

A Data-Guided Approach to Supporting Students' Social-Emotional Development in Pre-K

Andrew P. Gadaire¹, Laura Marie Armstrong¹, James R. Cook¹, Ryan P. Kilmer¹,
Jacqueline C. Larson¹, Caitlin J. Simmons¹, Lindsay G. Messinger², Tracy L. Thiery²,
and Mary Julia Babb²

Online First Publication, December 14, 2020. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/ort0000522>

The development of social-emotional competencies in early childhood is essential for long-term health and wellbeing. These skills are particularly critical for children from disadvantaged backgrounds to set the foundation for success in school and in life. This study examined the effects of a data-driven intervention to support pre-kindergarten (pre-k) teachers' ability to address their students' specific social-emotional strengths and needs.

The intervention: Sharing social-emotional data and strategies with pre-k teachers

Teachers in a publicly-funded pre-k program completed the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA; LeBuffe & Naglieri, 1999; LeBuffe & Shapiro, 2004) to measure their students' social-emotional functioning. "Intervention" teachers received summaries of their students' social-emotional strengths and needs based on the DECA and packets providing teaching strategies they could use to target the social-emotional domains assessed by the DECA. Strategies were selected from the Teaching Strategies Gold curriculum (Teaching Strategies, n.d.) in collaboration with preschool leadership. Teachers were encouraged to work with their coaches to interpret their classroom summaries, identify strategies to address their students' needs, and implement those strategies in the classroom. At the end of the year, teachers completed the DECA again, which allowed us to compare the growth of students whose teachers received this social-emotional feedback (i.e., DECA classroom summaries and targeted social-emotional teaching strategies) with students whose teachers did not receive feedback.

Results: Students showed greater growth when their teachers received the intervention

Multilevel modeling revealed that students whose teachers received social-emotional feedback showed significantly greater social-emotional improvements over the school year in self-regulation, attachment and relationships, total protective factors, and behavior concerns compared to students whose teachers did not receive feedback. On average, children in the intervention condition showed medium improvements in protective factors and small improvements in behavior concerns, while children in the control condition showed small improvements in protective factors and non-substantial changes in behavior concerns. Results also suggested that children's early language skills did not vary by study group, which provides discriminant validity and supports our conclusion that the provision of social-emotional feedback was responsible for the observed differences in social-emotional growth across study groups.

Discussion: Data-guided social-emotional feedback yields meaningful benefits for children

Our findings suggest that having teachers assess their students' social-emotional development at the beginning of the school year and providing teachers with data-based feedback may build teachers' capacity to promote social-emotional development for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. See the full article for more information about our conclusions, study limitations, and strategies for building on this approach to better prepare children for success in elementary school and beyond.

CITATION

Gadaire, A. P., Armstrong, L. M., Cook, J. R., Kilmer, R. P., Larson, J. C., Simmons, C. J., Messinger, L. G., Thiery, T. L., & Babb, M. J. (2020, December 14). A Data-Guided Approach to Supporting Students' Social-Emotional Development in Pre-K. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/ort0000522>