Associations between High School Students' Social-Emotional Competencies and Their High School and College Academic and Behavioral Outcomes in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI)

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Why this study?

Education stakeholders in the CNMI expressed the need to better understand their high school students' social-emotional competencies and how those competencies might be associated with students' academic and behavioral outcomes in high school and college. Social-emotional competencies refer to the knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors that help students recognize and manage their emotions, build positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. This study relied on survey responses from grade 11 and 12 students in the CNMI public school system about their social and emotional competencies and examined links between those competencies and their high school and college academic and behavioral outcomes.

Social and Emotional Competencies Examined

Self-management: Ability to regulate one's own emotions and behaviors.

Growth mindset: Belief that one is capable of learning.

Self-efficacy: Belief that one can reach one's own academic goals.

Sense of belonging: Feeling one is socially connected to peers and teachers.

Social awareness: Ability to empathize with others.

Academic and Behavioral Outcomes Examined

	High school	College
Academic Outcomes	• Cumulative GPA. • ACT Aspire math score. • ACT Aspire reading score.	• First semester GPA. • Enrollment in developmental English. • Enrollment in developmental math. • Completed all attempted credits.
Behavioral Outcomes	• Absences.	• Persistence to a second semester.

The study controlled for the following student characteristics: high school attended, ethnicity, gender, grade level, Northern Marianas descent, and Pell grant receipt.
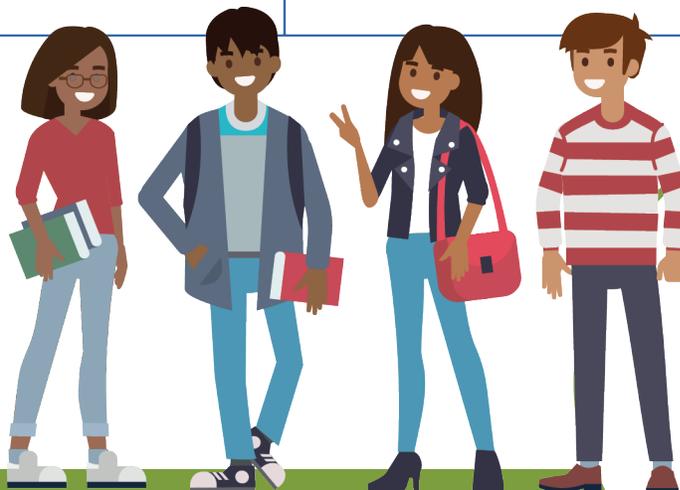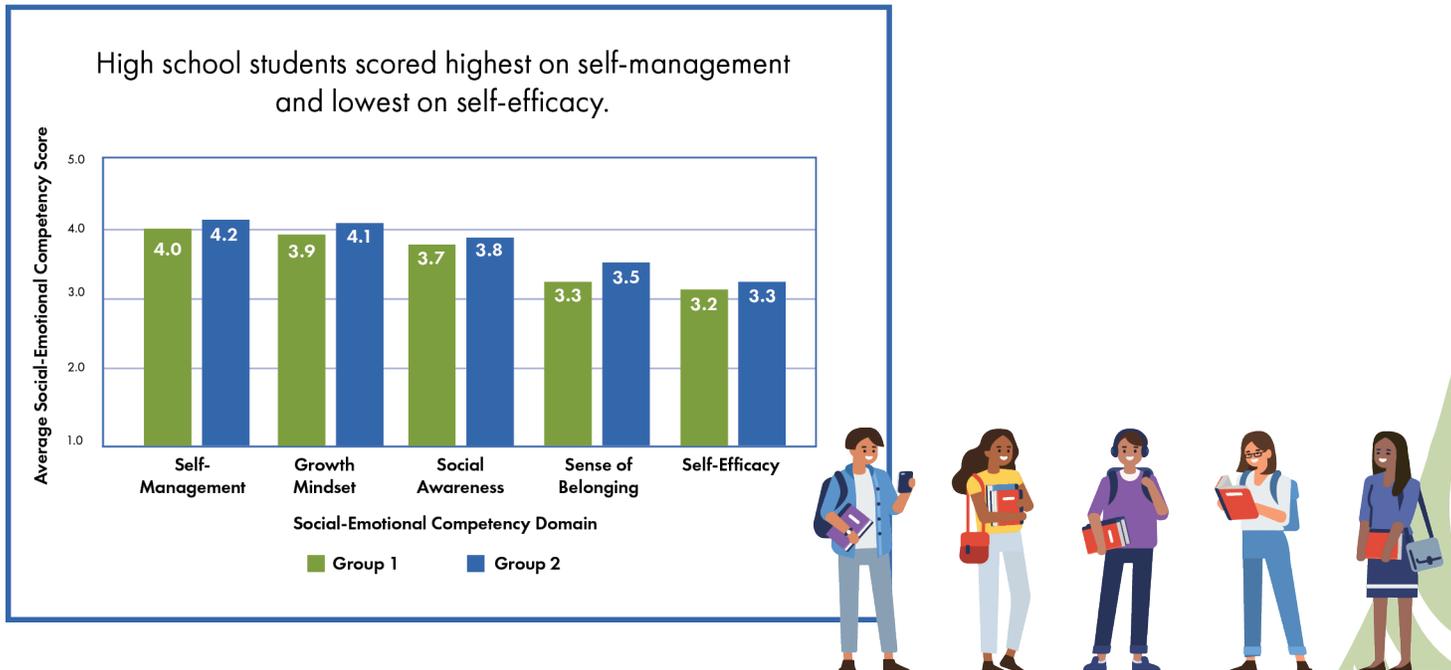
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Methods

The study examined outcomes for two groups:

- **Group 1** included data from 439 students who were in grade 11 or 12 at a CNMI public high school during the 2018/19 academic year, who completed the social-emotional competencies survey administered in May 2019, and whose survey results could be linked to high school data on student characteristics and high school academic and behavioral outcomes.
- **Group 2** consisted of 82 students from the previous sample who were in grade 12 and for whom responses could be linked to fall 2019 and spring 2020 data provided by Northern Marianas College.

Findings

High school students scored highest on self-management and lowest on self-efficacy.

Average Social-Emotional Competency Score

Social-Emotional Competency Domain	Group 1	Group 2
Self-Management	4.0	4.2
Growth Mindset	3.9	4.1
Social Awareness	3.7	3.8
Sense of Belonging	3.3	3.5
Self-Efficacy	3.2	3.3

Scores on growth mindset, self-efficacy, and social awareness were associated with at least one of the academic and behavioral outcomes examined in the study.

Social-Emotional Competency	High school GPA	ACT Aspire Math Scores	ACT Aspire Reading Scores	Days Absent	College First-Semester GPA
Growth mindset	↑	↑	↑	n.s	↑
Self-efficacy	↑	↑	↑	↓	n.s
Social awareness	↓	n.s	n.s	n.s	n.s

Note: Scores on self-management and sense of belonging were not associated with the academic and behavioral outcomes examined in the study.

"n.s" – the social-emotional competency is not a statistically significant predictor of the outcome
↑ – a statistically significant, positive relationship: as one increases, the other increases
↓ – a statistically significant, negative relationship: as one increases, the other decreases

What might educators in the CNMI consider doing to increase college success?

Implement systemwide strategies to promote K–12 students' self-efficacy across grade levels. The study found that students' self-efficacy scores were associated with all high school outcomes. Prior research suggests practices that promote students' self-efficacy can improve student outcomes[1] and that systemwide approaches to social and emotional learning are more effective at promoting students' social-emotional competencies than piecemeal approaches.[2]

Create a continuous improvement system that assesses students' social emotional competencies. This may help educators monitor any changes in students' average social-emotional competencies over time and determine whether the social-emotional learning practices are having the intended effect on students' social-emotional development.

Examine college students' social-emotional competencies. Findings may vary as students transition from high school to college. Getting a sense of college students' social-emotional competencies could help educators support their social-emotional needs.

Explore diverse student populations and contexts. Patterns may differ for groups of students according to their backgrounds and cultural contexts. Examining such differences can help educators promote equity in their social and emotional learning practices and help promote the social-emotional needs of all learners.[3, 4]

Endnotes

1. Honicke, T., & Broadbent, J. (2016). The influence of academic self-efficacy on academic performance: A systematic review. *Educational Research Review, 17*(1), 63–84. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2015.11.002
2. Oberle, E., Domitrovich, C. E., Meyers, D. C., & Weissberg, R. P. (2016). Establishing systemic social and emotional learning approaches in schools: A framework for schoolwide implementation. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 6*(3), 277–297. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2015.1125450.
3. National Forum on Education Statistics. (2016). *Forum guide to collecting and using disaggregated data on racial/ethnic subgroups. (*NFES 2017-017). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2017/NFES2017017.pdf
4. CASEL District Resource Center. (2021). *SEL as a lever for equity.* https://drc.casel.org/sel-as-a-lever-for-equity/