

Promoting Social Emotional Learning and Wellbeing in Ugandan Schools (SEL-UG)

**LASER
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Mental Health and Social Emotional Learning Policy Brief



Mental health needs are high in Ugandan school communities, and Primary Teacher Training Colleges (PTCs) can play a key role in supporting teachers' and learners' social-emotional and mental health needs. 45% of Ugandan primary school learners and 25% of teachers are having social emotional or mental health challenges, but school mental health programs for children and teachers do not exist in the Ugandan education system. Primary Teacher Colleges (PTCs) play a key role in providing Professional Development Programs to teachers and addressing their needs. Thus, strengthening PTCs tutors' capacity to provide a social emotional learning (SEL) and mental health promotion curriculum to teachers can be an efficient way to promote teacher and learner SEL.

As part of the LASER PULSE- funded project on Catalyzing Change in Education through a Transformative Learning Collaborative: Scaling-Up of a Social Emotional Learning Curriculum in Uganda, a diverse team of the NYU School of Medicine, Makerere University, Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports (MOE), Uganda Ministry of Health (MOH), and Primary Teacher College (Nakaseke), has been working together to

- ParentCorps and Teacher-Wellness programs are evidence-based interventions for promoting teachers and children mental health with support evidence from Uganda. Training teachers on both programs not only **improves learners' SEL/mental health outcomes**, but also **improves teachers' teaching practice, classroom behavioral management, stress management, and teacher social emotional wellbeing**. Training teachers on both programs is a **cost-effective method** to address mental health gaps for teachers and learners in Uganda.
- MOE should integrate and promote training teachers on ParentCorps and Teacher-Wellness programs. These evidence-based and cost-effective interventions for promoting teacher and child mental health have the potential to address mental health gaps for teachers and learners in Uganda.
- MOE can apply an academic-mental health-policy-PTC partnership strategy to implement programs. The partnership approach increases buy-in, improves PTC capacity to address and support learners' and teachers' mental health needs, and promotes scalability and sustainability of the programs.

Key Takeaways



Version March 1, 2023

address these needs by implementing an adapted version of the evidence-based intervention (EBI) *ParentCorps* that has shown to be effective in Uganda and other countries.

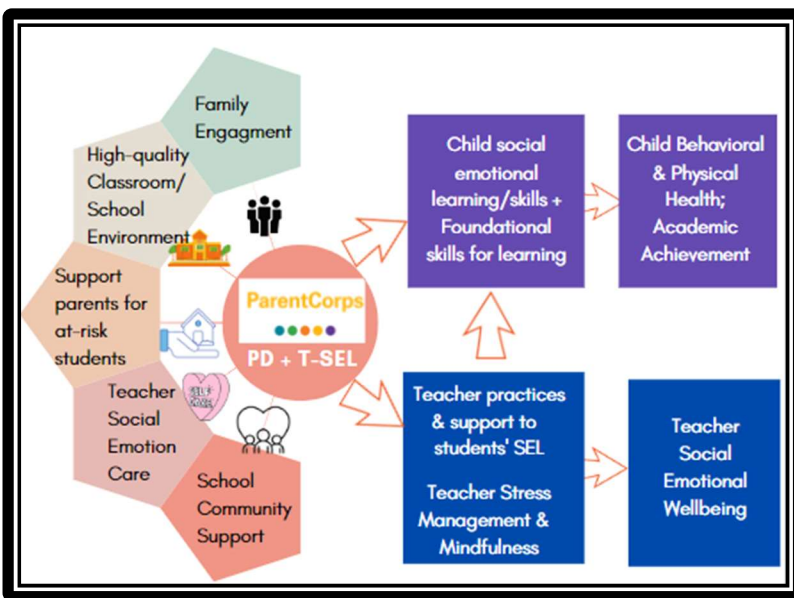
ParentCorps is a multi-component and school-based SEL/mental health intervention aimed at promoting safe, nurturing, and predictable environments at home and school to support children’s SEL/mental health and development. It has undergone a series of testing in Uganda over the past 10 years for promoting positive teacher and parenting practices and children’s SEL and development. Dr. Janet Nakigudde (Makarere University, Uganda) and Dr. Keng-Yen Huang (New York University School of Medicine, US) have collaborated with Ms. Elizabeth Kasirye (Ministry of Education) and Dr. Hafsa Sentongo (Ministry of Health) to carry out a series of studies to implement and evaluate impacts of ParentCorps on teachers, parents, and students. Previous studies conducted between 2013-2017 (with 16 schools) demonstrated expected impacts that ParentCorps improved teachers’ and parents’ practices in providing safe, nurturing, and predictable classroom and home environment for young children to grow, which promoted children’s SEL and wellbeing. Previous studies also demonstrated Ugandan mental health professionals and school personnel were capable to implement *ParentCorps-Professional development (PD)* to teachers and *ParentCorps-Family Program* to parents with high fidelity and engagement. However, the previous implementation did not consider teacher stress and social-emotional wellness, which creates a threat to teachers’ engagement in the ParentCorps-PD program. The previous implementation also relied on mental health professionals to provided *PD* intervention/training and without considering low number mental health professionals, which creates a challenge to provide *PD* at-scale.

To ensure ParentCorps can be accessible and broadly available to primary school teachers in multiple regions

in Uganda, the leadership team extended the partnership and invited PTCs to collaborate in 2019. This new collaboration allows us to further scale-up ParentCorps in the larger Ugandan education system. One important scale-up strategy considered was to develop a new train-the-trainer model to strengthen PTCs’ capacity to take on the SEL/mental health intervention implementation role (instead of relying on mental health professionals) to promote school communities’ SEL. PTCs were trained in evidence-based child social-emotional/mental health promotion strategies and intervention implementation skills.

To consider teachers’ high stress and mental health support needs, the collaboration team also developed a *Teacher-Wellness intervention* (a

brief mindfulness-based T-SEL intervention for promoting teachers' social-emotional wellbeing) in 2019. The Teacher-Wellness intervention was provided as an add-on workshop in the PD. The theory of change for the integrated PD + T-SEL is described in the figure above.




A team of Ugandan PTC tutors and mental health professionals have been trained and successfully implemented ParentCorps and Teacher-Wellness interventions in 12 schools between 2021-2022; more than 100 teachers have received training and support, and resulted in expected positive impacts; and more than 8,000 learners have benefited from their teachers receiving the interventions



Preliminary results from the evaluation studies have demonstrated expected impacts on teachers and learners


and supported the theory of change model described above (see Figure for summary). Teachers who received the intervention showed better teaching practices (such as better family engagement/home-school connection, less harsh discipline, less discouragement of negative emotion expression), better teacher social emotional wellbeing (such as better work support, lower school staff stress, better emotional regulation such as ability to focus on goal and redirect negative thinking to positive thinking when upset); and better learners' social emotional outcomes (such as less peer problems) than the teachers who did not receive the interventions.

Impacts on Teachers' Practices and Teachers' & Learners' SEL



TEACHING PRACTICES

- Better family engagement/home-school connection
- Less harsh discipline
- Less discourage negative emotion



TEACHER WELLBEING

- Better work support
- Lower school staff stress
- Better emotional regulation (ability to focus, redirect negative thinking to positive when upset)



LEARNERS' SOCIAL EMOTIONAL COMPETENCY

- Peer Relationship

The ParentCorps and Teacher-Wellness Intervention Scale-Up Implementation project offers a mental health policy solution to promote school communities' mental health and social emotional wellbeing

This project demonstrates the feasibility of our scale-up model and approach in strengthening the PTCs' capacity to take on the SEL/mental health promotion role. The programming approach serves as a policy implementation model to fulfill existing school mental health policy gaps.

"Strengthening PTCs capacity to take on the mental health/SEL promotion role and support teachers to address the mental health needs in schools is a feasible approach and can be an effective way to address school mental health programming gaps in Uganda."

"COVID-19 has many impacts on our learners. When we received the learners, their behaviors and performance were not so good. The number of learners has also increased. It's very hard to manage learners with many different ages and challenging behaviors. We appreciate the program came at the right time. It helps us a lot in helping our learners"
(Male Ugandan Teacher)

"The program has helped me as a teacher & my students! My students have come to me more often to ask questions and make suggestions. They also do more problem solving themselves. I have become more enjoy my job. Even at home, my children talk to me more often and help me do things"
(Female Ugandan Teacher)

WEBSITE

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This brief is made possible by the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) via the LASER PULSE Program. The contents herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.



Version: March 1, 2023