



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Four-Year Randomized Control Trial (RCT) Study



THE CHALLENGE

**More than
12 million
children in
the U.S. live
in poverty.**

**This can affect every
aspect of a child's life.**

Children living in low-income communities are:

More likely to lack basic needs such as food, clothing, and adequate housing. Children may live in unsafe neighborhoods and are more likely to spend time alone or unsupervised after school, which can lead to involvement in crime or drugs.

At a higher risk for poor academic outcomes.

By fourth grade, low-income students can be 12-18 months behind their more affluent peers academically. Low-income students are also 3-4 times more likely to be chronically absent or drop out of high school than other students.

More likely to incur adverse childhood experiences, including abuse, neglect, exposure to neighborhood violence, or having an incarcerated parent.

Nearly half of children who have three or more adverse childhood experiences have low levels of engagement in school, and more than 40 percent demonstrate negative behaviors such as arguing and bullying.

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

A Step in the Right Direction



We cannot change a child's economic situation, but we can equip them with the skills needed to create a more equitable chance at success in school and in life.

Social emotional learning (SEL) is the process by which children acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

Through social emotional learning, children develop skills such as stress management, problem solving, and resisting negative pressure that help them learn about and manage their emotions and interactions with others. This prepares them for academic success, forming healthy relationships, and eventually excelling in the workplace.

SEL Core Competencies

WINGS is rooted in the five interrelated core competencies that make up social emotional learning: self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and relationship skills. Learn more about these core competencies at www.wingsforkids.org/core-competencies.

WINGS FOR KIDS

Bringing Together High-Quality SEL and Engaging Afterschool Programming

WINGS for Kids has been bringing high-quality social emotional learning to at-risk kids in low-income communities for over 20 years through its structured afterschool SEL program. WINGS currently operates direct service programs at Title I elementary schools in Charleston, SC; Atlanta, GA; and Charlotte, NC; and has served more than 10,000 students in grades K-5. The program operates three hours per day, five days per week during the school year.

WINGS' EVIDENCE BASE

WINGS believes in the importance of strong evidence and research. That's why the WINGS Afterschool SEL program design is firmly rooted in and guided by research that states effective SEL programs incorporate components that include:

- + **High participation rates**
- + **Multi-year programming**
- + **Development of both academic and social emotional skills**
- + **The four SAFE characteristics (sequenced, active, focused, explicit)**
- + **Emphasis on the five key SEL competencies**

The WINGS framework states that at least two years of participation would be required to see significant shifts in SEL competency.

About the Research

In 2012, researchers began a randomized control trial (RCT) study to evaluate the impact of the WINGS Afterschool SEL program on the at-risk students it serves. Led by Dr. David Grissmer at the University of Virginia and funded by the Institute of Education Sciences and the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, the RCT studied three cohorts of students entering kindergarten at four elementary school-based WINGS programs in Charleston, SC, over a four-year period. To date, it is the only such study on the impact of SEL in an afterschool setting.

The evaluation included an extensive longitudinal data collection from parents, teachers, and child testing that measured 35 developmental, behavioral, and academic outcome measures. Longitudinal data was collected at three times: upon students' entry into kindergarten (pre-test), after one year of participation in WINGS, and after two years of participation in WINGS. Assessments included direct child assessments and surveys on classroom and home behavior by teachers and parents.

What is an RCT?

A randomized control trial, or RCT, is a study that randomly assigns individuals to an intervention group or a control group in order to measure the effects of the intervention. In this case, the intervention group was children participating in the WINGS Afterschool program, and the control group was children who did not participate in WINGS. The U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences has said that well-designed and implemented randomized control trials are "considered the 'gold standard' for evaluating an intervention's effectiveness."

RCT BY THE NUMBERS

354

Total number of students evaluated in the RCT

35

Number of developmental, behavioral, and academic outcome measures evaluated

100

Days each year that children were required to attend WINGS

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The results of the RCT provide evidence that participation in the WINGS Afterschool program for at least two years increases children's academic skills and positive classroom behaviors. Children who participated in WINGS in kindergarten and first grade showed improved social emotional skills, executive function, and reading measures.

Key findings from the RCT include:

Classroom teachers noted positive SEL-related effects and changes in WINGS participants in 15 specific areas.

Significant Effects ($p < .05$)	Marginally Significant Effects ($p < .10$)
Self-awareness	Decision-making
Less bullying	Relationship skills
Less hyperactivity	Self-management
Less problem behaviors	General social skills
Self-regulation	Closeness to teachers
Executive function	Less conflict with teachers
Naming vocabulary	
Letter-word identification	

Participation in WINGS for two years resulted in stronger effects than participation for only one year. This finding suggests that the longer amount of time a child participates in WINGS, the stronger the impact of the program will be.

Children's behavior and social emotional skills improved in the classroom, but the same significant effects were not found at home, as measured by parent ratings. This suggests that parents' measures of behavior and social emotional skills differ from teachers' and may be less objective.

Executive function

is the group of mental processes that enable one to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and manage multiple tasks. Research shows that learning these skills early benefits children for the rest of their lives.

Statistically significant effects

are those that are determined to be a reliable result of the intervention, and not a result of random chance.

WHAT THIS ALL MEANS

The RCT provides WINGS—and the larger education field—with evidence that high-quality SEL in afterschool has a positive impact on students' classroom behavior and academic skills. But what does that mean moving forward? The results of the RCT can influence the way educators, afterschool programs, and curriculum developers implement quality SEL.



Dosage matters.

In the study, dosage refers to the amount of time that students spent in the WINGS program. The results show that positive effects on students who participated in WINGS for only their kindergarten year were very weak, while students who participated in WINGS for both kindergarten and first grade exhibited strong positive effects. **This suggests that the positive effects of WINGS and SEL may grow with more dosage, therefore increasing the effects of the program among older students who have participated for several years.**

As WINGS is a K-5 program, we would expect that children who participate in WINGS for all six years would have much stronger positive effects. Thus, the RCT evaluation, which only includes children in kindergarten and first grade with up to two years of dosage, may underestimate the potential full impact of WINGS.

Access matters.

Consistent participation in WINGS is a key component of the study and a predictor of positive effects on participants. Students were required to attend WINGS for 100 days in each of the two years of the evaluation. However, consistent attendance was not always possible for every participating student due to relocation and frequent changes in jobs, income, health, and relationships that impacted student participation—all of which are common factors among the at-risk populations and low-income communities that WINGS serves.

As WINGS is not offered in every school in Charleston, transferring to a different school—even within the city—may mean they no longer have access to a WINGS program.

The results of the study suggest that the impact of the WINGS program could be significantly increased if it is implemented in all schools within a school district.

This could both increase dosage and mitigate challenges resulting from school closures or families relocating as students would still be able to participate in the program across the district.

WHAT THIS ALL MEANS

Stress matters.

While teachers' evaluations of WINGS kids showed improvement in classroom behaviors and social emotional skills, parents' evaluations did not note improved behavior at home. This shift could be due to a number of factors, one of which is parental stress. WINGS kids arrive home much later—and often more tired—than children who arrive home immediately after school and spend time with caregivers.

In addition, the parent survey showed statistically significant higher levels of stress for parents of children participating in WINGS. This increased stress may result from the challenges of having a child attend WINGS and the associated challenges of a later home arrival of a tired child, as well as other financial, social, and familial stresses. **The RCT suggests that stressed parents, with all other things being equal, may rate their child's behavior lower.**

Environment matters.

Another potential explanation for the difference between teacher and parent evaluations may be the environment in which they are interacting with children. In a classroom filled with children, regardless of their participation in WINGS, teachers are able to evaluate students more objectively and in comparison with other students. In most cases, parents don't have this opportunity and, as a result, their ratings can be biased.

In addition, the classroom environment is much more similar to and places similar demands on children as the WINGS Afterschool program environment. As such, students may find it easier to transfer the behavior and skills they learn during WINGS to the classroom, rather than to a more stressed and different home environment. **While this should not negate parents' feedback and ratings on their child's behavior at home, it does show that environment is an important factor in considering evaluations.**



Applying the RCT to the Future of WINGS and SEL



WINGS is committed to increasing equitable access to high-quality social emotional learning for all kids, regardless of where they live. The RCT process, findings, and conclusions have influenced WINGS' continued work to expand the reach of our programs.

Implementing District-Wide SEL Initiatives

One of the key takeaways from the RCT study is that the positive impacts of WINGS could be significantly increased if all schools in a district implemented the program so that children whose families frequently move between schools could participate for more years. In 2016, WINGS launched a partnership with **Pomona Unified School District** in Pomona, CA, to bring the WINGS Afterschool curriculum to the district's existing afterschool program, The Learning Connection (TLC), in four schools. In 2017, the partnership expanded to include all TLC schools in the district—the first district-wide adoption of an afterschool SEL model in California. In addition to the curriculum, WINGS provides SEL-focused training and professional development to afterschool professionals working across TLC programs.

LESSONS LEARNED

Creating a Culture of SEL

SEL isn't just for kids—in fact, it begins with adults. In order for classroom teachers and afterschool professionals to effectively teach social emotional skills to kids, they must first build and strengthen their own social emotional skills. WINGS provides training and professional development to educators to help them understand their own social emotional skills. In turn, they're able to infuse SEL into every interaction with students and recognize and leverage opportunities to teach social emotional lessons in activities, games, conversations, and homework time—effectively creating a program-wide culture of SEL. Building upon its successful model for afterschool practitioners, WINGS launched a partnership in 2018 with **Laurens County School District 55** in Laurens, SC, to pilot an in-school SEL professional development program for classroom teachers in all six elementary schools in the district. The goal of the program is to create a seamless connection of SEL during and after the school day by supporting a school culture where SEL can thrive.

Helping Parents Better Understand SEL

Social emotional learning is widely known in the education field, and surveys show that a majority of educators and school and district leaders believe social emotional development is important for all students. However, many parents may still be unfamiliar with what SEL is, why it's important, and how social emotional skills can be developed at home as well as in the classroom and during structured educational programming. To help parents better understand SEL and their role in helping their child develop and practice these skills, **WINGS has created a number of tools and resources specifically for parents.** These include online lessons in behavior management and social emotional skills led by WINGS SEL coaches, toolkits with tips for making SEL part of their daily routine, and fun games and activities that help kids build social emotional skills.

