

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING



WINGS for Kids

Multiple Locations

1,119 Average number of students served during the school year through direct service sites

95% Students from low-income families

Main funding sources:

- ▶ Foundations
- ▶ 21st Century Community Learning Centers
- ▶ AmeriCorps
- ▶ In-kind donations

Taking an intentional and integrated approach to building students' social and emotional skills and competencies

Ensuring all children and youth thrive as they move through school and into their adult lives requires that they have the opportunity to develop the skills and competencies that will help them land their first job, navigate and overcome the challenges they will face, keep positive relationships, and make good decisions. While families are central to this effort, others who interact with students can and should play a supporting role. Afterschool and summer learning programs, which have long been a place for positive youth development, are helping students develop these skills and competencies. Programs are providing caring and supportive mentors, creating safe spaces where students can explore new interest areas and develop confidence in their abilities, showing students how to reach consensus and work collaboratively, and providing meaningful ways for students to engage in the program.

Overview

The mission of *WINGS for Kids (WINGS)* is to provide a safe, supportive environment for at-risk and underserved students, helping them develop the social and emotional skills necessary to succeed in and out of school from a young age. To do this, WINGS creates a culture of social and emotional learning for K-5th graders, employing a comprehensive social and emotional learning curriculum, integrating social and emotional learning into all activities, reinforcing lessons through teachable moments throughout the day, and having both staff and students model social and emotional skills while engaging with one another to help students internalize lessons.

A typical day for students

Each week at WINGS is dedicated to one or two lessons focused on social and emotional skill building. Monday through Thursday, the program incorporates the weekly social and emotional skill building lessons into activities, discussions, and staff-to-student and student-to-student interactions. Fridays are the culmination of the week's lessons, where students and staff celebrate what they learned.

For instance, if the lesson of the week is accepting personal responsibility, Monday's "Community Unity"—WINGS' opening activity where staff and students come together to discuss the week's lesson, play games, and reflect on moments when the lesson was in action—includes staff using the teaching tip "Show Your ID", encouraging students to take responsibility for their actions, both positive and negative, without placing blame. In the program's Academic Center, staff might

use the technique to recognize a student's contribution helping her peer with a difficult math problem. During Enrichment Time, which includes extracurricular activities and free play, staff and students might use the lesson to talk about the role of students helping their team win a soccer game, complete an art project, or perform in a dance routine. The culminating Friday "Wild WINGS" celebration could be a Making the Band theme, where students work together to choose a song and create a dance routine, each taking responsibility for the outcome of their performance.

Outcomes

Preliminary findings from a four-year randomized control trial study show that compared to students not in the program, WINGS students improved their executive function and self-regulation, processes which are instrumental in helping set goals and priorities, focus, and manage multiple tasks; their academic skills; and their behavior in class, including less hyperactivity and bullying. The study—conducted by University of Virginia's Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning, College of Charleston, and Child Trends—also found that, based on teacher reports, participation in WINGS led to reduced negative classroom behavior and an improved relationship with teachers.



Challenges

Academics alone are not enough for students' future success. Employers are looking for employees who possess applied academic skills, as well as employees who are able to communicate effectively, work well in teams, and apply other social and emotional skills and competencies. According to a Business Roundtable survey, companies reported that an applicant's basic reading, writing, and math skills were just as relevant to their company as an applicants' communication and teamwork skills.

Schools recognize the importance of social and emotional learning, but barriers to implementation exist. Although teachers and principals are strong proponents of social and emotional learning for their students, schools struggle with the implementation of social and emotional learning practices during the school day, which include lack of sufficient time focused on building social and emotional skills, training for teachers and administrators, and integration of social and emotional learning into educational practices.

Too many children and youth today have faced a traumatic experience, placing them at higher risk for negative outcomes. Protective factors, such as social and emotional skills and competencies, help children and youth manage stressful and traumatic experiences in their life. However, close to half of children in the U.S. have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience that could have negative and lasting effects on their health and wellbeing, including depression, drug use, and poor physical health.

Read [An Ideal Opportunity: The Role of Afterschool in Social and Emotional Learning](#) to learn more.





Program characteristics

A focus on social and emotional learning is at the core of WINGS, embedded into its program environment, program design, staff development, curriculum, and program activities. WINGS' comprehensive approach to social and emotional learning can be seen through the three pillars of the program: culture, adult skills, and curriculum. The program's culture emphasizes creating a supportive environment where students feel a sense of safety and belonging. Regarding adult skills, all frontline staff receive 80 hours of training before programs start. Pre-training topics include professional development on empowering kids in poverty and using behavior techniques with empathy to help staff learn how to internalize and model the social and emotional skills. Frontline staff also receive additional training and professional development throughout the year. Finally, WINGS employs a comprehensive curriculum that has 10 social and emotional learning lessons over the course of the year. Each lesson includes a learning objective and a technique that is incorporated into the program's opening activity, group discussions, homework help, and extracurricular activities, including cooking, music, games, sports, arts, and dance. Community partners are brought in to help lead extracurricular activities, such as Children's Theater of Charlotte, Mad Science of Central Carolina, and Team Costal Lacrosse.

The foundation for the program is evident in its "I Soar with WINGS" mantra—The WINGS Creed—which students and staff repeat together every day and where each phrase is a mini-lesson, summarizing one of the five core competencies from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning's (CASEL's) framework. For instance, the phrase "I understand others are unique. I want to learn more about everyone I meet. I want to step into their shoes and see what they are going through," centers on the core competency of social awareness and the ability to empathize.

Program history

WINGS was founded in 1996 as a week-long residential summer program in Charleston, S.C. In 2000, the program opened its first afterschool program with a curriculum that purposefully integrated social and emotional learning skills into afterschool activities. Today, in addition to Charleston, WINGS has direct service sites in Charlotte, N.C., and Atlanta, Ga., and partner programs in Pomona, Calif., serving close to 2,500 students in all.

Recommendations

for intentionally integrating social and emotional learning:

- ▶ While curriculum is an important element for any program, *how* we teach social and emotional skills and competencies matters most. We integrate social and emotional learning into all activities, reinforce lessons in small teachable moments throughout the day, and make sure that staff are able to model the skills and competencies we are teaching with our students and with each other.
- ▶ Your staff are the foundation for any successful social and emotional learning initiative. Devoting time and resources to train frontline staff is a smart and critical investment.

