

Abstract

Evaluating a Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum for Children At Risk for Emotional or Behavioral Disorders

RFA: Social and Behavioral Outcomes to Support Learning, Efficacy Study Goal 3

The **purpose** of this study is to test the *efficacy* of a theoretically based social-emotional learning curriculum, *Social-Emotional Learning Foundations (SELF)*, developed and piloted in an IES Goal 2 study, *under routine conditions*.

The study **setting** comprises a diversity of school districts (rural & urban) in North Central Florida in elementary schools in which a majority of students participate in the National School Lunch Program.

The **target population** consists of 720 Kindergarten (K) and 1st grade children at risk for emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) in 60 schools (360 K-1 classrooms) across 3 years. Participating students will represent diverse ethnic groups and primarily low SES backgrounds.

The **SELF intervention** is intended to effect positive outcomes related to social-emotional learning, behavior, and adjustment to school. Small-group lessons for students at risk integrate social-emotional learning with literacy related instruction and provide multiple opportunities for targeted students to engage in discourse and activities related to storybooks with social-emotional themes. Lessons are designed to strengthen target children's language and self-regulation. **Control group** participants, also screened for EBD risk, will experience social-emotional learning "business as usual" (BAU) in K-1 classroom settings.

In a pretest-posttest **cluster randomized efficacy trial design**, we will randomly assign 60 schools across 3 years to treatment or BAU. Grade K and 1 teachers in both conditions will identify students in their classrooms who are at risk for EBD using the *Systematic Screening for Behavioral Disorders*.

To evaluate the efficacy of SELF, we will administer **measures** related to social-emotional competence, social-emotional language and self-regulation, and successful school adjustment pre and post intervention to targeted students in both conditions.

We will **analyze data** using multi-level models to account for the nesting of children in classrooms and classrooms in schools, and use observation protocols developed and tested by the research team to monitor intervention fidelity.

Results from this study will be used to determine the efficacy of the SELF intervention under routine conditions to improve outcomes related to social-emotional competence and successful school adjustment, compared to BAU. We will also explore whether social-emotional language, self-regulation, and treatment implementation quality mediate the relation between SELF and more distal student outcomes, and whether classroom interactions as measured by baseline score on each domain of the *Classroom Assessment Scoring System*, baseline identification for internalizing versus externalizing behavior problems, and/or baseline language development moderate the relation between condition and outcomes. This study will contribute to evidence about whether SELF can improve important school-related outcomes, with specific implications about its efficacy as a preventive classroom based intervention for young children at risk for EBD.