

Grounding Research

Over the past two decades, a large body of scientific evidence has accumulated on the benefits of social-emotional learning and character education at the elementary level. PurposeFull People was designed to include evidence-based social-emotional learning and character education content and instructional strategies that intentionally target the promotion of outcomes that serve as enablers to students' school and life success, including acquisition and use of social-emotional competencies and improvements in sense of belonging, well-being, and engagement in school. Together, these outcomes (a) result in improved academic performance, (b) prepare students to transition successfully into middle school, and (c) are predictors of longer term success into adulthood (Bywater & Sharples, 2012; Corrales et al., 2016; Lei et al., 2018).

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Social-Emotional Learning

A meta-analysis by Durlak and colleagues (2011) of 213 rigorous studies including over 270,000 students demonstrated that students who received SEL programming performed better than students who did not. Specifically, findings indicate that SEL programming was associated with an 11 percent gain on measures of academic achievement, and similar significant improvements were noted in student conduct and discipline, prosocial behavior, and emotional distress. A close inspection reveals that of the 213 studies, 120 (56%) were conducted in elementary schools, with consistent findings indicating that SEL programming is effective across elementary grades. Other researchers have conducted larger scale reviews and replicated these findings, which is one of the reasons why SEL programming has become an essential ingredient to Tier 1 universal supports in elementary schools (Corcoran et al., 2018; Sklad et al., 2012).

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- Robson, D. A., Allen, M. S., & Howard, S. J. (2020). Self-regulation in childhood as a predictor of future outcomes: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 146(4), 324–354.
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Character Education

With regard to character education, a meta analysis of 52 studies was conducted by Jeynes (2019) to examine the relationship between character education and student achievement and behavioral outcomes. Results indicated that character education was associated with higher levels of educational outcomes, including grades and test scores. The delivery of character education programming was also associated with increased self-discipline. While the effects for high school character education was higher than middle school and elementary, findings for elementary still found positive, significant effects on the above outcomes.

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Teaching Social Skills

Numerous studies have investigated the impact of teaching elementary-aged students social skills. The findings from this research are clear: teaching social skills interventions to children between the ages of 5-11 leads to a range of beneficial outcomes, including (a) increases in social competencies such as cooperation, assertiveness, and conflict resolution, (b) improvements in prosocial interactions and social inclusion, and (c) decreases in aggressive and disruptive behaviors (e.g., Durlak et al., 2010; Gresham et al., 2004; January et al., 2011). The research also reveals some nuanced findings that impact whether a program that teaches social skills is likely to be effective or not. First, social skills programs that use a direct and explicit instructional approach that involves telling (what the skill is and why it is important), showing (modeling what the skill looks like), doing (providing opportunities to practice the skill), and performance feedback (observing students to) are more effective than programs that use other types of instructional approaches (Gresham, 2017, Lane et al. 2005). Second, students need to receive a certain amount of instruction and support over time to acquire and apply social skills (Gresham et al., 2004). Third, students need to be supported to generalize the skills beyond the lessons through prompts and reminders, recognizing and acknowledging attempts to apply certain skills, and addressing missed opportunities to use the skills (Fox & McEvoy, 1993; DiPerna et al., 2017). Last, teachers need to maintain fidelity to teaching the social skills as planned to ensure students receive the instruction and support in a way that is likely to lead to beneficial outcomes (Durlak et al., 2008).

- DiPerna, J.C., Lei, P., Cheng, W. Hart, S. & Bellinger, J. (2017). A cluster randomized trial of the social skills Improvement system-classwide intervention program (SSIS-CIP) in first grade *Journal of Education & Psychology*, 23, 145-167.
- Durlak, J. A., & Dupre, E. . P. (2008). Implementation matters: A review of research on the influence of implementation on program outcomes and the factors affecting implementation. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 41, 327–350.
- Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., & Pachan, M. (2010). A meta-analysis of after-school programs that seek to promote personal and social skills in children and adolescents. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 45, 294–309.
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- Pandey, A., Hale, D., Das, S., Goddings, A. L., Blakemore, S. J., & Viner, R. M. (2018). Effectiveness of universal self-regulation–based interventions in children and adolescents: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 172, 566-575. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2018.0232

Teaching Executive Functioning Skills

Executive function skills include cognitive flexibility (ability to adapt to new, changing, or unplanned events), inhibition (self-control, self-regulation to resist temptations to engage in behaviors that are ill-advised), attention regulation (focusing and concentrating in the face of distractions), and organization (planning, time management, and keeping track of materials) (Diamond, 2013). Executive functioning skills have been shown to be more important predictors of school success than IQ (Blair & Razza, 2007). Executive functioning skills also predict a person’s success throughout their life, including career (Prince, et al., 2007) and mental and physical health in adulthood (Dunn, 2010; Kusche et al., 1993). A meta analysis including 12 studies involving 1054 children found that teaching children executive functioning skills improved organizational skills. Also, a review published in *JAMA Pediatrics* (Pandey et al., 2018) revealed that universal programs focused on teaching executive functioning skills to children are associated with several social-emotional outcomes such as improvements in academic achievement, promotion of mental health, decreases in behavioral problems, and reductions in school discipline. Other meta-analyses have found that programs that teach specific executive functioning skills demonstrate improvements in organizational skills, self-control, and ability to maintain attention to focus on tasks at hand

(e.g., Bikic et al., 2017; Diamond & Lee, 2011). The science on teaching executive skills has revealed some important quality indicators of effective programs, including explicit instruction that involves opportunities for rehearsal and feedback, supplemental strategies to promote the generalization and use of the skills beyond the lessons, and supports to maintain fidelity of implementation.

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Teaching Emotional Regulation Skills

The research is clear that teaching elementary-aged children emotion recognition and regulation skills is effective when done properly. This body of research shows that when elementary students are intentionally supported to acquire skills to regulate emotions in response to situations it leads to several positive short-term outcomes, including improved confidence, greater persistence and resilience in the face of adversity, increased engagement in school along with better test scores and grades, and reductions in behaviors that interfere with learning (Corcoran et al., 2018; Kraag et al., 2006; Moltretch et al., 2010). From a long-term perspective, teaching emotion regulation skills leads to greater college and career readiness and success, healthier relationships, better mental health, and greater civic engagement (Greenberg et al., 2017). There is also evidence that when teaching emotion regulation skills is able to boost the effect of Tier 1 Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports by producing more significant reductions in externalizing and internalizing problems among elementary students (Cook et al., 2015). Research examining what makes for effective programs that teach emotion

recognition and regulation skills has revealed that following combination of components are important: (a) psychoeducation to increase children's understanding of emotions to develop a vocabulary to label their emotional experiences, (b) strategies to increase self-awareness and recognition of emotions and how they impact their behavior in certain situations, and (c) explicit teaching of emotion regulation skills to manage thoughts (e.g., positive self-talk, reappraisal, acceptance) and actions (e.g., such as deep breathing, guided imagery, progressive muscle relaxation, physical activity, mindfulness practices) (Barret et al., 2001; Macklem, 2011). In addition, there is a need for strategies that are infused throughout the day to prompt, encourage, and motivate students to apply their emotion knowledge and skills (Hoffman et al., 2020).

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Post COVID: Students, Educators, and Administrators

Students

- Since COVID it has been estimated that 1 out of every 3 children experience social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties that interfere with some aspect of their daily functioning (CDC, 2021; WHO, 2021)
- Research unequivocally shows that elementary children who acquire and apply certain social, emotional, and behavioral competencies are associated with a range of positive short-term (academic engagement, increased belonging and relationships, positive indicators of well-being) and long-term outcomes (graduation, employment, positive mental health, even longer lives) (e.g., Robson et al., 2020)
 - Children who effectively manage their thinking, attention, and behavior are also more likely to have better grades and higher standardized test scores.²
 - Children with strong social skills are more likely to make and sustain friendships, initiate positive relationships with teachers, participate in classroom activities, and be positively engaged in learning (Jones et al., 2017)
- 51% increase in self-harm behaviors among youth since COVID, with the largest increase among 5-11 year olds (Racine et al. 2021).

Teachers

- Research has shown that when teachers invest in delivering SEL programs, they are likely to experience benefits in return with regard to improved social-emotional competencies and lower levels of stress and burnout (Brackett et al., 2017)
- Teachers consistently rank student social, emotional, and behavioral needs as one of their top priorities (Phi Delta Kappa, 2021)

- Teachers report a lack of professional skills and knowledge in delivering SEL instructions. In addition, many report their schools rarely provide resources (instruction materials, specific courses or activities) or create conditions (training teachers, devoting teaching hours, receiving school administration support) that would promote teachers' instruction of SEL (Schiepe-Tiska et al., 2021)

Administrators

- In a survey of over 800 principals, 98% participants reported that social-emotional competencies are important and promoting skills in these areas would be beneficial to students (Depaoli et al., 2017).
- However, study after study reveals that lack of leadership support for SEL is one of the most significant barriers to implementation (Locke et al., 2019)
- Leaders who cast a vision and maintain commitment to change and intentionally integrate SEL school-wide are more likely to achieve successful implementation (Cook et al., 2022)