promoting effective, efficient, interactive, and sustainable interventions for children

WHO WE ARE

School Reform and Beyond (SRB) is a collaborative research network based at the University of Michigan and at Harvard, Georgetown, and New York Universities. Partners in the SRB network include faculty leaders from the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, the New York University School of Medicine, and the University of Pittsburgh. SRB was started as an initiative of the University of Michigan Center for Advancing Research and Solutions for Society (CARSS). Collectively, these individuals – representing fields of psychology, economics, public policy, and medicine – offer a broad and comprehensive research base that stimulates creative thinking and contributes significantly to project planning and development.

Our primary interest is to build an early foundation for children’s success in school and to close the educational achievement gap that increases dramatically over the first ten years of life. Our focus is the development and implementation of sustainable, evidence-based interventions that simultaneously promote school achievement and healthy development of children from ages 0-10. The overarching goal of SRB is to maximize academic outcomes of all children, particularly children from low-income households, families of color, children with special needs, and children who experience English language challenges.

We believe that it is essential to include social learning as an integral part of the educational process. Beginning with families and moving through pre-school and formal education, we aim to provide a base of support that helps children learn and apply effective interpersonal skills that also support and sustain academic learning and achievement. SRB’s framework includes the essential elements of safe, healthy living environments; support to parents and families in preparing their children for successful entry to preschool; and the cognitive, social, and emotional development and self-motivated learning of children in their elementary school experience.

OUR CREATIVE APPROACH

SRB pursues a unique approach to intervention research. In addition to addressing concepts of self-regulation, impulse control, and acquisition of social and emotional skills among children, SRB promotes effective parenting strategies and integrates health and community services in ways that will foster children’s academic proficiency and overall school success, beginning at birth and sustaining through middle childhood years. SRB takes a multi-faceted approach to delivering service to children and families, including home-based assessment and coaching on parenting skills as well as use of more traditional networks. Beyond its focus on individual classroom activities, SRB emphasizes whole-school implementation of social learning skills, incorporates literacy integration in its projects, and develops program connections across the academic curriculum.

Through innovative research and practice, framed within this broader collaboration, our vision is that children will experience a healthy and supportive environment from conception through childhood, continually learning and applying incremental skills that result in cumulative academic achievement into middle school. SRB demonstrates its primary commitment to children by broadening its collaborative process to include parents, teachers, school staff, community service providers, and health care professionals. Specific SRB research projects are underway for ages 0-3, preschool, and grades K-3. Our projects are designed to align with each other and provide a continuum of support to children as they grow and develop.
OUR CURRENT PROJECTS

SRB’s 0-3 Initiative focuses on interventions designed to provide social and educational supports for infants, babies, young children, their parents, and their families. This project unifies approaches associated with existing pediatric care structures, child care programs, and center-based activities. An existing intervention called the Video Interaction Project (VIP) provides coaching support to parents based on video recordings of parent-child interactions. Likewise, the existing Family Check-up (FCU) program provides home-based assessment and follow-up to the family on parenting practices. A primary objective of SRB’s 0-3 effort is to unify VIP and FCU elements to reduce the risk of substance abuse and other factors, as well as to increase the likelihood of successful social and educational outcomes for children in low-income households. Seeing parents and primary caregivers as important partners is a key concept and the group is considering a variety of engagement opportunities to address the importance of advocacy within the family.

The pre-K Initiative is designed to promote self-regulation for young children across social, emotional, and cognitive domains. Preliminary work in Phoenix will generate a model to be used in school-embedded pre-school programs that will align with K-3 SECURE. The focus is on providing developmentally appropriate activities and strategies to encourage acquisition of social skills and outcomes that are most critical at early stages of development. The group also discussing a proposal that would adapt or supplement SECURE to target the unique challenges of the special needs student population.

The K-3 Initiative is developed to improve the self-regulation skills of students in grades K-3. The program, called SECURE (Social, Emotional, Cognitive Understanding and Regulation in education) is designed to teach specific thinking and interpersonal skills in a school-wide context, with the goal of improving academic performance and developing a community of self-regulated learners. Developed and piloted in collaboration with the Success for All Foundation, SECURE consistently generates enthusiasm and support from the field. SECURE has progressed through development and pilot stages in multiple school districts and SRB is now in the process of engaging school districts in several states to take the program to a larger scale and evaluate its impact across a broad and diverse student population.

OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE

No challenge is greater than providing an environment for children in which they will experience and build upon successes from their entry into the world through their elementary school years. SRB is passionately engaged in the development of accessible and sustainable strategies and structures to activate this vision, particularly to children and families not served well by existing systems. In addition, SRB eagerly advances innovative ideas and approaches that bring together proven existing programs to improve and enhance their impact and effectiveness.

SRB’s ultimate goal is to take to national scale a sustainable, efficient, and developmentally integrated set of evidence-based interventions that accelerate learning of all children from birth onward. In the future, SRB plans to expand its formal curriculum to include all elementary school grades, as well as to demonstrate the importance and value of targeted instruction for parents, other family members, teachers, and students that emphasizes the complete set of skills needed for effective learning and performance of children from birth through childhood. SRB also plans a project focused on supplementation of program materials and approaches to ensure appropriate inclusion and participation of children with a spectrum of special needs in conventional classrooms.

To further accomplish its goals, SRB is energized to move forward in outreach to individuals, groups, and institutions with shared values and commitment, and to collaborate with those who will join with us to innovate and generate approaches and interventions to sustain the change that is necessary for the success of our children.
SRB is dedicated to communication and partnerships with individuals and groups that share the common goal of promoting successful outcomes for young children. As we continue our interdisciplinary collaboration and move forward on our goal to promote early and sustained success in health and education experiences for every child, we are always alert for ideas and resources that can help us maintain and expand our efforts. For more information on SRB and its projects, contact Robin Jacob, Assistant Research Scientist at the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research/School of Education, rjacob@umich.edu