

Research in Brief:
Enhancing students social and emotional learning

Do programs led by teachers and offered to all students in a classroom, improve the social and emotional learning of students?

A recent meta-analysis of 213 school-based, universal social and emotional learning programs involving more than 270,000 students concludes that students who participated in the programs showed **significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behaviour**, and improvement in **academic performance** that reflected an **11 percentile-point gain in achievement**.

Students do not typically learn alone, and social and emotional skills can help improve their academic achievement. Because these skills are so important to learning, it is important that schools and families effectively teach these skills to ensure student success.

Our students come from diverse cultural and social backgrounds, with varied abilities and motivations for learning. Students who lack social-emotional competencies may become less connected to school as they progress from elementary to middle to secondary school, and this lack of connection hinders their academic performance.

What is a meta-analysis?

Meta-analysis is a way of combining the results from similar studies to determine if the results from different studies add up to stronger evidence. The important parts of a meta-analysis include a comprehensive search strategy, ensuring that the results can actually be compared across studies (measuring the same thing, the same way), and a way of combining the results that is meaningful.



Why does this matter?

- ⇒ *This meta-analysis provides **strong evidence that social-emotional learning has a positive impact on academic achievement.***
- ⇒ *The programs also **improved student behaviour by increasing pro-social behaviour and by reducing conduct and internalizing behaviours.***
- ⇒ *The programs were for **all students in a classroom** and **were delivered by classroom teachers.***
- ⇒ *Programs that were successful **focused on program implementation** as well as using **a sequenced step-by-step training approach, active forms of learning** and were **focused with explicit learning goals.***

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

Communities of practice in the KNSWB include: **Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition, PREVNet, School Mental Health ASSIST, and the Social Planning Network of Ontario**

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KNAER-RECRAE is funded by the government of Ontario. The views expressed in this brief are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Ontario government.

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What did they do?

The research team used four search strategies to locate studies that met their criterion. They used computer searching in *PsychInfo*, *Medline*, and *Dissertation Abstracts*. Second, they reviewed the reference lists for the articles found in the first search to identify additional studies. Third, they manually searched 11 journals starting in 1970. Finally they searched organization Web sites promoting youth development and social-emotional learning.

They included studies that emphasized the development of social-emotional learning that targeted students between 5 and 18 years without any identified adjustment or learning problems. The studies also included studies that included a control group, and reported sufficient data that an effect size could be calculated.

They excluded studies targeting students with pre-existing behavioural, emotional or academic problems, as these programs have been evaluated in a recent study (Patton et al, 2008). Some of these programs were delivered by school personnel, some were delivered by outside staff, and some programs had a combination of school and outside personnel.

What did they learn?

They found 213 studies that involve 270,034 students. Most of the studies (75%) were published in the last two decades, and nearly half



September 10, 2012



of the studies (47%) used randomized designs. More than half the programs (56%) were delivered to elementary school students, about a third were delivered to middle school students (31%), and the remainder included high school students.

The programs showed statistically significant improvements in social-emotional learning, attitudes, positive social behaviour, conduct problems, emotional distress, and academic performance. Some of the studies (15%) collected follow-up data at least 6 months after the intervention. The improvements remained significant across all the outcomes at follow-up.

Programs that were delivered by school personnel produced significantly positive outcomes in all six areas, while programs delivered by a mix of staff produced significant improvements in four outcomes. Programs delivered by outside personnel only produced significant improvement in three outcomes.

Programs that used step-by-step training, active forms of learning, were focused on social-emotional learning, and taught explicit skills (the SAFE design) produced positive outcomes in all six areas, while programs that did not appear to use these methods only produced significant improvements in three areas.

Studies that reported they had difficulties in implementation of the program only produced significant improvements in two areas, while programs that did not report difficulties in implementation reported significant improvement in all six outcomes measured.

This brief summary was prepared from:

Joseph A. Durlak; Roger P. Weissberg; Allison B. Dymnicki; Rebecca D. Taylor; Kriston B. Schellinger (2011) The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Intervention *Child Development* 82,405-432

Please see the original document for full details. In the case of any disagreement between this summary and the original document, the original document should be seen as authoritative.