



## **RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND RELEVANCE TO PROGRAM QUALITY ASSESSMENT**

Non-cognitive skills are increasingly recognized as key in preparing youth for school, work and life. These skills are part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies identified by the National Research Council (2012) that differentiate between cognitive skills (e.g., cognitive processes and strategies, knowledge, and creativity) and non-cognitive skills including intrapersonal competencies (e.g., intellectual openness, work ethic, and conscientiousness) and interpersonal competencies (e.g., positive core evaluation, teamwork and collaboration, and leadership). Similarly, social and emotional learning captures a subset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills including self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, self-awareness, and responsible decision making (CASEL, 2013). Providing supportive learning environments help to foster such skills.

Empirical research supports the value of developing youth non-cognitive skills for academic gains. Durlak, Weissberg, and Pachan (2010) examined the afterschool program features that improved student outcomes across 47 studies. They found programs providing youth guidance on personal and social skills, compared to controls, showed increases on various positive outcomes (e.g., self-perceptions, bonding, social behaviors, school grades, and academic achievement). In addition to a focus on enhancing personal and relationship skills, programs that also provided sequenced activities and active forms of learning increased the positive effects on several student outcomes.

The Afterschool Outcome Measures Online Toolbox assesses skill development and positive behavior, including social competencies, as well as attitudes and beliefs and view of the future which address these areas of non-cognitive skill development. Youth self-reports of program experiences (relationships with staff and peers and program activities) address the environmental features that impact youth development. Research shows that the quality of student's experiences scale of the Online Toolbox is linked to positive youth outcomes (Kataoka & Vandell, 2013) and is highly correlated with observational data of program quality as assessed by the Promising Practices Rating System (PPRS; Rosenthal & Vandell, 1996). The PPRS is a program quality assessment tool featured by the California Department of Education (CDE, September, 2014a) as one tool aligning with the CDE After School Division's quality standards for expanded learning programs (September, 2014b): these include, safe and supportive environment, active and engaged learning, skill building, youth voice and leadership, healthy choices and behaviors, diversity, access, and equity. Together the Afterschool Outcome Measures Online Toolbox and the Promising Practice Ratings System provide programs with research-based tools to assess student outcomes and gather valid and reliable data that can inform their program quality improvement efforts.



For more information about the Online Toolbox and PPRS contact us at [afterschool@uci.edu](mailto:afterschool@uci.edu)

## References

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