



The Impact of Blue Star Education's
MINDFULNESS MATTERS SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING PACKS
in Elementary School Classrooms:

A Research Study

Research Study: Mindfulness Matters Social-Emotional Learning Packs

Overview

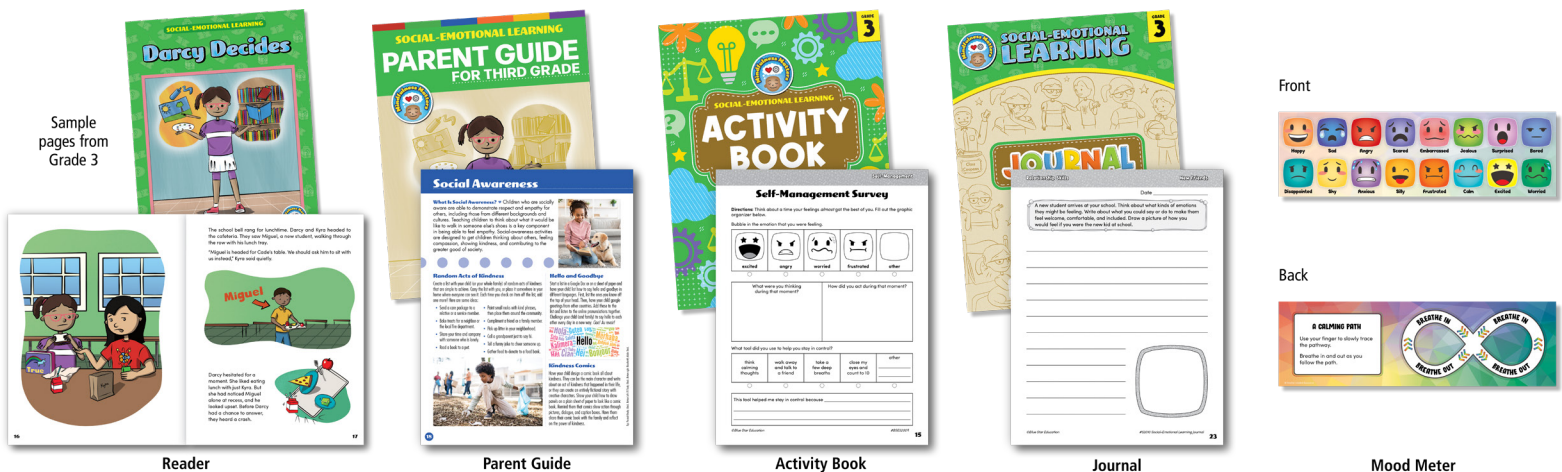
Blue Star Education partnered with Garretson Elementary (a Title I, transitional kindergarten through sixth grade AVID elementary school in the Corona-Norco School District, located in western Riverside County, California) to conduct a six-week social-emotional learning research study during the fall of 2024.

Garretson Elementary offers a Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) magnet program and a Spanish Dual Language Immersion (DLI) program. Garretson's student enrollment by ethnicity includes 731 Hispanic or Latino, 95 White, 58 Asian, 14 African American, 8 Filipino, and 3 American Indian. 260 Garretson students are English Learners, and 65% of the students receive free or reduced lunch. In all, 181 students (grades 3-6) participated in Blue Star Education's *Mindfulness Matters* Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) program. The demographic information of the school is representative of the participants in the program.

The focus and intent of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the *Mindfulness Matters* SEL program on students' overall social and emotional intelligence. Educators implemented the SEL program across a diverse group of students, exploring its impact on student learning and engagement. Each student was given a grade-appropriate *Mindfulness Matters* learning pack that included a leveled-text reader, a parent guide, a student activity book, and a student journal. Teachers were provided with a six-week pacing plan that covered each of the five main SEL components: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Participants in the study were given assessments (pre- and post-) in order to accurately measure their understanding.

The following report presents valuable insights into the impact of the *Mindfulness Matters* program on students' emotional intelligence.

Sample pages from Grade 3



Rationale

In order to meet academic standards, students must also be taught how to deal with social and emotional situations that can impede academic learning. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) identifies social-emotional learning as the process that enables children to learn how to understand themselves and those around them, manage their emotions, display empathy and respect, build solid relationships, and make smart choices (CASEL 2020). Children who are taught emotional intelligence have the tools they need to communicate successfully, maintain healthy relationships, and function in society. SEL is simply the process of learning and growing these necessary life skills.

While social-emotional learning (SEL) has been a buzzword since the 1990s, it wasn't until the COVID-19 pandemic that the majority of schools across the United States began to understand the real need for SEL in the classroom. Teachers and parents do not need to look very far to see an increase in people who are experiencing anxiety, depression, and higher levels of stress. These issues have always been present, but the pandemic exacerbated and intensified these symptoms by disrupting normal life, routines, and learning settings (Mental Health America 2022). Research indicates that SEL instruction "reduces problem behaviors and emotional distress that interferes with the learning and development of some students" (U.S. Department of Education 2013). Eliminating or reducing behaviors that interfere with learning has been shown to significantly raise test scores and academic performance (CASEL).

The *Mindfulness Matters* learning packs provide opportunities for students to identify and express their feelings, use coping strategies for managing emotions, promote positive thinking, and learn about inclusion, respect, and acceptance. In addition to the weekly SEL sessions in the classroom, students were encouraged to continue their SEL learning at home. Parents were given a 32-page Parent Guide that offered background information on SEL and included a variety of tips, tools, and advice for constructing meaningful SEL moments at home. The guide encouraged families to communicate, practice coping strategies, and build their emotional intelligence together.



Methodology

The study included 181 students from 8 different classrooms (grades 3–6), including students from GATE, DLI, and EL classes. On average, *Mindfulness Matters* was woven into the classroom curriculum based on two 15-minute intervals twice a week. Pacing plans differed slightly based on class level, but the following was used as a guide:

- **Week 1:** Students were introduced to the different components of the program and completed a **pre-assessment**. They read the SEL book together, examined the provided after-reading discussion questions, and completed an independent journal entry. Parents were given the Parent Guide, and students were assigned an optional homework assignment in the activity book. Students were encouraged to start a habit of recording their feelings in their *Feelings Tracker* daily.
- **Week 2:** Students focused on self-awareness (identifying emotions and recognizing their own strengths and limitations). They completed journal and activity book pages and had a class discussion.
- **Week 3:** Students focused on self-management (recognizing various tools to manage emotions in different situations and understanding how to control their own behavior in order to set and achieve goals). They completed journal and activity book pages and had a class discussion.
- **Week 4:** Students focused on social awareness (understanding respect, empathy, and kindness). They completed journal and activity book pages and had a class discussion.
- **Week 5:** Students focused on relationship skills (how to build and maintain healthy relationships and how to resolve conflicts). They completed journal and activity book pages and had a class discussion.
- **Week 6:** Students focused on responsible decision-making skills (understanding the importance of evaluating consequences and considering the well-being of others when making decisions). They completed journal and activity book pages and had a class discussion. They completed the written **post-assessment**.

Assessment Tools

The pre- and post-assessments consisted of 10 multiple-choice questions with two questions devoted to each SEL component: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The assessments also included six short-answer questions in order to collect qualitative data and to enable authentic participant expression (students' viewpoints, thoughts, opinions, and experiences).

Pre-assessments were collected at the start of the study, and multiple-choice answers were graded and recorded. Post-assessments were collected at the end of the study, and multiple-choice answers were graded and recorded. Short-answer responses were read and analyzed to uncover themes, patterns, and cognitive processes.

Results

The study compared data collected from the multiple-choice questions from the pre-assessments and post-assessments. The percentage of students who answered each question correctly was recorded.

On average, students showed a notable improvement in their understanding of the SEL concepts taught throughout the program, with an increase of nearly 20% more students who answered correctly from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment (see Figure A).

- In the area of self-awareness: 49% of students answered correctly on the pre-assessment; 78% answered correctly on the post-assessment. This represents a 29% increase.
- In the area of self-management: 79% of students answered correctly on the pre-assessment; 91% answered correctly on the post-assessment. This represents a 12% increase.
- In the area of social awareness: 76% of students answered correctly on the pre-assessment; 87% answered correctly on the post-assessment. This represents an 11% increase.
- In the area of relationship skills: 66% of students answered correctly on the pre-assessment; 89% answered correctly on the post-assessment. This represents a 23% increase.
- In the area of responsible decision-making: 65% of students answered correctly on the pre assessment; 87% answered correctly on the post-assessment. This represents a 22% increase.

Mindfulness Matters Assessment

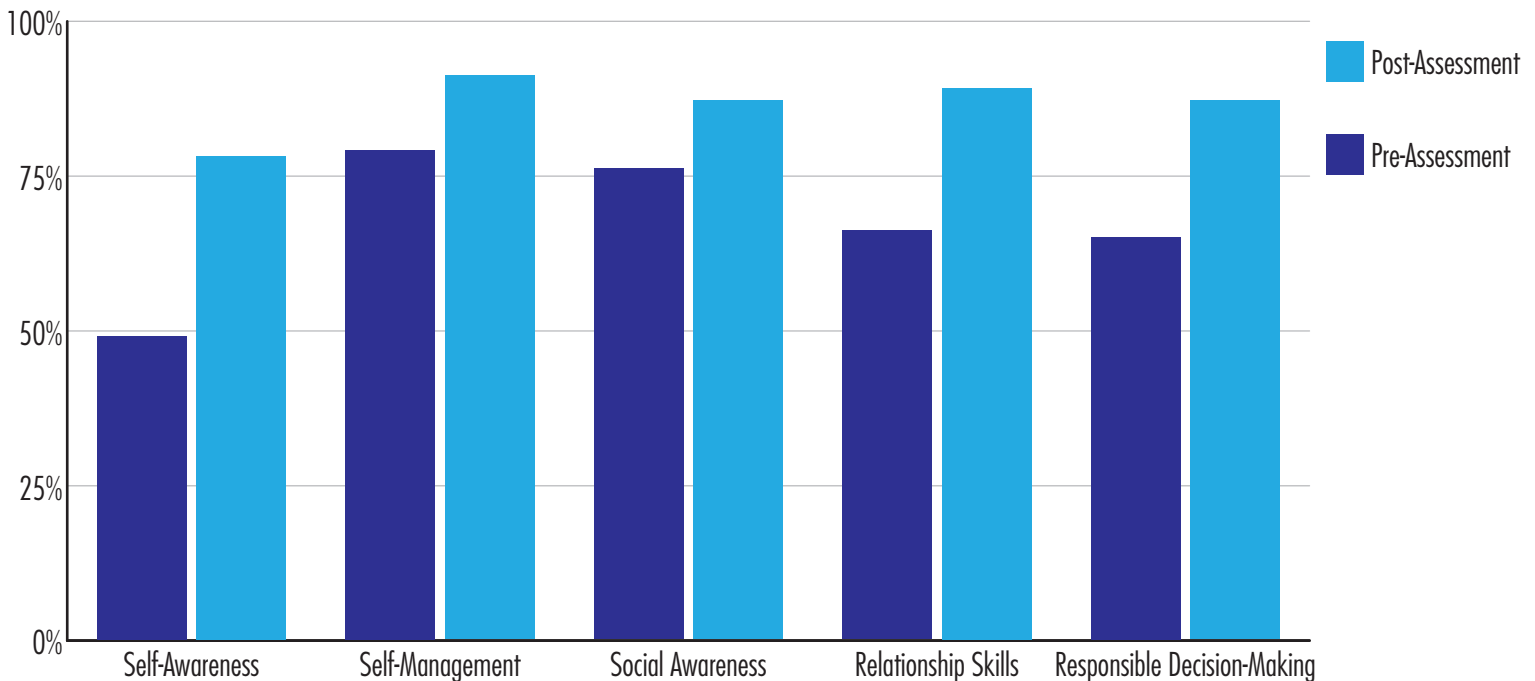


Figure A: The percent of students who answered the SEL questions correctly

Student performance improved across all five SEL components in the six-week span, highlighting the effectiveness of the *Mindfulness Matters* program. Incorporating this program into only two short time blocks a week had a positive impact on student understanding and application of key social emotional skills.

Surveys

Students, parents, and teachers were asked to complete a survey after participating in the *Mindfulness Matters* program.

Students

“ It helped me understand myself and why I am feeling specific feelings. ”

My favorite part was taking deep breaths to control emotions. I rate this a 5/5 because it is perfect for kids with anger issues. ”

“ I feel like I understand myself better because I used to think I was a bad person but now I know I am not. ”

“ My favorite part is realizing how much this program actually cares about our feelings. ”

“ I rate it 5 stars because it was fun and also it made me come out of my shell. ”

“ I understand myself better because I am a lot more positive and I don't get mad often now. ”

Parents

“ The Parent Guide has really nice insights about how to spend quality time with kids and how to initiate healthy conversations. ”

“ There were so many good activities that include the whole family. ”

“ I am a therapist and I think it's great you're doing this! ”

“ It was good material to read together as a family. ”

“ This source was helpful in understanding how to cope with the mental well-being of my child. ”

“ I really enjoyed this book. Some of the activities were great ideas such as the affirmations. We created a list together with the whole family. ”

Teachers

“ Wow! This was an amazing resource for which students were excited about. I 100% recommend this program to other teachers/schools. ”

“ The journals were valuable. It was nice to teach the kids how to write about their feelings. ”

“ This program encouraged family involvement and gave students a chance to reflect and journal on their feelings. The journal and parent guide are a missing piece in other programs. ”

“ The Activity Book helped kids visualize the different social emotional learning. This was useful when they wrote in their journals. They were able to draw from the activities for more meaningful journal entries. ”

“ I enjoyed how the parent engagement spoke about how communication is key. I like how there's a communication jar and how it takes a village. ”

“ Students realized SEL was not only about themselves, but also about the impact they have on others. ”

References

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