

Social and emotional learning programs found to boost students' skills

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Being successful in school requires a combination of social, emotional, and academic competencies. A new analysis of more than 200 school-based social and emotional learning programs has found that such programs improve students' attitudes and behaviors, and in some cases, even boost academic performance.

The study appears in the January/February issue of the journal, *Child Development*. It was conducted by researchers at Loyola University Chicago and the University of Illinois at Chicago.

In the first large-scale meta-analysis of school programs that enhance students' social and emotional development, researchers reviewed 213 school-based, universal social and emotional learning programs involving more than 270,000 K-12 [students](#). (Universal programs are offered to all students in participating classes or schools rather than to select groups.)

These programs aim to promote students' abilities in one or more areas, including recognizing and managing emotions, establishing and maintaining positive relationships, setting and achieving positive goals, making responsible decisions, and constructively handling interpersonal situations. The programs examined included classroom-based instruction by teachers, classroom-based instruction by others (such as university researchers), and comprehensive programs featuring a combination of classroom-based teaching with additional programming at school or in families.

The researchers found that, compared to students in the studies' control groups, students in the programs that were considered showed significantly improved social and emotional skills, caring attitudes, and positive social behaviors. In addition, students' [disruptive behavior](#) and [emotional distress](#) declined. In the small group of studies that examined academics, the researchers found that students performed better on achievement tests, tantamount to an 11-percentile-point gain in achievement.

Programs were effective for students of all ages and from different ethnic groups, regardless of whether their schools were in urban, suburban, or rural areas, the analysis found. And not surprisingly, the researchers found better results in programs that followed recommended practices for training school personnel in promoting skills among children than in those that didn't follow these practices.

"The findings highlight the value of incorporating well-designed and carefully conducted social and emotional learning programs into standard educational practice," according to Joseph A. Durlak, emeritus professor of psychology at Loyola University Chicago, the study's lead author. "Such programs do not detract from but can enhance academic achievement, while providing students with stronger skills in areas that are important to their daily lives and future functioning."

Provided by Society for Research in Child Development

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