

Supporting Students' Resilience in the School and Community

The importance of strength-based approaches to child and adolescent development is now well recognized. An emphasis on students' resilience in the school and community is gaining ground as the shortcomings of deficit-based approaches become more evident. Resilience assets enable good student outcomes in the face of serious threats (Masten, 2001). These *protective factors* include positive social relationships, positive attitudes and emotions, the ability to control one's own behavior, and feelings of competence (Doll, Zucker, & Brehm, 2004). Research shows that they can be enhanced through skills-based training (Masten & Reed, 2002). Presented below is selected research that supports various approaches that fit within a resilience framework, including social and emotional learning, prevention and mental health promotion, mindfulness, and positive psychology.

Social and Emotional Learning

- Students who participate in school-based social and emotional learning programs show greater improvement in grades and standardized test scores than students who do not participate. They demonstrate significant improvement in social and emotional skills, caring attitudes, and positive social behaviors, while reducing disruptive behaviors and emotional distress (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Fleming et al., 2005; Greenberg et al., 2003).
- Fifteen separate research studies on *Strong Kids*, Oregon Resiliency Project's social-emotional learning program for students in pre-K through grade 12, have found evidence of significant and meaningful positive outcomes with regard to student knowledge gains, reductions in problem symptoms, and increases in social-emotional competence (Merrell, 2010).
- Evaluation of *You Can Do It!*, a social and emotional learning skills curriculum for kindergarten and first grade students, showed statistically significant positive effects on social emotional competence and well-being for all students and improvement in reading among lower-achieving first grade students (Ashdown & Bernard, 2011).
- Longitudinal analysis of the impact of *Fast Track PATHS*, a universal social and emotional learning program for students in grades 1–3, showed that it produces significant positive preventive effects on aggression, social competence, and academic engagement (Bierman et al., 2010)
- The results of three randomized trials to investigate the impact of *Positive Action*, a school-based social-emotional program for elementary school students, showed that it significantly prevents declines in positive behaviors over several years (Washburn et al., 2011).

Prevention and Mental Health Promotion

- Well-designed and well-implemented school-based prevention and youth development programs positively influence numerous social, health, and academic outcomes (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2002; Greenberg et al., 2003).
- Longitudinal evaluation of the elementary school mental health intervention, *KidsMatter*, revealed significant improvements in academic performance among students in schools where the intervention was well implemented (Dix, Slee, Lawson, & Keeves, 2012).
- Preschool prevention programs have positive effects on children's cognitive and social-emotional functioning and parent-family wellness, enduring into grades K-8 (Nelson, Westhues, & MacLeod, 2003).
- Whole-school interventions using positive behavior support have been shown to decrease behavior problems while improving academic performance, as measured by standardized tests in reading and mathematics (Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, & Feinberg, 2005).
- Programs that increase students' engagement and sense of community in the school produce reductions in problem behaviors, increased associations with prosocial peers, and better academic performance (Battistich, Schaps, & Wilson, 2004).

Mindfulness

- A review of 52 research studies indicates that mindfulness practice can positively influence the brain, the autonomic nervous system, stress hormones, the immune system, and health behaviors, and cultivating mindfulness is associated with less emotional distress, more positive states of mind, and better quality of life (Greeson, 2009).
- A review of recent studies evaluating mindfulness-based interventions for children, adolescents, and families in educational and clinical settings found evidence that they can have a positive impact on child and family functioning (Harnett & Dawe, 2012).
- A study with 99 fourth- and fifth-graders found mindfulness to be significantly related to inhibitory processes in early adolescence, suggesting mindfulness-based intervention programs can foster cognitive functioning, enhance self-regulation, and promote positive development in youth (Oberle, Schonert-Reichl, Lawlor, & Thomson, 2012).
- Mindfulness-based training programs with adolescents have been shown to improve internalizing and externalizing complaints, attention problems, and happiness (Bögels, Hoogstad, van Dun, de Schutter, & Restifo, 2008); significantly reduce anxiety (Semple, Lee, Rosa, & Miller, 2010; Sibinga et al., 2012); and increase calm, conflict avoidance, self-awareness, and self-regulation (Sibinga, Perry-Parrish, Thorpe, Mika, & Ellen, 2014).
- Evaluations of mindfulness-based training programs with elementary school students showed them to improve executive functioning, behavioral regulation, and metacognition (Flook et al., 2010); to decrease impulsive action and stress responses (Gould, Dariotis, Mendelson, & Greenberg, 2012; Mendelson et al., 2010); to reduce internalizing and externalizing symptoms (Lee, Semple, Rosa, &

Miller, 2008); and to increase optimism and improve socially competent behaviors and self-concept (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010).

- Evaluation of the Mindfulness-based training program, *Meditation on the Soles of the Feet*, among students diagnosed with conduct disorder show that it produced reductions in aggressive behaviors and maintenance of acceptable behaviors through graduation (Singh et al., 2007).

Positive Psychology

- A meta-analysis of 51 interventions based on principles of positive psychology with more than 4,000 individuals revealed that they significantly enhance well-being and decrease depressive symptoms (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009).
- A meta-analysis of 39 studies involving more than 6,000 participants showed that positive psychology interventions (self-help, group training, and individual therapy) can be effective in the enhancement of subjective well-being and psychological well-being, as well as in helping to reduce depressive symptoms (Bolier et al., 2013).
- The Penn Resiliency Program for Children and Adolescents—a program based on positive psychology concepts—has been shown to have significant preventive effects on disruptive behaviors of middle school students (Cutuli, Chaplin, Gillham, Reivich, & Seligman, 2006).
- Research has revealed the Penn Resiliency Program to significantly reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety among middle school students (Cardemil, Reivich, Beevers, Seligman, & James, 2006; Gillham et al., 2006; Gillham et al., 2007) and to reduce depressive symptoms for 12 months following intervention among students 8 to 18 years of age (Brunwasser, Gillham, & Kim, 2009).
- Research on the Penn Resiliency Program in primary care settings found that it prevents depression, anxiety, and adjustment disorders among high-symptom adolescents (Gillham, Hamilton, Freres, Patton, & Gallop, 2006).
- An Internet-based study identified three positive psychology interventions produce lasting increases in happiness and decreases in depressive symptoms (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005).

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