

Research Summaries

Research on the Relationship Between Mental Health and Academic Achievement

- A meta-analysis of school-based social and emotional learning programs involving more than 270,000 students in grades K-12 revealed that students who participated in these programs improved in grades and standardized test scores by 11 percentile points compared to control groups (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011).
- Research indicates that well-planned and well-implemented social and emotional programming can positively affect academic outcomes (Greenberg, Weissberg, O'Brien, Zins, et al., 2003; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004).
- Several hundred well-designed studies have documented the positive effects of social and emotional learning programming on students of diverse backgrounds, from preschool through high school, in urban, suburban, and rural settings (Greenberg, Weissberg, O'Brien, Zins, et al., 2003; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004).
- Longitudinal evaluation of a positive youth development initiative in 11 Alaska school districts revealed that not only are several aspects of school climate and connectedness related to student achievement, but positive change in school climate and school connectedness is related to significant gains in student scores on statewide achievement tests (Spier, Cai, & Osher, 2007; Spier, Cai, Osher, & Kendziora, 2007). School Climate and Bonding to School
- Changing a school's climate and connectedness for the better is associated with increases in student performance in reading, writing, and mathematics (regardless of whether a school starts with high or low school climate and connectedness or high or low achievement scores) (Spier, Cai, & Osher, 2007; Spier, Cai, Osher, & Kendziora, 2007).
- A longitudinal study provided strong empirical evidence that interventions that strengthen students' social, emotional, and decision-making skills also positively impact their academic achievement, both in terms of higher standardized test scores and better grades (Fleming, Haggerty, Brown, Catalano, et al., 2005).
- Longitudinal research has demonstrated positive impact on elementary students' academic performance of the Raising Healthy Children, a school-based program that focuses on promoting positive youth development, reducing risk factors, and preventing adolescent problem behaviors (Catalano, Mazza, Harachi, Abbott, Haggerty, & Fleming, 2003).

- Students who receive social-emotional support and prevention services achieve better academically in school (Greenberg, Weissberg, O'Brien, Zins, et al., 2003; Welsh, Parke, Widaman, & O'Neil, 2001; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004).
- Scientifically based research findings support the conclusion that enhanced social and emotional behaviors can have a strong impact on success in school and ultimately in life (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004).
- Research shows that children's developmental competence is integral to their academic competence (Masten, Roisman, Long, Burt, et al., 2005).
- There is a strong tie between students' overall health and resilience and their academic achievement (WestEd, 2003).
- In summarizing studies on the relationship between children's emotional distress and achievement behavior, researchers found that students with frequent feelings of internalized distress (e.g., sadness, anxiety, depression) show diminished academic functioning and those with externalized distress (e.g., anger, frustration, and fear) exhibit school difficulties including learning delays and poor achievement (Roeser, Eccles, & Strobel, 1998).
- Research on the relationship between emotional dispositions and academic performance among middle school students provides support for the conclusion that emotional regulation significantly contributes to grade-point averages of students, over and above the contribution made by cognition-related abilities (Gumora & Arsenio, 2002).
- Adolescents with depression are at increased risk for impairment in school and educational attainment (Asarnow, Jaycox, Duan, LaBorde, et al., 2005).
- Research reveals that intervening to decrease anxiety in six- to 13-year-old children with high anxiety predicts improved school performance and social functioning (Wood, 2006).
- Longitudinal research employing the California Healthy Kids Survey indicated that increasing sadness or hopelessness among students was related to subsequent declines in gains in test scores in reading, language, and mathematics; however, students' reports of caring relationships in school, high expectations at school, and meaningful community participation were related to increases in test scores (Hanson, Austin, & Lee-Bayha, 2004).
- A longitudinal study found participation in a school-based, early childhood program providing educational and family-support services for low-income children between the ages of three and nine years to be associated with a wide range of positive outcomes on general well-being into adulthood. These include higher rates of school completion; higher levels of educational attainment; and lower rates of felony arrests, convictions, incarceration, and depressive symptoms (Reynolds, Temple, Ou, Robertson, Mersky, Topitzes, & Niles, 2007).

- A longitudinal study of third and fourth grade students provides support for a causal relationship between good social skills and higher academic achievement (Malecki & Elliott, 2002).
- Students' perceptions of teacher support and the teacher as promoting interaction and mutual respect are related to positive changes in the students' academic motivation and engagement (Ryan & Patrick, 2001).
- School mental health programs improve educational outcomes by decreasing absences and discipline referrals and improving test scores (Jennings, Pearson, & Harris, 2000).
- Longitudinal research demonstrates that adjustment variables (e.g., forming secure attachments, functioning autonomously, moving toward self-regulation) measured in the first three years of life predict achievement in math and reading in elementary school (Teo, Carlson, Mathieu, Egeland, & Sroufe, 1996).
- Children's adjustment in the first three years of life and later emotional health and social competence in the school years have been shown through longitudinal research to be significant predictors of academic achievement in elementary school, even after controlling for the effects of IQ or prior achievement (Teo, Carlson, Mathieu, Egeland, & Sroufe, 1996).
- Research has shown that healthy peer relationships predict students' grades both concurrently and over time (Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997).
- Research with sixth and seventh graders found that prosocial classroom behavior is significantly related to better academic outcomes, and evidence suggests that the former causes the latter (Wentzel, 1993).

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