

REL Southwest Ask A REL Response

Discipline

September 2018

Question:

To what extent are social-emotional education programs, such as Second Step, effective in reducing behavioral incidents that lead to referrals, suspensions, and expulsions?

Response:

Thank you for the question you submitted to our REL Reference Desk. We have prepared the following memo with research references to help answer your question. For each reference, we provide an abstract, excerpt, or summary written by the study's author or publisher. Following an established Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest research protocol, we conducted a search for research reports as well as descriptive study articles on social-emotional education programs' effectiveness in reducing behavioral incidents.

We have not evaluated the quality of references and the resources provided in this response. We offer them only for your reference. Also, we searched the references in the response from the most commonly used resources of research, but they are not comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist. References provided are listed in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance. We do not include sources that are not freely available to the requestor.

Research References

Brown, J. A., Jimerson, S. R., Dowdy, E., Gonzalez, V., & Stewart, K. (2012). Assessing the effects of school-wide "Second Step" implementation in a predominately English language learner, low SES, Latino sample. *Psychology in the Schools, 49*(9), 864–875. Retrieved from <https://bobcat.militaryfamilies.psu.edu/sites/default/files/placed-programs/Brown,%202012.pdf>

From the abstract: "Because school violence is widespread, social and emotional competence must be targeted. 'Second Step' is a social and emotional violence-prevention curriculum that teaches prosocial skills and reduces aggressive behavior. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of 'Second Step' implementation on students ($N = 403$) in preschool through fourth grade who were predominately Latino, English language learners, and from families with low socioeconomic status. The data of 165 out of the 403 students were included in the present study. Analyses consisted of

paired-samples t-tests to identify changes in social and emotional knowledge and behavioral and emotional risk. Results showed that there was a significant increase in both social and emotional knowledge and behavioral and emotional risk following the implementation of ‘Second Step.’ These results are discussed with regard to previous and future research, limitations, and implications for school practice.”

Cuccaro, C. & Geitner, G. (2007). Lunch and recess: The “eye of the storm”—Using targeted interventions for students with behavioral problems. *TEACHING Exceptional Children Plus*, 3(4), Article 2. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ967453>

From the abstract: “A group of fifth-grade students who had persistent problems at lunch and recess were identified and provided with direct instruction in pro-social skills. These skills were taught by the authors in a two-week program that they called the ‘Alternative to Lunch Program for Students’ (ALPS). This action research study measured the impact of the intervention on their ability to demonstrate skills such as using self-control, avoiding trouble, and accepting consequences. The ALPS was part of a larger school-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program. Pre- and post-intervention data suggest that for a majority of the students, the ALPS resulted in improved behavior within the cafeteria and at recess.”

Espelage, D. L., Low, S., Polanin, J. R., & Brown, E. C. (2013). The impact of a middle school program to reduce aggression, victimization, and sexual violence. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 53(2), 180–186. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/27336416/The_Impact_of_a_Middle_School_Program_to_Reduce_Aggression_Victimization_and_Sexual_Violence (log-in required)

From the abstract: “Purpose: To evaluate the impact of the Second Step: Student Success Through Prevention (SS-SSTP) Middle School Program on reducing youth violence including peer aggression, peer victimization, homophobic name calling, and sexual violence perpetration and victimization among middle school sixth-grade students. Methods: The study design was a nested cohort (sixth graders) longitudinal study. We randomly assigned 18 matched pairs of 36 middle schools to the SS-SSTP or control condition. Teachers implemented 15 weekly lessons of the sixth-grade curriculum that focused on social emotional learning skills, including empathy, communication, bully prevention, and problem-solving skills. All sixth graders (n = 3,616) in intervention and control conditions completed self-report measures assessing verbal/relational bullying, physical aggression, homophobic name calling, and sexual violence victimization and perpetration before and after the implementation of the sixth-grade curriculum. Results: Multilevel analyses revealed significant intervention effects with regard to physical aggression. The adjusted odds ratio indicated that the intervention effect was substantial; individuals in intervention schools were 42% less likely to self-report physical aggression than students in control schools. We found no significant intervention effects for verbal/relational bully perpetration, peer victimization, homophobic teasing, and sexual violence. Conclusions: Within a 1-year period, we noted significant reductions in self-reported physical aggression in the intervention schools. Results suggest that SS-SSTP

holds promise as an efficacious prevention program to reduce physical aggression in adolescent youth.”

Espelage, D. L., Rose, C. A., & Polanin, J. R. (2016). Social-emotional learning program to promote prosocial and academic skills among middle school students with disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education, 37*(6), 323–332. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1119329>

From the ERIC abstract: “This 3-year study evaluated the effectiveness of the Second Step-Student Success Through Prevention (SS-SSTP) social-emotional learning program on increasing prosocial behaviors that could serve as protective factors against peer conflict and bullying among students with disabilities. Participants included 123 students with disabilities across 12 schools in Midwest United States. Students labelled with a disability were selected for inclusion. Students completed self-report measures of school belonging, empathy, caring, and willingness to intervene in bullying situations. Report card grades and standardized test scores were collected from school records. Students with disabilities in the intervention schools reported a statistical and clinical significant increase in willingness to intervene in bullying incidents in comparison with students with disabilities in control schools and an increase of half a grade on their report cards in comparison with the control sample. The current study demonstrates the promise of social-emotional learning programming for students with disabilities.”

Flannery, K. B., Fenning, P., Kato, M. M., & McIntosh, K. (2014). Effects of school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports and fidelity of implementation on problem behavior in high schools. *School Psychology Quarterly, 29*(2), 111–124. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/6970/1f40438fb17c173f9f220f7ef3231d35d5fc.pdf>

From the abstract: “High school is an important time in the educational career of students. It is also a time when adolescents face many behavioral, academic, and social-emotional challenges. Current statistics about the behavioral, academic, and social-emotional challenges faced by adolescents, and the impact on society through incarceration and dropout, have prompted high schools to direct their attention toward keeping students engaged and reducing high-risk behavioral challenges. The purpose of the study was to examine the effects of School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SW-PBIS) on the levels of individual student problem behaviors during a 3-year effectiveness trial without random assignment to condition. Participants were 36,653 students in 12 high schools. Eight schools implemented SW-PBIS, and four schools served as comparison schools. Results of a multilevel latent growth model showed statistically significant decreases in student office discipline referrals in SW-PBIS schools, with increases in comparison schools, when controlling for enrollment and percent of students receiving free or reduced price meals. In addition, as fidelity of implementation increased, office discipline referrals significantly decreased. Results are discussed in terms of effectiveness of a SW-PBIS approach in high schools and considerations to enhance fidelity of implementation.”

Graves, S. L., Jr., Herndon-Sobalvarro, A., Nichols, K., Aston, C., Ryan, A., Blevari, A., et al. (2017). Examining the effectiveness of a culturally adapted social-emotional intervention for

African American males in an urban setting. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 32(1), 62–74.
Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/features/spq-spq0000145.pdf>

From the abstract: “The purpose of the present study was to assess the efficacy of a culturally adapted version of the Strong Start intervention program on the social-emotional outcomes of African American male students. Externalizing behavior problems of children, specifically African American males, are of great concern for schools. Punitive discipline policies such as expulsion and suspension have proved to be ineffective and harmful. Consequently, school-based social-emotional learning (SEL) interventions have been proposed to teach children coping skills that can help them increase positive social behaviors and emotional regulation. Sixty-one African American male students enrolled in an urban elementary school participated in this intervention. This study employed a randomized delayed treatment control design. Results indicated positive effects in the areas of self-regulation and self-competence. However the intervention did not have an impact on student's empathy, responsibility, or externalizing behavior. Implications are discussed in terms of developing culturally relevant school-based interventions for African American males.”

Jolstead, K. A., Caldarella, P., Hansen, B., Korth, B. B., Williams, L., & Kamps, D. (2017). Implementing positive behavior support in preschools: An exploratory study of CW-FIT Tier 1. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 19(1), 48–60. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1123735>

From the ERIC abstract: “Challenging behavior in preschool is a serious concern for teachers. Positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) have been shown to be effective in reducing such behaviors. Class-Wide Function-Related Intervention Teams (CW-FIT) is a specific multi-tiered intervention for implementing effective classroom management strategies using PBIS practices. CW-FIT has been shown to be effective in elementary classrooms but has not yet been evaluated with younger age groups. CW-FIT Tier 1 is a group contingency utilizing social skills training, teacher praise, and positive reinforcement to improve student behavior. The present study examined the effects of CW-FIT Tier 1 implementation on student group on-task behavior and on teacher praise and reprimand rates in four preschool classrooms. A single-subject delayed multiple baseline design with embedded reversals was used to evaluate impact. Results indicated the intervention increased student group on-task behavior and teacher praise to reprimand ratios. Both teachers and children found CW-FIT Tier 1 to be socially valid. Limitations and implications of this study for researchers and practitioners are discussed.”

Nese, R. N. T. & McIntosh, K. (2016). Do school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports, not exclusionary discipline practices. In B. G. Cook, M. Tankersley, & T. J. Landrum (Eds.), *Advances in Learning and Behavioral Disabilities* (pp. 175–196). Bingley, UK: Emerald Group. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED571283>

From the ERIC abstract: “All educators will inevitably face unwanted student behavior that they need to address. A ubiquitous response to unwanted behavior is exclusionary discipline practices, including time-out, office discipline referrals, and suspensions. However, extensive research has demonstrated that these practices are associated with

negative outcomes, including increased likelihood of further unwanted behavior, decreased achievement, and racial/ethnic discipline disparities. In this chapter, we provide a preventative alternative to exclusionary practices, school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (SWPBIS). SWPBIS is an evidence-based framework for implementing systems to reduce unwanted behavior and increase prosocial behavior, decreasing the need for exclusionary practices.”

Snyder, F. J., Flay, B. R., Vuchinich, S., Acock, A., Washburn, I. J., Beets, M. W., & Li, K.-K. (2010). Impact of a social-emotional and character development program on school-level indicators of academic achievement, absenteeism, and disciplinary outcomes: A matched-pair, cluster-randomized, controlled trial. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 3(1), 26–55. Retrieved from <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/sel-impact-sch-indicators.pdf>

From the abstract: “This article reports the effects of a comprehensive elementary school-based social-emotional and character education program on school-level achievement, absenteeism, and disciplinary outcomes utilizing a matched-pair, cluster-randomized, controlled design. The "Positive Action" Hawai'i trial included 20 racially/ethnically diverse schools (M enrollment = 544) and was conducted from the 2002-03 through the 2005-06 academic years. Using school-level archival data, analyses comparing change from baseline (2002) to 1-year posttrial (2007) revealed that intervention schools scored 9.8% better on the TerraNova (2nd ed.) test for reading and 8.8% on math, that 20.7% better in Hawai'i Content and Performance Standards scores for reading and 51.4% better in math, and that intervention schools reported 15.2% lower absenteeism and fewer suspensions (72.6%) and retentions (72.7%). Overall, effect sizes were moderate to large (range = 0.5-1.1) for all of the examined outcomes. Sensitivity analyses using permutation models and random-intercept growth curve models substantiated results. The results provide evidence that a comprehensive school-based program, specifically developed to target student behavior and character, can positively influence school-level achievement, attendance, and disciplinary outcomes concurrently.”

Sullivan, T. N., Sutherland, K. S., Farrell, A. D., & Taylor, K. A. (2015). An evaluation of Second Step: What are the benefits for youth with and without disabilities? *Remedial and Special Education*, 36(5), 286–298. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/275642497_An_Evaluation_of_Second_Step

From the abstract: “The impact of a school-based violence prevention program, Second Step, on peer victimization and aggression, and emotion regulation was evaluated among 457 sixth graders. A cluster-randomized trial was conducted with classrooms randomly assigned to intervention (n = 14) or control (n = 14) conditions. A repeated measures analysis of covariance on each measure was conducted using random effects. Several intervention effects were moderated by gender and disability status. Teacher-rated relational victimization at posttest decreased for students with disabilities in intervention but not control classrooms. Students without disabilities in intervention classrooms reported greater decreases from pretest to 6-month follow-up in overt aggression. Boys in the intervention classrooms had smaller increases in teacher-rated overt aggression at posttest than boys in control classrooms. Girls in intervention classrooms reported greater

decreases from pretest to 6-month follow-up in relational aggression than girls in control classrooms. Study implications and directions for future research are discussed.”

Top, N., Liew, J., & Luo, W. (2016). Effects of Second Step curriculum on behavioral and academic outcomes in 5th and 8th grade students: A longitudinal study on character development. *Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)*, 10(1), 24-47.
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1167262>

From the ERIC abstract: “School-based programs designed to reduce problem behaviors, increase prosocial behaviors, and improve academic achievement have often been characterized as social-emotional learning or character development (education) programs. This longitudinal study investigated effects of such a program, called ‘Second Step’, on observed problem behaviors, observed prosocial behaviors, and school grades across 4 school semesters for 5th to 8th grade students. A sample of 5,189 from 35 schools (16 control and 19 treatment schools) in an open-enrollment charter school system participated. Results from a three-level longitudinal growth model analysis indicated that students in the treatment schools (with ‘Second Step’ curriculum) attained higher school grades and exhibited fewer problem behaviors than students in the control schools across 4 school semesters. Students in the treatment schools also exhibited more prosocial behaviors, but this increase was marginally significant or approaching significance. The findings have implications for promoting a positive classroom or school climate that supports engagement and achievement.”

Additional Organizations to Consult

Collaboration for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) – <https://casel.org/>

From the website: “Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is the nation’s leading organization advancing the development of academic, social and emotional competence for all students. Our mission is to help make evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) an integral part of education from preschool through high school. Through research, practice and policy, CASEL collaborates to ensure all students become knowledgeable, responsible, caring and contributing members of society.”

CASEL Resources – <https://casel.org/resources/>

CASEL Guide: “Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs” – <https://casel.org/guide/>

PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports)/OSEP Technical Assistance Center – <https://www.pbis.org/>

From the website: “Funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), the Technical Assistance Center on PBIS supports schools, districts, and states to build systems capacity for implementing a multi-tiered approach to

social, emotional and behavior support. The broad purpose of PBIS is to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and equity of schools and other agencies. PBIS improves social, emotional and academic outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities and students from underrepresented groups.”

Second Step – <http://www.secondstep.org/>

From the website: “Second Step is a program rooted in social-emotional learning (SEL) that helps transform schools into supportive, successful learning environments uniquely equipped to help children thrive.”

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- Social-emotional learning + behavioral incidents + referrals + suspensions + expulsions
- Social-emotional learning + behavioral incidents + referrals + suspensions
- Social-emotional learning + behavioral incidents + referrals
- Social-emotional learning + behavioral incidents
- Social-emotional learning
- Social emotional learning programs
- Second Step program
- Second Step program + behavior
- Second Step effectiveness
- Strong Start program
- PBIS effectiveness

Databases and Resources

We searched ERIC for relevant, peer-reviewed research references. ERIC is a free online library of more than 1.6 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). Additionally, we searched the What Works Clearinghouse.

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

When we were searching and reviewing resources, we considered the following criteria:

- *Date of the publication:* References and resources published from 2003 to present, were included in the search and review.

- *Search priorities of reference sources:* Search priority is given to study reports, briefs, and other documents that are published and/or reviewed by IES and other federal or federally funded organizations, academic databases, including ERIC, EBSCO databases, JSTOR database, PsychInfo, PsychArticle, and Google Scholar.
- *Methodology:* The following methodological priorities/considerations were given in the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized control trials, quasi-experiments, correlational studies, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, mixed methods analyses, and so forth; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected, and so forth), study duration, and so forth; and (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, and so forth.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by stakeholders in the Southwest Region (Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest at AIR. This memorandum was prepared by REL Southwest under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-91990018C0002, administered by AIR. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.