

**The Positive Impact of Social and Emotional Learning for  
Kindergarten to Eighth-Grade Students:  
Findings from Three Scientific Reviews**

**Addendum: Promoting the Social-Emotional Health of Children in  
California's San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties**

John Payton  
Hank Resnik  
Roger P. Weissberg  
Joseph A. Durlak  
Allison B. Dymnicki  
Rebecca D. Taylor  
Kriston B. Schellinger  
Molly Pachan

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## **Addendum: Promoting the Social-Emotional Health of Children in California's San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties**

This is an addendum to an earlier report, *The Positive Impact of Social and Emotional Learning for Kindergarten to Eighth-Grade Students: Findings from Three Scientific Reviews* (available at [www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org) or [www.lpfch.org/sel](http://www.lpfch.org/sel)). This earlier report defined social and emotional learning (SEL) as the process through which children and adults acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to:

- Recognize and manage their emotions
- Set and achieve positive goals
- Demonstrate caring and concern for others
- Establish and maintain positive relationships
- Make responsible decisions
- Handle interpersonal situations effectively

Its purpose was to summarize the findings and implications of three large-scale reviews of research evaluating the impact of SEL programs for school children in kindergarten through 8th grade. The three reviews summarized in the report included: (a) a review of school-based universal interventions appropriate for a general student body; (b) a review of school-based indicated interventions that identify and work with students who are displaying early signs of behavioral or emotional problems and (c) a review of interventions conducted in after-school programs.

This addendum compares relevant national (Youth Risk Behavior Survey), California (California Healthy Kids Survey--CHKS), and local data from San Mateo and

Santa Clara counties (CHKS) on the prevalence of selected risk factors, resilience assets, and emotional health problems among 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> graders. We focus on this age group to highlight the need to provide students making a transition to middle or high school with effective, preventive SEL programming. Then we describe examples of SEL programs currently being implemented in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties that address these risk and protective factors in order to promote the healthy development and school/life success of youth.

### *Student Risk Factors<sup>1</sup>*

In order to compare California and U.S. data on the prevalence of students' social and emotional health problems, this section describes available information for 9<sup>th</sup> graders. The most recent data available indicate a high degree of risk for both groups of 9<sup>th</sup> graders. According to the 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), during a recent 12-month period, 28% of 9th graders nationwide “felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more weeks in a row that they stopped doing some usual activities” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008). Comparable data from the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) indicate that a slightly greater proportion of 9<sup>th</sup> graders (32%) reported experiencing this degree of sadness or hopelessness (WestEd, 2005-2007).

The percentages of 9<sup>th</sup>-grade students in the California counties of San Mateo and Santa Clara reporting such sadness or hopelessness during a recent 12-month period were 29% and 30%, respectively (WestEd, 2006-2008). (Table 1).

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<sup>1</sup> National prevalence data on risk factors for emotional health problems and social-emotional development are unavailable for 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders.

Student prevalence of a perceived lack of physical safety is also high. Seven percent of 9<sup>th</sup> graders nationwide reported that they had not gone to school on one or more of the past 30 days because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to or from school (CDC, 2008). Although this item was not used on the CHKS, 9% of California 9<sup>th</sup> graders reported feeling unsafe or very unsafe at school (WestEd, 2006-2007). Five percent and 7%, respectively, of San Mateo and Santa Clara County 9<sup>th</sup> graders reported feeling unsafe or very unsafe at school (WestEd, 2006-2008) (Table 1).

Alcohol use is another factor that may increase students' risk for impaired social-emotional development and/or emotional problems in school. Among 9<sup>th</sup> graders, the prevalence of having at least one drink of alcohol during the previous 30 days was about 36% nationwide (CDC, 2008), 27% in California (WestEd, 2005-2007), and 26% and 21% in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, respectively (WestEd, 2006-2008) (Table 1).

### *Student Assets*

Risk factors can contribute to an increased prevalence of conduct problems and emotional distress (e.g., depression and anxiety) among children and youth. Conversely, factors such as high levels of internal and external resilience assets (e.g., social-emotional skills and positive behaviors and having caring relationships with others) help to reduce such problems. Although national data on the prevalence of these resilience assets are not available, data from the California Healthy Kids Survey indicate that about 60% of 5<sup>th</sup> graders statewide scored "high" on having a caring adult relationship at school; i.e., they reported that it is "very much" or "pretty much" true that they have such a relationship at school (WestEd, 2005-2007).

Similar percentages of both San Mateo and Clara County 5<sup>th</sup> graders (61% and 62%, respectively) reported this external resilience asset (WestEd, 2006-2008). Sixty-three percent of California 5<sup>th</sup> graders, and comparable percentages of 5<sup>th</sup> graders in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties (65% and 61%) reported that it is “very much” or “pretty much” true that an adult at their school has high expectations for them. Approximately one in five California 5<sup>th</sup> graders (19%), including those in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties (19% and 20%), reported it was “very much” or “pretty much” true that their participation at school was “meaningful” (State data from WestEd, 2005-2007; county data from WestEd, 2006-2008).

The prevalence rates for these external resilience assets were even lower among California, San Mateo, and Santa Clara 7<sup>th</sup> graders. For California students, only 33% of 7<sup>th</sup> grade students reported having a caring adult relationship at school (compared to 60% of 5<sup>th</sup> graders). In addition, only 48% of 7<sup>th</sup>- grade students reported that an adult at school had high expectations for them (compared to 63% of 5<sup>th</sup> graders). County-level data also demonstrated lower levels of these external resilience assets among 7<sup>th</sup> graders compared to 5<sup>th</sup> graders. The levels of these external resilience assets were even lower among 9<sup>th</sup> graders in all three geographic areas (State data from WestEd, 2005-2007; county data from WestEd, 2006-2008).

With regard to *internal* resilience assets, only 42% of California 5<sup>th</sup> graders reported “high” levels of empathy. Thirty-seven percent reported “high” levels of problem solving skills, and 83% scored “high” on setting goals and having aspirations (WestEd, 2005-2007) (Table 2). The 5<sup>th</sup>- grade prevalence rates of these internal resilience assets in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties mirror those for California as a

whole. Data on the prevalence of internal resilience assets for a representative sample of 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders are unavailable at the county level. It should be noted, however, that the prevalence rates across grades for students in these counties on the other risk and protective factors reported here were similar to those for students in California as a whole.

This profile of student risk behaviors, unsafe environments, and internal and external resilience assets suggests that students in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, and those across California, could benefit from the types of SEL programs included in the three reviews summarized in the report described earlier (*Findings from Three Scientific Reviews*). Research on SEL programs summarized in these three reviews measured and found positive student impacts in both the reduction of risk factors and the increase of protective factors (internal and external resilience assets).

#### *SEL Program Descriptions*

Below we describe three examples of such programs currently being implemented in these counties. They include a range of different program models and approaches, including a universal SEL skills-building program conducted during the school day in grades 4-5; an in-school elementary and middle school indicated program providing student counseling and consultation for teachers of students with emotional or behavioral problems; and an after-school and in-school skills education and peer mentoring program for at-risk middle- and high-school students. Programs illustrating these different models were selected by the authors based on their representation of a diversity of program types and methodologies, the reliability of their program reporting and data, and recommendations of key informants in California familiar with the programs.

**Tribes Learning Communities:  
An In-School Universal Program in San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties**

The Tribes Learning Communities research-based program is a universal intervention that aims to develop a caring community of learners in the classroom through a process of participants observing four “agreements” (attentive listening, no putdowns, mutual respect, and the right to pass—i.e., not being required to share one’s own experience during an exercise). The program also teaches a set of collaborative skills in long-term cooperative learning groups called “tribes.” These skills include helping each other work on tasks, setting goals and solving problems, monitoring and assessing progress, and celebrating achievements. The Tribes Learning Community process was developed for use in grades K-12.

Instead of teaching formal lessons, the teacher’s role in the Tribes process is providing on-going support to the tribes by assessing the stage of development of each learning group, teaching the agreements and collaborative skills using a seven-stage process, and developing “learning experience plans” designed to give students on-going practice in the agreements and skills. These learning plans follow a format provided in the Tribes teacher manual and are comprised of strategies taken from program materials and categorized by developmental stage. Teachers are also taught how to integrate curriculum in order to create relevant and meaningful learning experiences for students.

Approximately 300 teachers in seven public elementary and middle schools in San Mateo County and four Catholic schools and one public school in Santa Clara County have been trained in the Tribes program and are implementing it in their classrooms (Rankin, 2008; Guidi, Bryan, 2008). Tribes was initiated at the Franklin School in the Burlingame School District in San Mateo County seven years ago with

support of a grant from funds administered by the school's Site Council. Currently, 525 Franklin students in grades K-5 participate in the program. Each participating teacher also has received a copy of the program manual, *Reaching All by Creating Tribes Learning Communities*, and each has completed the 24-hour Tribes training facilitated by a Certified Tribes Trainer.

Implementation of Tribes appears to be integral to the district's values and planning process. The mission and core values of the Burlingame School District cite an emphasis on developing students socially for responsible citizenship, as well as academically. The district's strategic plan calls for developing the whole child and implementing Tribes Learning Community at all K-8 sites. A related action included in its strategic plan is providing on-going training for staff at school sites whose personnel have already been trained in Tribes to continue the process of building classroom communities. The program has demonstrated increased student achievement, social-emotional learning skills, and a high degree of teacher satisfaction in the Burlingame District (Guidi, 2008). For more information about Franklin School and the Burlingame School District, visit [www.greatschools.net/modperl/browse\\_school/ca/6847](http://www.greatschools.net/modperl/browse_school/ca/6847); [www.bsd.k12.ca.us](http://www.bsd.k12.ca.us)). For more information about the Tribes program, visit [www.tribes.com](http://www.tribes.com).

**Cleo Eulau Center Services:  
An Indicated, In-School Intervention in San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties**

This program for at-risk teens includes a highly successful counseling program in San Mateo County and a resiliency consultation program for teachers and administrators working with at-risk students in both San Mateo and Santa Clara counties. The program,



developed by the Cleo Eulau Center (CEC) in Mountain View, now in its 13th year, is based on research showing that promoting youth resilience is key to effective prevention and intervention programming for this population.

The counseling component of the program is conducted by 14 CEC-assigned PhD psychology student interns assigned to local court and community schools. CEC provides these graduate students with ongoing training and supervision of their individual and group psychotherapy services, for which they receive graduate internship credit. This program component is a collaborative effort with the San Mateo County Office of Education, the Juvenile Probation Department, and the Wright Institute of Psychology. Approximately 250 youth each year receive weekly individual counseling sessions and/or group therapy sessions through this program. In these sessions, students learn the social and emotional skills of empathy and respect for one another's differences. Participating students have demonstrated improved school attendance and classroom behavior (Sorensen, 2008).

The consultation program component promotes resilience among both school staff and students on-site at eight public elementary and middle schools. CEC has hired, trained, and placed eight skilled mental health and child development experts in these schools to help them promote student success in school and life. As consultants they observe classrooms and conduct one-on-one consultations with teachers and administrators to help them develop caring and supportive relationships with their students, many of whom have been identified as at-risk. For example, a consultant may help a teacher understand what a student with a history of abuse might be experiencing in class and how classroom processes might be modified to address this student's needs.

Bringing such resources into the classroom helps teachers who are under a great deal of pressure to improve students' test scores and better manage their own stress by addressing key social and emotional issues that may get in the way of students' learning (Sorensen, 2008). This counseling and consultation program of the Cleo Eulau Center is funded largely by the juvenile court system and foundation grants and provides consultation to about 250 adults each year.

A recent formal evaluation of the consultation component of the program indicated success in teacher mastery of effective strength-based classroom interventions that foster positive changes in their students' lives (Sorensen, 2008). For more about programs of the Cleo Eulau Center, visit [www.cleoelaucenter.org](http://www.cleoelaucenter.org).

**STAY Safe Program:  
An Indicated, In-School and After-School Program in San Mateo County**

Now in its eighth year, the STAY Safe (Supportive Transitions for All Youth to be Safe) Program provides a range of in-school, after-school, and off-campus activities for at-risk students in four high schools in the Jefferson Union High School District in northern San Mateo County. These include activity-based education groups, support groups, peer mentoring opportunities, youth-led leadership development groups, community involvement, and other alternative activities. STAY Safe is a program of Asian American Recovery Service (AARS) and has been funded by the U.S. Center for Mental Health Services and the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (Mineta, 2008).

Students are referred to a STAY Safe support group because they are showing some level of risk (e.g., lack of commitment to school, declining grades, high absenteeism, engaging in problem behavior and/or holding favorable attitudes toward

such behaviors, feelings of alienation, or a lack of community recreational activities) associated with future drug use. Group participation increases student and community protective factors, such as building the social and emotional skills of decision-making, communication, and goal-setting; decreasing access to harmful drugs; increasing school bonding; actively creating coalitions of parents and youth to support positive norms and values; and networking with community leaders and organizations (Mineta, 2008; Pinto, 2008).

One of the most successful components of this program has been peer/cross-age mentoring, which pairs students from two area high schools who have been trained as mentors with 8<sup>th</sup>-grade students from two middle schools who are about to face the challenge of transitioning to high school. In 2006, students from Westmoor High School mentored 33 students from Fernando Rivera Middle School, and students from Jefferson High School mentored 22 students from T.R. Pollicita Middle School. In the fall of each year, prospective peer mentors are required to complete a comprehensive six-week training course prior to being paired the following spring with a middle-school mentee. This training covers confidentiality issues, communication skills, goal setting and knowing where to go for help (Mineta, 2008; Pinto, 2008).

Mentors and mentees meet together in groups facilitated by STAY Safe staff. Toward the end of the semester, the program sponsors a “shadow day” at each of the two participating high schools, during which mentees tour their prospective high school for half a day with their mentor. The STAY Safe Program also provides opportunities over the summer for mentors and mentees to continue building healthy peer relationships. For more about STAY Safe visit [www.aars-inc.org/programs/staysafe.html](http://www.aars-inc.org/programs/staysafe.html).

## Conclusion

Data from the California Healthy Kids Survey indicate that the prevalence rates of some risk factors for emotional problems among 9th graders in both Santa Clara and San Mateo counties are generally as high as those of 9th graders statewide, including almost one-third of these students reporting severe sadness and hopelessness over an extended period of time. Moreover, the percentages of 5<sup>th</sup> graders in these counties reporting external resilience assets such as having a relationship with a caring adult at school or describing their participation in school as “meaningful” range from only 20% to 60%. The percentages of 5<sup>th</sup> graders in these counties reporting high levels of internal resilience assets such as empathy and problem-solving ability are 40% or less. Available data also indicate that in general the prevalence of risk factors among 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders in these counties is greater than that of 5<sup>th</sup> graders, while their prevalence of protective factors is less.

This student profile of risk and protective factors suggests that students in these counties could benefit from wider implementation of SEL programs such as those highlighted here: in-school universal, in-school indicated, and after-school SEL programs currently being implemented in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties. These programs demonstrate various approaches to enhancing social and emotional skills and positive attitudes and behaviors, reducing conduct problems and emotional distress, and improving students’ academic performance. They are specific examples of the kinds of programs described in the previously mentioned report, *Findings from Three Scientific Reviews*. Their success in improving student risk and protective factors provides

educators and students in California with examples of how SEL programs have promoted the healthy development and school success of children in their area.

**Table 1. Percentages of 9<sup>th</sup> Graders Reporting Selected Risk Factors for Emotional Health Problems by Geographic Region\***

<b>Risk Factor</b>	<b>U.S.</b>	<b>California</b>	<b>San Mateo County</b>	<b>Santa Clara County</b>
<b>Felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for 2+ weeks during the past 12 months that they had stopped doing some usual activities</b>	28	32	29	30
<b>Didn't go to school at least 1 day of the past 30 because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to or from school</b>	7	--	--	--
<b>School perceived as unsafe or very unsafe</b>	--	9	5	7
<b>Took at least 1 drink of alcohol during the past 30 days</b>	36	27	26	21

\*U.S. data taken from CDC, 2008, Youth Risk Behavior Survey; California state and county data taken, respectively, from West Ed, 2005-2007, and West Ed, 2006-2008, California Health Kids Survey.

**Table 2. Percentages of 5th Graders by Geographic Region\* Reporting “High”\*\* Levels of External or Internal Resilience Assets**

<b>External Resilience Assets</b>	<b>California</b>	<b>San Mateo County</b>	<b>Santa Clara County</b>
<b>Has a caring adult relationship at school</b>	60	61	62
<b>Adult at school has high expectations of him/her</b>	63	65	61
<b>Participation at school is meaningful</b>	19	19	20
<b>Internal Resilience Assets</b>			
<b>Empathy</b>	42	42	41
<b>Problem solving</b>	37	40	34
<b>Goals and aspirations</b>	83	84	82

\*State and county data taken, respectively, from WestEd 2005-2007 and WestEd 2006-2008, California Healthy Kids Survey

\*\*A high asset level represents the percentage of students with an average score of 3+ on related questionnaire items using a 4-point scale, where 4 = “very much true” and 3 = “pretty much true” of me. (See WestEd presentation, *Using the Resilience and Youth Development Module* at [www.wested.org/chks/pdf/rydm\\_presentation.pdf](http://www.wested.org/chks/pdf/rydm_presentation.pdf)).

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