

Research in Brief:
Do the benefits of social and emotional learning programs last?

Do the beneficial effects, for students, of social and emotional learning programs remain after the programs are gone? Are they really predictors of future success?

A recent meta-analysis of 82 school-based universal social and emotional learning programs involving more than 97,000 elementary and secondary students showed that the benefits to students remained significant after six or more months.

Social emotional learning focuses on developing five competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making.

The research around such interventions have shown that social-emotional learning interventions have been successful in teaching specific skills that support social and academic adjustment, as well as decreasing conduct problems and emotional distress.

These are skills that can support school, career and life success while protecting students from negative outcomes.

Skills developed through the intervention showed to be the best predictor of long term benefit. Effects were consistent across multiple demographic factors such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status and school location.

Why does this matter?

- ⇒ This meta-analysis confirms that the benefits of social-emotional learning carry on for students, in all seven outcomes, well into their future.
- ⇒ The analysis identified that most social-emotional learning programs in the study use the four 'SAFE' program features (sequenced, active, focused and explicit), which are identified as best practice.
- ⇒ Beneficial effects of social-emotional learning carried across all demographic groups and variables investigated.
- ⇒ Targeting learning interventions to develop the social and emotional skills of students has a long-term impact on academic and behavioural success, and on a student's overall well-being.



The Knowledge Network for Student Well-Being is a project of the **Knowledge Network for Applied Educational Research** (www.knaer-recrae.ca)

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What did the researchers do?

Using similar procedures to the meta-analysis published by Durlak et al. (2011) the team searched for, selected and coded studies that described a school based universal social-emotional learning program that collected follow-up data (6 or more months later). Studies had to have appeared by December 2014 and needed to contain enough data to calculate effect size on one or more outcome.

The team found 82 studies which included 97,406 students between kindergarten and grade 12. Most of the studies used randomized design, monitored implementation and used reliable and valid outcome measures. All studies included both an intervention and a control group.

A majority of the studies were classroom-based and were promoting competencies through structured group lessons (30-45min).

A few also added these competencies into their regular instruction. Intervention that expanded beyond the classroom with additional efforts like enhancing classroom or school climate, school-wide initiatives or parent involvement were reported in a minority of the studies.

The research team did investigate each study for their use of sequenced, active, focused and explicit (SAFE) practices in the intervention design. They found that 89% did meet this criteria, which is considered best practice in the field.

The studies included a varied representation across ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and regions (urban, suburban and rural).

What did they learn?

Effects to be evaluated were selected based on measures that reported student changes; the result was seven variables, grouped into three

outcomes. These outcomes were:

- **positive social and emotional assets** (*social and emotional skills; attitudes towards self, others and school*),
- **positive indicators of well-being** (*positive social behaviour; academic performance*), and
- **negative indicators of well-being** (*conduct problems; emotional distress; and substance abuse*).

Long-term adjustment for a student was seen to be associated with learning that targeted various social and emotional assets.

The best long-term effect appeared to be related strongly to social-emotional skill development through interventions as opposed to social attitude development. This is consistent with the literature that indicates improvement in children's intrapersonal and interpersonal skills (self-regulation, problem solving, relationship skills) enhances academic performance and behaviour.

In those studies that did follow-up as long as 18 years later; there are notable developmental outcomes such as increased high school graduation rates and post-secondary attendance, improved social relationships, and reduced negative outcomes such as arrests or clinical disorders.

This study was an extension of the 2011 meta-analysis by Durlak et al., which is summarized in a previous *Research in Brief* "Enhancing students social and emotional learning", (2012)

This brief summary was prepared from:

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