

# Studies on SEL Education

## Research Supporting the Importance of Social and Emotional Skills

**Social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum directly addresses the five core areas of social and emotional competency: self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. There are over 20 years of research dedicated to proving the significant benefits of SEL curriculum; the most recent of which is highlighted here.**

Tests measuring executive function skills show a window of opportunity for dramatic growth in these skills between the ages of 3-5 (*Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, 2011*).

Studies from Loyola University and the University of Illinois at Chicago show social-emotional learning (SEL) programs improve mental health and behavior, boost children's social competence, and create more positive school climates. Students who participated in SEL programs gained an average of 11 percentage points more on achievement tests than students who didn't take part in the programs (*Durick et al., 2011*).

Researchers at Columbia University found an average return on investment of \$11 for every dollar spent on SEL programs. Other benefits studied include reductions in child aggression, substance abuse, delinquency, and violence; lower levels of depression and anxiety; increased grades, attendance, and performance in core academic subjects (*Belfield et al., 2015*).

In a study released in July 2015 that examined nearly 20 years of data from the Fast Track Research Project, researchers found that teacher-rated social competence in kindergarten consistently and significantly predicted outcomes in education, employment, criminal justice, substance use, and mental health into adulthood. The study showed kindergarteners with higher social competence scores are measurably more likely to earn a high school diploma, more likely to attain a college degree, and more likely to have a full-time job at age 25 (*Jones, Greenberg & Crowley, 2015*).

According to a 2015 report by the American Enterprise Institute and the Brookings Institution, SEL competencies are critically important for the long-term success of all students in today's economy (*AEI/Brookings Working Group on Poverty and Opportunity, 2015*).

The importance of developing social-emotional skills early in life is underscored by longitudinal research demonstrating that self-regulation in childhood predicts health, financial stability, and educational attainment into adulthood (*Moffitt et al., 2011*).

Executive function skills such as cognitive flexibility, inhibition (self-regulation and self-control), working memory, problem-solving, reasoning and planning are more important for school readiness than is IQ (*Blair, Razze, 2007*).



# Studies on SEL Education (Continued)

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According to a 2013 survey of 704 employers conducted by The Chronicle of Higher Education and American Public Media's Marketplace, half of those surveyed said they had trouble finding recent graduates to fill vacancies in their companies; even though applicants had the technical prowess, they lacked the communication, adaptability, decision-making, and problem-solving skills needed to do the job (*Durick, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011*).

Deficiencies in SEL skills inhibit learning in kindergarten students, causing them to fall behind academically (*California Department of Education, 2013*).

Social-emotional learning curriculum improves executive functioning skills (*Kusche et al., 1994*).

Executive function skills such as creativity, flexibility, self-control, and discipline, are key qualities children need to be successful throughout life (*Diamond, Lee, 2011*).

Children with poor self-control (less persistence, high impulsivity, and poor attention regulation) at ages 3-11 tend to have worse health, earn less, and commit more crimes 30 years later than those with better self-control as children (*Arseneault et al., 2011*).

Researchers at Penn State found adolescent bullying and youth violence can be confronted in America through in-school programs that integrate "kindness - the antithesis of victimization" (*Clark & Marinak, 2010*).

Preschool is an opportune time to equip children with SEL skills since their brains are rapidly developing (*Flook, 2013*).

In 2014, the White House emphasized the need for SEL curriculum in preschool with the Early Childhood Learning Plan and stated: "early education is the best investment we can make - not just in a child's future but in our country" (*White House Summit on Early Education, 2014*).

Emotion regulation, when taught to young learners, is linked to social and academic competence as well as language and moral development (*Durbin & Shafir, 2008*).

According to the *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanity Studies*, teaching conflict resolution to children creates safer schools that are freer of intimidation, fear, and violence and are more conducive to learning (*International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanity Studies, 2011*).

