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Social and Emotional Learning: A Sound Investment?



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Most educators intuitively believe that social and emotional learning (SEL) programs can improve students' lives. But can schools justify the financial investments such programs require? Help may come from a study conducted by the Center for Cost-Benefit Analysis, which compares the costs of these six well-known SEL programs with their long-term economic benefits: *The 4Rs Program*, *Positive Action*, *Life Skills Training*, *Second Step*, *Responsive Classroom*, and *Social and Emotional Training*.

The analysis calculated the per-student costs of the programs in terms of personnel, materials and equipment, facilities, and other inputs. It calculated the economic pay-off by looking at how the programs' research-documented benefits relate to smoking, teenage pregnancy, child abuse, asthma, criminality and other behaviors that are costly to society, as well as lifelong earnings.

The results of the analysis were striking: "Each of the six interventions for improving SEL shows measurable benefits that exceed its costs, often by considerable amounts." For example, the cost of implementing the 4Rs Program for 100 students was \$68,000, whereas the economic benefit was \$832,000. Across all six programs, the study found that "identified benefits outweigh the costs by a factor of 11:1."

The Economic Value of Social and Emotional Learning, published by the Center for Cost-Benefit Analysis at Columbia University Teachers College, is available at <http://cbcse.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/SEL-Revised.pdf>.



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Mental health diagnoses for kids are increasing

8.1 Percentage of U.S. children's visits to a pediatrician in 2010 that resulted in a mental health diagnosis.

10.5 Percentage of U.S. children's visits to a pediatrician in 2013 that resulted in a mental health diagnosis.

...especially for boys.

14.7 Percentage of boys' visits to a pediatrician that resulted in a mental health diagnosis in 2013.

8.2 Percentage of girls' visits to a pediatrician that resulted in a mental health diagnosis in 2013.

Source: From a survey by athenaNet, reported in an October 28, 2013, blog post by athenaResearch titled "Data Points to Behavioral Health as a Growing Challenge for Pediatricians." The survey looked at pediatrician visits by children 6–17 years old (2.8 million visits) between July 2009 and June 2013 and used claims data to see whether a mental health diagnosis was made that visit.

A Curriculum That Teaches Hope



According to the [International Foundation for Research on Education and Depression \(iFRED\)](https://www.ifred.org/), the main predictor of suicide isn't loneliness, life losses, or trauma—it's hopelessness. So iFRED has created "Schools for Hope," a free curriculum for school-age students that explores what hope is (including how it ties into brain structures) and teaches kids to regulate their emotions, connect to a purpose in their lives, and stay calm and optimistic during stressful times.

Any educator can access the selfled, 10-lesson curriculum and materials at www.schoolsforhope.org. Besides the 10 core lessons, there are instructions for workshops on "Movies for Hope," "Artwork for Hope," and more. The curriculum is geared to a 5th grade level (and is being piloted with 5th graders in several schools) because research shows a rise in suicide attempts among 6th graders, but iFRED plans to expand it to other age groups.

7 Reminders About Emotional Health



01

If we think our purpose is to teach content and skills only, not to deal with the touchy-feely stuff, we're turning a blind eye to the developmental nature of the students we serve.

—Rick Wormeli, p. 10

For many challenging students, adults have been like mountain trolls: unpredictable, dangerous, powerful creatures that walk through their lives incapable of listening or recognizing human emotions.

—Jeffrey Benson, p. 42

02



03

Self-regulation is a stronger predictor of success in the classroom than intelligence, talent, or standardized test scores.

—Laurence Steinberg, p. 28

Research shows that schoolwide mental health programs can improve social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes—as well as students' academic performance.

—John E. Desrochers, p. 46

04



05

The teenage brain is highly impressionable because it has so many synapses. That means that good experiences leave their mark much more quickly—but so do bad experiences.

—Frances E. Jensen, p. 16

Misbehavior is a form of communication. We all tend to misbehave when we find ourselves in circumstances that threaten our well-being.

—Eric Toshalis, p. 34

06



07

Educators so often tell students to calm down or stop fidgeting. But how often do we show them practices that help them truly settle?

—Daniel Rechtschaffen and Taylor Rechtschaffen, p. 58