



The Everybody Matters Effect

*The social-emotional benefits
of teaching coping skills to
children*

By Everybody Matters, Inc.

Bennett MacKinney, Ed.D | Lori Madrid, MSW, LCSW

Everybody Matters is a nonprofit organization launched in Phoenix, Arizona. Founded in 2015, our mission is to teach coping skills to emotionally vulnerable students. This improves their ability to live, love, and learn. Through school-based social-emotional services and professional development, Everybody Matters has changed outcomes for thousands of students across Arizona. **Learn more about our work at everybodymattersaz.org.**

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"I am so excited to have Everybody Matters as part of our school. Students love the discussions they have with their Everybody Matters intern. One student asked me if I invented Everybody Matters because he loves it and has already learned to make better choices. More and more students are making positive choices on the playground, in class and to and from school, lessening the number of referrals in the office.

Having a positive loving environment creates strong community among our staff and students. This is one of the most powerful collaborations I've ever been a part of in terms of strengthening kids."

Jenny Robles, Principal, Paradise Valley School District

FOREWARD

Asking Why Not?

As an elementary principal, I often ended the day with thoughts of “I wish” and “if only.” These thoughts stemmed from the tireless work of my staff to meet both the academic, social, and emotional needs of our students. We “wished” for more time with individual students. “If only” there were enough counselors and social workers to help our students and families.

One very special social worker turned wishful thoughts into action by asking, “Why Not?” Ms. Lori Madrid, a school social worker in an urban school district in Arizona, created a program that provides students and families the specialized support they need by mobilizing school social work interns.

As you read the story of *Everybody Matters* and review the remarkable data, begin to consider the impact a group of trained social work interns could have on your organization. When *Everybody Matters* comes to my mind, I am quickly brought back to a moment in time when a parent shared that the program had saved not only her family, but her life. As this mother shared her story through her tears, I reflected on the impact of asking, “Why not?” *Everybody Matters* renewed my belief that educators can create moments of magic that impact childrens’ lives in ways that are unimaginable.

Kimberly Guerin, Ed.D
Assistant Superintendent

Executive Summary

Everybody Matters is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing individualized social-emotional support to children. This support is provided by interns in college level social work programs. These interns receive intensive training and ongoing feedback from a clinical social worker on the *Everybody Matters* staff. This enables them to provide children with a wide variety of social-emotional coping skills. This in turn helps children thrive in the classroom and at home.

During the 2018 – 2019 school year Everybody Matters provided this service to students in the Balsz School District. Teacher and parent surveys were given before and after this support was provided. Results indicate a statistically significant benefit to student well-being and emotional health. This exciting result will surely contribute to gains in other areas both academically and at home. Indeed, a growing body of research clearly demonstrates the positive connection between emotional well-being and academic success.

Surveys measured five key areas of emotional well-being: the ability to

1. positively express emotions,
2. demonstrate positive social skills,
3. cope with life circumstances,
4. use coping skills,
5. overall classroom or home behavior

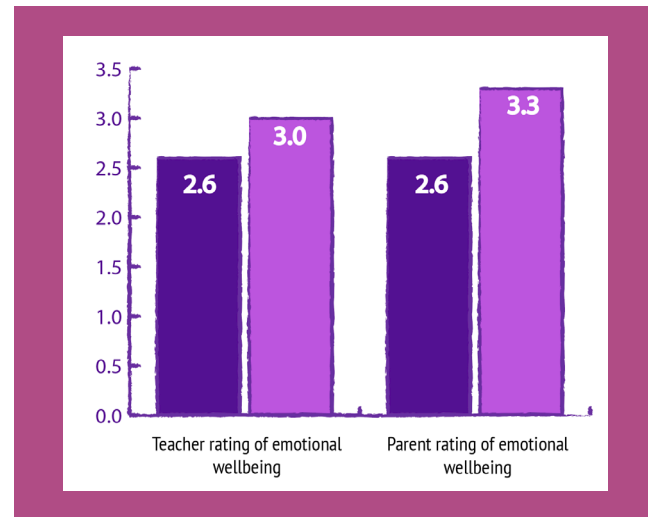
For each of these five areas teachers and parents rated students on a five-point Likert scale. These ratings were assessed before and after eight weeks of individualized support services.

Analysis of survey results indicated statistically significant gains for the average scores on both the teacher and parent surveys. After only eight weeks of intervention the average teacher rating for a child's emotional well-being increased from 2.6 to 3, on the five-point scale. The parent average increased from 2.6 to 3.3 on the same scale.

A deeper dive into the data sheds light on which students benefited the most from the social emotional coaching.

When teachers referred students to Everybody Matters they selected one or more of nine areas of need:

1. emotional support
2. aggression
3. family issues
4. grief
5. classroom behavior
6. social skills
7. ongoing support
8. coping skills
9. other



Both teacher and parent surveys showed statistically significant gains for students referred for coping skills and emotional support. It is important to note that these two areas were among the most commonly checked area of need on the referral. Teacher surveys showed statistically significant gains for students referred for aggression or classroom behavior, while parent surveys showed significant gains for students referred for family issues. Indeed, teachers and parents reported significant growth in their respective environments.

Everybody Matters' services would be useful to any school district looking to benefit from the academic gains that social-emotional coaching can provide. Additionally, feedback from interns indicates that this program satisfies the well-documented challenge of finding high-quality field placements.



The Everybody Matters Model

Two problems that created a solution

Sara's Story

Sara's mom pulled into the school parking lot and offered her daughter words of encouragement, "Today is going to be a great day, right Sara?" But Sara stayed quiet, and like so many days before, refused to leave the car.

Soon the principal and a school aide joined mom in a chorus of optimism and reassurance: "your friends are waiting for you... this morning in math your teacher is doing that game you like... you get to finish that art project today..." But Sara stayed quiet and refused to leave the car.

Karen's Story

Karen parked her car and took a deep breath. "This internship interview better go well" she thought. Karen needed to start a placement in less than two weeks, but so far no one had offered anything that would help her truly develop the field skills she desired.

She really wanted to graduate with all the skills she would need to get a strong start in the field. With fingers crossed, she stepped out of her car and walked into the interview with Everybody Matters.

Schools across the country face the challenge of dealing with student emotional states that interfere with learning. Whether it is with students like Sara who refuse to enter the building; students who throw books in the classroom; or students who fight their way to the front of the cafeteria line, school staff often find themselves focusing on much more than just academic content.

Meanwhile, social worker training programs face the challenge of finding quality field placements that provide opportunities to put coursework into practice. Additionally, these programs must provide a high level of supervision and feedback. Interns like Karen hope to find a placement with real world applications of what they learned in their coursework. And the supervisors of these eager interns hope they can provide the in-depth feedback and guidance while still managing their own caseload of clients.

The Everybody Matters model brings these challenges together in a way that provides a solution for both sides. The model provides a robust training experience for interns while also providing a huge benefit to students with emotional needs. This report will explain this model in detail and review research on its effectiveness. A review of the studies documenting these two challenges is provided below.

Emotional States that Block Learning

The often-cited Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) report documented the negative effects that traumatic childhood experiences, such as divorce or abuse or parent incarceration, can have on one's health as an adult (Felitti et al., 1998). This seminal report led educators and researchers to reconsider the influence of strong emotional states on the brain. Subsequent research then demonstrated that trauma in childhood can alter the wiring of the brain (Crosby, 2015; Racco & Vis, 2015), block memory formation (Siegfried, Blackshear, 2016), block learning (Mcewen, 2013), limit creative thinking (Yeager et al., 2019) and cause one to escalate aggression quickly (Perry, 2001).

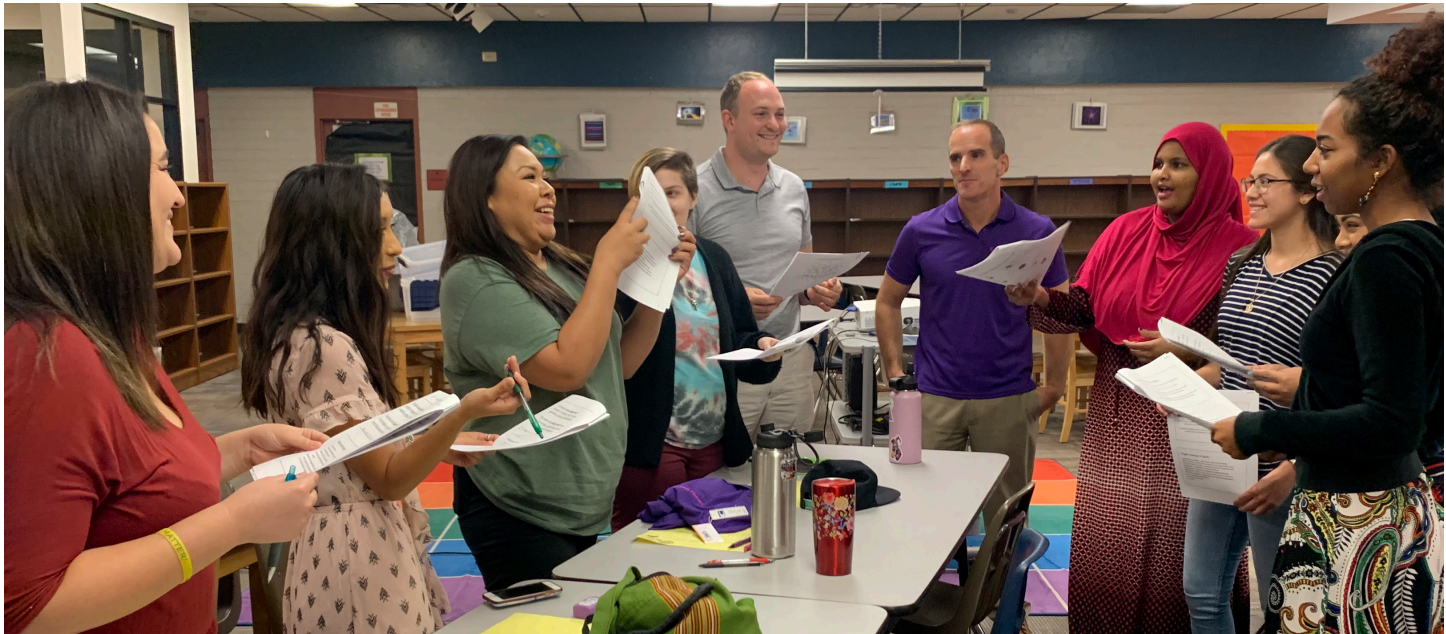
The mechanism of this cognitive rewiring relates to the stress responses triggered by negative emotional states. While a small degree of negative emotions is helpful towards building resiliency and a healthy stress response system, frequent negative emotional states leave the developing brain chronically exposed to stress hormones; thereby creating a “toxic stress” that changes the architecture of the brain affecting learning, memory, mood, relational skills, and components of executive functioning (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012). Furthermore, children with a traumatic background can have a smaller window of tolerance to stressful events, triggering a fight or flight response in situations that other children would work through without issue (Corrigan, Fisher, & Nutt, 2010).

For example, a difficult spelling test might cause a typical child to get nervous and chew on a pencil. Conversely, the same challenge might cause a child with trauma to break the pencil and throw it across the room. While the first child processed stress, the child from trauma was overcome by it and shifted into an aggressive state.

Lastly, the mental mechanism of this shifting, the hypothalamic pituitary adrenal axis, can wear out from frequent use, leaving the child even more prone to emotional breakdowns (Fenoglio, 2006). Like a car with a broken transmission, children with traumatic backgrounds may constantly slip out of emotionally stable gears. It is worrisome to consider how these factors play out in the classroom. Students with a traumatic background may struggle to learn and be easily distracted or upset (van der Kolk & Streeck-Fischer, 2000).

Clearly, educators need to be aware of these emotional blocks to learning. But what can be done if these blocks have been “hard-wired” into the traumatized brain? The answer to this is hinted at in a common qualifier often mentioned in trauma research. Such reports commonly delineate the negative effects of trauma in the absence of a supportive adult and strong relationships. So, if negative emotions block learning, the key to unlocking learning might come in the form of supportive adult relationships that foster emotional regulation skills.

The model provides a robust training experience for interns while also providing a huge benefit to students with emotional needs.



Teaching Social-Emotional Awareness to Unlock Learning

Emotional states can have a positive or negative effect on classroom learning by influencing what children pay attention to, how they perceive new information, and how they perform tasks (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013). This is no surprise to anyone who works with children, yet this is not enough to truly understand the role of emotions in the classroom. The term Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) refers to knowledge of emotions that extends from mere awareness to management.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) breaks SEL into the categories of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (casel.org). Other researchers favor the term “emotional intelligence” and list skills such as recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing, and regulating emotion (Brackett et al., 2014). There are a variety of other models breaking down emotional management skills but what they all have in common is the message that emotions can be managed. This simple lesson is surprisingly powerful. In fact, it is not uncommon for students to make rapid improvements in their behavior and disposition simply because they learn: *I’m not a bad kid, I just make emotional reactions and I can learn to control these reactions.*

The classroom benefits to SEL or emotional intelligence are borne out in research. One study showed that classrooms with a higher emotional intelligence rating had students with higher levels of learning, more positive behaviors and more overall engagement (Brackett et al. 2014). Other research has demonstrated that the ability to regulate thoughts, feelings, and behavior is a stronger predictor of classroom success than intelligence, talent, or standardized test scores (Khine, 2016; Princiotta et al., 2014).

A Johns Hopkins/UCLA study of students exposed to adverse experiences showed that students with high levels of resiliency were much more likely to be engaged in school. This led researchers to conclude that explicitly teaching resiliency and self-regulation strategies might be the most important thing we can do for students from traumatic backgrounds (Bethell, Newacheck, Hawes, & Halfon, 2014). Subsequent research has supported this idea. A study examining elementary group-therapy programs that taught coping strategies such as conflict resolution, social problem-solving and relaxation demonstrated significant results in lessening PTSD symptoms (Langley et al., 2015).

Research has also been extended to show a connection between social emotional learning and academic gains. One meta-analysis of school-based SEL interventions clearly demonstrated higher academic performance for students in SEL programs and schools with high fidelity SEL programs were especially likely to have academic improvements (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011).

It is not uncommon for students to make rapid improvements in their behavior and disposition simply because they learn: *I'm not a bad kid, I just make emotional reactions and I can learn to control these reactions.*



“As a School Resource Officer, I was honored by the Anti-defamation League as The Educator of the Year. When I heard, I immediately wanted to tell Everybody Matters’ CEO, Lori Madrid, because I knew that my working side by side with Everybody Matters and witnessing the positive difference they’ve made in the lives of these students, has made me a better police officer!

They have taught me amazing strategies that have improved the way I teach lessons relating to becoming a stronger community, resilience, and supporting each other. I’ve marveled at the work they’ve done and am proud that together we do great things for kids!”

**Officer C. Morton,
Phoenix Police Department**

A follow-up analysis six years later showed that students in these programs maintained academic gains, were more likely to graduate from high school and attend college, and were less likely to have been arrested (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017).

While the benefits of explicit SEL instruction are clear and obvious, the pathways to provide this benefit are less so. Social-emotional learning programs compete for resources with a wide variety of curriculum initiatives. A nationwide survey of 605 preK-12 public teachers showed teachers understood the value of SEL but few worked in districts with explicit, evidence-based SEL strategies (Bridgeland et al., 2013).

While the benefits of explicit SEL instruction are clear and obvious, the pathways to provide this benefit are less so.



In summary, educators know that trauma negatively affects learning, they know that coping skills can help a child overcome this handicap, and they know that these coping skills would most effectively be taught by one-on-one interactions with supportive adults. What they don't have is the time or the resources to make this happen.

Enter problem number two: highly educated interns needing a meaningful field placement.

The Importance of Quality Field Work

The Council on Social Work Education recognized field education as the signature pedagogy of social worker training programs (CSWE 2008). However, to be a powerful learning experience intern placement in the field must meet several criteria. Most importantly, field placements should offer opportunities for real-world applications of content learned in the classroom (Petrila, Fireman, Fitzpatrick, Hodas, & Tausig, 2015). Interns also benefit from a positive climate in the placement agency and a sense that they are contributing to and are valued by that agency (Grady, Powers, Despard, & Naylor, 2011).

High-quality supervision and feedback is also critical for intern success and satisfaction (Kanno & Koesice, 2010). Supervision must be focused, intentional, and consistent. This feedback must help an intern bridge the gap between classroom understanding of evidence-based practice (EBP), and real-world application techniques of EBP (Ducharme & Boston, 2015).

Meeting these objectives is no easy task. Case in point: the supervisors who provide this feedback, as social workers themselves, are often dealing with crisis intervention that pulls away their attention (Ducharme 2015). This is problematic because poor quality supervision creates a negative impact on the skills attainment of social work students (Kanno & Koesice, 2010).

The social work field requires a great deal of introspection and guided reflection. This necessitates supervisors who have the time to focus on nurturing students at a deeper level than in most career paths. Interns must be able to balance academia with the strain of consistent self-reflection and self-improvement. Focused and committed supervision is essential to shepherd them into the field.

“You cannot solve a problem with the same thinking you used when you created the problem in the first place.”

– Albert Einstein

The Everybody Matters Model - a Single Solution to Two Problems

School staff struggle to provide emotional coaching to students and social work training programs struggle to deliver quality placements for interns. The Everybody Matters story begins with someone who was attempting to solve both of these problems. In 2014, Lori Madrid was a school social worker and an adjunct faculty member at a University teaching social work. In her own words she describes how she turned these two challenges into a solution.

Quite honestly, Everybody Matters was born from frustration. I was a master's level social worker with more than 20 years of experience, but I was struggling to meet the ever-expanding needs of my students. I was able to manage the top crises of the day, but this left other students without support. I was also concerned because I was not able to provide consistent support to any one student. Once their individual situation had been addressed, I was off to the next crisis. I was simply "putting out fires." Something needed to change, and it needed to change fast.

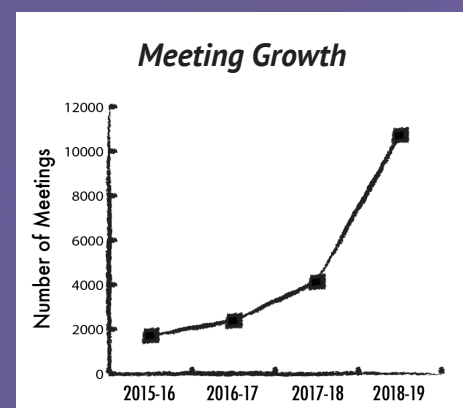
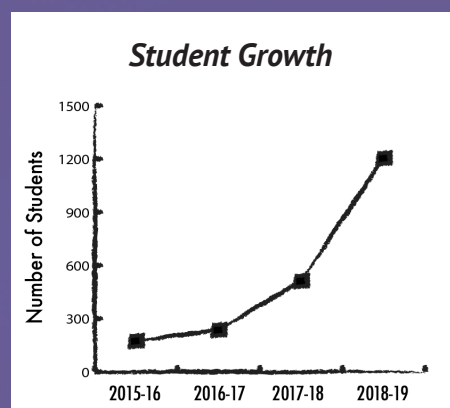
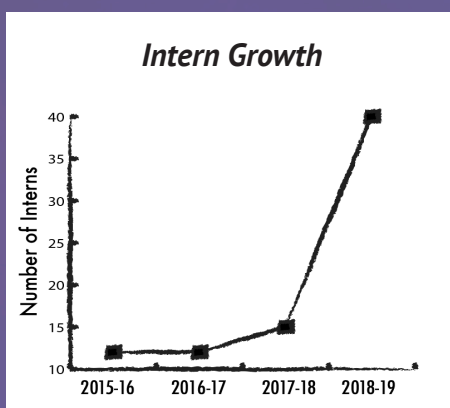
Simultaneous to working with students in schools, I was also teaching at a nearby university in the Masters of Social Work program, and I noticed a cadre of college students lamenting that they were struggling in their field placements because they "didn't have clients to see" or felt as though they were "just doing paperwork."

This was when my "a ha" moment struck. I could combine my work with children in the field with my work teaching new social workers. Instead of just taking on one or two interns a year, I could bring on a whole team. In this way I would be able to train a large group to provide the consistent weekly services that I didn't have the time to give. The powerful secondary benefit of this was that the interns would also receive excellent training, practice experience, and supervision.

In the first year I trained a team of 12 interns to meet weekly with those students who had been falling through the cracks. That first year, interns utilized the Everybody Matters model to meet with a total of 173 students over 1,700 times. In year two interns met with 235 students over 2,300 times. In the third year, as the program became more advanced and efficient, 15 interns met with 511 students over 4,100 times.

More school districts heard about this success and reached out requesting Everybody Matters services. This created an expansion into three new districts, including a total of 40 interns from three different universities, and a combined caseload of 1,203 students who were met with over 10,700 times. It was during this year that the Balsz School District agreed to partner on a research project to assess the degree to which students receiving services improved.

**– Lori Madrid, MSW, LCSW
Founder & CEO, Everybody Matters**



The professional literature supports Ms. Madrid's solution. As reviewed previously, research emphasizes the benefit of one-on-one emotional support from a caring adult. This is exemplified by the Everybody Matters model. In addition to this, the coaching model provided by interns matches two other lines of study in mental healthcare for children: treatment provided in a relatively short duration and treatment provided in the child's comfort zone.

This was when my “a ha” moment struck. I could combine my work with children in the field with my work teaching new social workers.

The standard model for delivering healthcare treatments requires a patient to visit providers in their office. This works well for issues related to physical health: visit a dentist and get a cavity filled; visit a pediatrician and get some antibiotics. However, this model can be challenging for issues related to children's mental health. First of all, the nature of therapeutic services requires multiple sessions. Secondly, treatments are most effective when delivered in an emotionally safe environment which can be challenging to create in a therapist's office.

For these reasons, mental healthcare providers for children have explored the feasibility of providing services in an environment that a child already knows as a nurturing, supportive place. Schools often fit this description. The prevalence of mental health challenges in children make schools an suitable location for providing mental health services to students who might otherwise not receive care (Michael et al., 2013).



The common features of a school, such as bus transportation and mandatory attendance, allow schools to be a more practical location to provide therapeutic services; thus eliminating challenges associated with transportation, social stigma or insurance. (Zirkelback & Reese, 2010) Indeed, research has documented the success of at-school services reducing behavioral distress (Ricard, Lerma, & Heard, 2013).

The Everybody Matters model provides services in a child's comfort zone and does so in a relatively short period of time. Within the mental health profession there is increasing pressure on providers to reduce the duration of treatment while still maintaining effectiveness (Boerema et al., 2016). For example, in the last few decades the treatment for depression has moved from multiple-year psycho-analytic approaches to briefer solutions such as cognitive behavioral therapy (Shapiro et al., 2003). Furthermore, it has become advisable to concentrate psychotherapy sessions within a short period of time rather than stretching it out (Cuijpers, Huibers, Daniel Ebert, Koole, & Andersson, 2013). It is easy to see how this would align with plans for a child's success at school. Emotional coaching that produces results in a few weeks, rather than in a few years, would certainly be preferable to parents and teachers creating a child's success plan for a single school year.



In summary, the Everybody Matters model provides services in a child's comfort zone, in a short duration of time, and does so through genuine connections with a nurturing adult. As expected, data from the research on this model shows that it works. The next section in this report will spell this out in detail.

Research Methods and Results

Sara's Story (continued)

"When my daughter, Sara, first started experiencing anxiety I felt lost and frustrated. As a working parent, it was challenging to find time to meet with a professional. I jumped at the chance to have her meet with a social work intern. The idea of giving Sara the help she needed without taking her out of a trusted and safe environment was ideal.

The results have been amazing. She is feeling more confident and is now equipped with skills to effectively manage her emotions. I have no doubt the coping strategies she learned during her weekly meetings with the Everybody Matters intern will continue to help Sara well beyond her elementary school years."

Karen's Story (continued)

"I learned so much working with Sara. We are trained as interns to understand that people are the experts on themselves and can figure out their own solutions. They just sometimes need a little help focusing.

Instead of insisting that kiddos follow some cookie cutter approach to what we think is best for them, we practice listening and asking good questions so we can help them put together their own plan. It was amazing to see how quickly she was able to resolve this issue! It's humbling to watch a person so young overcome a challenge that big. Way to go, Sara!"

The Everybody Matters model provides social-emotional coaching using a research-informed approach. During the 2018 – 2019 school year, this approach was studied in detail with students receiving services in an urban school district in Phoenix, Arizona. One hundred and sixty-three students, along with their teachers and parents or guardians, agreed to participate in the study.

Data for the study came in the form of a survey measuring five areas of the child's emotional well-being: the ability to 1. positively express emotions, 2. demonstrate positive social skills, 3. cope with life circumstances, 4. use coping skills, and 5. overall classroom or home behavior. For each of these five areas teachers and parents rated students on a five-point Likert scale using the following scale: (1) Poor: requires frequent visits to the principal's office and regular disruption to the classroom, (2) Limited: causes some minor disruption to the classroom and has some infrequent trips to the principal's office, (3) Good: meets the classroom expectations with minor issues, (4) Very Good: meets all of the classroom expectations on a regular basis without difficulty and (5) Excellent: meeting all of the classroom expectations without difficulty and serves as a leader for peers. These ratings were completed before and after eight weeks of meetings.

Analysis of survey results indicated gains on the average scores on both the teacher and parent surveys. After only eight weeks of intervention the average teacher rating for a child's overall emotional well-being increased from 2.6 to 3, on the five-point scale. The parent average increased from 2.6 to 3.3 on the same scale. Statistical analysis determined that these gains were significant.

When overall emotional well-being is broken down into the five component areas the data show growth in all areas on both the parent and teacher surveys.

Component of Emotional Wellbeing	Average Increase on Teacher Survey (5-point scale)	Average Increase on Parent Survey (5-point scale)
Positively Express Emotions	0.54	0.6
Demonstrate Positive Social Skills	0.59	0.27
Cope with Life Circumstances	0.51	0.39
Use Coping Skills	0.58	0.87
Classroom or Home Behavior	0.74	0.48

A deeper dive into the data sheds light on which students benefited the most from the social emotional coaching. When teachers referred students to Everybody Matters they selected one or more of nine areas of need: 1. emotional support, 2. aggression, 3. family issues, 4. grief, 5. classroom behavior, 6. social skills, 7. ongoing support, 8. coping skills, or 9. other. The researchers in this study wanted to determine if students referred for different reasons showed different levels of growth. For this reason, paired samples t-tests were conducted to analyze the changes for each of these nine areas.



Subsequently, teacher surveys showed statistically significant gains for students referred for aggression or classroom behavior while parent surveys showed significant gains for students referred for family issues. Both teacher and parent surveys showed significant gains for students referred for coping skills and emotional support. It is important to note that emotional support was the most commonly checked area of need on the referral. Thus, Everybody Matters services were the most effective in helping with the most common referral reason.

Reason for Referral	Number of Referrals	Percentage of Total Referrals	Teacher Surveys Significant Change	Parent Surveys Significant Change
Emotional Support	90	55%	Yes	Yes
Classroom Behavior	70	43%	Yes	No
Social Skills	60	37%	No	No
Coping Skills	56	34%	Yes	Yes
Aggression	45	28%	Yes	*
Family Issues	34	21%	No	Yes
Other	25	15%	*	*
Ongoing Support	17	10%	No	No
Grief	6	4%	*	*

* denotes insufficient data for analysis

Clearly, this data indicates that the Everybody Matters model is having a positive effect on students. Growth occurred in all areas in only eight weeks. The next section of this report will further explore these implications.

Key Findings and Implications

The research in this report used parent and teacher surveys to measure growth in the emotional well-being of students. Data from the previous section detailed positive gains across multiple areas.

Average scores increased on both the parent and teacher surveys.

Parents and teachers spend hours a day watching and interacting with children. As such, they can be considered valid sources of evaluation. The fact that both parents and teachers noted growth for their children or students suggests that the Everybody Matters model is a valuable tool in helping children succeed at school and thrive at home.

Growth occurred in only eight weeks and through only four hours of intervention.

As noted earlier, mental health services for children are most effective when treatment is provided in a short period of time. The Everybody Matters model demonstrates that significant growth can occur within these limits. This is certainly a benefit to schools needing to see growth within a school year. An eight-week improvement to emotional well-being will surely be followed by academic gains in a similarly short amount of time.

All sub areas of emotional well-being showed growth.

This indicates that the Everybody Matters model benefited a broad spectrum of social-emotional needs. While some areas did not show enough growth to dismiss the idea of chance, it is still important to note that no areas showed any decreases.





“You’ll never forget the moment when a student’s eyes light up when they realize they get to meet with you every week... Every week you have the opportunity to help make students feel like they matter!”

-Everybody Matters Alum

The most common reason for referral to Everybody Matters was associated with the most growth.

More than half of the students referred to Everybody Matters had “emotional support” indicated as an area needing improvement. Survey data from both teachers and parents showed statistically significant growth for these students. This is a strong indication that the Everybody Matters model successfully addresses a major concern for parents and teachers. Two referral reasons not associated with significant growth require somewhat of a disclaimer. These two referral reasons were “school behavior” showing limited growth on parent surveys, and “family issues” showing the same on teacher surveys. In both of these cases the teacher or parent was answering survey items on issues outside of their area of expertise. As such, they may not have been the best source of information. It is critical to note that when the situation is reversed, statistically significant growth is evident. Teachers report improvements for students referred for classroom behavior and parents report improvements for students referred for family issues.

Referral reasons not connected to significant growth can inform improvement of the Model.

When the growth data are analyzed based on reason for initial referral, some areas did not show significant growth. These areas, such as “social skills” can inform areas of growth for the Everybody Matters model itself. For example, upcoming intern training sessions can focus on activities that assist in this area.

The data in this report support the effectiveness of the *Everybody Matters* model. School districts hoping to make academic gains would be wise to consider this model as part of a comprehensive district improvement plan. Academic gains are built on emotional health. And emotional health is the heart of this organization.

Acknowledgments

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