Social & Emotional Learning

The Scientific Evidence Linking Social and Emotional Learning to School Success

An abundance of research demonstrates that social and emotional learning (SEL) improves academic performance, but schools are limited in their ability to implement SEL programs.

A wide range of evidence shows that various social and emotional skills, such as prosocial behavior, have a positive impact on academic attitudes, behaviors, and performance. The authors review this evidence and highlight limitations faced by schools and teachers, suggesting a powerful role for out-of-school time programs. "There is general agreement that it is important for schools to foster children’s social-emotional development," they write, "but all too often educators think about this focus in a fragmented manner." The authors recommend that programs coordinate and consolidate interventions designed to impact specific social or emotional skills.


Long-Term Links Between Social Behavior and Literacy Achievement in Children

Literacy skills, aggression, and prosocial behavior influence one another in elementary school children.

Two groups of children were studied longitudinally as they passed through first, third, and fifth grade. Researchers found that poor literacy in first and third grade predicted aggressive behavior two years later while children with higher literacy skills in first grade showed more prosocial behavior later, throughout elementary school. Conversely, the authors also found that prosocial behavior in first grade was associated with higher literacy achievement years later, indicating that the effect is bi-directional.


Academic and Emotional Benefits of Learning and Discussing Feeling Words

Introducing and discussing feeling words raises academic performance and promotes social and emotional competence in children.

In the RULER Feeling Words curriculum, instructors introduce children to words that refer to feelings, such as "elated," discuss these words in depth, and engage in activities centered around the word. Children are also encouraged to discuss the words with family members and relate them to current events or academic subject matter. The RULER curriculum was based on emotional intelligence theory, which acknowledges the impact of emotional processing on thinking and cognition (e.g., decision making, reasoning, and remembering), and adheres to best practice guidelines developed by the Collaborative for...
Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). Researchers found that fifth and sixth graders participating in a 30-week RULER Feeling Words program had higher performance in English language arts and higher social and emotional competence, including improved work habits and social development, compared to children who did not participate in the curriculum. 


**Expanded Learning**

Expanding Opportunities For After School Physical Activity

*Underprivileged youth have limited access to physical activity programs, field-sharing agreements between different organizations are recommended.* CANFIT (Communities, Adolescents, Nutrition and Fitness) convened stakeholders in the OST community to assess the opportunities and challenges to low income youth participating in physical activities. They found that often, youth accessed physical activity opportunities through community based organizations rather than schools, but these organizations had difficulty accessing facilities and equipment. CANFIT found that opportunities for girls to participate in physical activities were especially limited. Recommendations include designing activity programs especially for girls as well as brokering agreements between schools, community organizations and athletic leagues.


Something to Say: Success Principles for Afterschool Arts Programs

*Youth want to participate in arts programs when the activity is specifically identified in the title and when the instructor is a practicing artist.*

The Wallace Foundation commissioned a market-research study to assess the qualities of arts-based OST programs that were attractive to youth and would generate sustained participation. The study found that labels were important: youth did not want to participate in “arts,” but were excited about “design,” and “dance.” Furthermore, youth highly valued instruction if it came from a practicing artist. While parents frequently discouraged participation in the arts, favoring sports instead, the research found that youth had a lot of autonomy in choosing their OST activities.


Linking Common Core and Expanded Learning

*California has made OST programs a strategic component of their plan to meet the Common Core Standards.*

This article highlights the efforts that California has undertaken to connect its out of school time programs with its schools to achieve the goals set out by the Common Core. California explicitly and intentionally included the OST structure in its strategic plan, but allowed each region the flexibility to implement its own initiative. Region 5 invited OST practitioners to attend professional development trainings focused on connecting the school day goals to the afterschool structure, and provided coaching to support the implementation of this training into daily practice—these best practices are spreading to other regions.