

Life's Lessons for Character Building

A validation study conducted by Evaluation Systems Design Inc. of Tallahassee, Florida, for Learning for Life



Overview

Learning for Life is a character education program designed with grade-specific flexible lessons employing age-appropriate activities and materials for students in early childhood through 12th grades. Developed in 1991, it has been used in more than 20,000 schools and organizations across the nation. The program encourages hands-on activities and cooperative learning in a nurturing, open environment.

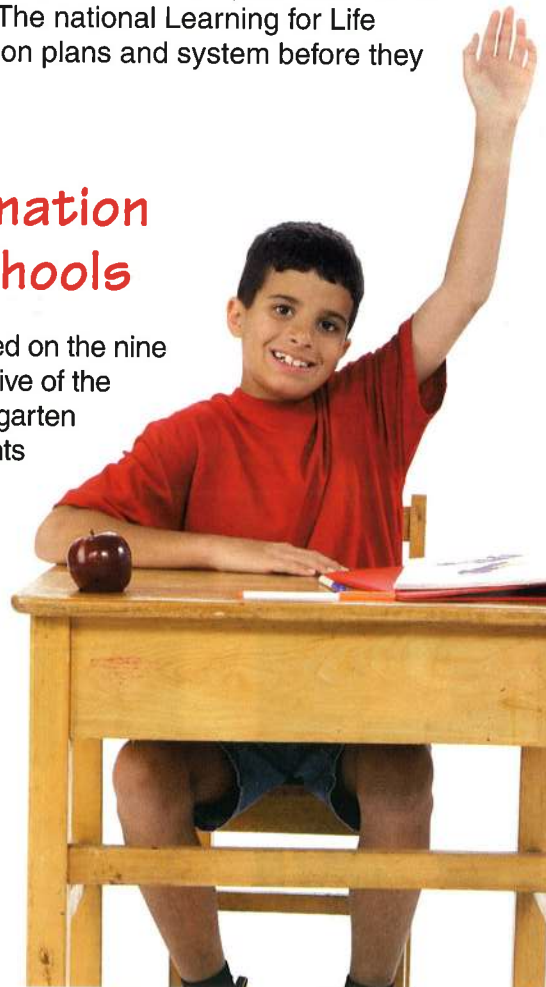
Learning for Life commissioned Evaluation Systems Design Inc., an evaluation consulting firm with more than 30 years of experience, to conduct an independent evaluation of the effectiveness of its programs. The purpose of the study was to compare students in Learning for Life classes with students who did not have the benefit of being in the program.

Four school districts in Florida were part of the study, with nine schools representing rural, suburban, and urban populations using the Learning for Life program for the first time and three schools serving as comparison schools. The schools included a total of 92 teachers and 2,095 students.

For this study, lessons were selected from the Learning for Life curriculum addressing nine character traits: respect, responsibility, honesty/trust, caring/fairness, perseverance, self-discipline, courage, citizenship, and life skills. Teachers taught one lesson plan each week from November 2008 to April 2009. The national Learning for Life director trained teachers for the lesson plans and system before they began the weekly schedule.

Demographic Information on Participating Schools

Demographic information was collected on the nine schools used in the validation study. Five of the schools served students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, one served students in pre-kindergarten through sixth grade, and three served students in pre-kindergarten or kindergarten through eighth grade. The number of students in these schools ranged from 200 to 967, with an average of 596. The percentage of students served in the Free or Reduced-Priced Lunch Program ranged from 17 percent to 99 percent, with an average of 69 percent.



The surveyed schools' populations ranged from 19 to 99 percent minority students, with an average of 69 percent. Two of the schools had an African-American student majority, and three schools had a Hispanic majority. Students came from many different types of communities, including urban, suburban, rural, beach, and small towns. The Learning for Life program was perceived by most teachers and administrators across these diverse settings to be a valued addition to their school and for their students.

Schools implementing Learning for Life Demographic Data

Community	Grade Levels	Student Population	Percent in Free/Reduced-Price Lunch Program	Percent Minority
Beach Community	K-8	662	23	59
Large City	PK-5	530	99	99
Large City	PK-5	368	95	99
Rural	PK-5	732	73	77
Suburban	PK-5	703	36	62
Small City	PK-5	967	71	48
Small City	K-8	200	86	98
Remote Town	PK-6	617	61	58
Remote Town	PK-8	584	17	19
Range	PK-5 to PK-8	200-967	17-99	19-99
Average		596	62	69

Methods and Measures

Two measures were used before lessons began and after they were completed for students in both Learning for Life and comparison schools:



- **Student Attitude Measure**—consisting of 35 to 40 items measuring attitudes toward character and behavior. Response scale is true, false, or not sure.
- **Student Attendance**—measured through the Florida Student Database and reported by every public school and district. Attendance was extracted from the district database for 2008, prior to the study, and 2009, the year of the study, for participating and comparison students.

Surveys were also conducted at the end of the school year for participating teachers, students, and the students' parents.

What We Found

Attitudes Improved in Students in Learning for Life Programs

- * Statistically significant differences were noted in favor of the Learning for Life program in student attitudes toward common character traits for students in grades four and five.

In separate analyses by grade level, statistically significant improvements in the attitudes of students in the Learning for Life program were identified when compared with attitudes of students in the comparison groups. The students who were included in the analyses, results were virtually the same for both grade levels.

Attendance Improved for Students in Learning for Life Programs

- * Statistically significant differences were noted in favor of the Learning for Life program on reducing absences from school.

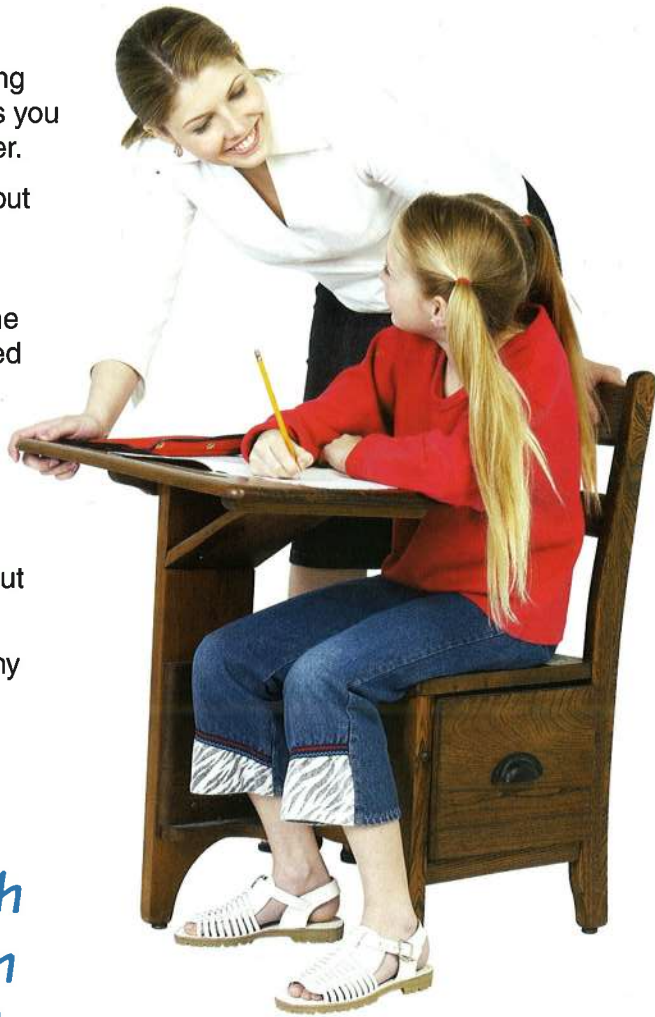
Attendance improved by 1.6 days for the Learning for Life students, compared with a very small increase (0.1 days) for the comparison students. Increasing attendance by 1.5 days a year per student can have a marked financial impact on schools and school districts.



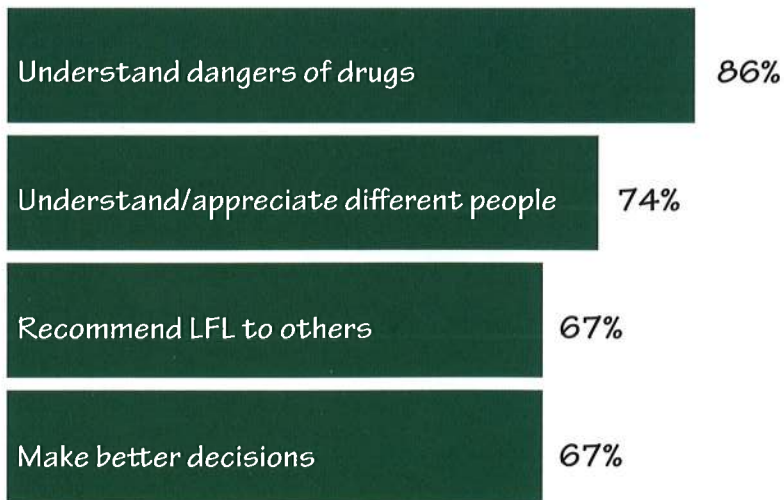
Students Like the Program

- * Students gave overall positive ratings for the Learning for Life program.
- * An overwhelming percent of students agreed that the program helped them understand the dangers of using drugs, and helped them understand and appreciate people who are different than themselves.
- * More than two-thirds responded that Learning for Life helped them make better decisions.
- * Overall, two-thirds of the responding students answered that they would recommend the Learning for Life program to other students.
- * We spent better time doing good learning instead of playing video games.

- * The thing I liked about it is changing yourself. Respecting differences, because it helps you think about when you're older.
- * I liked the activities we did, but I mostly liked working with a partner or group.
- * It helped me treat people the way I would like to be treated and reminded me about not treating people differently.
- * Learning about what to do if you are in a bad conversation, drugs, or about staying healthy.
- * I like that it said to eat healthy and always think positive, not negative.



Student Agreement with Statements on Benefits of Being in the Learning for Life Program

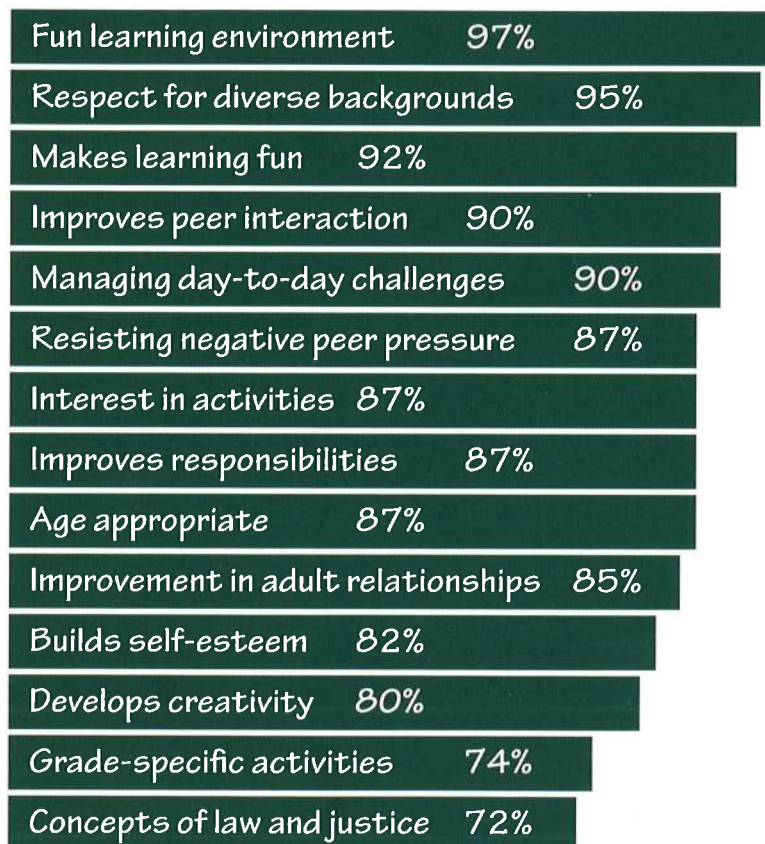


Teachers Like the Program

Teachers were overwhelmingly positive about the Learning for Life program.

- * The highest-rated item was that the program helps create a fun learning environment.
- * Teachers were almost unanimous in responding that the lessons help children respect those of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.
- * Ninety percent or more of the teachers also responded that the program
 - helps children develop skills to manage day-to-day challenges,
 - provides fun ways to learn new things, and
 - provides lessons and activities that help children learn to get along better with each other.

Teacher Agreement with Statements on Benefits of Learning for Life Program



Comments from participating teachers on the aspects of the Learning for Life program they liked the best included:

- * I thought that the program offered a wide range of activities for several types of circumstances that may come up. I thought that the lessons were engaging and most stories related to the students. I especially liked the lessons that built their self-esteem, because they need to develop it at their age.

- * The activities were fun. The potato and sewing activities were my favorite. I loved how Learning for Life fit right in with our class meetings.
- * I liked the format, as the lessons were simple in the design and simple to teach. Topics are very appropriate for this grade level.
- * Lessons are a welcomed break for the students from the standard curriculum. Lessons positively embody characteristics and attributes that each student should possess. I enjoyed the fact that there is a component that involves the parent(s)/family.

Parents Like the Program

Parent responses to the survey on aspects of the positive statements about the program ranged from 70 percent to 80 percent. The following statements are what parents agreed upon:

- * The family activities are appropriate for my child's age.
- * Family activities are a fun way for my child to learn new things.
- * My child has learned skills that help them stay safe.
- * Family activities help children learn how to treat others.
- * Family activities are helpful tools for teaching children to be honest.
- * My child likes the family activities.

Parent Agreement with Statements on Benefits of Learning for Life Program



Overall, reactions to the Learning for Life Program were very positive. The program has a statistically proven record of improving student attitudes on major character education traits and increasing student attendance.

