

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Civilian

## Early Teacher-Child Relationships and the Trajectory of Children's School Outcomes Through Eighth Grade

Hamre, B. K., & Pianta, R. C. (2001). Early teacher-child relationships and the trajectory of children's school outcomes through eighth grade. *Child Development*, 72(2), 625-638. doi:10.1111/1467-8624.00301

**SUMMARY:** How a child adjusts to kindergarten can impact their long-term school trajectory. Associations between child behavior, teacher relationship quality, academic skills, and achievement were examined among a cohort of 179 children who were followed from kindergarten through eighth grade. Greater relational negativity (e.g., conflict, over-dependency) in kindergarten student-teacher relationships was related to poorer student academic and behavioral outcomes through eighth grade.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Kindergarten teachers' report of relational negativity (i.e., high levels of conflict and child over-dependency) uniquely predicted poorer student grades, standardized test scores, and work habits in early elementary school.
- Relational negativity predicted behavioral outcomes into upper elementary and middle school, particularly for boys and those with early behavioral problems.
- Males, Black students, and children with low verbal intelligence scores in kindergarten were more likely to have academic and behavioral problems through eighth grade.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Examine the best ways to build positive relationships between teachers and military students (e.g., reward programs, school social events, teacher professional development training)
- Help develop school programs that teach conflict resolution skills to military youth

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer classes to military parents about how to facilitate children's ability to form healthy peer and teacher relationships
- Collaborate with school personnel to identify students who are struggling in their relationships and offer additional support (e.g., peer mentor)

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage professional development for teachers regarding how to promote positive youth interpersonal skills
- Recommend free or low-cost pre-school services for youth in which they could strengthen their interpersonal skills and increase access to healthy adult role models

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## METHODS

- A class of kindergarteners (1988-1989) in one school district were included in the study, and follow-up continued through eighth grade.
- Child cognitive development, behavior, and teacher relationship quality were measured during kindergarten; student grades, work habits, basic academic skills, and disciplinary infractions or suspensions were measured annually from first to eighth grade.
- Associations between child development, behavior, achievement, and teacher relationship quality were examined over the course of elementary school.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 179 children (51% male), who were 60% White and 40% Black.
- Maternal education status included 35% high school graduates, 22% some high school, 16% some college, 14% college graduates, and 8% graduate work.
- Kindergarten teachers had an average of 10.30 years of teaching experience.

## LIMITATIONS

- Only students who remained in the district through eight grade were included in the study, and participants may have differed from students who moved.
- Annual student-teacher relationship quality data were not available after kindergarten, and relationships likely continued to change and to influence child outcomes over time.
- The results are correlational, and causal conclusions are not appropriate.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Assess the student-teacher relationship throughout elementary and middle school to understand its on-going impact on student outcomes
- Examine whether student perceptions of relationships with their teachers are associated with later student outcomes
- Explore mechanisms through which positive teacher relationship and support may help students achieve better outcomes in school

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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