
Bridge Project Research Brief

Spring 2019 Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Skills Increase in 2018-2019

Study Sample

One-hundred and forty-two kindergarten through 8th grade students from four Bridge Project sites were observed and rated by *Second Step* group facilitators using the *Devereux Student Strengths Assessment* in the fall and spring of the 2018-19 academic year.

Method

The *DESSA-SSE* is a 72-item, standardized, norm-referenced behavior rating scale used to evaluate social, emotional, and behavioral skills of students in kindergarten through 8th grade. This strengths-based assessment tool has been used by Bridge Project staff since the fall of 2011 and assesses four key competencies: 1) general skills for living, 2) empathy, 3) emotion management, and 4) problem-solving. *Second Step* group facilitators rated individual youth using the *DESSA* in the fall of 2018 and again in the spring of 2019. A paired samples statistical test was used to determine if there were significant changes between the pretest and posttest skills of the participants in the sample.

Key Findings

Seven items in the *Self-Awareness* scale are used to measure students' realistic understanding of their strengths and limitations as well as their desire for self-improvement. Bridge Project participants significantly increased their skills between fall and spring ($t(141) = -5.943$, $p < .001$).

Social-Awareness is measured using a 9-item scale aimed at determining a young person's capacity to interact with others in a way that shows respect for their ideas and behaviors, recognizes their impact on them, and uses cooperation and tolerance in social situations. Mean social-awareness scores increased significantly from fall to spring ($t(141) = -4.532$, $p < .001$).

Self-Management is measured using a 11-item scale that examines students' ability to control their emotions and behaviors, to complete a task or succeed in a new or challenging situation. Mean scores on this scale increased significantly from fall to spring ($t(141) = -3.704$, $p < .001$).

Goal Directed Behavior is measured using a 10-item scale that assesses a student's initiation of, and persistence in completing tasks of varying difficulty. Mean scores on the goal directed behavior measure increased significantly from fall to spring ($t(141) = -3.643$, $p < .001$).

Relationship skills is measured using a 10-item scale. It assesses a child's consistent performance of socially acceptable actions that promote and maintain positive connections with others. Mean scores on this scale increased significantly from fall to spring ($t(141) = -4.853, p < .001$).

Ten items in the *Personal Responsibility* scale are used to measure students' tendencies to be careful and reliable in their actions and in contributing to group efforts. Mean personal responsibility scores increased significantly from fall to spring ($t(141) = -4.283, p < .001$).

Decision Making skills were measured using an 8-item scale that examines students' approaches to problem solving which involves learning from others and from their own previous experiences, using values to guide action, and accepting responsibility for decisions. Bridge Project participants significantly increased their skills between fall and spring ($t(141) = -4.475, p < .001$).

Optimistic Thinking was measured using a 7-item scale. It assesses students' attitudes of confidence, hopefulness, and positive thinking in the past, present, and future. Mean scores on this scale increased significantly from fall to spring ($t(141) = -4.068, p < .001$).

Implications

Youth who participated in the *Second Step* skills training curriculum significantly improved their social, emotional, and behavioral skills during the 2018-19 school year. This is important because evidence suggests that these types of skills are positively related to academic performance and to low rates of involvement in problem behaviors like school dropout, delinquency, and substance use.

This Research Brief was written by Jeff Jenson Ph.D. and Stephanie Nisle, MA of the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Denver in consultation with the Bridge Project Research Committee.