Welcome to the ninth issue of New Developments, the quarterly e-newsletter from SRI International’s Center for Education and Human Services. This issue highlights the findings from a large scale study of the effectiveness of First Step to Success, an evidence-based intervention for children with or at risk for behavioral problems. Earlier issues are available on our website.

An Evidence-based Behavioral Intervention for the Primary Grades

SRI conducted a large-scale study of the effectiveness of First Step to Success in partnership with Oregon Research Institute, developers of the intervention. Funding was received in 2006 from the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Special Education Research in the Institute of Education Sciences.

First Step to Success is an early intervention to help children who are at risk for developing or who demonstrate antisocial or aggressive behaviors get off to the best possible start in school. First Step to Success behavior coaches work with each participating student and his or her class peers, teacher, and parents for 50 to 60 hours over a 3-month period. Major components of the program are classwide screening; CLASS, a classroom-based curriculum; and HomeBase, a module involving families in the intervention process.

The study involved 48 elementary schools in five diverse school districts across the country (Chicago, IL, San Jose, CA, Huntington, WV, Eugene, OR, and Tampa, FL). Half the schools in each district were randomly assigned to implement the program, and the other half were assigned to the usual care condition and offered the program on completion of the study. This enabled us to compare children who participated in First Step to Success with children who received the usual services provided at their school. In each school, six first- through third-grade classrooms were chosen to participate in the study. Teachers who implemented First Step to Success in the intervention schools their first year were asked to repeat First Step to Success with a new student the next year (one student in each of two consecutive years). This allowed comparison of the outcomes of students whose teachers had experience implementing First Step to Success with outcomes of students whose teachers had no experience with the intervention.

In this large-scale randomized controlled trial of First Step to Success, we assessed the effectiveness of the intervention with a diverse set of children under natural implementation conditions. Effects on both behavior and academic achievement were assessed at the end of the intervention and 1 and 2 years later for evaluation of the long-term effects of First Step to Success.

Key Findings

Results demonstrated that students who participated in First Step to Success showed significantly increased positive prosocial behavior, decreased problem behaviors, and improved academic functioning compared with students who received the standard services available in their schools (i.e., usual care condition).*

For details on our findings, please visit our web page at: https://firststeptosuccess.sri.com/documents.html


For more information about First Step to Success, visit https://firststeptosuccess.sri.com.

SRI International is an independent, nonprofit research institute. For more information about SRI’s Center for Education and Human Services, visit http://policyweb.sri.com/cehs/.

SRI International, 333 Ravenswood Ave., Menlo Park, CA 94025