggestions for improving the curricula were requests for content expansion.

Respondent Demographics

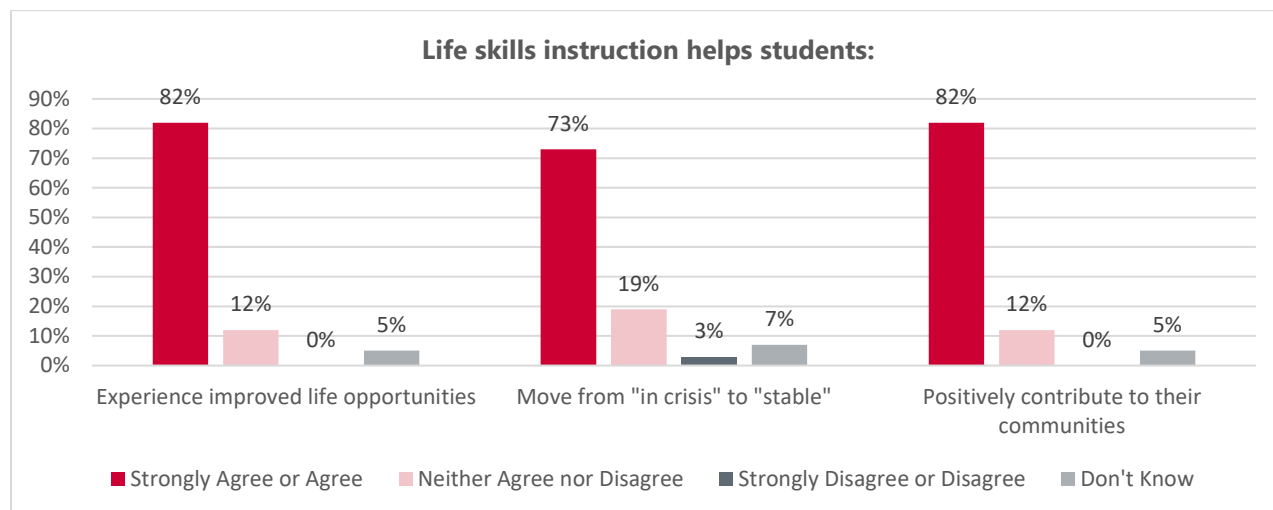
Respondents to the Overcoming Obstacles Curricula evaluation survey included various educators. 1,737 respondents indicated they had used the curricula, including teachers, counselors/student advisors, social workers, administrators, and other positions. Most are employed in public schools. There were respondents from most states and some respondents who used the curriculum internationally.

- Of the respondents that answered the question, “Are you an employee or a volunteer in a school or educational setting?” (**n=1608**), **91%** of respondents indicated they are employees or volunteers in a school or educational setting and **9%** indicated they are not employed or do not volunteer in a school or educational setting.
- Of the respondents that answered the question, “In which kind of educational setting did you implement or oversee the Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills Curriculum?” (**n=913**), **70%** of respondents are employed in public schools; **7%** are employed in charter schools; **4%** are employed in denominational or non-denominational private schools; and **12%** are employed in other educational settings including after-school programs, enrichment programs, alternative and specialized schools, juvenile justice and correctional settings, homeschooling and co-ops, postsecondary and career training programs, health and therapeutic programs, government and non-profit services, and religious schools and programs; **7%** of respondents are educators that work in other settings such as youth programs (YMCA and other mentoring programs), mental and behavioral health services, residential and community care, juvenile and legal system, family and parenting support, nonprofit organizations, adoption programs, other community agencies, faith-based programs, and employment and skill development programs.
- When asked, “What is your current position?” **35%** of respondents reported they are teachers or assistant teachers; **24%** are school counselors; **11%** are social workers or case workers; **2%** are afterschool care providers; **5%** are administrators; and **23%** hold other positions and come from a diverse mix of education, nonprofit, mental health, higher education, community, and volunteer roles, including traditional school staff (including librarians), faith-based leaders, and community outreach professionals—many of whom support student development outside of the typical classroom setting.
- There were respondents from every state except Alaska, Hawaii, and Rhode Island. The highest proportion of respondents reported using the curricula in New York (**7%**), followed by Texas (**7%**), Florida (**7%**), and California (**7%**). There were no respondents from Puerto Rico or any other U.S. territories. There were 19 respondents who used the Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills Curricula internationally (Canada, India, Cambodia, China, Guatemala, Kenya, Ireland, Japan, Malta, Mexico, Panama, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, and the Bahamas).

Impact of Life Skills Curriculum on Students

Most respondents had a favorable opinion of Life Skills instruction and its impact on students.

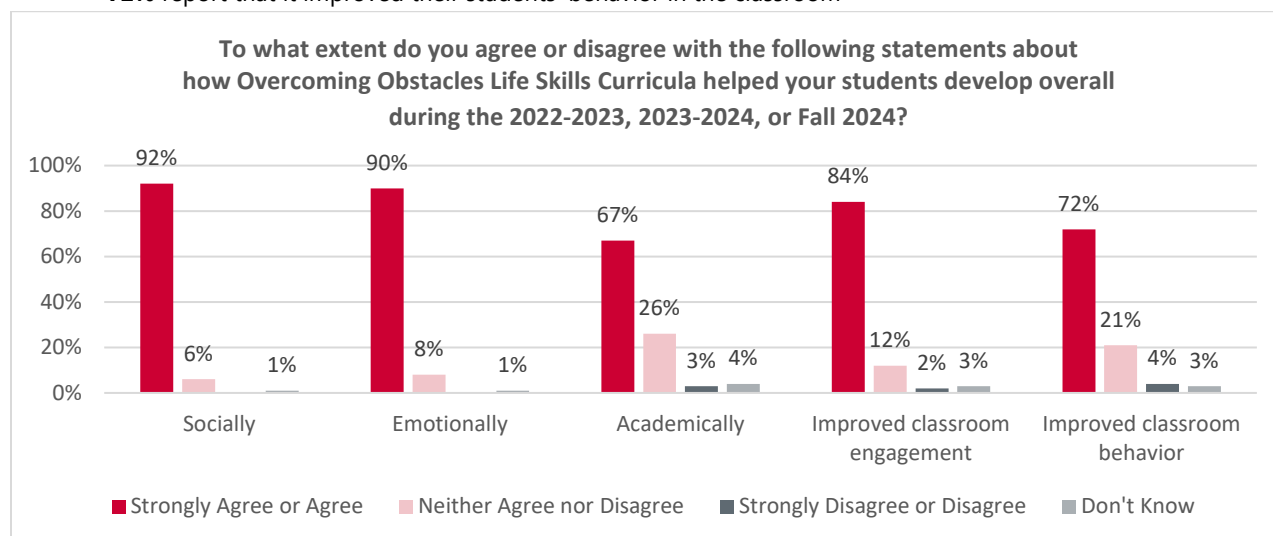
- **82%** report that it helps students experience improved life opportunities
- **82%** report that it helps students contribute positively to the community
- **73%** report that it helps students move from an "in-crisis" status to a "stable" status



Impact of Overcoming Obstacles on Student Growth and Outcomes

Most respondents who implemented Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills Curricula during the 2022-2023, 2023-2024, and/or Fall 2024 academic years reported that the curricula contributed positively to their students' growth socially, emotionally, and academically. Respondents also reported that the lessons had positive impacts, such as improved classroom engagement and classroom behavior.

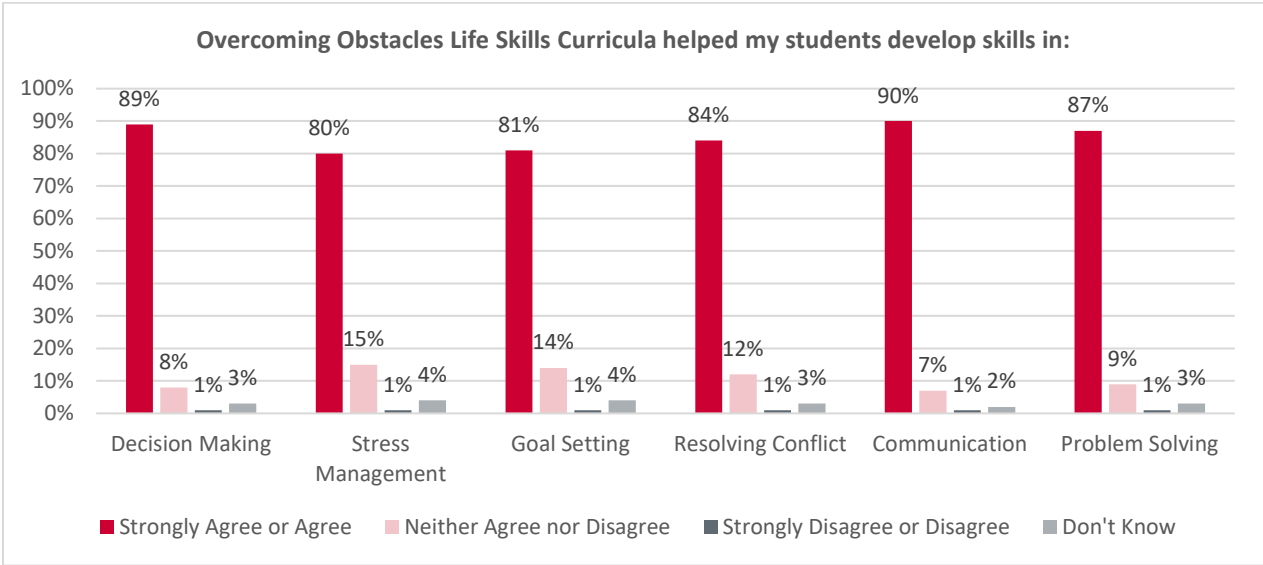
- **92%** report that it helped students develop socially
- **90%** report that it helped students develop emotionally
- **67%** report that it helped students develop academically
- **84%** report that it improved classroom engagement
- **72%** report that it improved their students' behavior in the classroom



Impact of Overcoming Obstacles on Student Skill Development

Most respondents who implemented Overcoming Obstacles during the 2022-2023, 2023-2024, and/or Fall 2024 academic years reported that the curricula helped their students with skill development.

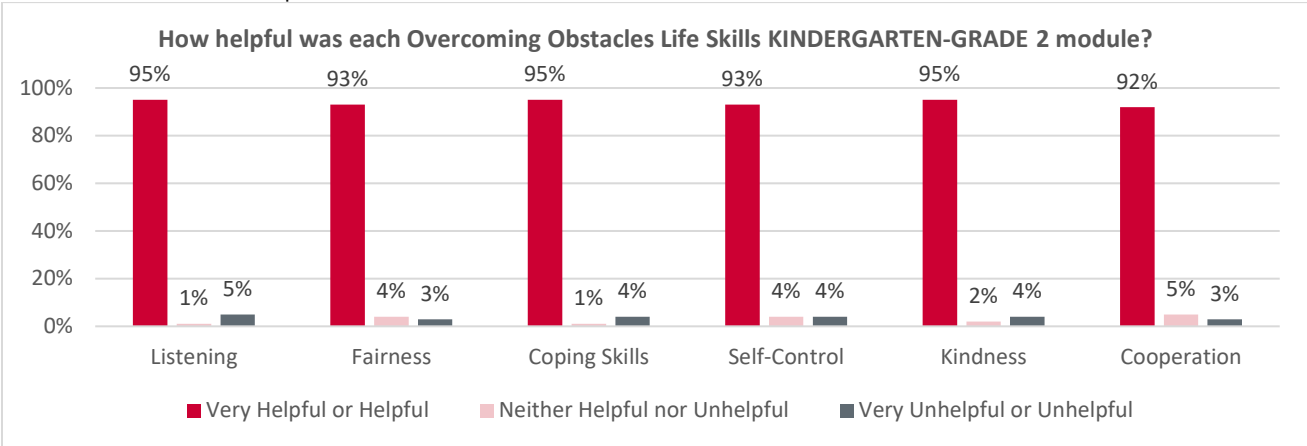
- **90%** report that it helped students with communication skills
- **89%** report that it helped make students with decision-making skills
- **87%** report that it improved students' problem-solving skills
- **84%** report that it helped students resolve conflict
- **81%** report that it helped students with goal-setting skills
- **80%** report that students were better able to manage stress



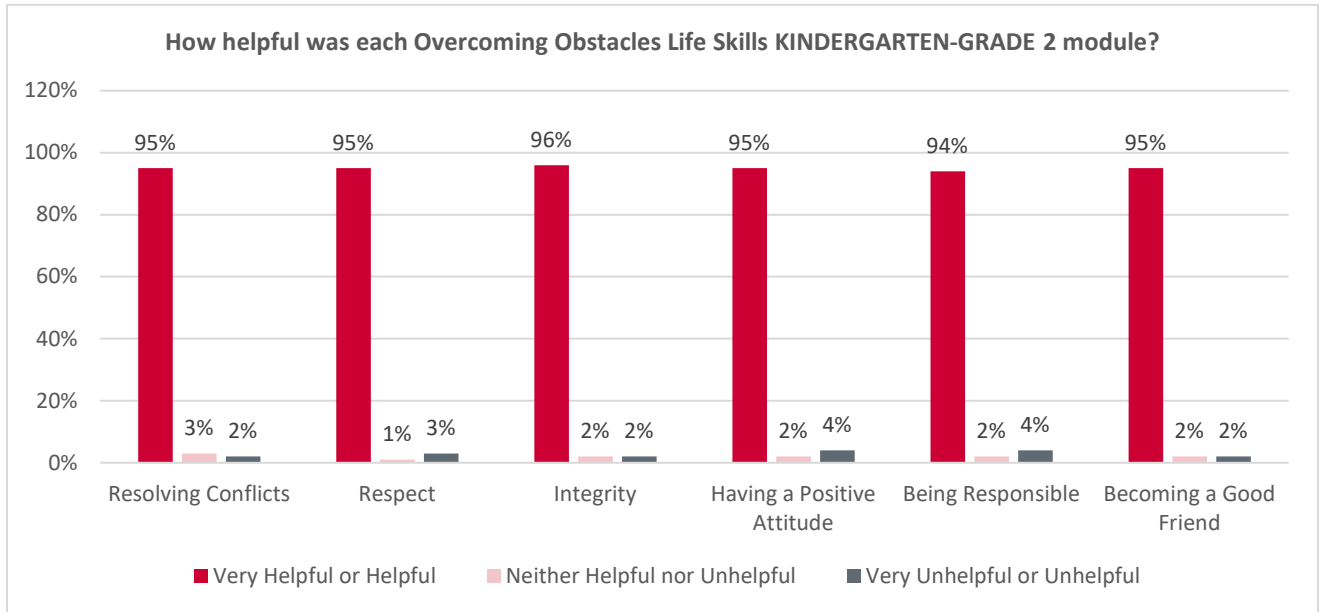
Helpfulness of Each Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills KINDERGARTEN-GRADE 2 Module

Most respondents who implemented the Kindergarten through Grade 2 curricula during the 2022-2023, 2023-2024, and/or Fall 2024 academic years reported that the modules were helpful to elementary school students.

- **95%** reported that the Listening, Coping Skills, and Kindness modules were helpful
- **93%** reported that the Fairness and Self-Control modules were helpful
- **92%** reported that the Cooperation module was helpful



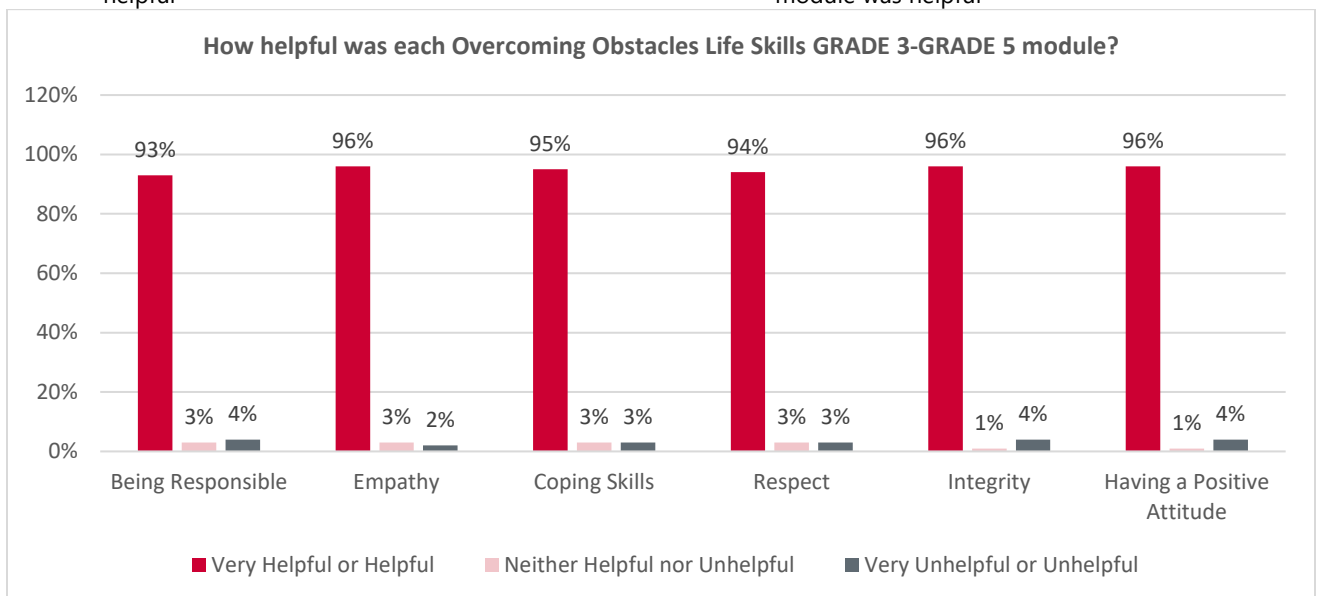
- **96%** reported that the Integrity module was helpful
- **95%** reported that the Resolving Conflicts, Having a Positive Attitude, Respect, and Becoming a Good Friend modules were helpful
- **94%** reported that the Being Responsible module was helpful



Helpfulness of Each Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills GRADE 3-GRADE 5 Module

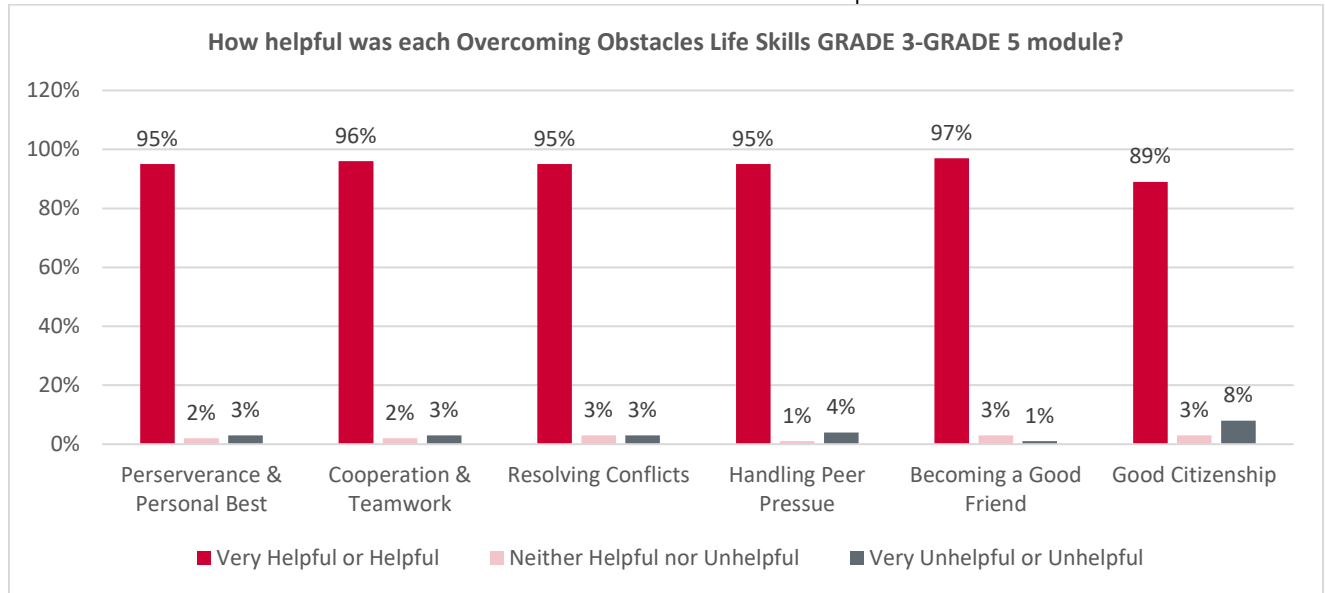
Most respondents who implemented the Grades 3 through Grade 5 curricula during the 2022-2023, 2023-2024, and/or Fall 2024 academic years reported that the modules were helpful to elementary school students.

- **96%** reported Empathy, Integrity, and Having a Positive Attitude modules were helpful
- **95%** reported that the Coping Skills module was helpful
- **94%** reported that the Respect module was helpful
- **93%** reported that the Being Responsible module was helpful



- **97%** reported that the Becoming a Good Friend module was helpful
- **96%** reported that the Cooperation & Teamwork module was helpful

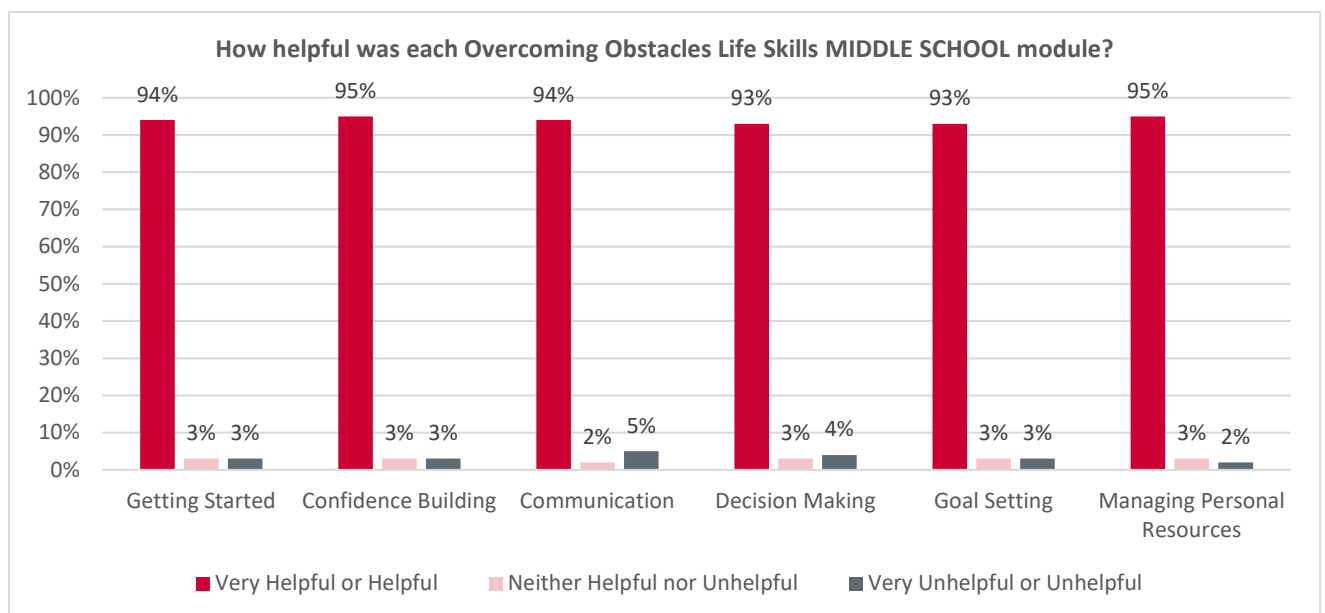
- **95%** reported that the Perseverance & Personal Best, Resolving Conflicts, and Handling Peer Pressure modules were helpful
- **89%** reported that the Good Citizenship module was helpful



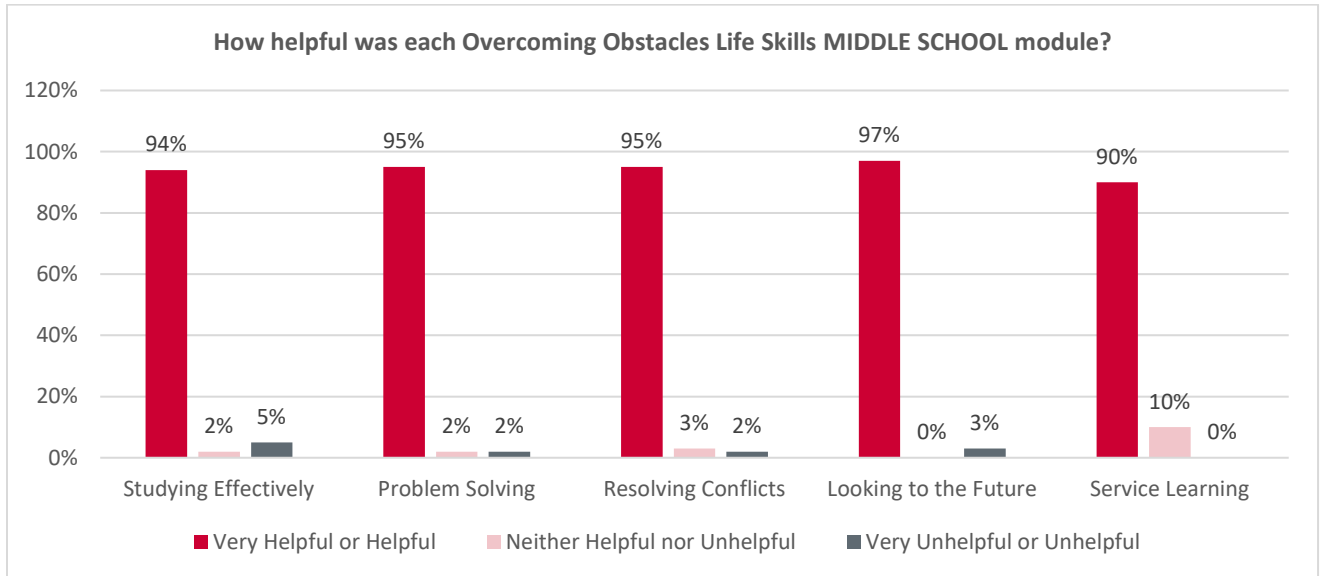
Helpfulness of Each Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills MIDDLE SCHOOL Module

Most respondents who implemented the middle school curricula during the 2022-2023, 2023-2024, and/or Fall 2024 academic years reported that the modules were helpful to middle school students.

- **95%** reported that the Confidence Building and Managing Personal Resources modules were helpful
- **94%** reported that the Getting Started and Communication modules were helpful
- **93%** reported that the Decision Making and Goal Setting modules were helpful



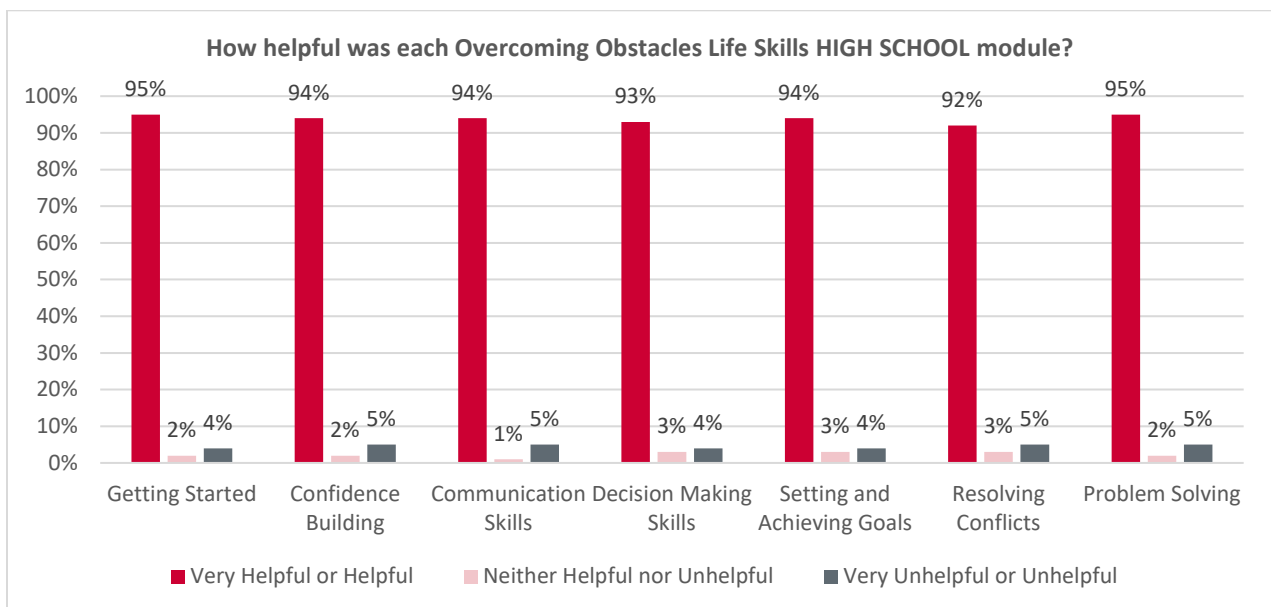
- **97%** reported that the Looking to the Future module was helpful
- **95%** reported the Problem Solving and Resolving Conflict modules were helpful
- **94%** reported that the Studying Effectively module was helpful
- **90%** reported that the Service Learning module was helpful



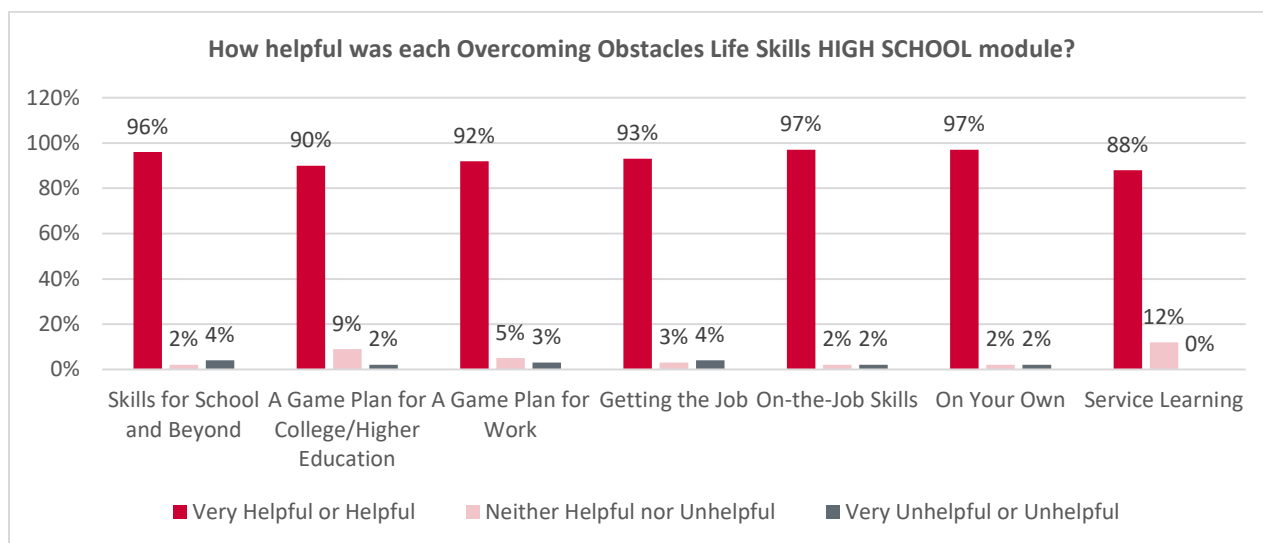
Helpfulness of Each Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills HIGH SCHOOL Module

Most respondents who implemented the high school curricula during the 2022-2023, 2023-2024, and/or Fall 2024 academic years reported that the modules were helpful to high school students.

- **95%** reported that the Getting Started and Problem-Solving modules were helpful
- **94%** reported that the Confidence Building, Communication Skills, and Setting and Achieving Goals modules were helpful
- **93%** reported the Decision-Making Skills module was helpful
- **92%** reported that the Resolving Conflicts module was helpful

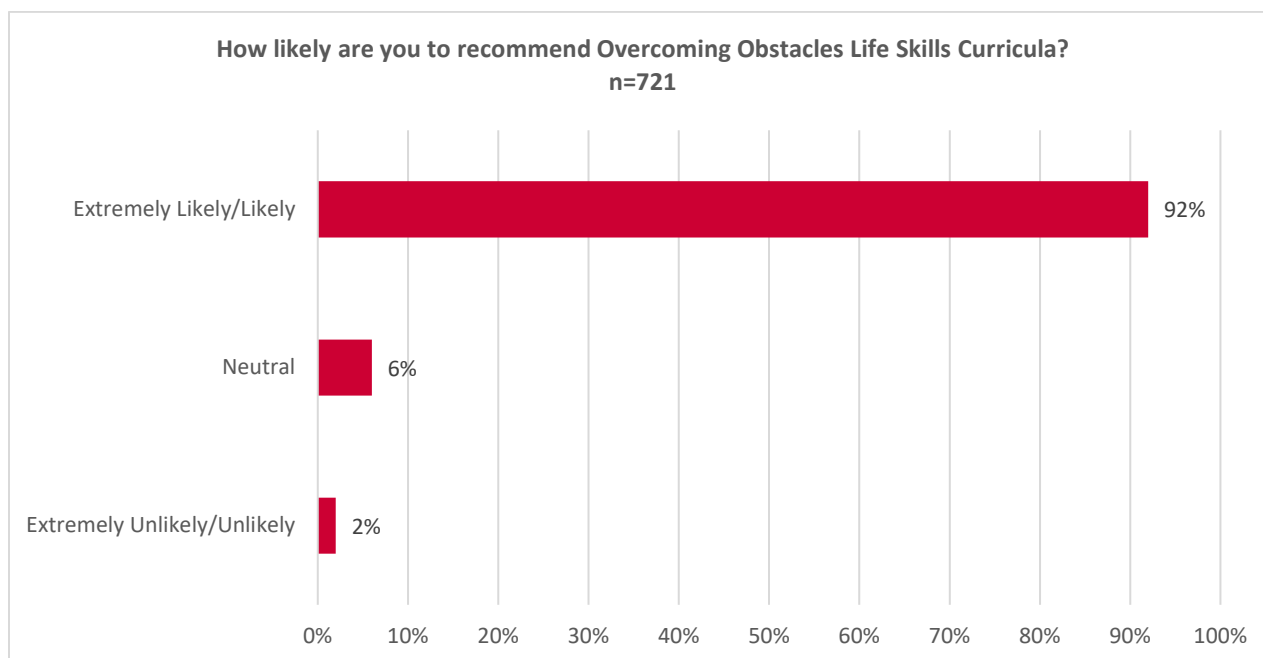


- **97%** reported that the On-the-Job Skills and On Your Own modules were helpful
- **96%** reported that the Skills for School and Beyond module was helpful
- **93%** reported that the Getting the Job module was helpful
- **92%** reported that the A Game Plan for Work module was helpful
- **90%** reported A Game Plan for College/Higher Education module was helpful
- **88%** reported the Service-Learning module was helpful



Additional Educator Comments and Endorsements

92% of respondents who have implemented the Overcoming Obstacles curricula are “Extremely Likely” or “Likely” to recommend it to other educators, while only **2%** of respondents were “Extremely Unlikely” or “Unlikely” to recommend it. **6%** of respondents were “Neutral”.



The Institute for Families, Rutgers University School of Social Work

The Institute for Families advances the professional practice and knowledge base of individuals and organizations creating brighter futures for children, youth, and their caregivers. IFF provides training, technical assistance, and applied research and evaluation services that:

- advance child welfare, early childhood, and human service systems through workforce development initiatives;
- educate child- and family-serving professionals through innovative learning experiences that build evidence-based practices into their everyday work; and
- reveal methods and demonstrate improved professional and program outcomes.

We accomplish this through collaboration with public agencies, community-based organizations, national thought leaders, expert professionals and educators, and persons with lived experiences. These partnerships create practices, services, and systems that give children the opportunity to flourish.

This report was prepared by the Institute for Families at the Rutgers School of Social Work. For questions, please contact the contributing team at IFF@ssw.rutgers.edu

Theresa McCutcheon, Managing Director

Ilona Arnold-Berkovits, Ph.D., Director of Research and Evaluation

Tina Gajda-Crawford, MA, NCC, Senior Research Coordinator

Melissa Garfinkel, M.S.S., Evaluation Coordinator