

# Building Social-Emotional Skills Through Game-Based Virtual Learning



Elementary school is a time of tremendous growth and development in students' social skills and peer relations. However, many students with poor social skills don't receive the help they need. The reach of traditional in-person social-skills training is limited and there are a number of logistical barriers to implementation. Technology-based interventions provide the opportunity to reduce these barriers.

## About the Project

Social Skills Group Intervention (S.S. GRIN) is a social emotional learning (SEL) training program that has been used by thousands of students in elementary schools across the U.S. and abroad for over 20 years. The program is designed to build students' social-emotional skills in all five tenets of the SEL framework developed by Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) — **self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.**

The original training program was in-person and in small groups, however, this approach offered limited scalability and reach, and few mechanisms were in place to overcome barriers related to accessibility and implementation. To overcome this, Ed-Tech developer, Centervention, produced *Adventures Aboard the S.S. GRIN*, a game-based virtual version of the program with funding from the Department of Education and the National Science Foundation. In *Adventures Aboard the S.S. GRIN*, students engage with a fictional story requiring them to practice and build their social-emotional skills to navigate their interactions with the crew and thwart the evil commander and the enemies of friendship.

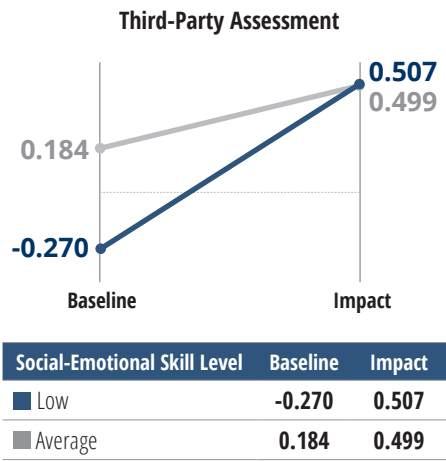
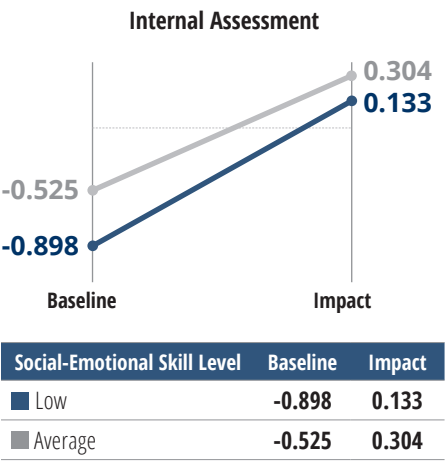
"It wasn't just a game for them; it was something that they really enjoyed, which made my eyes open up a little bit because it was something different for them, where I'm not teaching it to them—they're learning it themselves."

~ELEMENTARY TEACHER

Research and Findings

To determine the efficacy of the digital program, WestEd conducted a randomized control study with 1,645 third-grade students from 88 classrooms in 37 schools across four California public-school districts. The study was broken into in two cohorts — Cohort 1 from 2019–2020 and Cohort 2 from 2020–2021. Due to the pandemic, most of Cohort 2 implemented the program remotely.

Study results showed that, on average, *Adventures Aboard the S.S.GRIN* benefited all students demonstrating that the program is an appropriate resource for all learners. Of particular note is that **students identified as having low social-emotional skills appeared to show greater improvement than other students**. This positive impact was seen in both the internal and third-party assessments that were used.



“I definitely saw better behavior, at least, from certain students. They took what they learned and they implemented it into their real lives. I also saw a lot of kids looking forward to it. They would finish an episode and ask when they can do the next one...”

~ELEMENTARY TEACHER

Teachers observed the learnings filtering into students’ daily lives including solving problems and encouraging others, addressing interpersonal issues with classmates and relating more positively to peers, as well as exhibiting positive shifts in attitude or behavior.

Teachers also reported high levels of student engagement and positive user experiences. They noted that implementing the program was generally smooth, and that students were able to engage with the program independently after an initial learning period, and that they looked forward to playing the game.

More information about the [Efficacy Study of Adventures Aboard the S.S.GRIN](#), along with related resources, can be found on [WestEd.org](#).