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Social Skills Teaching Improves School Grades: Study

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Programs that teach school children social skills, or social and emotional learning (SEL), can improve grades, according to a new study. (Photos.com)

Programs that teach school children social skills, or social and emotional learning (SEL), can improve grades, according to a study published in the journal Child Development on Feb. 4.

[Researchers](#) from the University of Chicago at Illinois analyzed data from 213 school-based SEL programs involving more than 270,000 students from [kindergarten](#) through to high school age. The students participating in SEL programs showed significantly improved social and emotional skills with academic performance increasing by 11 percentile points.

Four recommended practices for [developing](#) these skills were identified, referred to by an acronym as the SAFE model. They are a "sequenced" set of activities; "active" forms of learning; at least one component "focused" on developing social skills; and [targets](#) "explicit" SEL skills.

The study also noted that interpersonal, instructional, and environmental support enhance school performance, and that incorporating well-designed and well-instructed SEL programs into mainstream education can contribute to healthy development in children.

"We learned this is very practical for schools and doable in schools," Joseph Durlak, psychology professor and chief investigator of the study, told Education Week. "There can be a payoff academically for these kids that compares to a lot of straightforward academic interventions, which is really sort of amazing."

Corinne Gregory, founder of the SEL program Socialsmarts, said the correlation might be a result of students being calmer and more cooperative with their teachers.

"We focus all of our efforts on that nasty endpoint of the social-emotional continuum—bullying—rather than preventing all the other problems that lead up to that," such as disrespect in the classroom or cheating, Gregory said, according to Education Week. "By then, it's almost too late in the game."

Interestingly, the study showed that simple classroom-based programs were much more successful than large-scale programs incorporating parents and school-wide activities, such as Socialsmarts.

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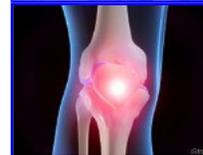
"The more comprehensive and broader programs tended to have more implementation problems," Durlak said, according to Education Week. "Trying to do more in the schools tends to be harder, takes more coordination, involves more people—they're a lot harder to pull off."

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Gregory said that although Socialsmarts has a successful track record, implementation of the program has been a "challenge."



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