
Research Brief

Number 29

Spring 2013 Participation in *Second Step* Program Improves Social and Emotional Skills in 2012-13

Study Sample

One hundred-forty-six, kindergarten through 5th grade students from four Bridge Project sites were observed and rated by *Second Step* group facilitators using the *Devereux Student Strengths Assessment—Second Step (DESSA-SSE)* in the fall and spring of the 2012-2013 academic year. Fifty-one percent of youth participants were male and 49% were female. Thirty-four percent of youth were Latino, 28% African-American, 14% Asian-American, 4% Caucasian and 20% “other.”

Method

The *DESSA-SSE* is a 36-item, standardized, norm-referenced behavior rating scale used to evaluate social and emotional skills of students in kindergarten through 5th grade. This strengths-based assessment tool has been used by Bridge Project staff since the fall of 2011 and assesses four key competencies: Skills for Learning, Empathy, Emotion Management, and Problem Solving. *Second Step* group facilitators rated individual youth using the *DESSA-SSE* in the fall of 2012 and again in the spring of 2013. Two separate analyses were conducted. A paired samples statistical test was conducted to determine if there were significant differences between the pretest and posttest skills of the participants in the sample. Regression analyses were then conducted to examine whether participation in other type of Bridge programming was associated with a change in social and emotional skills.

Key Findings

Nine items in the *Skills for learning* scale are used to measure students’ ability to use listening, self-talk, and assertiveness skills. Bridge Project participants significantly increased their skills for learning between fall and spring ($t=-4.37, p<.01$). Participation in Tutoring ($r=.222, p<.05$), Homework Help ($r=.244, p<.05$) and Enrichment Activities ($r=.165, p<.05$) at the Bridge Project were significantly and positively related to skills for learning.

Empathy is measured using a 9-item scale aimed at determining a young person’s ability to identify and label emotions in themselves and in others and to take on others’ perceptions. Mean empathy scores increased significantly from fall to spring ($t=-5.80, p<.01$).

Emotion Management is measured using a 9-item scale that examines students’ ability to cope with strong emotions and express them in socially acceptable ways. Mean scores on this scale increased significantly

between fall and spring ($t=-4.75$, $p<.01$). Involvement in science activities ($r=.331$, $p<.05$) at the Bridge Project was significantly and positively related to a changes in emotion management skills. Finally, *Problem Solving* skills are measured using a 9 item scale that assesses how students effectively handle personal difficulties and interpersonal conflicts. Mean scores on the problem-solving measure increased significantly from fall to spring ($t=-4.67$, $p<.01$).

Implications

Findings suggest that participation in the 2nd Step social curriculum leads to improvements in social and emotional skills between fall and spring of the academic year. Participation in Tutoring, Homework Help, and Enrichment Activities at the Bridge Project is related to greater increases in social and emotional skills among students.