



**Implementation and Interpretation Guide
for the
Systematic Evaluation of the Association of Recovery Schools
(SEARS) - Student Surveys**

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September 2024

Disclaimer

This guide was written by the researchers and staff of the Systematic Evaluation of the Association of Recovery Schools (SEARS), with support from the Association of Recovery Schools (ARS) and the Peer Recovery Center of Excellence. The suggestions and interpretations in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Association of Recovery Schools, the Peer Recovery Center of Excellence, Tufts University, Vanderbilt University, or Harmony Academy.

Recommended citation:

Jurinsky, J., Finch, A. J., Riccio, A. A., & Dursi Martin, S. (2024). *Implementation and Interpretation guide for the Systematic Evaluation of the Association of Recovery Schools (SEARS) Student Surveys*. Peer Recovery Center Excellence.

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Letter from the Authors

Dear recovery friend,

Thank you for taking an interest in SEARS. We are grateful that you are joining us on this journey. We hope that this implementation and interpretation guide will help you administer the survey and utilize the resulting data. As a bit of backstory, recovery high schools emerged in the 1970s, with the Association of Recovery Schools forming in 2002. For decades, champions of recovery and recovery high schools have recommended the integration of data into daily practices and programming decisions, which could simultaneously highlight the amazing work done at recovery high schools. During COVID, recovery high school administrators began to meet virtually. While data collection has been a priority of ARS since its inception, a new demand for data emerged and supported a nation-wide effort to understand what data schools were collecting. The Association of Recovery Schools data subcommittee was then formed followed by the creation of the Systematic Evaluation of the Association of Recovery Schools (SEARS) project. SEARS grew out of decades of recovery and recovery data advocacy and those early admin meetings. SEARS primarily aims to develop a nation-wide recovery high school data infrastructure to understand recovery high schools and their students as well as support recovery high school programming.

Early on, we polled schools to understand what data is already collected. Those findings, coupled with the current recovery science, health behavior, and positive youth development literature, have informed the current SEARS tool. Each wave of development and implementation has been and will continue to be iterative. We do our best to implement cutting edge research and feedback from students, recovery school staff, and experts in addiction, recovery, and human development. We have much work to do, and we hope that this guide will be another stepping stone to a brighter future for our youth, families, schools, and communities.

We also want to thank all of the recovery high school students and staff that have supported SEARS. We would not be able to do this without you all. Thank you, and we look forward to a future where all recovery high schools are empowered by data.

Sincerely,

Jordan, Andy, Arianna, and Sharon

Introduction

This guide is designed to help you effectively use the SEARS Student Survey tool, covering two key areas: (1) Administering the SEARS Student Survey, and (2) Interpreting the SEARS Student Summary Report. These sections will walk you through how to efficiently conduct or re-conduct the survey and provide clear guidance on interpreting the results found in the Summary Report.

While administering SEARS might seem complex at first, with some preparation, the process becomes straightforward. Many school staff who have used the tool previously report that it runs smoothly once they are familiar with it. Though the survey generates an extensive amount of data for each student, the Summary Report has been designed to distill that information into a format that is both digestible and actionable.

Interpreting the SEARS Student data revolves around understanding this Summary Report. As we'll explore in the second section, interpreting data is as much an art as it is a science. While SEARS is grounded in the best available evidence, the field of adolescent recovery is still emerging, and new research may lead to changes in both the tool and the interpretation methods.¹ Moreover, each school and student brings a unique context, history, and set of needs. Effective interpretation requires integrating these specific factors to ensure that recommendations are meaningful and applicable for individual students.

In addition to the SEARS Student tool, this guide includes a brief overview of SEARS School, a school-level survey completed annually by an administrator. This additional tool provides a broader view of the recovery environment at your school, complementing the individual student insights offered by SEARS Student.

Why Participate in SEARS?

A common question we hear is, “Why participate in SEARS?” There are many compelling reasons why schools choose to engage with this tool, each contributing to a stronger, healthier school community. Below, we’ll explore four key motivations that drive schools to adopt SEARS: promoting student success, enhancing school evaluation, supporting grant applications, and being part of something greater.

Student Success

At its core, SEARS is about fostering student success. The survey provides valuable insights into students’ experiences and recovery journeys, helping schools identify areas of strength and areas that need support. By participating in SEARS, schools gain a clearer understanding of the social, emotional, and recovery-related needs of their students. These insights allow educators and administrators to tailor interventions and supports that are specific to each student’s context, ultimately contributing to better educational and recovery outcomes.

School Evaluation

In addition to benefiting individual students, SEARS serves as a powerful tool for school-wide evaluation. The data collected can highlight trends, uncover areas for improvement, and celebrate areas where the school is excelling. By systematically assessing student recovery and well-being, schools can use the results to refine policies, improve programs, and make informed decisions that align with their overall mission. SEARS also provides a consistent metric for year-over-year comparisons, enabling schools to track progress and adjust their approaches as needed. Participation in SEARS is also considered in the Association of Recovery Schools accreditation process.

Grant Applications

For many schools, securing funding is essential to sustaining and expanding their programs. SEARS data offers a robust evidence base that can be instrumental in grant applications. Whether applying for local, state, or federal funding, having detailed, data-driven insights into student recovery can set your application apart. SEARS results demonstrate that your school is committed to using evidence-based approaches, making a compelling case to funders that your initiatives are both necessary and impactful.

Part of Something Greater

Finally, by participating in SEARS, your school becomes part of something greater. The data gathered contributes to a growing body of knowledge in the field of adolescent recovery, helping shape future research and practices. Schools that participate are joining a larger network of institutions dedicated to improving recovery outcomes for young people. By working together, schools not only improve their local communities but also contribute to the broader mission of advancing recovery science and supporting youth on a national or even global scale.

Administering SEARS Student Survey

School Setup: First Time Only

- Contact Arianna Riccio to start the process: arianna.a.riccio@vanderbilt.edu
- **Each school has been assigned a unique two-digit identifier.** The staff member designated as your school contact will receive your school's code number by email. **Student identification numbers** are made up of the two-digit school code plus four more numbers. We can provide a sample spreadsheet form for schools to create student ID's. Each number assigned to a student will be their permanent identifier for survey use throughout their school enrollment. You can watch this short video on creating the Student Identification numbers: <https://youtu.be/1lemTSfEhuU>
- Every student will log into the **same link** to take the survey: https://redcap.link/SEARS_Student

School Setup: Returning Users

- Students who have tested previously need to **use the same six-digit code** they used before.
- Students testing for the first time will need a unique six-digit code, starting with that school's **two-digit** identifier (see instructions above).
- Decide if you want the same staff to be the point-person on the current survey. Each student will provide a staff member's email at the start of the survey, which receives the Student Summary Report.

Preparing Recovery High School Staff: First Time

- **Get staff buy-in.** Take time to explain the purpose of the assessment and the results that will be shared at the end. Give staff time for feedback and questions.
- Let staff know about confidentiality
 - Researchers **will not** be able to identify individual students from the data. Only an individual's school will know which student is linked with which six-digit code.
 - Only key study personnel (e.g., Project Director, Principal Investigator) **will** know which school a student is linked to, but they will still not be able to identify individual students.
 - Review which staff will have access to the data (e.g., recovery coach, counselor, principal). This will differ at each school.
 - Students should be made aware prior to the start of the survey who will be able to view results from the survey.
 - Students should be given the option of not participating.
- Give staff at your school a chance to walk through the survey ahead of time, using a six-digit number that will **never be** assigned to a student (i.e., 99).

Preparing Recovery High School Staff: Returning Users

- **Keep staff buy-in.** Discuss any problems encountered or lessons-learned from the last session. Discuss solutions. Reach out with questions.
- **Review confidentiality (see above).**
- Let folks know: staff will automatically and immediately be sent the **Summary Report** after each student completes their survey.

Survey Frequency: All Schools

- Schools should aim to survey their students **at least once per year** during the Spring (i.e., January) data collection period. There are, however, three formal data collection waves. While an annual data collection will benefit national evaluation efforts, it is best to survey your students multiple times during the year to see growth or regression. Suggested administration points are:
 1. Within a few weeks of the **start of the school year**, preferably no later than September.
 2. Sometime **early in the spring semester**, preferably January (*this wave is requested of ALL schools*)
 3. Sometime in the **last few weeks of the school year**, May or June
- You should survey all new students within a couple weeks of their enrollment, and then just pick up the regular cycle after that.
- *Specific surveying dates are an in-house decision and do not need to be communicated to ARS or the SEARS team.*

Preparing to Start Surveys: All Schools

- Let students know about the assessment ahead of time and give them time to ask questions. For schools that took the survey previously, give students a chance to share how their experience may have been improved (more/less time, clarity on some items—for example, students at one school had several questions about prescribed meds..., etc)
 - It is up to each school to decide whether and how to inform caregivers about SEARS participation.
- Make sure assigned staff have everything they need: links, computers, student IDs, etc
- SEARS will provide, if asked, a format for **slips of paper** ahead of time for students to use when logging in and taking their survey. The info on the slips should include their **start date at your school, their unique student identifier code, and the email address of your school contact person.**
 - Alternatively, you may use a virtual platform (e.g., Teams, Zoom, Google Classroom) to privately direct message students their information along with the link.

- If you know the actual date of your school's **graduation** ceremony, write it on a whiteboard so students can fill it in. Anyone who isn't a senior can borrow that date and revise for their actual year.
- For questions that ask "in the past 90 days" we found it helpful to write the months that time period covers on the board, and jog memory with things like, "going back to right before winter break," or "right when school started..."
- Set aside **quiet space with groupings** of up to 20 students (some schools might prefer 10-12 at most). *Students may also complete the survey on any smartphone with internet capability outside of the designated time.*
- Plan on **30-40 minutes of assessment time** with something quiet for students who finish early to do.
- We recommend leaving time (~20min) for students to check in with staff after the survey is completed. This should be done before dismissal and before weekends, especially long ones.
- **Allocate at least one staff** (preferably a recovery coach/mentor) to be present to help students with questions, redirects, etc.
- **Minimize interruptions.** (Suggest putting a sign on the door, hosting the survey in a room with a door that closes, on the quiet side of the building.)
- Use **visual barriers** if needed to keep students from looking at each other's screens. This will create more of a feeling of safety/privacy.
- Let students know about **confidentiality** (see above) and what the results will be used for.
- Let students know the Big Picture. Consider **reading the first section** with them or summarizing it. Let them know that other recovery school students are participating. They're part of something bigger.
- Let them know **details of the survey**, especially any items you anticipate may be confusing. For example, let them know that the drug chart is only for drugs they MISUSE, not for medications prescribed to them that they are using as prescribed.

During Surveying

- Students can **stop and restart the survey** as long as they finish the page they are on when they get tired. (If they don't, they'll have to respond a second time to any questions on that one page, no big deal.)
 - If a student is going to stop and restart the survey, they need to hit the '**save and return later**' button at the bottom of the screen, which will then provide a **Return Code**. A staff person or the student **must** keep the Return Code. It is unique to the student.
 - Without the return code, the student will have to retake the survey from the beginning.

- **When a student is ready** to continue the survey, use the original survey link and select “Returning?” in the top right corner of the screen to enter the Return Code and resume the survey.
- **Students can take breaks as needed**, but we don’t recommend spreading the survey out over too many days. We recommend trying to get each student through the assessment in no more than **1-2 days**.
- **Don’t let students share answers** with each other.
- Have a **proctor** who can answer questions.
- The **proctor should not look at the responses** students are giving. This will help maintain a feeling of safety/privacy and increase the chances of honesty/validity.
- Look out for students who may be just **clicking through**.
- **Encourage** students to review, and even take a picture of, the resource page or put the hotline numbers in their phone.

Deep Thoughts on Surveying

- There is likely to be some “**emotional stickiness**” as a result of the survey.
- Staff will need to look out for students who may be “feeling some type of way” after the survey, which is one reason we recommend scheduling additional check-in time after the survey.
- We will get the best results from students who feel comfortable being honest. This statement is as true for our programs (in our opinion) as it is for the assessment itself.
- In the administrator meetings, one person recommended an intentional **discussion with students about honesty** and how they don’t have to be afraid to be engaged in real ways with their own recovery path. Each school’s talk will differ by school culture. Giving students clarity about the role(s) adults play in their building is vital.

After the Survey

- **After a student completes the survey**, their Summary Report will automatically and immediately be sent to the contact email that the student provided in the survey.
- **Reviewing a student’s results before sitting down with them** can help us frame the discussion in a loving and productive way. The results can spur conversations about strengths and needs, and help our students identify and advocate for themselves! Administrators and recovery mentors may see patterns that will help them improve their programs or advocate for more adolescent support in the larger community.

Interpreting the SEARS Student Summary Report

Art and science are typically treated as separate fields despite their commonalities. One place that art and science overlap is in the interpretation of data. Data are facts, statistics, or pieces of information collected together. Interpretation often verges on an art form as it requires creative consideration of all available and unavailable data in the context of where it was collected. The SEARS projects aim to collect data to inform practices and understanding of recovery high schools and their students.

However, the interpretation of that data requires an artful approach. No piece or collection of data will fully and perfectly represent an individual student or school. So, the interpretation process begins with the acknowledgement that these data are inherently missing something, whether that be a person's unique context (e.g., family life) or a recent event that may impact the data (e.g., presidential election, recent overdose of a friend). SEARS is a robust instrument that collects data on several areas of life including recovery capital, quality of life, and positive youth development. The most effective and helpful interpretation of these data will involve the careful consideration of all available data, including not only information present in SEARS but also that known by the individual reviewing the data. The staff person reviewing these data will then connect the individual pieces of data to reveal the story the data is telling.

What follows in this interpretation guide are brief overviews of the varying concepts that SEARS measures as well as how an individual score on each domain may be interpreted. Each score is categorized for ease of interpretation (e.g., strength, developing strength, growth area). In an individual's Summary Report, only the category in which their score falls is displayed. In the guide, each category for each concept is listed.¹ However, the demarcation of these categories is, at this time, based on theory and not rigorous evidence. There is a dearth of scientific literature exploring adolescent recovery.¹ So, the interpretation recommendations here are based on what is available, which includes adult recovery science, developmental psychology, health behavior, public health, and expert advice. This guide is a living document and the recommendations are likely to change over time as new evidence becomes available.

Furthermore, SEARS has been successful in establishing the largest database of recovery high school students ever collected. As of June 2024, 24 recovery high schools have had their students participate in at least one survey, and 749 students have taken at least one SEARS Student survey, with 1,037 total surveys taken. This includes 319 students who have been enrolled in recovery high school for less than 90 days. Although this is a huge accomplishment for recovery high schools and recovery science, several schools and hundreds of students have not yet participated. We thus cannot say for sure how representative the SEARS data is compared to the entire population of recovery high schools.

¹The For domains categorized into three levels, we have defined the cut points as follows: Strength = $\geq 90\%$, Developing Strength = 70–89%, and Growth Area = $< 70\%$ of the possible score (rounded down). For domains with two categories, Strength is defined as $\geq 75\%$, and Growth Area as $< 75\%$. These cut points have not yet been empirically validated.

The large scale of data collection that has taken place can still, however, be useful in understanding recovery high schools and their students. After careful deliberation and where possible, we have chosen to include the average and median scores of students that have been enrolled for less than 90 days and have taken the survey (see [Breakdown of average, median, and possible scores](#)).

Interpreting an individual's score in light of the average and median scores is another place where artfulness and caution is required. A staff member should consider an individual student's context (e.g., new to a recovery high school, first recovery attempt) and reflect on how an individual has grown or can grow. This is not a place where an individual should simply be labeled as doing better or worse compared to the "average" student. Each student is different with unique strengths, growth areas, and combinations of capabilities. The Summary Report is meant to help facilitate conversation and understanding surrounding an individual's recovery journey. It is not meant to strictly determine where a student is in their recovery or how they will progress. Both the strengths and growth areas should be discussed, with an emphasis on the strengths. With a student, consider how a strength or needed growth in one area may help or hinder another domain. Furthermore, the best comparison for a student is often themselves. When a student completes multiple waves of the SEARS Student Survey, a staff person can review how that student has changed in between those two data collection periods. This can be a great source of conversation; positive changes and the maintenance of strengths can both be celebrated.

Logistics of the Summary Report

In the current phase of SEARS, the Student Summary Report is automatically generated and sent to the staff person whose email was provided by the student. If a student has completed the SEARS Student Survey but the report has not appeared, please reach out to troubleshoot. The most common source of not receiving the Summary Report is a misspelled email address, which can easily be fixed. After a staff person has received the Summary Report, we recommend a **three-phase approach** to making the most of it.

Phase 1: Before Meeting with a Student

1. Familiarize Yourself with This Guide

- Review the Guide thoroughly to understand the domains that will appear in the report and the framework for interpreting them.

2. Examine the Student's Report

- Take time to carefully review the student's report. Remember, each scale score is categorized under one of three areas: Strength, Developing Strength, or Growth Area. **Only the specific category relevant to the student's score** will be shown in the report.

3. Understand the Categories

- Use the domain descriptions and possible text provided below to get a sense of what each category (Strength/Developing Strength/Growth Area) may indicate. This will help you prepare for a deeper discussion during the meeting.

4. Analyze the Data

- Reflect on what the data is telling you. Identify patterns or trends within the student's strengths and growth areas. How do these results compare to what you already know about the student?

5. Interpret the Results Holistically

- Consider the unique combination of strengths and growth areas for the student. What story does this combination tell about their current situation and progress?

6. Plan for the Discussion

- Choose a time and setting that will encourage open and constructive dialogue with the student about their results. Ensure that the environment is conducive to a meaningful conversation.

Phase 2: Meeting With a Student

1. Create a Supportive Environment

- Begin by setting a comfortable and supportive tone for the conversation. Ensure that the student feels at ease, and emphasize that the goal of this meeting is to explore their strengths and areas for growth together, with the intent of helping them on their recovery journey.

2. Start with an Open-Ended Question

- Open the conversation by asking the student how they're feeling about the process and if there's anything they want to share before reviewing the report. They will likely remember taking SEARS and may have thoughts or feedback directly related to it. Feel free to jot down any feedback about the instrument or process for the SEARS team. This helps engage the student and sets the stage for a collaborative discussion.

3. Introduce the SEARS Report

- Briefly explain the structure of the report, including the three domains (Strength, Developing Strength, and Growth Area). Clarify that these categories are meant to guide a strengths-based conversation, not to label or judge their abilities.

4. Highlight Strengths First

- Begin by discussing the student's strengths. Talk through the areas where they've demonstrated solid skills or progress, and acknowledge their efforts. Encourage the student to reflect on how these strengths have contributed to their journey and explore how they might continue to build on them. Also, consider exploring with the student how they use those strengths in their day-to-day life.

5. Discuss Developing Strengths

- Transition to areas of developing strength. Frame this as positive progress and invite the student to share their thoughts on these areas. Ask them how they think they can further grow and what support they might need to continue strengthening these areas.

6. Review Growth Areas with Sensitivity

- Approach the Growth Areas with care. Acknowledge that everyone has areas where they can improve and emphasize that these are opportunities for learning and development. Ask the student what challenges they've faced in these areas and explore strategies or resources that could support their growth. Are there strengths that could help support growth? Are there some growth areas that are limiting growth in other areas?

7. Encourage Reflection and Self-Assessment

- Throughout the conversation, encourage the student to reflect on their own experiences and feelings. Ask questions like, "How do you feel about these results?" or "What do you think has been helping or holding you back in this area?"

8. Co-Develop an Action Plan

- Collaboratively create an action plan with the student based on their strengths, developing strengths, and growth areas. Encourage them to identify specific steps they can take to further their recovery and set realistic goals. Be sure to offer your support and discuss any resources that may be available to them.

9. End on a Positive Note

- Conclude the meeting by reinforcing the student's strengths and progress. Reaffirm that this is a collaborative process, and you are there to support them as they continue their journey. Thank them for their openness and engagement in the discussion.

10. Additional Resources

- For staff who would like further support in facilitating these conversations, [Appendix A](#) includes a series of prompts designed to guide discussions with students. These prompts are aimed at encouraging reflection, self-assessment, and meaningful dialogue about the student's strengths and growth areas.

Phase 3: After the meeting

1. Reflect on the Conversation

- Take a few moments to reflect on how the conversation went. Consider the student's responses, their engagement with the process, and any insights gained during the discussion. This reflection can help inform future interactions and support.

2. Follow Up with Resources

- If any specific resources or support were discussed during the meeting, be sure to follow up promptly. This could include connecting the student with additional services, providing information on relevant programs, or scheduling a follow-up meeting.

3. Document Key Takeaways

- Make brief notes on the key takeaways from the meeting, including the student's strengths, areas for growth, and any action steps that were discussed. This documentation will help track the student's progress and ensure continuity in future discussions.

4. Maintain Open Communication

- Encourage ongoing dialogue by letting the student know they can reach out if they have questions or need further support. Keeping the lines of communication open reinforces the collaborative nature of the process.

Recovery Capital

There have been over ten formal definitions of recovery, and the most consistent commonality is that recovery extends beyond reduction in substance use to include improved wellness.^{1,2} Recovery science takes a strengths-based approach to the study of recovery, which differs from the traditional addiction pathology and acute medical intervention focus of addiction science.³ One way to understand and observe recovery growth is to measure factors that are linked to improved or sustained recovery, also known as recovery capital.⁴⁻⁶

The concept of recovery capital primarily emerged from a large body of sociological research on social capital.⁴ The core concept of social capital is that the flow of resources between individuals and groups can lead to positive outcomes for individuals and communities.^{7,8} Recovery capital expands upon the social capital concept by incorporating resources that not only flow through relationships but also through individual actions and structures (e.g., recovery community organizations). There are a growing number of ways to measure and think of recovery capital. A recent review identified ten different measures assessing 41 unique components of recovery capital.⁶ The data collected with SEARS includes a subset of these measures and constructs, which we hope will be useful in recovery care planning for

adolescents. Be sure to read the “Caveats about Recovery Capital” section later in the section. In SEARS, we present the domains most closely aligned with the Multidimensional Inventory of Recovery Capital (MIRC) and Assessment of Recovery Capital (ARC) scales. We chose the ARC because it is one of the most commonly used measures of recovery capital, along with its condensed 10-item Brief Assessment of Recovery Capital (BARC).⁶ We chose the MIRC for its rigorous development and hopeful psychometric findings.⁹

Two of the recovery capital domains in the SEARS Student Survey (personal and social recovery capital) are each measured by two different scales. It may happen, therefore, that a student has high personal recovery capital on one scale but low personal recovery capital on another. If this happens, multiple categories will appear in the Summary Report. In that case, we recommend framing the results as showing part of personal recovery capital as a strength, while other aspects of personal recovery capital have room to grow. The results of SEARS can best be used as a conversation starter with a student. Asking them how and in what ways they feel their personal recovery is a strength may help them leverage their recovery to grow in other areas.

The following summary of the recovery capital domains measured in SEARS aims to provide scaffolding to support an individual’s recovery. Although we hope to see growth over time, each student’s score should be considered in their larger context. For example, some students may come in with a high level of family and financial support, while others may have challenging family dynamics (e.g., parental substance misuse) and limited financial resources. So, we suggest not skipping straight to the score totals, because they do not consider the range of scores across recovery capital domains or a student’s larger context. Furthermore, exploring all the results with an individual student with the aid of conversation prompts may help reveal more about an individual and provide a crucial opportunity for reflection.

SEARS provides recommendations from a strengths-based perspective. We believe that every individual person has both strengths and growth areas. In the following narrative breakdowns, we consider each score to fall within one of three buckets: Strength, Developing Strength, and Growth Area. The Strengths are presented first, followed by the Developing strengths, and concluding with the Growth Areas. Within each category a brief interpretive statement is included. Note that **only the specific category relevant to the student’s score** will be shown in the report. Regardless of the categorization, however, we encourage the person meeting with a student to use the results as an entryway into a deeper conversation that investigates how a student is progressing in their recovery journey.

Personal/Human Capital (ARC/MIRC)^{9,10}

*Human recovery capital includes the **internal resources involved in recovery**, including mental and physical health, a positive outlook on life, and motivation to pursue recovery.*

- Strength
 - Individuals with strong human/personal recovery capital are poised to consider challenging themselves to expand other recovery domains. An

individual's personal recovery capital can help bolster the awkwardness and risks of meeting new people, attending new social gatherings, and diving deeper into personal healing.

- Developing strength
 - Individuals developing strong human/personal recovery capital may be ready to begin expanding their social network by meeting new people and attending new social gatherings (e.g., new mutual aid group/meeting, religious/spiritual service, sport). However, they may need additional support in preparing themselves for the awkwardness and risks of being vulnerable with new people and places. They may also need additional time after new connections and events to process and work through the thoughts and feelings related to those meetings.
- Growth area
 - Individuals with personal/human recovery capital as a Growth Area are likely to need additional support to bolster their sense of self and self-esteem. New experiences (e.g., meetings, connections) are likely to cause increased stress. Yet, individuals with this growth area likely need more support coping with those stressors.

Physical Capital (MIRC)⁹

*Physical recovery capital includes the **tangible resources that can impact recovery**, such as finances, transportation, housing, and health insurance. A unique aspect of youth physical recovery capital is that it typically depends on the family context. Unfortunately, little can be done to directly support entire families who are struggling to meet their basic needs in this context. The most effective approach likely entails providing a comprehensive list of resources in the community (e.g., Medicaid for health insurance, SNAP for food assistance).²*

- Strength
 - Individuals with strong physical recovery capital likely get their basic needs met and are able to leverage these resources to support other areas of their recovery. Some aspects that may this strength may highlight:
 - Stable Household Income: caregivers have a stable source of income
 - May have a part-time job to supplement but not for basic needs

² In some conceptualizations of recovery capital, physical recovery capital is included as part of personal recovery capital.^{4,9,11-13} Similarly, community recovery capital and cultural recovery capital have been considered both separate and unique domains. In SEARS, we present the domains most closely aligned with the MIRC and ARC scales. Be sure to read the "[A caveat about recovery capital](#)" section.

- Access to Financial Resources: Availability of savings, investments, or other financial assets that can be used in times of need.
 - Health Insurance Coverage: Having health insurance that covers treatment, counseling, and other recovery-related services.
 - Knowledge of budgeting and financial planning
- Developing Strengths
 - Individuals developing this strength may not have consistent access to the material resources that could benefit their recovery. Some things to work on or explore may include:
 - Budgeting Skills: Learning to manage finances effectively through budgeting, tracking expenses, and setting financial goals.
 - Building Savings: Starting and maintaining an emergency fund to cover unexpected expenses and provide financial security.
 - Accessing Financial Support Services: Utilizing resources like financial counseling, debt management programs, or community aid to improve financial stability.
- Growth Area
 - Individuals with physical recovery capital as a growth area likely need support in identifying resources and leveraging other areas of recovery capital. However, there is very little that a school can do to support the financial growth of a household. The primary way that schools can support families with financial need is to provide a comprehensive list of resources to external programs. These may include:
 - Local, state, and federal resources that could support obtaining basic needs (e.g., Medicaid for health insurance, SNAP for food assistance)
 - Debt reduction and credit building programs
 - Career development opportunities (e.g., job skills, possible career pathways)
 - Opportunities for college (4-year, community, and trade schools) possible scholarships. Education about how completing high school and pursuing post-secondary options can support financial independence.

Social Capital (MIRC/ARC)^{9,10}

Social recovery capital refers to the social networks (e.g., friends and family) and resources that support recovery.

- Strength
 - Individuals with strong social recovery capital are likely to have the following:
 - Strong Support Networks: Having reliable and supportive friends and family members who encourage and sustain recovery efforts.
 - Active Engagement in Recovery Communities: Regular participation in mutual aid groups like AA/NA or SMART Recovery, which provides a sense of belonging and shared experience.
 - Positive Peer Influence: Surrounding oneself with peers who are also committed to recovery and leading a lifestyle that does not revolve around substance use.

- Developing strength
 - Individuals developing their social recovery capital are likely to be or could benefit from:
 - Building Trust: Re-establishing trust with family members and friends through consistent, positive behaviors and open communication.
 - Expanding Social Circles: Building new peer groups through activities and communities that do not revolve around substance use.
 - Participating in Community Activities: Involvement in local events, volunteering, or recreational activities that build social connections and a sense of community.

- Growth areas
 - Individuals growing their social recovery capital could benefit from or are actively working to:
 - Reconnecting with Estranged Relationships: Working towards mending relationships that were strained or broken due to substance use.
 - Improving Social Skills: Enhancing communication, conflict resolution, and interpersonal skills to navigate social interactions more effectively.
 - Seeking Professional Support: Utilizing counseling or therapy to address underlying social anxieties or relationship issues that may hinder recovery.

Cultural Capital (MIRC)⁹

*Cultural recovery capital includes community and cultural resources for recovery. Such resources may include **cultural traditions and identification and access to community-based support groups** (e.g., NA/AA, SMART).³*

- Strength
 - Individuals with strong cultural recovery capital likely identify strongly with their cultural heritage and/or are able to connect with resources in the community. Some aspects of their cultural recovery capital that could be leveraged to support other areas of their recovery may include:
 - Cultural Identity: A strong sense of cultural identity that provides a foundation for values, beliefs, and behaviors supporting recovery.
 - Community Engagement: Active participation in cultural groups or activities that reinforce a sense of belonging and community.
 - Cultural Traditions: Utilizing cultural practices, rituals, or traditions that promote healing, resilience, and a positive self-image.
 - Respect for diverse perspectives and values
 - Cross-Cultural Relationships: Developing relationships across different cultural groups to broaden support networks and enhance social integration.
 - Addressing Cultural Stigma: Working to overcome and address any cultural stigmas related to substance use and recovery within one's community.
- Developing Strengths
 - Individuals developing their cultural recovery capital are likely familiar with their cultural identity and community resources. However, they could benefit from additional support in many ways, such as:
 - Exploring Cultural Heritage: Learning more about one's cultural background and history to deepen understanding and connection.
 - Cultural Competence: Developing an appreciation for diverse cultures and perspectives, enhancing interpersonal relationships and community integration.
 - Accessing Culturally Relevant Resources: Seeking out recovery resources and services that are culturally sensitive and tailored to specific cultural needs.
 - Community events and support: Identifying and linking to varying community-based activities and support groups

³ The "Cultural" domain includes broad notions of cultural and community aspects connected to recovery.⁹ Thus, this domain is one way to measure community recovery capital.

- Growth Areas
 - Individuals with cultural recovery capital as a growth area are likely unfamiliar or not connected with their culture and their community. They may benefit from:
 - Learning more about their cultural and community history
 - Learning more about recovery communities through exposure to mutual aid meetings
 - Identifying community events to meet other people with similar cultures and experiences.
 - Exploring parts of their identity that were not prioritized during substance use (e.g., hobbies, likes/dislikes)
 - Beginning to foster a curiosity about one personal and community cultural heritage

Commitment to change and recovery¹⁴

This section highlights how motivated an individual is in reducing harms, stopping, or maintaining their cessation of substance use. It is important to consider an individual's recovery goals while reviewing their commitment to change and recovery.

- Strength
 - Committed to recovery – Individuals report high motivation for reducing harm, cessation of substance use, and continued recovery.
- Developing Strength
 - Currently committed to recovery but may have doubts about maintaining recovery status and practices. These individuals may benefit from positive changes that have or may take place as a result of their recovery.
- Growth area:
 - Considering cessation but not committed to reducing harms: Individuals in this category may need additional support to see the consequences and risks of their substance use. Alternatively, those in this category may not be seeking recovery. The level of support these individuals need will depend on their specific goals.

Recovery group participation¹⁵

*The recovery group participation measure explores an individual's participation and involvement in community recovery groups broadly.*⁴

- Strength
 - Individuals with this strength are likely connected and have a strong identification with their recovery. They are likely an active participant in

⁴ In one recovery capital measurement framework, recovery group participation and access is seen as a form of community recovery capital.¹⁶

recovery support services and mutual aid groups (e.g., 12-step/SMART). Those with this strength often report higher quality of life, greater self-esteem, and more non-using friends

- Developing strength
 - Individuals developing their recovery group participation are likely engaged in some way. However, their participation is likely inconsistent. These individuals may benefit from identifying ways that group participation helps them. They may also benefit from support in finding other groups to attend.
- Growth area
 - Individuals with this growth are more likely to have passive or limited participation in recovery support groups: These individuals are either unaware or uninterested in attending recovery support groups. They may benefit from linkage to identity groups (e.g., young people's 12-step meeting) or other support groups.

Specific challenges to recovery

There may be a range of personal and structural barriers to recovery. The student survey highlights a few **common barriers for those in recovery**. Below are some barriers or needs that a participant may note:

- Legal/criminal
- Transportation
- Substance use
- Injection use
- Service needs

A caveat about recovery capital

Recovery from substance use disorders existed long before researchers began labeling recovery capital domains and developing scales to measure it.¹⁷ The growing support of recovery research and services may make long term recovery more likely. However, the research exploring youth recovery lags behind that of adults.¹ For example, we do not have a norm reference group for youth in recovery. How youth vary across biological, psychological, social, and spiritual domains along with the population norms are largely unknown. Even among adults, there is little consensus on the domains of recovery capital.⁴⁻⁶ Originally, recovery capital focused on the social resources that supported recovery (i.e., social recovery capital), but has expanded to include 41 recovery capital domains.^{6,11}

The research into recovery capital domains, similarities and differences, measurement, and independent and joint influences on recovery has and will continue to evolve. For example, initial item development of the MIRC featured five domains (social, physical, human, cultural, and community capital), but the cultural and community domains were collapsed through pilot testing and psychometric evaluation.⁹ The domains presented, measures used, and the action steps suggested in SEARS are based on the best evidence we have. Yet, there is much left to be done. The scales, domains, and how those translate to action is iterative and may change. The specific suggestions may also not apply to the individual student you are working with.

Wellness

There is no single definition of recovery or agreed upon way to measure it, especially for young people.^{1,2} Recovery is, however, typically understood to feature improved functioning across physical, psychological, and social well-being and health. The SEARS-Student tool includes measures that do not ask specific recovery or substance use questions but focus on other areas of well-being and health. The following section highlights those measures

Quality of Life and Life Satisfaction^{16,18}

*The quality of life and life satisfaction scores highlight **how satisfied or bothered people are by important aspects of their life**, and this interpretation will be a highly individual matter. Individuals with the same resources may perceive their quality of life differently, and that perception can have an important influence on physical and mental health. The quality-of-life measure includes a total score as well as scores in four specific and one general domain.*

- Strengths
 - An individual with a high-quality life is likely to be satisfied with their current circumstances and have a positive outlook on their life. This strength could be leveraged to tackle other challenges (e.g., trying something new, taking a healthy risk).
 - The following areas were highlighted as strengths (include “overall quality of life and life satisfaction”)

- Growth area
 - An individual with a quality-of-life score as a growth area is likely to benefit from additional support identifying current challenges related to that domain and ways to overcome them.
 - The following areas were identified as growth areas or those needing more support

Positive youth development¹⁹

*Positive youth development is a perspective that aims to **identify the strengths of young people** and align those strengths with **resources in the community** to facilitate thriving young people.²⁰ In SEARS, we use the **5-Cs of positive youth development: caring, confidence, connection, character, and competence**. Caring is the ability to show empathy and sympathy for others. Confidence is the positive self-regard and a sense of self-efficacy. Connection is the positive bonding with people and organizations. Character represents one's integrity, sense of right and wrongs, and moral values. Competence includes the intellectual and social and behavioral skills. Each domain combines to represent an overall level of positive youth development. However, it is important to note that the specific arrangement of scores can be unique to an individual even if the overall score is the same as others. When an individual develops these 5 Cs over the course of their youth, they are likely to contribute to personal development, family relationships, community wellbeing, and civil society.²¹*

- Strengths (at or above average)
 - An individual with a high positive youth development is likely to have the capacity to cope with life's stressors. Moreover, they are likely to be thriving and have the resources to continue thriving as they grow older.
 - The following areas were identified as strengths: [include those domains]
- Growth Area (below average)
 - An individual with the general positive youth development or a particular domain as a growth area are likely to need targeted support building skills focused on the domains.
 - The following areas were identified as growth areas: [include those domains]

General social support²²

*In addition to social recovery capital questions, an additional scale is used to further account for the importance of **general social identity/relationships**. This general social support measure focuses on how an individual is feeling on the day that the survey was taken.*

- Strength
 - Individuals with general social support as a strength are more likely to be healthier and have healthier behaviors. They are also more likely to have access to a social network to assist in coping or resource sharing.
- Growth area
 - Individuals with general social support as a growth area are likely to feel disconnected from their social network. They would likely benefit from linkage to social events or activities where they could meet other people.

Human flourishing²³

*Human flourishing, similar to recovery, does not have a singular definition. However, human flourishing is most often considered the **ability to achieve and maintain holistic well-being and adequate functioning**. The human flourishing measure included in SEARS-Student is based around five central domains: **happiness and life satisfaction, physical and mental health, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, and close social relationships**. The measure also includes a six domain—financial and material stability—that may indicate the ability for an individual to sustain flourishing into the future across the five primary domains. The results are reported for each domain, as the patterns and trends can vary significantly between them. There is currently not enough data for us to report averages. Thus, the following table displays the score for each domain, which can range from 0-20. **Higher scores represent more flourishing within that domain**. Higher scores in the financial and material stability domain, specifically, represent higher likelihood of sustaining flourishing in the other domains.*

Self-identified Goals

As part of SEARS, students are asked to fill in what some of their goals are across specific types of goals. These goals can be a place to begin conversations around an individual's recovery. When students are completing SEARS over time, the goals can also be a place to refer back to and review progress.

The goals that are asked include:

- Where do you see yourself in your recovery journey?
- What are your current life goals?
- What are your recovery goals?
- What do you need to help you get to the next goal in your life journey?
- Who do you rely on to help you with your recovery?

Breakdown of average, median, and possible scores

Below are tables showing the mean and median scores for each of the measures for students who have been in a recovery high school for less than 90 days. The number of students that provided adequate data is included in each table (e.g., n = 250). This number differs across measures, and even domains within measures, because some students did not complete the section or the measure was added in a later wave. The more students that complete a measure increases our confidence in the mean and median of that measure. However, all scores should be considered in light of only having some students and schools participate in data collection.

Assessment of Recovery Capital (ARC)

	Total (n=250)	Personal (n=272)	Social (n=271)
Mean	37.09	17.82	19.07
Standard Deviation	9.31	5.2	4.93
Median	38	18	20
Out of	50	25	25

Brief Assessment of Recovery Capital (BARC-10)

	Total Score (n=287)
Mean	7.69
Standard Deviation	2.25
Median	8
Out of	10

Multidimensional Inventory of Recovery Capital (MIRC)

	Total (n=105)	Human (n=120)	Social (n=115)	Physical (n=113)	Cultural (n=117)
Mean	75.54	17.79	17.43	21.81	18.77
Standard Deviation	9.52	3.44	2.82	3.38	3.06
Median	74	18	18	22	19
Out of	112	28	28	28	28

Recovery Group Participation Scale

	Total Score (n=285)
Mean	7.93
Standard Deviation	4.27
Median	9
Out of	14

Commitment to Sobriety Scale

	Total Score (n=301)
Mean	20.51
Standard Deviation	6.88
Median	21
Out of	30

Quality of Life (WHOQOL-BREF)

	Overall Score (n=292)	Physical Health (n=308)	Support Satisfaction (n=313)	Housing Satisfaction (n=310)	Psychological Health (n=306)	Quality of life (n=311)
Mean	12.64	12.04	12.42	14.99	10.03	11.68
Standard Deviation	3.45	5.11	4.72	4.79	5.36	4.84
Median	12.48	12.0	15.2	16.2	10.0	11.0
Out of	20	20	20	20	20	20

General Social Support

	Total Score (n=303)
Mean	18.55
Standard Deviation	6.76
Median	19
Out of	28

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Positive Youth Development - Very Short Form

	Overall Score (n=319)	Care (n=318)	Character (n=318)	Connection (n=318)	Competence (n=319)	Confidence (n=319)
Mean	3.49	4.13	3.66	3.49	3.04	3.10
Standard Deviation	0.52	0.77	0.59	0.71	0.78	1.0
Median	3.47	4.00	3.75	3.50	3.00	3.00
Out of	5	5	5	5	5	5

Completing the SEARS School Survey

The Association of Recovery Schools has been maintaining an ongoing list of recovery high schools in operation for decades. In the mid 2010s, the Association also began collecting basic demographic characteristics of schools. SEARS has adopted this work into SEARS School Survey, which is the school-level survey sent out once per year. SEARS School collects information about the schools, including funding structure, full time employee equivalents, student population size, and several other characteristics. These data help understand the characteristics of recovery high schools over time. The data, both individual school and population wide, may assist schools in the routine collection of information that can be useful in individual evaluations, reports to executive boards, and grant applications. SEARS School should be completed by a staff member with access to data regarding their staff, students, and organization. For many schools, this would be a person at the principal or director level. If the data are readily available, SEARS School can be completed in about 15 minutes.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to the many individuals and organizations that have contributed to the development and success of SEARS. First and foremost, we thank the recovery high school students and staff whose dedication and participation have been vital to this project. Your insights, commitment, and feedback have helped shape SEARS and continue to inspire our efforts. We also extend our appreciation to the Association of Recovery Schools, the data subcommittee, the Peer Recovery Center of Excellence, Dr. Emily Hennessy, and the countless advocates of recovery education whose vision and collaboration have been instrumental in building this data infrastructure. Finally, we thank the researchers, experts, and community members whose ongoing support and guidance have propelled SEARS forward. Together, we are working toward a future where data empowers recovery high schools to better serve their students, families, and communities.

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Appendix A: Discussion Prompts for Student Meetings

The prompts below are designed to guide discussions with students. They are aimed at encouraging reflection, self-assessment, and meaningful dialogue about the student's strengths and growth areas. Some of the prompts may best be applied during conversation about specific components of the Summary Report, while others may be useful throughout the discussion.

Setting the Stage

- How was your experience taking the SEARS survey?
 - *What did you like about it?*
 - *What did you not like about it?*
- How did you feel emotionally as you went through the SEARS survey?
 - *At what point did those feelings come up?*
 - *Why do you think you experienced those feelings?*
- What do you think your SEARS report will tell you about your recovery journey?
 - *How do you think your SEARS report will reflect this?*
 - *How open do you feel to reviewing this report together?*

Reviewing the SEARS Report

- When you look at this report, what sticks out to you?
 - *How does it feel to see confirmation of your strengths?*
 - *How does it feel to learn about specific areas for growth?*
- How does this strength show up in your life?
 - *How has this strength supported you on your recovery journey?*
 - *What, if anything, has helped you develop this strength?*
 - *How can you continue to use this strength in your daily life?*
- How does this growth area show up in your life?
 - *What sort of challenges, if any, have you faced in this area?*
 - *What, if anything, has held you back in this area?*
 - *What could help you strengthen this area?*

Wrapping Up

- How do you feel about the results of this report?
 - *In what ways are these results an accurate reflection of your journey?*
 - *In what ways are they not an accurate reflection of your journey?*
- Why do you think you received the results that you did?
 - *How do your growth areas relate to each other, if at all?*
 - *How do your strengths relate to each other, if at all?*
- What are some next steps?
 - *Which growth areas would be most helpful to focus on right now?*
 - *Which strengths could best support those growth areas?*
 - *What do you need to help you develop these growth areas?*