

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Social and Emotional Learning in the Kindergarten Classroom: Evaluation of the Strong Start Curriculum

Kramer, T. J., Caldarella, P., Christensen, L., & Shatzer, R. H. (2010). Social and emotional learning in the kindergarten classroom: Evaluation of the Strong Start curriculum. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 37(4), 303-309.
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SUMMARY: Teacher and parent behavior ratings were used to assess changes in the social and emotional competence of Kindergarten students after receiving the Strong Start curriculum. In addition, this study examined whether teachers were able to implement the curriculum, and explored teachers' views of the acceptability, feasibility, and value of Strong Start. Students experienced gains in their social and emotional competence after the Strong Start program and teachers rated the programs as acceptable and feasible.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Both teachers and parents reported that students' prosocial behaviors (e.g., establishing positive peer relationships) increased significantly following the Strong Start intervention; this increase was maintained through a 6-week follow-up.
- Teachers (but not parents) reported a significant decrease in children's internalizing behavior problems (e.g., acts sad or depressed) following the Strong Start intervention.
- Teachers indicated that the Strong Start curriculum is acceptable and feasible for use in kindergarten classrooms, however, the length and difficulty of some lessons for kindergarten students caused concern.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Collaborate with professionals in the field regarding ways to promote military youths social and emotional development within military programs
- Help develop activities to inform staff of best practices for promoting social and emotional development among military youth

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer workshops to military parents regarding way to promote their child's emotional and social development
- Disseminate information regarding normative social and emotional development for youth based on age

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend early interventions in social and emotional skills for young military children to build resiliency and reduce later risk
- Support programs and services that promote social and emotional development among military youth
- Recommend research that examines the efficacy and feasibility of individualized attention and treatment, versus group focused intervention

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METHODS

- The Strong Start social emotional learning curriculum was implemented in four kindergarten classrooms.
- Teachers and parents completed behavior rating scales to assess internalizing and peer-prosocial behaviors; the pre-test occurred twice before the intervention, at six-week intervals, and the post-tests occurred twice following the intervention at six-week intervals.
- This article focused on civilian children.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample consisted of 67 kindergarten children and their parent or caregiver and children's Kindergarten teachers.
- The majority of children were White (80%), female (55%), and between the ages of five and six years.
- Participating teachers has an average of 12 years of teaching experience; three were White and one was a Pacific Islander.

LIMITATIONS

- A selection bias may have influenced the results; children who participated also needed a parent to participate and these children and families may differ in a way this was not measured.
- Teacher reports of both internalizing problems and prosocial behaviors may have been biased by the fact that they were the ones who implemented the intervention and they “expected” or had a desire to see an improvement.
- Only sub-scales were used, which limit researchers ability to make definitive assessments.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Assess the impact of SEL programs on behavior change in populations pre-kindergarten through middle-school, as well as the long-term stability of behavior change
- Explore the costs, benefits, and outcomes of programs that target the whole class (e.g., Strong Start), versus programs that focus on individualized interventions (e.g., positive behavior support programs) for military youth
- Determine if the Strong Start program can also influence externalizing behavior as well as internalizing behavior among samples of military youth

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