New Mexico has approximately 27,000 entering first graders in the 2016-17 school year, based on the U.S. Census estimate. The numbers of young children entering school in New Mexico are declining each year, as a percentage of the state’s population—making the state’s economic future hinge on fewer children being more productive, peaceful, healthier, and happier.

Unfortunately, the percentage of children developing lifetime mental, emotional, behavioral and related medical disorders is rising each year in North America. This trend has been characterized as an epidemic—which dwarfs terrifying epidemics like polio in the 1950s. Most Americans have no idea that our nation possesses practical science to prevent psychiatric disorders1 that is good or better than that of the Salk and Sabin vaccine, which together have nearly banished polio permanently.

Could New Mexico adopt a public-health model to protect all children from psychiatric disorders? Yes, the PAX Good Behavior Game (PAX GBG) is a “behavioral vaccine”2,3 (e.g., like hand washing, wearing a seatbelt) that builds a lifetime skillset of self-regulation, co-regulation (with teacher or peers), and group regulation for positive, valued purposes of personal and peer-group peace, productivity, health happiness. Leading psychiatrists and neuro-scientists have named PAX GBG as the “next big thing” to prevent psychiatric disorders.4

Changes In Observed Student Behaviors in 75 Days (Mid-March thru May)

Dysregulated, Disruptive, Disturbing, Inattentive Behaviors per Student per Hour

Students = 3,329

-62%
-57%
-65%

Bloomfield
Espanola
Santa Fe

Resilience
Post-PAX Good Behavior Game

A leading medical journal, Psychiatric Clinics, cites PAX Good Behavior Game as the next big thing for universal, public-health prevention of psychiatric disorders.4 This has important economic consequences for states and America’s economic future, since childhood psychiatric disorders are the largest single expense for Medicaid and children’s health insurance—growing a billion dollars a year.

Medicaid Expenditures for the Five Most Costly Conditions in Children

Fiscal Year Expenditures


Does PAX GBG actually avert or reduce the prevalence and/or severity of mental-health disorders over children’s lifetimes? Yes! That has been well proven in “platinum-standard” randomized, comparative-effectiveness longitudinal studies that followed children for decades.7,8,10,11,5,6,12-15 Some Hopkins studies compared PAX GBG to universal parenting supports as well as standard classroom strategies in the same school. PAX GBG was more effective than parenting supports. The question is why? PAX GBG creates nurturing interactions between the teacher and students, and the positive peer changes last across many years—predicting reduced risk of suicide.16 Further, children will spend more waking time in school that with their parents. The change in children’s behavior at school from PAX GBG also makes parents more reinforcing to and less negative or rejecting toward their children.17

These combined regulatory skills, in turn, reduce dysregulated or impulsive thoughts and behaviors that predict special education, psychiatric disorders, addictions, school failure, poor employment, injuries, violent crime, early sex and pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, and other social ills.5,8 PAX GBG also increases standard measures of academic progress in reading and math as well as high-school graduation and college entry.5,8

The recent pilot project that involved 3,300 students in three school districts of New Mexico (Bloomfield, Espanola, and Santa Fe conclusively proves that the immediate increase in self-regulation, co-regulation and group regulation in New Mexico classrooms by direct observation of dysregulated, problematic behaviors that interfere with learning, positive social relationships, and lifetime wellbeing.
Can New Mexico predict benefits if all first grade children were protected by PAX GBG? Yes. The work of the Washington State Institute for Public Policy has done the grunt work to enable such predictions, using much of the science cited in this brief. There are approximately 27,000 -28,000 first graders in New Mexico, and the benefits of protecting them with PAX GBG appear in the next figure.


If each first grade classroom is protected, then New Mexico will have a more productive, peaceful, healthy and happy future. The rate of return on this investment is approximately 80-to-1, and the polio vaccine had “only” a rate of return (ROI) of 3-to-1. The cost of protecting a child from these problems is about $150 (including indirects), compared to more $2,000 per child for vaccinations for childhood diseases.

For more information, visit www.GoodBehaviorGame.org, and read the references at www.pubmed.gov, the National Library of Medicine.