

Promising New Research Findings on the Impact of Social and Emotional Feedback

By Susan Damico, M.A.

Since the inception of the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) Program in 1999, the goal of the Devereux Center for Resilient Children (DCRC) has always been to support early care and education providers and parents in understanding and strengthening children's within-child protective factors (i.e., social and emotional skills). Recognizing that early care and education providers and parents often have limited time, resources and formal training, the goal was to create a research-informed, practical intervention that could be successfully implemented in a typical early childhood classroom and home setting.

[Several research studies have shown that the DECA Program does improve young children's protective factors](#), and the promising new research findings from a 2020 peer-reviewed journal article offers further support that the simple process of providing teachers with "social and emotional feedback" about the children in their classrooms is a valuable intervention.

The article, "A data-guided approach to supporting students' social-emotional development in pre-k," published in the American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, describes a simple intervention designed to (a) raise teachers' awareness of their students' social and emotional needs and strengths, and (b) help teachers identify teaching strategies to respond to the specific needs and strengths in their classroom and promote their students' social and emotional development. Using a stratified randomization strategy, Andrew P. Gadaire and colleagues of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte conducted this study (2020) in a large, southeastern school system with pre-K teachers and their coaches in a publicly funded pre-K program. Teachers were asked to provide information about their students' social and emotional functioning by completing the DECA. Their results were analyzed and consolidated into classroom summaries that highlighted the social and emotional strengths and needs of the students.

For the study, teachers and coaches were randomly assigned to either the feedback or no feedback group. A total of five coaches and their 65 teachers were in the feedback group, and eight coaches and their 110 teachers were in the no feedback group. Teachers and coaches in the feedback group received DECA feedback that included classroom summaries of student DECA results, similar to what DCRC calls the "Classroom/Group Profile," with a child's scores coded in red for need and green for strength. The feedback group also received packets of information that included strategies for each of the scales measured by the DECA – attachment/relationships, self-regulation and initiative. Approximately five, developmentally appropriate strategies/activities per scale were provided and were selected from the Teaching Strategies Gold platform that was being used in the





pre-K program. This feedback documentation was intended to illustrate to teachers and their coaches what the most pressing social and emotional needs of the students in the classroom were, and to encourage teacher-coach collaboration to identify teaching strategies to address those needs.

The authors of this study hypothesized that early care and education programs would have a strong impact on strengthening children's social and emotional skills when teachers are:

- 1) given the opportunity to assess children's social and emotional skills;
- 2) receive the results of the assessments;
- 3) provided with strategies that can be used to differentiate instruction based on the children's social and emotional assessment results; and
- 4) receive support from a coach with whom the teacher can collaborate, problem-solve, and formulate an action plan based on the data received.

The results from this study are very promising. Specifically, when teachers received feedback, students' expected growth on total protective factors was 2.20 points higher (about a quarter of a standard deviation) by the end of the year than students whose teachers did not receive feedback. Similarly, student improvement on self-regulation and attachment/relationships was 1.74 and 2.27 points higher, respectively, in the teacher feedback condition compared to the no feedback condition. Receiving social and emotional feedback also had a significant effect on teacher-reported behavior concerns. Students whose teachers received feedback were predicted to improve 2.02 points more by the end of the year than students whose teachers did not receive feedback.

“In summary, multilevel modeling revealed that students whose teachers received social-emotional feedback (classroom summaries and strategy packets) showed significantly greater social-emotional gains (across multiple domains) over the school year compared to students whose teachers did not receive feedback. Our findings suggest that having teachers complete social-emotional assessments of their students 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.”

Our DCRC Team is strongly encouraged by the results of this study. The DECA Program incorporates the exact same components that Gadaire researched, which include:

- 1) raising teachers' awareness about the importance of children's social and emotional health;
- 2) providing them with a standardized, valid, reliable, and practical tool to understand children's social and emotional strengths and needs;
- 3) connecting the results of the assessments to developmentally appropriate strategies that can strengthen areas of need and celebrate strengths; and
- 4) providing support to teachers so that they can implement this process within a collaborative culture that values the overall health and well-being of all children and their adult caregivers.



The fact that Gadaire selected and aligned strategies from Teaching Strategies Gold to the scales on the DECA illustrates how the DECA Program can be used in conjunction with other resources that support high quality programming. It also shows how teachers benefit from a laser focus on DECA results, and aligned strategies that strengthen the specific areas of attachment/relationships, self-regulation and initiative.

For those professionals serving the role of a DECA Coach, findings from this study suggest that the children whose teachers have the support of experienced coaches demonstrate improvements in self-regulation, attachment and total protective factors. While this study does not offer details on which coaching practices were most effective, coaches should continue to use best practice coaching techniques that (1) emphasize a trusting, supporting relationship, (2) encourage and support teachers; and (3) honor the struggles and celebrate the successes that teachers experience. Children benefit when teachers and coaches are working together.

For those interested in reviewing the study, [click here](https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000522).