

The Evidence File

What teachers are reporting about the youngest children — what the research supports, and the four popular claims it no longer does.

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01 · The one-page version

If you only read one page, or need something to hand to an administrator, this is it.

The pattern

Figure	Finding	Source
82%	of K-12 teachers say the pandemic's lasting impact on student behavior has been negative; 78% say the same about emotional well-being	Pew Research Center, n=2,531, fielded Oct.-Nov. 2023
79%	of U.S. public schools report the pandemic's lingering effects still negatively affect students' socio-emotional development	NCES School Pulse Panel, May 2025
76%	of elementary teachers say student behavior worsened over the past year — against 54% of high school teachers	EdWeek Research Center, n=5,802, Aug.-Nov. 2025
37%	of schools serving kindergarten say most kindergarteners behaved worse than typical expectations for the grade — higher than grades 1–4	NCES School Pulse Panel, May 2025
17–18 points	how far behind the pandemic-disrupted cohort entered kindergarten on executive function and social-emotional measures — across all income levels	Le et al., <i>AERA Open</i> , 2025, n=662 (Denver)
58%	of teachers chose "instruction for parents on teaching children how to behave in ways that are appropriate for school" as something that would have a major positive impact — 2nd of 10 options	EdWeek Research Center, n=5,802, Aug.-Nov. 2025

The honest counterpoint, which belongs here. On the federal measures, these numbers have *improved* slightly since 2024 — every pandemic-impact item declined significantly from May 2024 to May 2025. The accurate statement is not "this keeps getting worse." It is "this is not fixed."

What it adds up to

The strain is concentrated in the earliest grades, it is measurable and not only felt, and the specific gap teachers describe is narrower than "behavior" — it is what happens in the moment a young

child's plan fails. Disappointment. Not getting a turn. Losing. Hearing *no*. Waiting.

Teachers are not asking for stricter children. Asked what would help, the second-most-selected option was something to put in a family's hands.

02 · What teachers are reporting

Pew Research Center — the strongest single source

What's It Like To Be a Teacher in America Today? Published April 4, 2024. Fielded Oct. 17 – Nov. 14, 2023. n = 2,531 U.S. public K-12 teachers, administered by RAND on the American Teacher Panel; margin of sampling error ±2.4 points.

Teachers saying the pandemic's lasting impact was negative on...	Net negative
Students' behavior	82%
Students' academic performance	82%
Students' emotional well-being	78%
The way parents interact with teachers	55%

Separately, 79% said parents do too little to hold their children accountable if they misbehave in school. Between 1% and 4% said parents do too much. Among elementary teachers, 51% rated most students' behavior fair or poor.

Caveat that travels with this: teacher perception and retrospective attribution, not measurement. The parental-involvement item is an opinion question with no behavioral anchor. This is a single wave — there is no Pew trend line.

EdWeek Research Center — the most recent

The State of Teaching 2026. Online survey of 5,802 teachers, August–November 2025.

"In the past year, the behavior of the students I teach has..."	Worse	Same	Improved
All teachers	64%	24%	12%
Elementary (PreK–5)	76%	17%	7%
Middle (6–8)	61%	23%	17%
High (9–12)	54%	31%	15%

Asked what would have a major positive impact on student behavior (select all that apply), the top five of ten options were: smaller class sizes 63%; **instruction for parents on teaching children how to behave appropriately at school 58%**; limiting parents' ability to undermine consequences 54%; reducing access to screens and devices 53%; tougher consequences 50%.

Caveat that travels with this: EdWeek describes the survey as nationally representative but publishes no recruitment method, weighting scheme, response rate or margin of error. Treat it as an opt-in online panel, and always cite it as "EdWeek Research Center, n=5,802." It should not be presented as a federal or probability-based estimate.

NCES School Pulse Panel — the federal picture

Figures below come from the National Center for Education Statistics' own national data files, May 2025 collection. The respondent is the school leader.

"Compared to typical expectations, how did MOST students behave this year?" — % worse	May 2025	May 2024
Kindergarten	37%	38%
1st grade	33%	36%
2nd grade	30%	37%
3rd / 4th grade	32% / 33%	38% / 43%
11th / 12th grade	22% / 19%	—

Kindergarten is rated worse than every grade from 1st through 4th, and it is the only early-elementary grade that did not significantly improve year over year. Grades 2, 3 and 4 all improved significantly; kindergarten did not move.

Caveat that travels with this: NCES labels School Pulse Panel results experimental data. The respondent is a principal or school leader reporting an impression of a whole grade, not an observer of individual children — so "37% of schools serving kindergarten" is correct, and "37% of kindergarteners" is not.

03 · Measured, not just perceived

Everything in section 02 is adults reporting impressions. This is the study that assessed the children.

Le, V.-N., Schaack, D., Cisneros, C., & Gregory, J. (2025). The COVID-19 Pandemic’s Disruptions to Preschool Children’s Cognitive, Social-Emotional, and Executive Functioning Skills. *AERA Open*, 11.
doi:10.1177/23328584251330165

Longitudinal design: children assessed in the fall of preschool and again in the fall of kindergarten. n = 662 Denver Preschool Program children — 204 in the pandemic-affected 2019-20 cohort, 458 across the pre-pandemic 2016-19 cohorts.

Domain	Effect (Hedges' g)	Reported as
Social-emotional: behavioral concerns	g = .46	18 point disadvantage
Executive function: inhibition problems	g = .44	17 points
Social-emotional: protective factors	g = -.37	14 points
Executive function: working memory	g = .34	13 points
Early math	g = -.29	11 points
Receptive vocabulary, early literacy	not significant	—

From the authors' abstract, verbatim: *"Pandemic-related disadvantages were observed for early math, social-emotional, and executive functioning, with the pandemic-affected cohort showing disadvantages of between 11 and 18 percentage points. Developmental disadvantages were observed across all income levels."*

Caveat that travels with this: one city, one publicly funded preschool program, one pandemic cohort — not a national sample. The social-emotional and executive-function outcomes are adult-rated instruments rather than direct behavioral observation. Effects are moderate, not large. Always name Denver when citing it.

Why the earliest years are where this shows up

Two well-established findings give the context, both correlational rather than causal:

- Across 75 studies and 14,424 children aged 32–80 months, inhibitory control correlated with academic skills at $r = .27$, 95% CI [.24, .29] (*Allan et al., 2014*).

- Across 150 studies and 215,212 children, self-regulation at about age 4 predicted social competence, school engagement and academic performance at about age 8 (*Robson et al., 2020*).
- In 1,050 primarily Black pre-K children in historically disinvested neighborhoods, emotion knowledge at the end of pre-K predicted math and reading scores in kindergarten and in second grade, controlling for pre-academic skills and demographics (*Ursache et al., 2020*). The relation was attenuated among children from immigrant families.

These are predictive relationships, not promises about any individual child, and none of them was produced by randomly assigning children to have more or less of a skill.

04 · Why home and classroom together

This is the best-evidenced section in the file, and it comes from intervention studies rather than correlations.

A meta-analysis of 117 group-design studies (592 effect sizes) found that interventions connecting families and schools improved children's social-behavioral competence ($g = 0.33$) and mental health ($g = 0.39$). The authors identify the active ingredients as both relational — communication, collaboration, the parent-teacher relationship — and structural: home-based involvement and behavioral supports.

Sheridan, S. M., Smith, T. E., Moorman Kim, E., Beretvas, S. N., & Park, S. (2019). *Review of Educational Research*, 89(2), 296–332. doi:10.3102/0034654318825437

The finding most people don't expect

Across 448 independent studies and 480,830 families, parental involvement in schooling related to children's emotional adjustment at $r = .17$ and social adjustment at $r = .12$. Different types of involvement were similarly positively associated — with one exception.

Parents' homework assistance was *negatively* associated with children's achievement ($r = -.15$). It was the one form of involvement that did not help. Engagement and motivation were unaffected.

Barger, M. M., Kim, E. M., Kuncel, N. R., & Pomerantz, E. M. (2019). *Psychological Bulletin*, 145(9), 855–890. doi:10.1037/bul0000201 — the authors note little variation due to age, ethnicity or socioeconomic status.

Does emotion instruction from an adult change anything?

A meta-analysis restricted to randomized controlled trials, in children 18 months to 6 years 11 months, found that emotion-socialization parenting interventions improved children's emotional competence ($g = 0.44$) and behavioral adjustment ($g = 0.34$). The finding held after accounting for publication bias.

England-Mason, G., Andrews, K., Atkinson, L., & Gonzalez, A. (2023). *Clinical Psychology Review*, 100, 102252. doi:10.1016/j.cpr.2023.102252 — **caveat:** only 15 independent trials, a thin evidence base, and the intervention target is the parent rather than the child directly.

On social-emotional learning programs generally

The largest and most recent meta-analysis — 424 studies, 53 countries, 575,361 K-12 students — found an overall effect of $g = 0.194$, 95% CI [0.166, 0.222], and $g = 0.112$ for academic achievement.

Cipriano, C., Strambler, M. J., Naples, L. H., et al. (2023). *Child Development*, 94(5), 1181–1204. doi:10.1111/cdev.13968 — **caveat, and it is the authors' own:** they detected publication bias (Egger's $t = 3.59$, $p < .001$), and more than half

the studies did not monitor implementation at all. The widely quoted "11 percentile point" figure comes from the 2011 predecessor meta-analysis and is not supported at that magnitude by this one.

What this does not say. These meta-analyses evaluate implemented, monitored school curricula. They are not evidence about any particular product, including ours. We have not run a trial on The Krewelings and we don't present these numbers as if we had.

05 · Four claims we won't make

These are widely repeated in children's social-emotional materials — including by brands selling products. Each one is either dead or actively disputed in the current literature. We're listing them because a teacher or parent deciding what to believe deserves to know, and because we'd rather tell you what we won't claim than have you find out later.

1 · The marshmallow test predicts life success **DEAD**

The 2018 conceptual replication found the correlation was half the size reported in the originals and was reduced by two-thirds once family background, early cognitive ability and home environment were controlled. Most of the variation came from being able to wait about twenty seconds. A 2024 follow-up of 702 children to age 26 concluded that the test does not reliably predict adult functioning — almost all regression-adjusted coefficients were non-significant.

Watts, Duncan & Quan (2018), *Psychological Science*, doi:10.1177/0956797618761661 · Sperber, Vandell, Duncan & Watts (2024), *Child Development*, doi:10.1111/cdev.14129

What's more interesting than the myth: a 2013 study found children who had just experienced an unreliable adult waited far less. Part of what the task measured was whether a child had reason to trust the grown-up in the room.

2 · "Name it to tame it" calms the brain **OVERSTATED**

The famous amygdala finding was in adults, in an fMRI scanner, and the outcome measured was a brain signal — not feeling better and not behaving better. Since then, two independent sets of adult studies have found that labeling an emotion actually *interfered* with a subsequent regulation strategy. There is no direct experimental support for the mechanism in children.

What is supportable: children with stronger emotion vocabularies tend to regulate emotions better, and in one 2026 observational study of 334 preschoolers, days on which a child labeled feelings more were days of faster emotional recovery. That is an association, not a mechanism — which is why we say a feelings vocabulary *helps children*, never that naming a feeling *tames* it.

3 · Growth mindset programs improve outcomes **NOT FOR THIS AGE**

Two reasons, either sufficient. First, every study in this literature is on school-age and adolescent students — there is no growth-mindset evidence base for four-to-seven-year-olds, so applying it to preschool is an extrapolation regardless of how the wider debate resolves. Second, the most methodologically rigorous meta-analysis (63 studies, $n = 97,672$) found $d = 0.05$, non-significant after correcting for publication bias, and $d = 0.02$ among the highest-quality studies. It also reported that authors with a financial incentive to report positive findings published significantly larger effects.

Macnamara & Burgoyne (2023), *Psychological Bulletin*, 149(3–4), 133–173. doi:10.1037/bul0000352

The American Academy of Pediatrics' current policy statement (*Pediatrics*, January 2026) deliberately declines to frame children's media as a time limit, stating that "media and children cannot be viewed solely through the lens of individual child behaviors or screen limits alone." The 2016 hour-based guidance that still circulates has been replaced.

Munzer, T., Parga-Belinkie, J., Milkovich, L. M., et al. (2026). *Pediatrics*, 157(2). doi:10.1542/peds.2025-075320

What is supportable, and more useful: in a University of Michigan study of preschoolers, using a mobile device to calm an upset child predicted greater emotional reactivity months later in boys. The researchers concluded it *may displace opportunities for learning emotion-regulation strategies*. The argument isn't that screens are bad. It's that a child needs something to reach for when the feeling gets big.

Radesky, J. S., Kaciroti, N., Weeks, H. M., Schaller, A., & Miller, A. L. (2023). *JAMA Pediatrics*, 177(1), 62–70. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2022.4793 — community convenience sample; the association did not hold for girls.

06 • Full citations

Every DOI below was verified against Crossref and confirmed to resolve to the paper named. Survey figures were read from the originating body's own published page or data file.

Peer-reviewed

- Allan, N. P., Hume, L. E., Allan, D. M., Farrington, A. L., & Lonigan, C. J. (2014). Relations between inhibitory control and the development of academic skills in preschool and kindergarten: A meta-analysis. *Developmental Psychology*, 50(10), 2368–2379. doi:10.1037/a0037493
- Barger, M. M., Kim, E. M., Kuncel, N. R., & Pomerantz, E. M. (2019). The relation between parents' involvement in children's schooling and children's adjustment: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 145(9), 855–890. doi:10.1037/bul0000201
- Cipriano, C., Strambler, M. J., Naples, L. H., et al. (2023). The state of evidence for social and emotional learning: A contemporary meta-analysis of universal school-based SEL interventions. *Child Development*, 94(5), 1181–1204. doi:10.1111/cdev.13968
- England-Mason, G., Andrews, K., Atkinson, L., & Gonzalez, A. (2023). Emotion socialization parenting interventions targeting emotional competence in young children: A systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 100, 102252. doi:10.1016/j.cpr.2023.102252
- Le, V.-N., Schaack, D., Cisneros, C., & Gregory, J. (2025). The COVID-19 Pandemic's Disruptions to Preschool Children's Cognitive, Social-Emotional, and Executive Functioning Skills. *AERA Open*, 11. doi:10.1177/23328584251330165
- Macnamara, B. N., & Burgoyne, A. P. (2023). Do growth mindset interventions impact students' academic achievement? A systematic review and meta-analysis with recommendations for best practices. *Psychological Bulletin*, 149(3–4), 133–173. doi:10.1037/bul0000352
- Munzer, T., Parga-Belinkie, J., Milkovich, L. M., et al. (2026). Digital Ecosystems, Children, and Adolescents: Policy Statement. *Pediatrics*, 157(2). doi:10.1542/peds.2025-075320
- Radesky, J. S., Kaciroti, N., Weeks, H. M., Schaller, A., & Miller, A. L. (2023). Longitudinal Associations Between Use of Mobile Devices for Calming and Emotional Reactivity and Executive Functioning in Children Aged 3 to 5 Years. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 177(1), 62–70. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2022.4793
- Robson, D. A., Allen, M. S., & Howard, S. J. (2020). Self-regulation in childhood as a predictor of future outcomes: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 146(4), 324–354. doi:10.1037/bul0000227
- Sheridan, S. M., Smith, T. E., Moorman Kim, E., Beretvas, S. N., & Park, S. (2019). A Meta-Analysis of Family-School Interventions and Children's Social-Emotional Functioning: Moderators and Components of Efficacy. *Review of Educational Research*, 89(2), 296–332. doi:10.3102/0034654318825437
- Sperber, J. F., Vandell, D. L., Duncan, G. J., & Watts, T. W. (2024). Delay of gratification and adult outcomes: The Marshmallow Test does not reliably predict adult functioning. *Child Development*, 95(6), 2015–2029. doi:10.1111/cdev.14129
- Ursache, A., Kiely Gouley, K., Dawson-McClure, S., Barajas-Gonzalez, R. G., Calzada, E. J., Goldfeld, K. S., & Brotman, L. M. (2020). Early Emotion Knowledge and Later Academic Achievement Among Children of Color in Historically Disinvested Neighborhoods. *Child Development*, 91(6), e1249–e1266. doi:10.1111/cdev.13432
- Watts, T. W., Duncan, G. J., & Quan, H. (2018). Revisiting the Marshmallow Test: A Conceptual Replication Investigating Links Between Early Delay of Gratification and Later Outcomes. *Psychological Science*, 29(7), 1159–1177. doi:10.1177/0956797618761661

Surveys and institutional sources

Pew Research Center (2024, April 4). *What's It Like To Be a Teacher in America Today?* Survey of 2,531 U.S. public K-12 teachers, fielded Oct. 17 – Nov. 14, 2023.

EdWeek Research Center (2026). *The State of Teaching 2026*. Online survey of 5,802 teachers, August–November 2025.

National Center for Education Statistics. *School Pulse Panel*, May 2024 and May 2025 collections. Experimental data.

07 · What we could not verify

Listing this is the point. A source list that claims everything checked out is a source list nobody audited.

- **EdWeek Research Center's sampling methodology.** Not published on their 2026 About page or in their downloadable data file. We treat their survey as an opt-in online panel and always cite it by name and sample size.
- **NCES School Pulse Panel responding-school counts for May 2025.** Not in the data files, the methodology page, or any press release. NCES labels these results experimental data.
- **Exact pooled correlations from Trentacosta & Fine (2010)** on emotion knowledge and social competence. The full text was not retrievable, so we quote only the authors' own qualitative summary — "small to medium-sized relations" — and no specific figure.
- **A study count discrepancy** in the preschool SEL meta-analysis by Murano et al. (2020): the abstract reports 48 studies, the results text in the author's copy says 57. We have not cited a figure from that paper in this file for that reason.
- **Any market-size figure for physical social-emotional learning products.** The available industry reports cover digital SEL only. Any dollar figure circulating for the physical product market is unverified, including ones we have seen quoted.

And what we did not search

ERIC, PsycINFO, dissertation databases, the What Works Clearinghouse, and non-English literature. That matters most for one specific gap: we could not locate a randomized controlled trial demonstrating that teaching frustration-tolerance or disappointment-coping strategies specifically to three-to-five-year-olds produces durable behavioral change. One may exist in those databases. We are not claiming it doesn't — only that we did not find it, and we are not going to imply otherwise.

About The Krewelings

The Krewelings | The Krewe of Feelings is a PreK–2nd grade social-emotional learning brand from Cajun Ink Designs, LLC — twenty characters, each carrying a feeling a child already has, with an emotion card deck, a teacher's workbook and a classroom poster suite built around them.

The research in this file describes the problem we built it to meet. It is not a study of our products, and we don't present it as one. The Krewelings is an educational resource, not a clinical, therapeutic or diagnostic tool, and is not a substitute for professional mental health services.

