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# Game to help NSW students improve marks, behaviour

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Education editor

NSW public schools are introducing an in-class behaviour game that has been shown to decrease aggression, increase students' test scores and their chances of going to university, and make them less likely to smoke, drink or use drugs.

The PAX Good Behaviour Game is new to Australian schools but has been used in America for decades. Longitudinal studies in the US involving thousands of students have found it not only reduces disruptive behaviour, but can also have long-lasting benefits.

Students who participated in PAX did better in tests, had higher

reading levels, and were more likely to go to college, John Hopkins University research found. They were also less likely to use abuse substances, and were at less risk of mental, emotional or behavioural disorders.

The in-class games are brief, and based on the curriculum. They challenge students to focus, work together and regulate their emotions to win a prize, which is usually chosen by the students.

During a lesson about marine biology, a teacher might set a 30-second timer, and ask students to work in teams to write down every sea creature that comes to mind. "What's been taught there is focus," said Rhoni Stokes, principal project officer at the NSW Department of Education.



**A kindergarten class tries the new program.** Photo: Steven Siewert

al project officer at the NSW Department of Education.

"You want your group to win, so there's that peer support. Say there was a student who may not always be best at certain subjects, but is really good at something else. As the teacher, you would incorporate something to let that

child shine. Their peers recognise the value of having that person in their group."

Another game involves dividing children into small teams, and challenging them to commit as few negative behaviours as possible within a period of minutes.

"It's not just behaviour, it's taking it beyond so they can balance out their emotional highs and lows that then exhibit as a behaviour," Ms Stokes said. "It looks at increasing self-discipline, which leads to better academic outcomes and better peer relationships."

The program was introduced into public schools in June. So far, the department has trained more than 400 staff across 120 schools.

Canley Vale Public School has signed up and has begun training its pre-school, kindergarten and year 1 and 2 teachers.

The school had few of the disruptive behaviours that PAX was designed to address, "but [students] are very quiet and compliant, and we wanted to find something to engage them," said principal Margaret Creagh.

The harmonica was chosen to announce the game as a way to avoid triggering children who might associate loud noises or shouts with trauma. "They've shown the harmonica can be a soothing type noise," Ms Creagh said. "The kindergarten children love it, they respond straight away."