What Works Clearinghouse

INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION SCIENCES

Character Education Revised April 23, 2007

Positive Action

Program description

Positive Action, a K–12 program, aims to promote character development, academic achievement, and social-emotional skills and to reduce disruptive and problem behavior. The program is based on the philosophy that you feel good about yourself when you think and do positive actions, and there is always a positive way to do everything. The curriculum includes six units; some grades have a review for a seventh unit. All lessons are scripted and use classroom discussion, role-play, games, songs, and activity sheets or text booklets. Optional components that may or may not be implemented as part of the program are: site-wide climate development; drug education for grade 5 and middle school; conflict resolution; counselor, parent, and family classes; and community/coalition components.

Research

One study of *Positive Action* met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards, and one study met standards with reservations. The studies included 56 elementary schools in Florida and Hawaii. Both studies examined results on students' behavior and academic achievement.[1]

The WWC considers the extent of evidence for *Positive Action* to be moderate to large for behavior and for academic achievement. No studies of *Positive Action* that met WWC evidence standards with or without reservations addressed outcomes in the domain of knowledge, attitudes, and values.

Effectiveness

Positive Action was found to have positive effects on elementary school students' behavior and academic achievement.

	Behavior	*Knowledge, attitudes, and values*	*Academic achievement*
Rating of effectiveness	Positive effects	na	Positive effects
Improvement index[2]	Average: +19 percentile points Range: –12 to +36 percentile points	na	Average: +14 percentile points Range: +8 to +36 percentile points

na = not applicable

1. The evidence presented in this report is based on available research. Findings and conclusions may change as new research becomes available.
2. These numbers show the average and range of improvement indices for all findings across the two studies and the available student-level improvement indices.

Additional program information

Developer and contact

Positive Action, Inc. 264 4th Avenue South, Twin Falls, ID 83301. Web: http://www.positiveaction.net. E-mail: info@positiveaction.net. Telephone: (800) 345-2974. Fax: (208) 733-1590.

Scope of use

The *Positive Action* program was created and first implemented in four school sites in Idaho from 1979–81. Positive Action, Inc. was founded in 1982. Since then, more than 11,000 schools in 2,500 school districts and 2,000 community groups and agencies in all 50 states have adopted the program. *Positive Action* may have changed since the studies were conducted. The WWC recommends asking the developer for information about the most current version of this curriculum and taking into account that student demographics and school context may affect outcomes.

Teaching

The *Positive Action* curriculum for each of the elementary school grades averages 140 lessons taught four days a week, organized into six teaching units and a seventh review unit, presented in a consistent order. Units 1–3 and a summary of units 4–7 are taught in grade 7, totaling 81 lessons, while units 4–7 and a summary of units 1–3 are taught in grade 8, totaling 75 lessons. The high school curriculum is composed of four kits. Each kit covers one school year but can stand on its own or be used in a different order. Each kit includes six teaching units and a review unit and has approximately 132 lessons. Kit IV, however, has two options, each with its own curriculum, so the possible number of lessons doubles for that kit. In each of the elementary, middle, or high school grade levels teachers may implement the entire set of lessons or choose a partial implementation of at least 20 lessons per grade level. There are *Levels of Implementation Plans* for the Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum Levels, which guide users on how to choose lessons for the highest level of effectiveness. In all grade levels a typical lesson lasts about 15 minutes.

The *Positive Action* program consists of a core curriculum and optional components that may or may not be implemented as part of the program—site-wide climate development; drug education for grade 5 and middle school; conflict resolution; counselor, parent, and family classes; and community/coalition development. The program philosophy, "You feel good about yourself when you think and do positive actions, and there is a positive way to do everything," underlies the content of the program units. Kits for the core curriculum and the supplemental components may include instructor's manuals, group materials, activity booklets or activity sheets, text booklets, posters, song CDs with lyrics, game boards, and teaching aides (stickers, index cards, medals, puppets, flannel boards and figures, bean bags, and visual aids).

Cost

The cost of a *Positive Action* classroom kit varies by grade level. Kindergarten kits cost $460; grades 1–8 cost $360; high school kits I, II, and III cost $360; and high school kit IV costs $460. The cost of the drug education supplemental kits also varies by grade level, ranging from $250 to $360. The optional community kit costs $550, the counselor kit $125, and the family kit $75. Family classes cost $360 and parenting classes $160. Some of the kits are available in Spanish. Combo kits (at reduced prices), refresher kits, and kit parts are also available for varied prices.

An orientation training workshop that includes curriculum; climate development; and counselor, family, and community components costs $200 a school type (elementary, middle, or high school). Ongoing training workshops and media training workshops cost $250 each. Workshops that combine orientation, ongoing training, and media training for grades K–12 cost $900.

Research

Twelve studies reviewed by the WWC investigated the effects of the *Positive Action* program. One study of the impact of *Positive Action* on elementary school students met WWC evidence standards, and one study met standards with reservations. One study (Flay, Acock, Vuchinich, & Beets, 2006) was a randomized controlled trial. The second study (Flay & Allred, 2003) used a

Research *(continued)*

quasi-experimental design. The remaining 10 studies did not meet WWC evidence screens.

Flay and Allred (2003) included 36 elementary schools in a large Southeastern school district. The study compared outcomes for students participating in the *Positive Action* program with the outcomes for students in schools that did not use this program. The study focused on *Positive Action* as implemented schoolwide.

Extent of evidence

The WWC categorizes the extent of evidence in each domain as small or moderate to large (see the What Works Clearinghouse Extent of Evidence Categorization Scheme). The extent of evidence takes into account the number of studies and the total sample size across the studies that met WWC evidence standards with or without reservations.[3]

The WWC considers the extent of evidence for *Positive Action* to be moderate to large for behavior and for academic achievement.

Effectiveness

Findings

The WWC review of character education addresses student outcomes in three domains: behavior; knowledge, attitudes, and values; and academic achievement.

Behavior. Flay and colleagues (2006) reported statistically significant differences favoring the intervention groups on students' suspension rates, use of alcohol, being drunk, and use of tobacco and illegal drugs. The study also reported statistically significant differences favoring the intervention group on serious violence among boys but not among girls. The average effect size across all behavior outcomes in this study was statistically significant.[4]

Flay and Allred (2003) reported statistically significant differences favoring the intervention group on students' violent behavior and suspension rates. In addition, the average effect size was statistically significant.

Academic achievement. Flay and colleagues (2006) reported, and the WWC confirmed, statistically significant differences favoring the intervention groups on students' grade retention rates. The study also examined the impact on state standardized test scores in reading and math but found no statistically significant differences. In addition, the average effect size was statistically significant.

Flay and Allred (2003) reported, and the WWC confirmed, statistically significant differences favoring the intervention group on total scores of the Florida Comprehensive Aptitude Test (FCAT). The authors reported no statistically significant impacts on absenteeism. The average effect size across the two outcomes in this domain was statistically significant.

Rating of effectiveness

The WWC rates interventions as positive, potentially positive, mixed, no discernible effects, potentially negative, or negative. The rating of effectiveness takes into account four factors: the quality of the research design, the statistical significance of the findings (as calculated by the WWC), the size of the difference between participants in the intervention condition and the comparison condition, and the consistency in findings across studies (see the WWC Intervention Rating Scheme).

3. The Extent of Evidence categorization was developed to tell readers how much evidence was used to determine the intervention rating, focusing on the number and size of studies. Additional factors associated with a related concept, external validity, such as students' demographics and the types of settings in which studies took place, are not taken into account for the categorization.
4. The level of statistical significance was reported by the study authors or, where necessary, calculated by the WWC to correct for clustering within classrooms or schools and for multiple comparisons. For an explanation, see the WWC Tutorial on Mismatch. See the Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations for the formulas the WWC used to calculate the statistical significance. In the case of Positive Action, corrections for both clustering and multiple comparisons were needed.

The WWC found *Positive Action* to have positive effects on both behavior and academic achievement of elementary school students

Improvement index

For each outcome domain, the WWC computed an improvement index based on the effect size (see the Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations). The improvement index represents the difference between the percentile rank of the average student in the intervention condition versus the percentile rank of the average student in the comparison condition. Unlike the rating of effectiveness, the improvement index is entirely based on the size of the effect, regardless of the statistical significance of the effect, the study design, or the analysis. The improvement index can take on values between –50 and +50, with positive numbers denoting favorable results. The improvement index for behavior is +19 percentile points, with a range of –12 to +36 percentile points. The improvement index for academic achievement is +14 percentile points, with a range of +8 to +36 percentile points.

Summary

The WWC reviewed 12 studies on *Positive Action.* One study met WWC evidence standards, and one study met standards with reservations. Both studies assessed elementary school student outcomes in the behavior and academic achievement domains. When the WWC aggregated the results in each of these domains, the average effect sizes were statistically significant. So the WWC rated the program as having positive effects on both behavior and academic achievement. Character education, an evolving field, is beginning to establish a research base. The evidence presented in this report is limited and may change as new research emerges.

References

Met WWC evidence standards

Flay, B., Acock, A., Vuchinich, S., & Beets, M. (2006). Progress report of the randomized trial of Positive Action in Hawaii: End of third year of intervention. Available from Positive Action, Inc. 264 4th Avenue South, Twin Falls, ID 83301.

Met WWC evidence standards with reservations

Flay, B. R., & Allred, C. G. (2003). Long-term effects of the Positive Action program. *American Journal of Healthy Behavior, 27*(1), 6–21.

Did not meet WWC evidence screens

Allred, C. G. (1984). *The Positive Action program: An evaluation. Royal School, Honolulu School District, HI.* Twin Falls, ID: Positive Action, Inc.[5]

Burcham, S. (1992). Improving the academic self-esteem of elementary students. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Nova University, Fort Lauderdale-Davie, FL.[6]

Flay, B. R., & Ordway, N. (1999). *Effectiveness of the Positive Action program: Changes in school-level percentile achievement rankings and disciplinary report.* Twin Falls, ID: Positive Action, Inc.[6]

Flay, B. R. (2001). *An intensive case study of the Positive Action program as a comprehensive school reform demonstration program: Year 2 results.* Twin Falls, ID: Positive Action, Inc.[6]

Additional citation

Flay, B. R. (2000). *An intensive case study of the Positive Action® program as a comprehensive school reform demonstration program.* Twin Falls, ID: Positive Action, Inc.

Flay, B. R., Allred, C. G., & Ordaway, N. (2001). Effects of the Positive Action program on achievement and discipline: Two matched control comparisons. *Prevention Science, 2*(2), 71–88.[7]

Flay, B. R., & Slagel, M. (2006, July). The Positive Action Family Program: A pilot randomized trial. Available from the Positive Action, Inc., 264 4th Avenue South, Twin Falls, ID 83301.[8]

5. Does not use a strong causal design: there was only one intervention and one comparison unit, so the analysis could not separate the effects of the intervention from other factors.
6. Does not use a strong causal design: the study did not use a comparison group.
7. Does not use a strong causal design: the study, which used a quasi-experimental design, did not establish that the comparison group was equivalent to the treatment group at the baseline.
8. The sample is not appropriate to this review.

References *(continued)*

Heuer, L. G. (1995). Behavior, attitudes, and knowledge related to drug and alcohol prevention curricula in North Dakota seventh through twelve grade students. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 56*(10), 3826. (UMI No. 9605472)[6]

Hoyer-Rufner, C. S. (1994). The Positive Action curriculum for fifth graders: An exploratory study of accuracy of self-perceptions and self-esteem. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 54*(7), 2513A. (UMI No. 9333361)[6]

Waggoner-Weir, M. S. (1991). The Positive Action program and self-esteem of 6th-grade students. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 52*(07), 2417. (UMI No. 9136806)[5]

West, B. G. (1997). The effects of improving the self-esteem on academic performance of fourth-grade students in a rural elementary school. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 58*(03), 691. (UMI No. 9726368)[9]

Woodward, J. R. (1996). Improving academic achievement of fourth-grade students through a program of self-concept enhancement activities. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Jacksonville, FL.[9]

For more information about specific studies and WWC calculations, please see the WWC *Positive Action* Technical Appendices.

9. Complete data are not reported: the WWC could not compute effect sizes.