

What Works Clearinghouse



Skills for Action

Program description *Skills for Action*, a program to build positive character values and life and citizenship skills for students in grades 9–12, includes classroom lessons and service learning. The program, with more than 100 lessons focused around 26 personal, social, and thinking skills, ranges from one semester to four years in length. Students explore personal stories highlighting values and behavior through teachers’ questions and group discussion and resource pages in the curricular materials. For service learning, students perform school-based or community-based projects and reflect on their experiences. Optional components include a student magazine, an Advisory Team, and supplemental units on drug use prevention. A related program is reviewed in the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) intervention report on [Skills for Adolescence](#).

Research One study of *Skills for Action* met the WWC evidence standards with reservations. The study included almost 1,800 high school students in 26 classrooms from 25 rural, suburban, and urban schools in seven states in the eastern and central United States. The study authors examined results on students’ knowledge, attitudes, and values.¹

Effectiveness *Skills for Action* was found to have no discernible effects on students’ knowledge, attitudes, and values.

	Behavior	Knowledge, attitudes, and values	Academic achievement
Rating of effectiveness	Not reported	No discernible effects	Not reported
Improvement index²	Not reported	Average: +5 percentile points Range: +5 percentile points	Not reported

1. The evidence presented in this report is based on the available research. Findings and conclusions may change as new research becomes available.
 2. These numbers show the average and range of improvement indices in the study. Because there was one finding reviewed, the average equals the range in the case of *Skills for Action*.

Additional program information

Developer and contact

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Scope of use

Skills for Action was first developed at the high school level in 1977 (originally known as “Quest’s Skills for Living”) and expanded to become three different Lion’s Quest programs for various grade levels in 1984 (*Skills for Growing*, K–5; *Skills for Adolescence*, 6–8; and *Skills for Action*, 9–12). The *Skills for Action* program has been used by almost 200,000 students in the United States and more than 300,000 students worldwide in urban, suburban, and rural communities with students from a variety of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. More than 5,000 US teachers and almost 7,000 teachers worldwide have been trained in the program. *Skills for Action* may have changed since the studies were conducted. The WWC recommends asking the developer for information about the most current version of this curriculum and taking into account that student demographics and school context may affect outcomes.

Teaching

The *Skills for Action* program is rooted in the belief that young people are valuable resources who can take active and meaningful roles in addressing the issues that affect their lives and their communities. Lessons focus on integrating service learning with character development, social and emotional competencies, workplace skills, and positive prevention in the context of a respectful learning environment and school-community partnerships. The curriculum includes more than 100 lessons focusing on character development, a respectful classroom environment, and life skills. The lessons can be implemented as separate courses that last from one semester or one year (using

a selection of lessons) to four years (using all lessons). They can also be integrated into a variety of existing curricula.

Service learning is integrated into the academic curriculum and structures time for students to think, talk, and write about what they did and saw as they served. Service learning activities either place students into existing service agencies or involve students in planning and conducting a service project that meets actual school or community needs.

A typical teacher training workshop lasts two to three days. It covers establishing a classroom and schoolwide learning environment that supports character growth, learning the theoretical underpinnings of the program, understanding program components and materials, implementing key elements of the program, and exploring further expansion of the program. Following training and certification, the Lions Quest Foundation provides curriculum materials for teachers. Additional materials include *Making a Difference* student magazine, *Skills Bank*, student workbook, and material for families as well as a *Teacher’s Resource Guide*, an *Advisory Team Handbook*, and a supplemental prevention unit called *Exploring the Issues: Teens—Alcohol and Other Drugs*.

Cost

A curriculum set costs \$120. A single issue of the *Making a Difference* student magazine costs \$2.95. The 15-session supplemental units *Exploring the Issues* cost \$29.95 a unit. The *Real Heroes* video costs \$5. An additional resource book, *The Complete Guide to Service Learning*, costs \$29.95.

Training workshops can be organized locally for \$4,000 for a two-day workshop or \$5,000 for a three-day workshop, with an added cost of \$500 if the reservation is made less than six weeks before the training. The developer also offers workshops at regional locations for \$500 a person (with discounts for four or more registrants and four or more weeks advance registration). With a guarantee of 12 or more participants, the developer will provide this workshop on a by-request basis. Collaboration with a local Lion’s Club group can reduce workshop prices.

Research Two studies reviewed by the WWC investigated the effects of the *Skills for Action* program. One study (Laird, Bradley, & Black, 1998) was a quasi-experimental design that met WWC evidence standards with reservations. The other study did not meet WWC evidence screens.

The Laird, Bradley, and Black (1998) study included almost 1,800 students from 25 high schools in seven states. The participating schools were broadly representative of US public schools in terms of demographic composition and urbanicity. Outcomes for 473 students in classrooms using *Skills for Action* were compared with outcomes for 257 students in comparison classrooms in the same or nearby schools. The study focused on *Skills for Action* as implemented in classrooms rather than as a schoolwide intervention.

Effectiveness Findings

The WWC review of character education addresses student outcomes in three domains: behavior; knowledge, attitudes, and values; and academic achievement.

Knowledge, attitudes, and values. Laird, Bradley, and Black (1998) reported no statistically significant or substantively important impacts of the *Skills for Action* program as measured by the Student Service Learning Survey.² In addition, the effect size for the finding in this domain was not substantively important (at least 0.25).

Rating of effectiveness

The WWC rates interventions as positive, potentially positive, mixed, no discernible effects, potentially negative, or negative. The rating of effectiveness takes into account four factors: the quality of the research design, the statistical significance of the findings (as calculated by the WWC²), the size of the difference between participants in the intervention condition and the comparison condition, and the consistency in findings across studies (see the [WWC Intervention Rating Scheme](#)).

The WWC found *Skills for Action* to have no discernible effects for knowledge, attitudes, and values

Improvement index

For each outcome domain, the WWC computed an improvement index based on the effect size (see the [Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations](#)). The improvement index represents the difference between the percentile rank of the average student in the intervention condition versus the percentile rank of the average student in the comparison condition. Unlike the rating of effectiveness, the improvement index is entirely based on the size of the effect, regardless of the statistical significance of the effect, the study design, or the analysis. The improvement index can take on values between -50 and +50, with positive numbers denoting favorable results.

The improvement index for the knowledge, attitudes, and values domain is +5 percentile points.

Summary

The WWC reviewed two studies on *Skills for Action*; one study met WWC evidence standards with reservations. It reported student outcomes in the knowledge, attitudes, and values domain. The study reported no statistically significant or substantively important findings. Therefore, the WWC rated the program as having no discernible effects on knowledge, attitudes, and values. Character education, an evolving field, is beginning to establish a research base. The evidence presented in this report is limited and may change as new research emerges.

2. The level of statistical significance was calculated by the WWC and, where necessary, corrects for clustering within classrooms or schools and for multiple comparisons. For an explanation, see the [WWC Tutorial on Mismatch](#). See the [Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations](#) for the formulas the WWC used to calculate the statistical significance. In the case of *Skills for Action*, corrections for clustering effects and multiple comparisons were not needed.

References **Met WWC evidence standards with reservations**

Laird, M., Bradley, L. R., & Black, S. (1998). *The final evaluation of Lions-Quest's Skills for Action*. Newark, OH: Lions Quest, Lions Clubs International Foundation.

Additional source:

Keister, S. C. (n. d.). Lions-Quest Skills for Action summary of research report to Quest International. (Available from Lions Quest, Lions Clubs International Foundation, 1984 Coffman Rd., Newark, OH 43055.) (study #1)

Did not meet WWC evidence screens

Laird, M., & Black, S. (n.d.). *Service-learning evaluation project: Program effects for at-risk students*. Newark, OH: Lions Quest, Lions Clubs International Foundation.³

Additional source:

Keister, S. C. (n. d.). Lions-Quest Skills for Action summary of research report to Quest International. (Available from Lions Quest, Lions Clubs International Foundation, 1984 Coffman Rd., Newark, OH 43055.) (study #2)

For more information about specific studies and WWC calculations, please see the [WWC Skills for Action Technical Appendices](#).

3. Does not use a strong causal design: there was only one intervention and one comparison unit, so the analysis could not separate the effects of the intervention from other factors.