

# SDDFS Notes

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## The Links Between Prevention Efforts and Academic Achievement

In recent years, many prevention programs have emerged to address the issue of safety in America's schools. While there are limited quantitative data to support the theory that prevention efforts have a positive impact on student academic achievement, empirical data suggest that there is a positive impact – that when a school is free of drugs and violence, children learn better. Implicit in the National Education Goals is the assumption that safe, secure, and orderly surroundings are essential to ensure a positive learning environment. These goals also suggest that in order to improve student achievement, all schools across America must be safe and free of drugs.

### Academic Performance and Prevention

There is a growing body of knowledge that supports the direct relationship between academic performance and prevention programs. In *Solvent Use, School Attendance, Gender & Ethnicity*, the authors (Jumper-Thurman, Bates, and Plested) note a strong relationship between low grade point averages and solvent use. The study also points out that “. . . at almost all grade levels, solvent users are mostly ‘D’ or ‘F’ students,” that the failure to finish high school is correlated with using marijuana and hard liquor, and that students who experience academic failure are at increased risk for involvement in crime and violence. It is likely then, that if we are able to reduce the risk for alcohol, tobacco and other drug use, as well as the risk for violence, our schools would be better able to ensure academic success.

The following excerpt is from *Academic Performance, Drug Related Prevention*, an article from *Dateline*, the national prevention newsletter of DREAM, Incorporated:

“We’ve all heard the cliché about the chicken and the egg. . . . While proponents and opponents debate both sides, the point of agreement is that the two are inseparably related, no matter which came first. A growing body of research indicates that the same can be said for the relationship between drug prevention programs within school settings and the academic performance of students within those same school settings. The two are clearly related, and students learning within safe, disciplined, and drug-free settings often seem to make better academic progress. Likewise, excelling in school or performing up to one’s potential helps build self-esteem and promote school bonding which can serve as protective factors from drug use and other destructive behavior patterns.

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At the request of the Florida Department of Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program, DREAM, Inc., developed a brief, annotated bibliography of selected programs, which exemplifies this relationship. DREAM is a subcontractor to the Region XIV Comprehensive Center at Educational Testing Service, the prime contractor for the U.S. Department of Education for this technical assistance center serving Florida, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The bibliography of 32 programs was developed by Hayden D. Center, Jr., Ph.D., and Chris Gilmer, Ph.D. According to Gilmer, "While it seems obvious that there would be some correlation between these two seemingly discrete areas of school culture, it has never seemed to me that any area within a school culture is truly discrete. They all exist in relationship. Children are holistic beings, and schools are, or should be, holistic environments. This is an area of interest for us, and we thought that beginning this work might make some contribution to those working in this field. We do not present this draft bibliography as an exhaustive or an all-inclusive study, but merely as a starting point for a survey of research in this area. Clearly there is much more which could be found. With so much emphasis being placed on increasing and improving test scores, we see it as an opportunity to galvanize support for Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities programs when a clear relationship can be shown between implementing these programs and improving test scores."

### A Brief Bibliography of Prevention Programs that Impact Academic Performance

Following is a list of a dozen entries from DREAM's bibliography of programs that have been found to positively impact academic performance. If you wish to see the complete document, including 20 additional programs, please visit the FIE/ Safe, Disciplined, and Drug-Free Schools Project website at [www.unf.edu/dept/fie/sdfs](http://www.unf.edu/dept/fie/sdfs). Click on **Proven Programs**.

#### 1. Reconnecting Youth Program

Eggert, L. L.; Thompson, E. A.; Herting, J. R.; and Nicholas, L. J. (1995). Reducing suicide potential among high-risk youth. Tests of a school-based prevention program. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 5(2), 276-296.

Eggert, L. L.; Thompson, E. A., Herting, J. R., Nicholas, L. J., and Dicker, B. G. (1994). Preventing adolescent drug abuse and high school dropout through an intensive school-based social network development program. *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 8(3), 202-215.

Research indicates that this program improves school performance, self-esteem, personal control, and school bonding. This program also reduces drug involvement and deviant peer bonding.

#### 2. School Development Program

Comer, J. P. (1988). Educating poor minority children. *Scientific American*, 259(5), 42-48.

The program had positive effects on grades, academic achievement test scores, and social competence.

#### 3. The Program Development Evaluation Method

Gottfredson, D. C., Gottfredson, G. D., Hybl, L. G. (1993). An approach to reducing risk through school system restructuring. Paper presented to the Research Partnership Network, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD.

Gottfredson, D. C., Gottfredson, G. D., Hybl, L. G. (1993). Managing adolescent behavior: A multi-year, multi-school study. *American Educational Research Journal*, 30(1), 179-215.

Findings from the study indicated that the program significantly reduced classroom disruption and increased classroom organization and clarity of the rules. The program had positive effects on grades, academic achievement test scores, and social competence.

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#### 4. The Seattle Social Development Project

Hawkins, J. D., Catalano, R. F., Morrison, D. M., O'Donnell, J., Abbott, R. D. and Day, L. E. (1992). The Seattle Social Development Project: Effects of the first four years on protective factors and problem behaviors. In J. McCord and R. E. Tremblay (Eds.), *Preventing Antisocial Behavior: Interventions from Birth through Adolescence*. New York, NY: Guilford.

O'Donnell, J., Hawkins, J. D., Catalano, R. F., Abbott, R. D., Day, L. E. (1995). Preventing school failure, drug use, and delinquency among low-income children: Effects of a long-term prevention project in elementary schools. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 65(1), 87-100.

Low-income boys had lower levels of interaction with antisocial peers and lower levels of delinquency. Low-income girls had lower rates of initiation of alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco use compared to controls. Girls also showed higher levels of classroom participation and greater attachment and commitment to school. Boys had higher scores on standardized tests, higher level of social skills, and better work skills. Longitudinal follow up indicate significant reductions in violent and delinquent behavior, teen sexual activity, and teen pregnancy.

#### 5. Behavioral Intervention for Middle School Students

Bry, B. H. (1982). Reducing the incidence of adolescent problems through preventive intervention: One- and five-year follow-up. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 10, 265-276.

Students who received the intervention had better grades and attendance records than those that did not. Also one year following the program, the students that received the intervention reported less abuse of drugs as well as criminal behavior. Five years after the program the students who were in the intervention group were significantly less likely to have a juvenile record than matched at-risk students.

#### 6. The Family Development Research Program

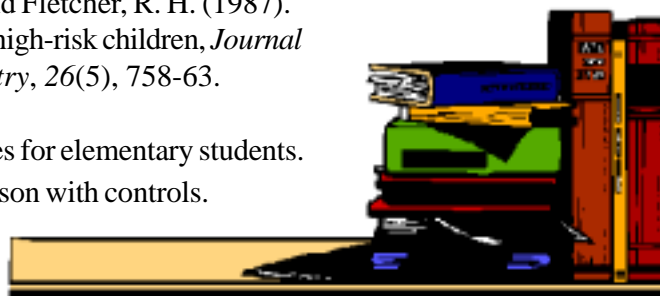
Lally, J. R., Mangione, P. L., Honig, A. S. (1988). The Syracuse University Family Development Research Program: Long-range impact on an early intervention with low-income children and their families. In D. Powell (Ed.) Parent evaluation as early childhood intervention. *Advances in Applied Developmental Psychology* (Vol.3), NJ.

Ten-year follow-up showed positive effects on girls on attendance, academic achievement, self-control, and attitudes towards school. Both boys and girls had reduced involvement with the juvenile justice system.

#### 7. The Carolina Abecedarian Project

Horacek, H. J., Ramey, C. T., Campbell, F. A., Hoffman, K. P., and Fletcher, R. H. (1987). Predicting school failure and assessing early intervention with high-risk children, *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 26(5), 758-63.

Results showed positive effects on reading and math scores for elementary students. Fewer project students were held back a grade in comparison with controls.



## 8. School Transitional Environment Project

Felner, R. D. & Adan, A. M. (1988). The School Transitional Environment Project: An ecological intervention and evaluation. In R. Price, E. L. Cowen, R. P. Lorion & J. Romoa-McKay (Eds.), *Fourteen Ounces of Prevention: A Casebook for Practitioners*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Felner, R. D., Brand, S., Adan, A. M., Mulhall, P. F., Flowers, N., Sartain, B., DuBois, D. L. (1993). Restructuring the ecology of the school as an approach to prevention during school transitions: Longitudinal follow-ups and extensions of the School Transitional Environment Project (STEP). *Prevention in Human Services*, 10(2), 103-136.

Project students were less likely to drop out of school than controls. Tenth grade students had fewer absences and significantly higher grades than controls. This program was more effective for students who were initially doing poorly in school.

## 9. Continuous Progress Instruction

Madden, N. A. & Slavin, R. E. (1989). Effective pull-out programs for students at risk. In R. E. Slavin, N. L. Karweit, and N. A. Madden (Eds.), *Effective Programs for Students at Risk*. Boston: Allen and Bacon.

Continuous progress programs carefully monitor students' progress so that their mastery of the skill is ensured. Multiple evaluations have shown significant positive effects on academic achievement.



## 10. The High/Scope Cognitive Curriculum

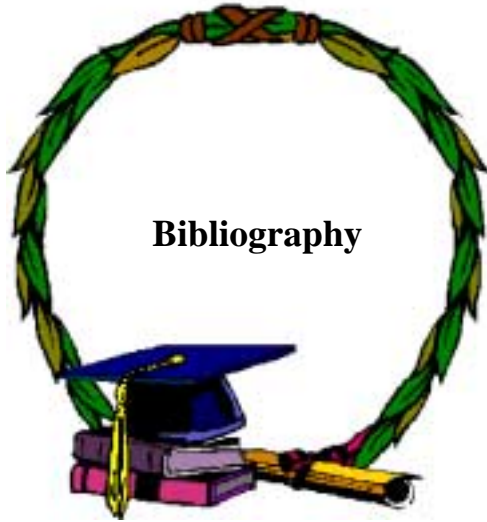
Berrueta-Clement, J. R. Schweinhart, L. J., Barnett, W. S., Epstein, A. S., & Weikart, D. P. (1984). *Changed lives: The effects of the Perry Preschool Program on youth through age 19*, Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press.

Schweinhart, L. J., Barnes, H. V., and Weikart, D. P. (1993). *Significant benefits: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study through age 27*. Monographs of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 10, Ypsilanti, MI: High Scope Press.

Participants achieved higher grade point averages, higher high school graduation rates, higher rates of employment, spent less time in special education classes and were less likely to receive public assistance. Arrests were reduced by 40% for participants, and there were fewer pregnancies in the participant group than the control group at age 19.



While the impact of prevention on academic achievement has been neither widely enough researched nor documented with scientific certainty, anecdotal research has linked prevention to positively impacting student academic achievement. There are significant studies emerging that offer us encouragement that the link will be definitively established. For additional information on this topic please review the following references and the annotated bibliography we have provided on programs that have been found to effect academic achievement positively.



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