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## **The Effectiveness and Economic Impact of Prevention Programs**

**Background:** Across Ohio and beyond, recent research has highlighted the expanding prevalence and increasing severity of the youth mental health crisis. In 2023, 1-in-5 adolescents across the U.S. had a current diagnosed mental or behavioral health condition; and from 2016 to 2023, adolescents' diagnosis of anxiety and depression rose significantly, by 61% and 45%, respectively.<sup>1</sup> These conditions impact both students' personal wellbeing as well as their academic functioning. Students with mental, emotional, or behavioral concerns are 3x more likely to repeat a grade,<sup>2</sup> and 2x as likely to drop out of high school compared to their peers.<sup>3</sup> **The total economic burden across North America of untreated youth mental health concerns and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) is estimated to be \$748 billion, annually.**<sup>4</sup>

**Personal Impact of Interventions:** Optimistically, research demonstrates that investments in evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) curricula and school-based prevention programs help youth build protective factors that significantly improve their emotional wellbeing, social functioning, *and* physical health. The impact of these investments is felt both, immediately through improved social functioning and academic achievement as well as long-term into adulthood; as **investments in youth prevention and SEL have been found to significantly reduce adult unemployment (15%), depression (44%), and other high-risk behaviors (33%).**<sup>5</sup>

**Economic Impact of Interventions:** Investments in child and adolescent mental health foster a strong economic advantage. A longitudinal study published in 2021 that followed 4,407 participants in 24 communities across 7 states found that **a modest \$602 investment in prevention services would result in an estimated \$7,754 cost savings per child by the time the participants are 23;** savings that are distributed across individuals, families, taxpayers, governments, the child welfare system, and other stakeholders.<sup>6</sup>

Considering benefits to individual health, education, and criminal justice sectors, as well as participation in the labor market upon reaching adulthood, prevention and intervention programs generate an incredibly positive return on investment. **For every \$1 spent on programs targeted toward children with behavioral challenges, the net positive return on investment is at least between \$1.80 and \$3.30;**<sup>7</sup> **and when behavioral health services are delivered specifically in schools-based settings, the return on investment is even higher.**<sup>8</sup>

**The Ohio Department of Education Evidence Based Clearinghouse:** [Ohio's Evidence-Based Clearinghouse](#) empowers Ohio's school districts with the knowledge, tools and resources to help them identify and implement evidence-based prevention curricula that meet the Every Student Succeeds Act's (ESSA) evidence-based criteria. Below is a sample of prevention curricula in the Clearinghouse that are commonly used across Ohio school districts, including estimated return on investment (ROI).

[Second Step](#) – A classroom-based social skills program for reducing aggressive behaviors in elementary and middle school-aged students. **ROI: \$4.93 for every \$1 spent.**<sup>9</sup>

[Strengthening Families](#) (10-14) – A parent and youth skills program to improve positive family relationship, reduce aggressive behaviors, and prevent substance use. **ROI: \$5.87 for every \$1 spent**<sup>10</sup>

[Too Good for Drugs](#) – An elementary and middle school classroom-based program to improve life skills, character values, and skills to resist negative peer influence. **ROI: \$10.06 for every \$1 spent**<sup>11</sup>

[Life Skills Training](#) – A classroom-based universal prevention program to prevent adolescent tobacco, alcohol, marijuana use, and violence. **ROI: \$15.97 for every \$1 spent**<sup>12</sup>

[Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies](#) (PATHS) – A classroom-based SEL program to reduce aggression and behavior problems. **ROI: \$24.44 for every \$1 spent**<sup>13</sup>

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