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School-based strategies to improve children's self-beliefs

An overview of meta-analyses exploring school-based interventions for self-beliefs



Jansen and colleagues, 2024

This report summarizes findings from: “Who Am I? A Second-Order Meta-Analytic Review of Correlates of the Self in Childhood and Adolescence ”

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Why do self-beliefs matter?

Self-beliefs, or the ways people evaluate themselves, are related to a multitude of important life outcomes. These include motivation,¹ learning,² academic achievement,³ health,⁴ careers,⁵ and life satisfaction.⁶

Self beliefs: the ways people evaluate themselves; also called self-worth, self-esteem, and self-efficacy

Childhood and adolescence are crucial periods of self-belief development.

Self-beliefs are formed across the lifespan, but childhood and adolescence are particularly important time periods for belief development and refinement.



Predictors

- Differential susceptibility
- Early life adversity
- Genetic predispositions
- Social experiences
- Temperament



Childhood and Adolescence

During this developmental time period, youth are experiencing perspective-taking, social comparison, and self-concept clarity and appraisal.



Outcomes

- Personal and social identity
- Sense of well-being
- Social relationships

Given the amount of time youth spend in schools across the K-12 years, schools are an important environment for shaping self-beliefs.

Programs in this review included those targeting students and those targeting school and classroom structures.

Student programs focused on:



Targeting self-beliefs directly

- Programs that teach students about self-beliefs



Psychological factors

- Social and emotional learning
- Social competence training



Physical activity

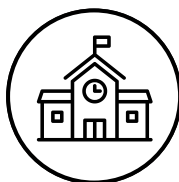
- Resistance training
- Yoga

Classroom and school changes focused on:



Classroom structure

- Individualized instructional strategies
- Mentored group work



School structure

- Implementing single-sex classrooms
- Offering bilingual education



Technology

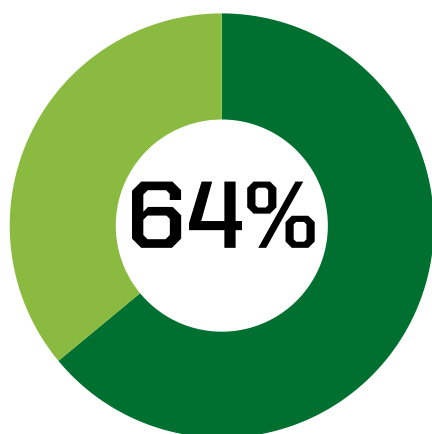
- Providing calculators to improve math self-beliefs
- Offering simulation games



What strategies improve self-beliefs for K-12 students?

Interventions focused on students had larger effects on self-beliefs than those targeting classroom and school structures.

Interventions targeting personal outcomes

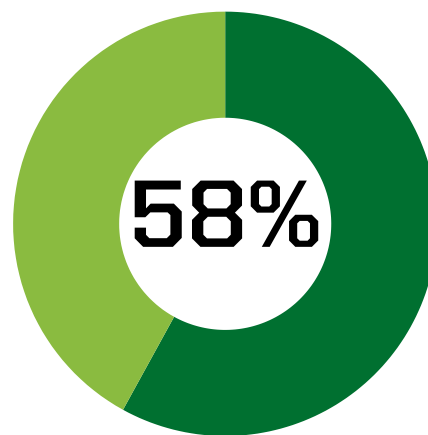


64% of the students in the interventions targeting personal outcomes were above the average for the control group

(self-beliefs, psychological factors, and physical activity)
SMD = 0.35, 95% CI [0.26, 0.43]

Interventions targeting classroom and school structures

58% of the students in the interventions targeting classroom and school structures were above the average for the control group

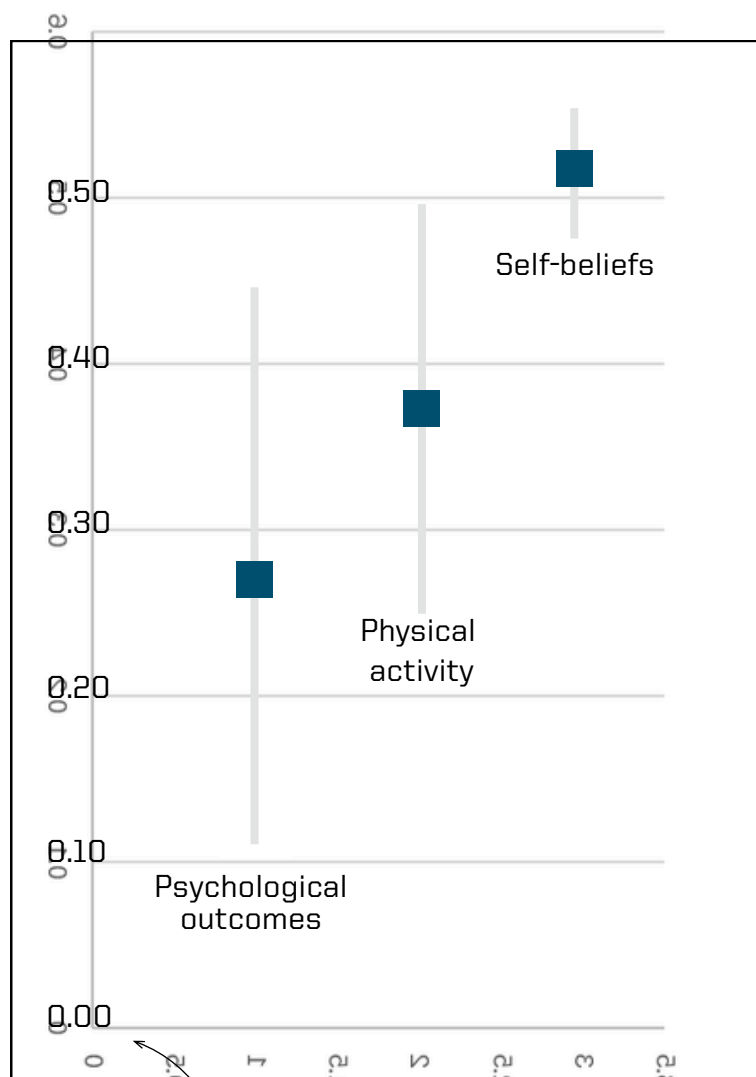


(classroom structure, school structure, technology)
SMD = 0.20, 95% CI [0.10, 0.29]

Interventions targeting personal outcomes were all beneficial on average.

Interventions targeting students' self-beliefs directly had the largest effects.

Impact on self-beliefs in standard deviation units



■ Standard Mean Difference
— 95% confidence interval

Self-beliefs
SMD = 0.52, 95% CI [0.48, 0.55]

Physical activity
SMD = 0.37, 95% CI [0.25, 0.49]

Psychological
SMD = 0.27, 95% CI [0.11, 0.44]

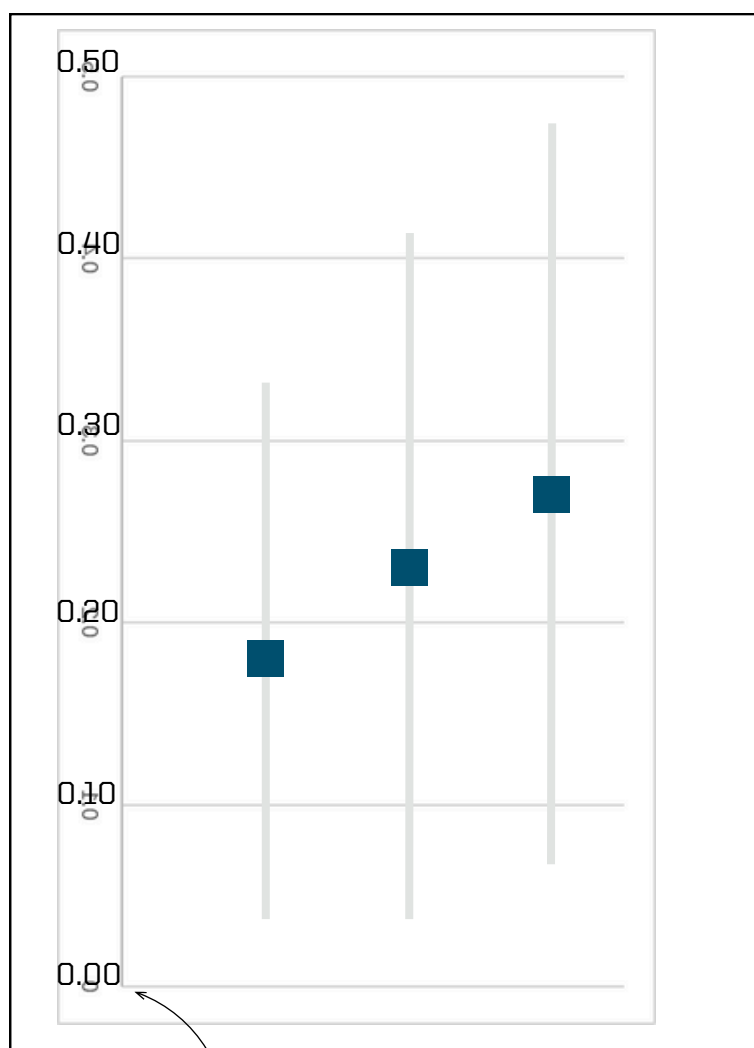
There was no evidence findings differed across elementary, middle, and high schools.

The "0" indicates "no effect," so all of these interventions had a positive effect on average

Interventions targeting school and classroom structures were all beneficial on average.

There was no evidence of differences in effects between the programs.

Impact on self-beliefs in standard deviation units



■ Standard Mean Difference
— 95% confidence interval

Classroom structure
SMD = 0.27, 95% CI [0.07, 0.47]

Technology
SMD = 0.23, 95% CI [0.04, 0.41]

School context
SMD = 0.18, 95% CI [0.04, 0.33]

There was no evidence findings differed across elementary, middle, and high schools.

The "0" indicates "no effect," so all of these interventions had a positive effect on average

The bottom line

Overall, school-based interventions of all kinds were beneficial for improving students' self-beliefs on average.

Interventions targeting students' self-beliefs directly had the largest effects: 70% of students in the program targeting self-beliefs were above the average for the control group.

Example program targeting self-beliefs directly:



SEE Learning

This free program has been shown to increase feelings of empathy for others, increase perspective-taking, and increase self-beliefs around school work. It has the highest rating from the [CASEL Clearinghouse](#)

SEE Learning is translated into 23 languages and was developed by Emory University. To learn more, visit: <https://seelearning.emory.edu/en/home>

For more evidence-based programs:

Visit these evidence-based clearinghouses where you can search and filter based on your school and student needs:

- [CASEL Program Guide](#)
- [Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development](#)
- [Evidence for ESSA](#)

Methods

38,234 studies

105 meta-analyses in the review

43 included in this report

Over 2 million students represented across studies

Additional Analyses

The authors tested the possible moderator effects of publication year, publication status, study design, and whether the sample only included children and adolescents during K-12 education. None of the characteristics had significant effects.

Limitations

Only a small number of meta-analyses investigated ethnicity and self-beliefs, thus limiting the authors' understanding of the impact of ethnicity on children's and adolescents' self-beliefs.

Locations where primary studies were conducted



Only **half** of meta-analyses reported where the sample of their primary studies came from.

In these meta-analyses locations included (one or more):

- North America (56%)
- Europe (22%)
- Asia (17%)
- Other continents (7%)

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