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Nation's First Study on Social-emotional Learning for K-12 Students Experiencing Homelessness Released
University of San Diego, Monarch School Three-Year Study Found 48% of Students Increased Their Self-Esteem with Support of School's Wrap-Around Services

SAN DIEGO – "Social-emotional learning" – the social, mental and life skill factors not taught in academics – is a buzzword among the education community and parents, but how are children experiencing homelessness impacted?

At the only K-12 public school in the nation exclusively for unhoused youth, the [Monarch School](#), along with research partner [University of San Diego's The Jacobs Institute for Innovation in Education](#), delved into how students grow, sustain or decrease 12 essential social and emotional factors, including social awareness, emotional regulation, self-esteem, student engagement and restorative mindset.

The first-ever study on social and emotional learning focused on unhoused youth was led by KishaLynn Elliott, Vice President of Operations and Evaluation at the Monarch School Project. Research was conducted with 3rd through 12th grade students from 2016-2019. Elliott co-authored the white paper, "Promoting Resilience: Social-emotional Learning Sustenance in the Monarch School Project," with Delia Contreras of Monarch School Project and Lisa M. Smith, Ph.D. and Perla Myers, Ph.D. of the University of San Diego.

Monarch School Project CEO Afira DeVries said what many may find surprising in the study is that students experiencing homelessness – an increasingly growing and vulnerable population – already have high social-emotional scores, demonstrating resilience and grit.

"Our students are young kids who have lived all or part of their lives not knowing where they are going to sleep, what food they will have to eat or if they will be safe, every night. Getting through every day, meeting challenge after challenge – can you imagine the emotional strength these extraordinary young people have?" said DeVries. "Through the comprehensive support services offered at Monarch School, our students are able to maintain and sustain their resilience. We urge other educators and supportive organizations to adopt similar practices and offer them to youth nationwide. Our young people and our future deserve it."

Monarch School provides students with a safe, stable learning environment where they can persevere through the trauma of homelessness that affects them and their success in education. Through Monarch's [whole student approach](#) – a combination of healthy coping skills, ability and freedom to explore their passions, and plan for a life of self-sufficiency – students are able to expand their existing skillsets and prepare for the future. Specific programming includes leveled literacy intervention, therapeutic arts, clinical mental health, regular family dinners and an alumni support program that work with students and family to foster academic and life skills, as well as social and emotional learning.

Social-emotional programs are crucial for outcomes, but also for attitudes, behavior and academic performance, with one study finding associated programming can lead to 11% gains in academic performance.

Over the three-year study, key findings included:

- Monarch students showed and maintained a high average restorative mindset, scoring 4 out of 5 – the highest scored and most consistent measure over time. This is also an area that the students and school can continue to grow in.
- 60% of students maintained or increased their feeling of safety at school.
- 58% of students increased their social awareness, being able to consider different perspectives and empathize with others.
- 48% of students surveyed increased their self-esteem.
- Over just one year, 40% of students showed positive changes in student engagement.

"The study results have significant potential to shift the perception of youth experiencing homelessness, highlighting their strengths, to inform schools and parents of how to support both housed and unhoused students emotionally and socially," said Smith. "The study also established the first-ever research framework for 'restorative mindset,' reflecting the growing trend toward restorative justice and solutions-oriented approaches in our society."

The Jacobs Institute and Monarch School Project are currently conducting a companion research study to assess students' social-emotional learning for the next three years post-pandemic.

To support Monarch School Project or get involved, visit www.monarchschoools.org.

About Monarch School Project

Founded in 1987, Monarch School has become the nation's only K-12 school offering a comprehensive program designed to educate youth experiencing homelessness. The mission of the Monarch School Project is to nurture resilience in unhoused youth and their families. We empower students to influence their own growth in the areas of academics, social and emotional growth, and life skills. We reinforce the existing strength of families so that students can thrive in school and in life.

Important Note: In our effort to mitigate the stigma often associated with the label "homeless," we consistently refer to people experiencing homelessness as "unhoused." In this way, we communicate that homelessness is neither a permanent condition nor a personal characteristic. En español, decimos estudiantes en situación sin vivienda.

Monarch School is a public-private partnership between the San Diego County Office of Education and the nonprofit Monarch School Project. Learn more at www.monarchschoools.org. Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

About The Jacobs Institute for Innovation in Education

The Jacobs Institute for Innovation in Education is a nonprofit research and development institute powering inclusive innovation and a leader in education. Affiliated with the School of Leadership & Education Sciences at the University of San Diego, we engage in pioneering research and evaluation, develop innovative curricula and technologies, and support professional learning grounded in the learning sciences.

Over the past eight years, The Jacobs Institute has advocated and advanced innovation and equity in education and schools. Our team of researchers, designers, technologists and faculty supports ed innovation initiatives, the development of new technologies, curriculum and pedagogical models, and support for educational organizations to sustain and scale various initiatives. Working with trans-disciplinary partners, we work in collaboration with districts, schools, educational organizations and education-supporting companies. Learn more at www.sandiego.edu/soles/centers-and-institutes/jacobs-institute.

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