



## ***She's supporting them; who's supporting her?***

### **Preschool center-level social-emotional supports and teacher well-being.**

Teachers in early childhood education are not only challenged with the task of educating and preparing children for kindergarten academically, but also socially and emotionally. In order to support children's social-emotional learning (SEL), teachers must have access to the necessary resources to teach about these topics, and be emotionally well themselves. Unfortunately, Research indicates early childhood professionals' experience higher than average workplaces stress, depression, and poor job satisfaction, in part because of poor working conditions and challenging child behavior. We studied how resources for child SEL may be related to teachers' workplace well-being. Our goal was to determine: 1) the extent to which preschool teachers' emotional well-being and workplace experiences be attributed to where they work?; and 2) how the implementation of social-emotional supports for children are related to teachers' well-being at work and/or their perception of their workplace?

### **Participants**

Participants in this study were 419 teachers who worked at 85 different Head Start centers across the United States. Participants were part of a larger nationally representative study, the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES, 2009 cohort; for additional recruiting sample information see [FACES 2009 Study Design](#)).

### **Key Points**

Early childhood teachers play an important role in children's social-learning (SEL).

To support high-quality social-emotional teaching, programs need to provide both adequate classroom resources and support teachers' own social-emotional well-being.

Although teachers work in individual classrooms, they share common perceptions of their workplaces.

Similarly, teachers working at a single center show similar levels of psychological health (e.g., depression) and job satisfaction.

One way to improve teacher well-being is through the provision of supports for children's social-emotional learning.

In centers that adopted more supports for SEL, teachers were less depressed, more satisfied with their jobs, felt more supported in managing challenging behavior, and viewed the workplace climate of their center more positively.



Teachers were almost all female and most were middle aged, had attended at least some college, and had been teaching for over a decade. Most teachers identified as either White, Black, or Hispanic/Latino. The teachers all worked in preschool classrooms where they taught three and four-year-old children whose families lived at or below the federally determined Head Start poverty criteria.

## Method

Researchers interviewed teachers about their perceptions of their center's workplace climate, the accessibility of supports for handling child behavior, their perception of children's behavior, and their own experiences of depression. Teachers were also asked to report whether or not their center used each of three possible SEL supports: a social skills curriculum, a mental health professional, and resources from the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL). Center directors reported the total number of lead teachers employed by the center.

We analyzed these data using hierarchical linear models which specifically consider the fact that teachers who work in the same school building have both independent and shared perceptions and experiences. For example, two teachers who both work at a single Head Start program may experience similar levels of support, but because of their own backgrounds or the children in their individual classrooms, they may perceive the effectiveness of that support differently.

## Results

Results indicate that although teachers work in individual classrooms they share common perceptions at the center-level of their workplace climate and access to support and, although to a lesser extent, experience commonalities in psychological health and job satisfaction. Furthermore, teachers who worked at centers with more SEL implementation (including access to mental health consultants, classroom curriculum, and training and resources for teachers) were less depressed, more satisfied with their jobs, felt more supported in managing challenging behavior, and had more positive views of workplace climate.

## Implications

The investment in high-quality child-level SEL supports (e.g., evidence based SEL curricula) has the potential to positively impact both child development and adult workplace experiences. By supporting both early-childhood educators and children's emotional well-being, centers will be able to better retain and support high-quality teachers.

### Original Reference:

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