

# Intervention improves teacher practices, student engagement in early elementary classrooms

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A classroom program that helps teachers adapt their interactions with students based on individuals' temperaments may lead to more student engagement in kindergarten, more teacher emotional support to kindergarten and first grade students, and better classroom organization and less off-task behavior in first-grade classes, according to research by NYU's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development.

The study, published in the December issue of the *Elementary School Journal*, builds upon recent findings that the same program generally improves the behavior and academic skills of young children, helps shy students be more engaged in their classwork, and reduces disruptive behavior among children with high maintenance temperaments.

Research has shown that effective teachers and behaviorally engaged students are vital for fostering learning in early elementary school classrooms. This early academic achievement and behavior sets the stage for students' later academic success.

"Classroom processes in the early years, including teacher practices and student behavioral norms, contribute to children's experience of themselves as learners and provide a foundation for future interactions," said Elise Cappella, associate professor of applied psychology at NYU Steinhardt and the paper's first author.

To support the development of young students - particularly in low-income schools, which are at risk for having less effective teachers and less engaged students - researchers are looking to classroom interventions focused on social-emotional learning. INSIGHTS into Children's Temperament is a social-emotional intervention designed by NYU Steinhardt professor Sandee McClowry to help teachers and parents match environmental demands with an individual child's personality. The program provides a framework for appreciating and supporting differences in the personalities of children, rather than trying to change them, and aims to increase responsive teaching strategies and enhance children's abilities to regulate their classroom behaviors.

In the current study, the researchers evaluated whether INSIGHTS supports teacher practices and student behaviors in kindergarten and first-grade classrooms. A total of 120 kindergarten and first-grade classrooms across 22 urban, low-income elementary schools were included in the study. Half of these schools were randomly assigned to the INSIGHTS intervention, while the other half served as the control group and participated in an afterschool reading program. The researchers visited classrooms to observe teacher practices and student behaviors in both the fall and spring of a school year.

In INSIGHTS classrooms, the researchers saw an increase from fall to spring in teacher practices of emotional support to [students](#) - essentially, teachers were more sensitive to student needs, created better classroom climates, and showed respect for student interests. This effect was magnified in first grade. Similarly, first-grade INSIGHTS classrooms had higher teacher practices of classroom organization and lower classroom off-task behaviors over the school year compared to control classrooms.

Kindergarten INSIGHTS classrooms saw improved student engagement from fall to spring compared to kindergarten control classrooms, but

generally, kindergarten teaching practices changed less than those in first-grade classrooms.

"In addition to INSIGHTS' focus on individual children's strengths and needs, our study illustrates the importance of understanding and supporting [classrooms](#) as a whole at the transition to formal schools," said McClowry, professor of applied psychology at NYU Steinhardt and the study's senior author.

Provided by New York University

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