

October 2016

This research brief was prepared by American Institutes for Research (AIR) on behalf of the Lions Clubs International Foundation to inform the implementation of Lions Quest programs. AIR is one of the world's largest behavioral and social science research and evaluation organizations. AIR's mission is to conduct and apply the best behavioral and social science research and evaluation towards improving people's lives, with a special emphasis on the disadvantaged.

# Effective Classroom Management Strategies in the Lions Quest Classroom

## Report Summary

Lions Quest teacher training workshops and coaching sessions emphasize classroom management techniques that promote student empowerment and positive teacher-student relationships. The group training sessions, delivered in conjunction with customized coaching sessions, aim to provide teachers with skills needed to create a caring, well-managed classroom environment that ultimately strengthens teachers' effective implementation of the Lions Quest program.

This research brief summarizes findings from elementary and middle school student surveys that measured teachers' classroom management techniques and growth in student social and emotional learning. Three findings are presented:

- (1) Most teachers use the classroom management techniques recommended by Lions Quest.
- (2) The recommended classroom management techniques significantly contribute to students' social and emotional learning.
- (3) Techniques that promote positive teacher-student relationships are predictive of students' social and emotional learning.

Analysis of the elementary school student survey data identified three important teacher behaviors:

- Paying attention to students' feelings
- Showing interest in students' opinions
- Connecting the concepts being taught to real-life examples

Analysis of middle school student survey data identified four important teacher behaviors:

- Paying attention to students' feelings
- Noticing when something is bothering a student
- Covering topics that students care about
- Encouraging and accepting different opinions

## Introduction

Schools that successfully enhance the social and emotional learning of their students provide safe spaces for them to learn and practice social and emotional skills.<sup>1</sup> These schools are likely to implement social and emotional learning programs with high fidelity.<sup>2</sup> Students attending these schools, moreover, exhibit greater school engagement and fewer incidents of disruptive and delinquent behavior.<sup>3</sup>

An important characteristic of safe spaces for social and emotional learning is positive teacher-student relationships. Multiple studies have reported that students who experience positive teacher-student relationships in which they perceive their teachers as caring and interested in their ideas and preferences had lower rates of problem behavior than did their peers.<sup>4</sup> Students appreciate when their teachers actively listen to them and provide fun and supportive yet academically challenging environment.<sup>5</sup>

During the last three decades, experts have advocated for prioritizing teaching practices that build positive teacher-student relationships and are sensitive to students' emotional needs.<sup>6</sup> Specific practices that promote a positive classroom climate and support instructional goals include teacher sensitivity (i.e., teachers' responsiveness to students' cognitive and emotional needs) and regard for student perspectives (i.e., the degree to which teachers' actions are informed by students' interests, motivations, and points of view).<sup>7</sup> In addition, experts have proposed that school climate and anti-bullying efforts should include opportunities for teachers to identify how their behaviors impact students' social competence and socially responsible behaviors.<sup>8</sup>

The rich content offered by the Lions Quest programs for elementary and middle schools requires a strong level of trust between students and teachers. The Lions Quest lesson plans ask students to reflect on personal experiences and engage in dialogue and collaborative projects on a variety of topics including emotion regulation, good citizenship, character values, and habits of healthy living. Practicing new skills in a safe classroom environment before generalizing them to other environments is an important part of the sequence of each lesson activity.

Lions Quest teacher training workshops and coaching sessions emphasize classroom management techniques that promote student empowerment and positive teacher-student relationships. The group training sessions followed by customized coaching sessions were designed to provide teachers with skills needed to create a caring, well-managed classroom environment that ultimately strengthens teachers' efforts to implement the Lions Quest curriculum effectively. Such teacher professional development opportunities have been in existence as standalone programs such as the Responsive Classroom,<sup>9</sup> RULER,<sup>10</sup> and SECURE.<sup>11</sup> This research brief investigates the extent to which teachers follow the recommended classroom management techniques and the extent to which these techniques influence the outcomes of students participating in the Lions Quest program.

## Methodology

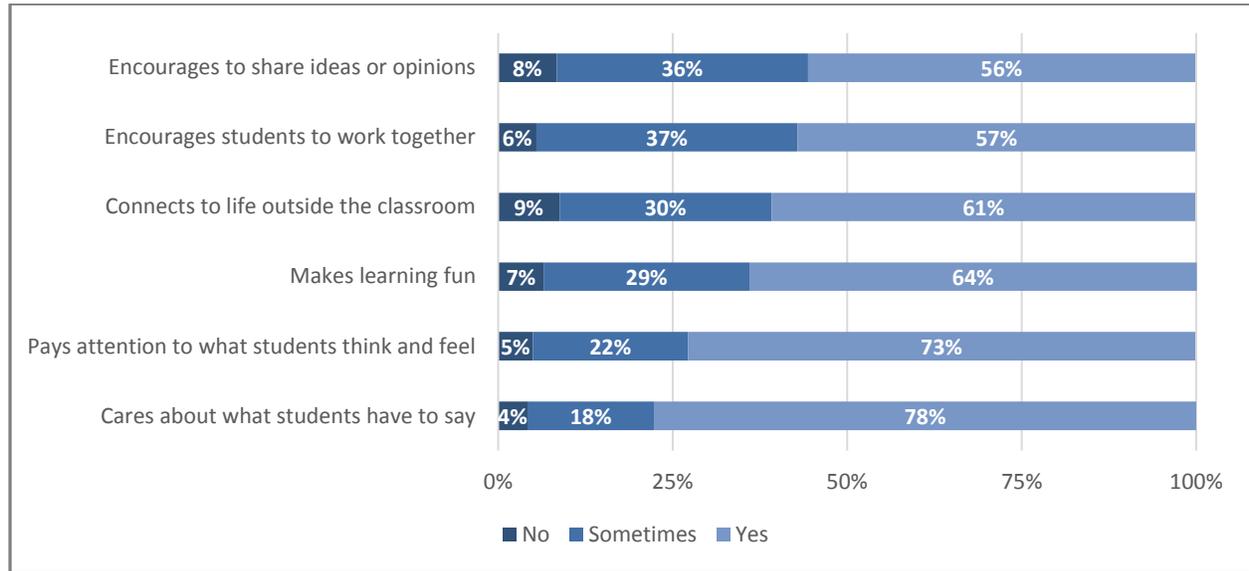
The data reported in this research brief were collected as part of an independent evaluation of Lions Quest in Eagle-Mountain Saginaw School District in Texas. Data were collected in the 2015–16 school year using a student self-report survey. The elementary school student survey was administered to 764 students in three elementary schools. The student response rates in these schools were 97 percent, 91 percent, and 50 percent in Grades 3, 4, and 5, respectively. The middle school student survey was administered to 1,707 students in two middle schools. The student response rates in these schools were 50 percent, 46 percent, and 75 percent in Grades 6, 7, and 8, respectively.

The student survey measured perceived social and emotional competence and the learning environment. The survey included previously validated items designed to assess social responsibility and social competence<sup>12</sup> as well as a sense of safety at school and peer social and emotional culture.<sup>13</sup> Student outcomes were calculated as the difference in student scores between the beginning and the end of the school year on each of these four scales: social responsibility, social competence, school safety, and peer culture. AIR developed additional items that asked students to rate teacher instructional practices during Lions Quest lessons.

### **Finding 1: Most teachers use the classroom management strategies recommended by Lions Quest.**

Elementary school students positively rated their teachers' instructional practices. Exhibit 1 shows the distribution of student ratings by each of the six classroom management techniques examined through the AIR survey. Most students (78 percent) reported that their teachers consistently communicated that they cared about what students had to say. A slightly lower percent of the students (73 percent) reported that their teachers consistently paid attention to what students were thinking and feeling during Lions Quest lessons. The least common teacher behavior was the explicit encouragement of students to share ideas or opinions—a practice reported by just over one-half (56 percent) of students.

### Exhibit 1. Teachers' Instructional Practices in Lions Quest Skills for Growing Lessons

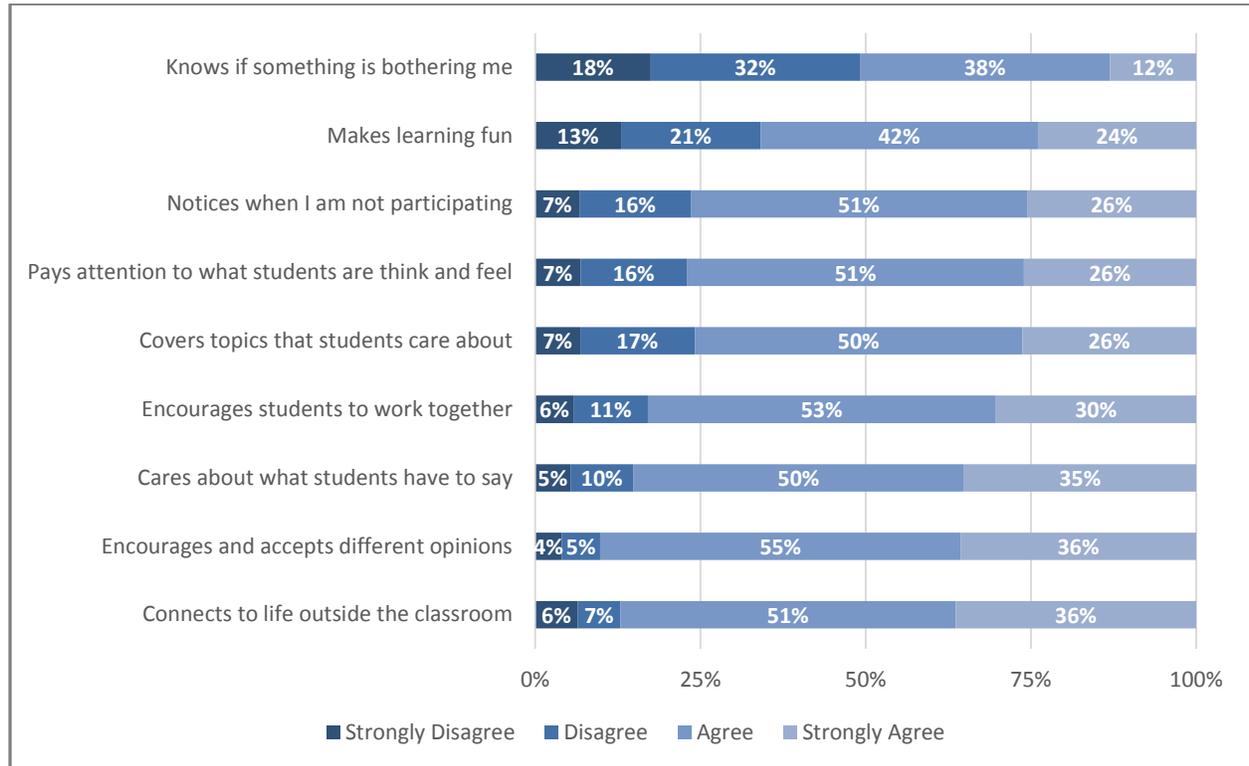


Note.  $n = 324$ .

Findings from the elementary school student survey were generally consistent with the middle school student survey. Exhibit 2 shows the distribution of student responses by each of the nine classroom management techniques examined by the AIR survey. The majority of students (91 percent) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “During Lions Quest lessons, my teacher encourages and accepts different opinions.” Most students (87 percent) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “During Lions Quest lessons, my teacher often connects what we are learning to life outside the classroom.” In addition, most students (85 percent) reported that their teachers cared about what students have to say. These findings show that teachers created positive classroom climates in which diverse opinions were accepted, and the importance and relevance of the topics were emphasized. Based on these data, both elementary and middle school teachers achieved a high level of implementation fidelity in terms of classroom management techniques.

The survey identified two areas for improvement. The least common teacher behaviors, according to student reports, related to unique emotional aspects of the lesson: identifying and addressing instances of student discomfort and disengagement. One-half of the students (50 percent) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “During Lions Quest lessons, my teacher seems to know if something is bothering me.” Two-thirds of the students (66 percent) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “During Lions Quest lessons, my teacher makes learning fun.”

## Exhibit 2. Teachers' Instructional Practices in Lions Quest Skills for Adolescence Lessons



Note.  $n = 910$ .

### Finding 2: Classroom management techniques significantly contribute to students' social and emotional learning.

The initial statistical analysis identified the teacher behaviors that are significantly associated with changes in student outcomes from the beginning to the end of the school year. This analysis assumed that each behavior might occur independently (that is, the other classroom management techniques may or may not be present). Exhibit 3 shows the correlation coefficients for the associations between teacher behaviors and growth in elementary school student outcomes.

Most of the teacher instructional practices assessed through the elementary school student survey were significantly correlated with improvement in student social and emotional outcomes from baseline to end of the school year. The only practice not associated with student outcomes was teacher encouragement of collaborative learning. It is possible that encouragement of collaborative work without modeling or enabling social and emotional learning is not a sufficient for supporting students' social and emotional development.

### Exhibit 3. Pearson’s Product Moment Correlations for Lions Quest Skills for Growing

During Lions Quest Lessons...	Peer Culture	School Safety	Social Competence	Social Responsibility
My teacher pays attention to what all students are thinking and feeling.	0.16***	-0.01	0.20***	0.21***
During Lions Quest lessons, my teacher really cares about what students have to say.	0.13**	0.12**	0.20***	0.20***
My teacher often connects what we are learning to life outside the classroom.	0.10*	15***	0.13**	0.14**
My teacher makes learning fun.	0.10*	0.15***	0.13**	0.14**
My teacher encourages me to share my ideas or opinions about what we are learning.	0.08	0.06	0.11*	0.04
My teacher encourages students to work together.	0.04	0.04	0.07	0.06

Notes. (1)  $n = 324$  for all analyses. (2) \* $p < .10$ ; \*\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

The same statistical analysis was conducted with middle school student survey data. Exhibit 4 shows the correlation coefficients for the associations between teacher behaviors and growth in middle school student outcomes.

### Exhibit 4. Pearson’s Product Moment Correlations for Lions Quest Skills for Adolescence

During Lions Quest Lessons...	Peer Culture	Safe School	Social Competence	Social Responsibility
My teacher seems to know if something is bothering me.	0.11***	0.09**	0.06	0.08**
My teacher makes sure that we cover topics that students care about.	0.10**	0.06	0.08**	0.12***
My teacher encourages and accepts different opinions.	0.07*	0.06	0.13***	0.13***
My teacher pays attention to what all students are thinking and feeling.	0.05	0.07*	0.07*	0.14***
My teacher really cares about what students have to say.	0.06	0.06	0.04	0.14***
My teacher makes learning fun.	0.05	0.02	0.01	0.12**
My teacher encourages students to work together.	0.05	0.01	0.07*	0.07*
My teacher often connects what we are learning to life outside the classroom.	0.05	-0.01	0.07**	0.13***
My teacher notices when I am not participating in class.	0.03	0.02	0.06	.08**

Notes. (1)  $n = 758$  for all analyses. (2) \* $p < .10$ ; \*\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

All of the teacher instructional practices assessed through the middle school student survey were significantly correlated with improvement in at least one student social and emotional outcome from baseline to end of the school year. In particular, all nine classroom management techniques assessed were significantly associated with improved social responsibility. Sense of school safety was the least connected student outcome. Given that sense of school safety was measured for both feeling safe in the classroom and feeling safe in public spaces around the school (e.g., hallways), schoolwide practices and the integration of Lions Quest techniques by all middle school teachers may be better predictors of this outcome.

### **Finding 3: Techniques that promote positive teacher-student relationships are most predictive of social and emotional learning.**

The second step of the analyses identified the teacher behaviors most likely to predict student social and emotional growth if all classroom management techniques were in place. A multivariate linear regression analysis of the elementary school student survey data showed that three teacher behaviors—paying attention to students’ feelings, showing interest in their opinions, and connecting the concepts learned to real-life examples—were the most important predictors of student outcomes.

The classroom management technique measured by the survey item, “My teacher pays attention to what all students are thinking and feeling,” significantly predicted increased social responsibility,  $b = 0.15$ ,  $t(308) = 2.42$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . It also was associated with increased positive social and emotional peer culture,  $b = 0.13$ ,  $t(308) = 1.91$ ,  $p = 0.06$  and social competence,  $b = 0.12$ ,  $t(308) = 1.82$ ,  $p = 0.07$ .

The classroom management technique measured by the survey item, “My teacher really cares about what students have to say,” significantly predicted increased social responsibility,  $b = .13$ ,  $t(308) = 2.01$ ,  $p < .05$ . It may also be associated with improved social competence,  $b = .11$ ,  $t(308) = 1.75$ ,  $p = .08$ .

The classroom management technique measured by the survey item, “My teacher often connects what we are learning to life outside the classroom,” significantly predicted increased sense of school safety,  $b = 0.13$ ,  $t(308) = 2.20$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . This practice may also be associated with increased social responsibility,  $b = 0.11$ ,  $t(308) = 1.81$ ,  $p = 0.07$ .

Similar results were obtained from analysis of the middle school student survey data. A multivariate linear regression analysis of the middle school student survey data showed that four teacher behaviors—noticing when something is bothering a student, covering topics that students care about, encouraging and accepting different opinions, and paying attention to students’ feelings and attitudes—were the most significant predictors of student outcomes.

The classroom management technique measured by the survey item, “My teacher seems to know if something is bothering me,” may be associated with increased positive social and emotional peer culture,  $b = 0.09$ ,  $t(656) = 1.80$ ,  $p = 0.07$ . The technique measured by the survey item, “My teacher makes sure that we cover topics that students care about,” also may be associated with increased positive social and emotional peer culture,  $b = 0.10$ ,  $t(656) = 1.84$ ,  $p = 0.07$ . The technique measured by the survey item, “My teacher encourages and accepts different opinions,” was significantly associated with increased social competence,  $b = 0.13$ ,  $t(656) = 2.27$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . Finally, the technique measured by the item, “My teacher pays attention to what all students are thinking and feeling,” was significantly associated with increased social responsibility,  $b = 0.12$ ,  $t(707) = 1.97$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . None of the remaining survey items significantly predicted changes in student outcomes.

## Conclusion

Positive teacher-student relationships enable students to feel safe and secure in their learning environments and provide scaffolding for important social skills.<sup>14</sup> By modeling positive behavior and creating safe spaces for students to practice new skills, teachers can inspire students to be kinder, more patient with others, and better communicators. Most of the Lions Quest program participants perceived their teachers to be caring and accepting of diverse ideas and opinions. Also, as required by the program, most students thought that their teachers connected the skills being taught to life outside the classroom.

The findings reported in this research brief distinguish between listening to students and proactively soliciting student input. Inviting students to express their opinions and gauging students' emotions are important means of ensuring student engagement and reinforcing the program's positive impact on all participants.

Group work was not associated with social and emotional learning in elementary school and had weak statistical correlations with the social and emotional learning of students in middle school. We do not interpret this finding as suggesting that group work is not an effective practice. This finding may point to the potential weakness of the survey item used. Research suggests that group work in the classroom can have a positive or negative influence on students' learning. Group work can promote student social, emotional, and academic growth when there is positive interdependence among group members in the form of mutual help and assistance, sharing resources and information, and acting in trustworthy and trusting ways. Group work does not support students' learning and could have harmful effects when there is negative (such as conflict, hiding resources and information from each other) or limited interaction among team members.<sup>15</sup> While Lions Quest lessons are structured to increase active student participation by including small-group tasks, teachers must thoughtfully plan each session to ensure that the quality of students' interactions within each group is cooperative. Teachers can monitor the behavior of students in groups and help students to improve their understanding of how they maintain effective working relationships with peers and what actions are helpful and unhelpful for successful group work.

The findings presented in this research brief highlight the value of classroom management training – a professional development opportunity sought by both novice and experienced teachers.<sup>16</sup> Classroom management strategies that promote positive interactions among peers can support the learning of all students, including shy and withdrawn students and students with chronic behavior problems.<sup>17</sup> Teachers need to create conditions that enable all students to ask questions and share information and ideas with others. Such conditions may include a range of strategies, from the physical arrangement of tables and chairs to rewarding participation through praise and tokens and asking students who more frequently volunteer to refrain from commenting until everyone has had a chance to participate.

In addition, for students who may feel discomfort with some social and emotional topics, teachers may encourage help-seeking behaviors and multiple channels of communications (e.g.,

communicating during or after class, face-to-face, or by e-mail) to allow students to share when they feel discomfort with social and emotional topics or activities.

The associations between teachers' practice and students' growth from baseline to the end of the school year were stronger among elementary students than middle school students. The middle school teachers who facilitated the Lions Quest lessons—unlike those at the elementary level—did not spend the majority of the school day with their students. Consequently, the careful integration of Lions Quest practices across the middle school curriculum may strengthen the program's impact on students.

This research brief describes unique attempt to measure implementation fidelity through systematic data collection of student reports on teacher instructional practice in the classroom. Students have a unique and valuable perspective on teachers' classroom performance. Unlike an outside observer who witnesses only a small sampling of a teacher's practice, students are in the classroom with the teacher every day. Numerous studies have found that student perceptions are a valid and reliable measure of educator effectiveness.<sup>18</sup>

The student classroom experience items developed for this survey can be used in future evaluations and assessments of implementation fidelity as discrete items or scale scores. Both elementary and middle school survey items exhibited high internal consistency indicating that these are reliable measures of students experience in the classroom (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.73$  and  $0.90$ , respectively). AIR recommends that, in future, these items be used in conjunction with classroom observations by trained observers or focus groups with students to more accurately and comprehensively measure implementation fidelity of the Lions Quest program.

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