



Social and Emotional Learning Implementation with Latinx Learners

Brief 2: Student Reactions and Perceived Gains to Social and Emotional Learning Lessons

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About the Study

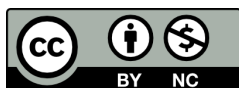
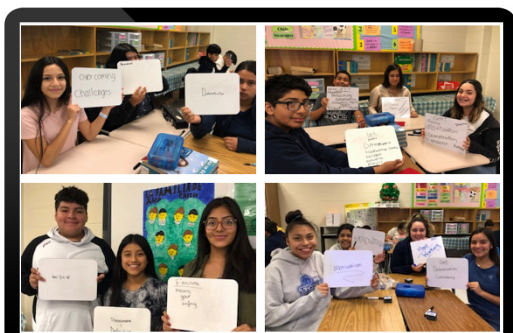
This issue brief is part of a five-part series that reports findings from research conducted by ACT in collaboration with Region One Education Service Center, a provider of educational services to over 430,000 students in South Texas who are primarily Latinx and from low-income communities. The research was funded by a NewSchools Venture Fund grant awarded to ACT's Center for Social, Emotional, and Academic Learning and ACT's Center for Equity in Learning. The overarching goal of the research was to gain a better understanding of factors related to social and emotional learning (SEL), including program efficacy, implementation, and family engagement. This brief focuses on the efficacy of SEL lessons implemented and includes results from surveys completed by students who participated in an SEL lessons during the 2019-2020 school year. The goal of the study was to better understand students' reactions to SEL lessons, including whether they found the lessons engaging, whether they acquired knowledge and skills, and whether they were able to apply content from the lessons in and out of school.

So What?

Findings from the current study provide efficacy evidence for SEL lessons on Sustaining Effort, Getting Along With Others, and Maintaining Composure. Following the SEL lessons, learners reacted positively, perceived learning gains, and felt confident applying content from these lessons. Although additional research is needed, these initial results are promising especially given the disruptions the COVID-19 pandemic caused as the lessons were being implemented.

Now What?

These results suggest SEL programming may be an effective way to support learners who have been historically underserved and who often need additional supports because they face significant barriers to college entry and completion. As such, a promising direction for future research is examining SEL implementation with a broader sample of historically underrepresented groups of students. This research can help inform efforts to focus on the whole child in education while supporting diverse learners.



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Student Reactions and Perceived Gains to Social and Emotional Learning Lessons

Social and emotional (SE) skills can be defined as interpersonal, self-regulatory, and task-related behaviors that are important for adaptation to and successful performance in educational and workplace settings (Casillas, Way, & Burrus, 2015). These skills are related to important outcomes, including appropriate behavior, healthy relationships, and academic success (e.g., Domitrovich, Durlak, Staley, & Weissberg, 2017). Further, a growing literature suggests social emotional learning (SEL) interventions can effectively enhance SE skills and other important outcomes, including academic achievement (for meta-analyses, see Corcoran, Cheung, Kim, & Xie, 2018; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017).

SEL interventions may be especially beneficial for students from historically underrepresented groups such as students of color and students from low-income communities. These students face significant barriers to educational achievement, such as exclusionary discipline practices, higher levels of educator stress, lower academic expectations, and lower rates of college readiness (ACT, 2016; Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, & Shic, 2016; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Morris & Perry, 2016; Peng & Lee, 1994).

To support a more equitable education, historically underrepresented groups can benefit from educational interventions designed with their needs in mind (Jagers, Rivas-Drake, & Williams, 2019). For instance, Reyes, Elias, Parker, and Rosenblatt (2013) suggest SEL can help students learn to manage and communicate their emotional distress and conflict, which in turn can improve educator-student relationships. Additionally, Rivas-Drake, Lozada, Pinetta, and Jagers (2020) suggest that improvements in empathy and perspective-taking may underlie positive development, including identity development. However, more research is needed to directly examine the effects of SEL with students from historically underrepresented groups. To that end, the current study aimed to investigate student reactions to SEL lessons with a population of students from schools within Region One, a network of schools along the United States–Mexico border in South Texas serving 96% Latinx, 85% low-income, and 38% English learners.

To support student growth in these important skills, students received supplemental SEL lessons following the Mosaic™ by ACT®: Social Emotional Learning assessment.¹ These lessons are delivered through student reports. These lessons are designed to be used in universal settings to help students develop SE skills. Lessons are designed to support students' understanding of and ability to demonstrate the skills of Sustaining Effort, Getting Along With Others, Maintaining Composure, Social Connection, and Keeping an Open Mind. For information on each of these skills, see Table 1.

¹ The lessons discussed in this report are available through the Mosaic by ACT: Social Emotional Learning assessment via student reports. For more information about the SE skills supported by these lessons, please visit <https://www.act.org/content/act/en/learning-solutions/social-emotional-learning.html>.

To test the efficacy of these lessons, we utilized ACT's Efficacy Framework (Mattern, 2019). This framework specifies various sources of efficacy data linked to Kirkpatrick's (1976) evaluation model. This model organizes outcomes into four levels:

- Level I: the extent to which learners find the lessons engaging and relevant
- Level II: the extent to which learners acquire intended knowledge and skills from the lessons
- Level III: the extent to which learners apply content from the lessons
- Level IV: the extent to which target outcomes are improved based on the lessons

Murano, Walton, Burrus, Anguiano-Carrasco, and Way (2019) provided initial evidence of efficacy for a subset of these lessons. In this study, eighth-grade students from Arizona participated in a lesson designed to help students develop the skill of Sustaining Effort. This was followed by a survey asking students about their impressions of the lesson. Most students reacted positively, reporting that they enjoyed the lesson, found the content valuable, and thought they could use skills from the lesson throughout their whole lives. Additionally, most students felt confident that they could define Sustaining Effort as well as identify associated behaviors and describe its importance. These results provide evidence of efficacy for both Level I and Level II of Kirkpatrick's model, but further research is needed, particularly on lessons targeting other skills.

To gather further efficacy evidence, the current study examined student responses to lessons on Sustaining Effort, Getting Along With Others, and Maintaining Composure. Table 1 describes each of these skills and provides sample topics and lessons for each of the skills. Students from several schools within Region One in South Texas completed SEL lessons during Spring 2020 and then completed a survey after each set of lessons. Lessons on Sustaining Effort were implemented first, in February and early March of 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic affected our ability to teach the remaining lessons on Getting Along With Others and Maintaining Composure. Nevertheless, smaller samples of students completed some programming on either Getting Along With Others or Maintaining Composure via virtual instruction.

Table 1. Definition of Targeted Skills and Corresponding Lessons

Skill	Student behaviors that demonstrate the skill	Examples of lesson topics	Description of an example lesson
Sustaining Effort	Diligence, effort, organization, self-control, and compliance with the rules.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persistence Goal setting Planning Time management 	One activity stresses the importance of goals to students and prompts them to set their own academic and extracurricular goals.
Getting Along With Others	Collaboration, empathy, helpfulness, trust, and trustworthiness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perspective taking Expressing feelings Communication Dangers of labels 	One activity illustrates the concept of individual differences, the dangers of labels, and ways to appreciate diversity.
Maintaining Composure	Stress management, emotional regulation, a positive response to setbacks, and poise.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mindfulness Identifying emotions Managing emotions Gratitude 	One lesson introduces students to the concept of mindfulness and gives instructions on how they can practice being mindful.

Participants and Method

For the Sustaining Effort lessons, a total of 491 students from nine schools started the survey, and 440 (90%) of those who started the survey completed all closed-ended questions. For Getting Along With Others lessons, 239 students from five schools started the survey, and 211 (88%) of those who started the survey completed all closed-ended questions. For Maintaining Composure lessons, 88 students from five schools started the survey, and 77 (88%) of those who started the survey completed all closed-ended questions. Students who partially completed the survey were included in the analyses.

The survey for each of the target skills included questions asking for basic information including the student's name and school. In addition, the surveys included the seven Likert-type questions shown in Figures 1–3. Students responded on a six-point scale (1 = disagree a lot and 6 = agree a lot). Next, each survey included a question asking, “Compared to what I knew about [each skill] previously, I feel like I now know...” Students answered this question on a five-point scale (1 = a lot less and 5 = a lot more). Further, each survey included an open-ended question asking students to indicate one thing they learned from the lessons. Finally, each survey included five example classification questions. For each question, students selected the example that best illustrated each of the skills out of a list of five examples.

As mentioned previously, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the lessons. Lessons on Sustaining Effort were implemented first, and students received an average of 4.2 lessons and 2.8 hours on content targeting this skill. Students completed a smaller amount of programming on either Getting Along With Others or Maintaining Composure. Specifically, students from schools that implemented lessons on Getting Along With Others completed an average of 3.6 lessons and 2.2 hours, and those from schools that implemented lessons on Maintaining Composure completed an average of 2.8 lessons and 2.2 hours.

Level I Efficacy Evidence

Figure 1 shows student reactions to lessons on each of the skills. Students generally indicated that they enjoyed the lessons. Across levels of agreement, the majority of students agreed that they enjoyed lessons on Sustaining Effort (84.5%), Getting Along With Others (91.9%), and Maintaining Composure (90.1%). Most students also felt that learning about each skill could help them succeed in school: Sustaining Effort, 88.1%; Getting Along With Others, 93.2%; and Maintaining Composure, 93.8%. They also thought working to develop each skill was important: Sustaining Effort, 90.6%; Getting Along With Others, 96.0%; and Maintaining Composure, 91.4%. Further, results were consistent across the three skills, indicating that students reacted positively and saw value in lesson content on each skill. These results provide Level I efficacy data for SEL lessons on each of these skills.

Level II Efficacy Evidence

Figure 2 shows items capturing gains in content knowledge resulting from these lessons. These questions are expected to tap student knowledge instead of behavior because they ask about student confidence performing a task versus asking about their actual experience with the task. Students who lack knowledge of a task will most likely provide less confident ratings. For instance, students who do not know the components of perseverance would be likely to report a lack of confidence in their ability to persevere on difficult tasks. Following the lessons on each skill, most students reported feeling they had acquired relevant content knowledge. Following lessons on Sustaining Effort, 85.5% of students agreed that they were confident they could persevere on difficult tasks, and 90.3% agreed that they could set goals, which are two important skills. Following lessons on Getting Along With Others, 94.5% of students agreed that they were confident they could work together with other students. Additionally, 95.5% of students agreed that they felt confident in their ability to demonstrate behaviors consistent with this skill. Following lessons on Maintaining Composure, 85.2% of students agreed that they were confident they could control their emotions, and 81.5% of students agreed that they were confident they could manage their stress levels, which are two important aspects of this skill.

Compared to what students knew beforehand, most students also reported knowing more about each skill following the lessons. Students agreed they knew either a little or a lot more on Sustaining Effort (70.3%), Getting Along With Others (71.8%), and Maintaining Composure (70.9%). Consistent with their self-reported perceptions of learning, students identified correct examples of each of these skills at levels above that of chance. The percentage of students who correctly answered at least three of the five questions were as follows: Sustaining Effort (45.2%), Getting Along With Others (76.3%), and Maintaining Composure (59.7%).

Students also responded to an open-ended question asking them one thing they learned from the lessons on each skill. Many students mentioned important themes from these lessons. For Sustaining Effort, student responses included persistence/resilience ($n = 131$), goal setting ($n = 72$), and hard work ($n = 34$). For Getting Along With Others, student responses included the perceived value of teamwork such as getting things done better and faster ($n = 71$), working together ($n = 32$), and valuing different opinions ($n = 20$). For Maintaining Composure, student responses included emotional regulation ($n = 27$), stress management ($n = 17$), and self-control ($n = 9$).

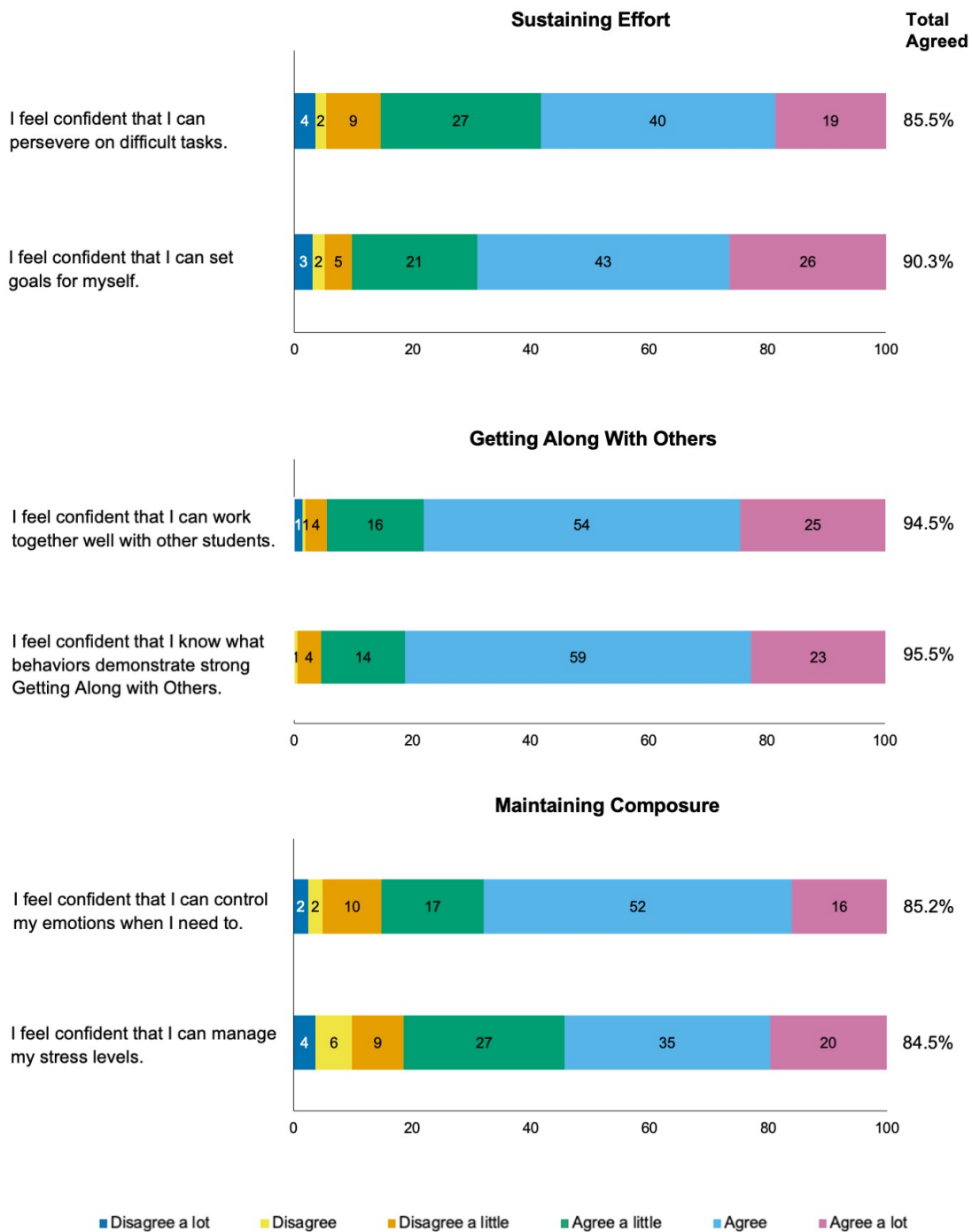
Taken together, these results regarding students' increased content knowledge provide Level II efficacy data for lessons targeting each of these skills.

Figure 1. Level I Efficacy Evidence for SEL Lessons on Each Skill



Note. For questions on Sustaining Effort, *Ns* ranged from 454 to 457. For questions on Getting Along With Others, *Ns* ranged from 220 to 223. For questions on Maintaining Composure, *N* = 81. Values shown to the right of the graph denote % of respondents that reported some level of agreement with each question. Absence of a bar indicates 0 responses.

Figure 2. Level II Efficacy Evidence for SEL Lessons on Each Skill



Note. For questions on Sustaining Effort, $N = 454$. For questions on Getting Along With Others, $N = 220$. For questions on Maintaining Composure, $N = 81$. Values shown to the right of the graph denote % of respondents that reported some level of agreement with each question. Absence of a bar indicates 0 responses.

Level III Efficacy Evidence

Figure 3 shows items capturing student confidence in applying what they learned from these lessons both inside and outside school. For all skills, most students felt confident applying what they learned about each skill in school. Specifically, students agreed that in school they were applying knowledge from lessons on Sustaining Effort (78.8%), Getting Along With Others (92.4%), and Maintaining Composure (87.7%). Outside school, most students also agreed they were confident applying content on Sustaining Effort (78.3%), Getting Along With Others (89.7%), and Maintaining Composure (84.0%). These results provide initial Level III efficacy data for lessons on each of these skills. Given that these results are based on self-reported questions, an important next step for future research is using questions rated by others (e.g., teachers, parents) to further support this level of efficacy.

Figure 3. Level III Efficacy Evidence for SEL Lessons on Each Skill



Note. For questions on Sustaining Effort, $N = 457$. For questions on Getting Along With Others, $N = 223$. For questions on Maintaining Composure, $N = 81$. Values shown to the right of the graph denote % of respondents that reported some level of agreement with each question. Absence of a bar indicates 0 responses.

Conclusions

Taken together, these findings provide efficacy evidence for SE skill-building lessons on Sustaining Effort, Getting Along With Others, and Maintaining Composure. In response to survey items measuring Kirkpatrick's Levels I through III outcomes, students reacted positively to the lessons, demonstrated evidence of improved content knowledge on various measures, and reported confidence in applying content from the lessons both inside and outside school. Overall, these results provide some initial evidence consistent with Level III of Kirkpatrick's model, but further evidence is needed to demonstrate changes in student behavior. Additional research is also needed to examine these lessons using a broader sample of historically underrepresented groups of students, using more rigorous research designs, and comparing the efficacy of SEL lessons delivered in-person versus via virtual instruction. Overall, these results provide support for the efficacy of the SE skill-building lessons for students from underserved communities, a group of students who often need additional supports because they face significant barriers to college entry and completion. Additionally, these results are promising given the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic caused during the administration of the lessons.

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