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HOOD COLLEGE



The Impact of Participation in an Elementary Behavior Support Program on Students' Prosocial Behaviors, School Functioning and Academic Performance

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Hood College
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree
Doctor of Organizational Leadership

by
Michele Baisey

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my lifelong friend, Justin, who coined the phrase “Look tough in the face and make it easy.” You were lost far too soon, and I strive to live every day by the example you set. I will forever be a better person because of the laughter and love you brought into my world.

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The Impact of Participation in an Elementary Behavior Support Program on Students' Prosocial
Behavior, School Functioning and Academic Performance

Michele Baisey, DOL

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ABSTRACT

Environmental factors are causing children to bring well developed patterns of antisocial behavior to school which negatively impact their ability to access their educational program. Existing strategies and resources are not adequately meeting the social-emotional and behavioral needs of students. Legislative changes to disciplinary procedures in early childhood programs recommend prohibiting suspension so administrators are seeking approaches to address antisocial behaviors which interfere with the learning of all students.

This action research study aimed to identify the impact of participation in an elementary behavior support program on kindergarten through second grade students' prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance. Quantitative data were gathered through the Behavior Assessment System for Children, Third Edition (BASC-3), number of disciplinary referrals and behavior support calls, and pre/post reading and mathematics assessments. Qualitative data were gathered through interviews and focus groups with school staff regarding observations of student behavior and associated data changes following participation in the elementary behavior support program.

The study's findings indicate a positive impact on students' prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance following program participation. Three out of five

students demonstrated improvements in all areas of prosocial behavior. All five students demonstrated more positive school functioning and academic growth in the area of reading. Three students maintained or improved their mathematics performance. These findings suggest the implementation of an elementary behavior support program positively impacts students' ability to effectively function in the school environment. Administrators considering alternatives to traditional disciplinary approaches should explore providing intensive and individualized behavioral interventions.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Current social-emotional and behavioral curricula, interventions and supports do not adequately meet the needs of kindergarten through second grade students (Cooper, Masi & Vick, 2009; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011; Hemmeter, Ostrosky & Fox, 2006; Zins & Elias, 2007; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004), and challenging behaviors for this student group has continued to rise (Metzler, Biglan, Rusby, & Sprague, 2001; Safran & Oswald, 2003; Sherrod, Getch, & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009; Walker, Horner, Sugai, Bullis, Sprague, Bricker & Kaufman, 1996). One out of seven U.S. children aged 2 to 8 years is reported as having a diagnosed mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder (Bitsko, Holbrook, Robinson, Kaminski, Ghandour, Smith & Peacock, 2016) and “aggressive, disruptive, and defiant behavior wastes teaching time, disrupts the learning of all students, threatens safety [and] overwhelms teachers” (Walker, Ramsey & Gresham, 2004, p. 1). With legislative changes to disciplinary procedures in early childhood recommending prohibiting suspension among students in this age group (US Department of Education, 2014; US Department of Health and Human Services & US Department of Education, 2014), administrators have sought approaches for how to respond to the antisocial behaviors which interfere with the learning of all students. The difficulties students in this age group exhibit in demonstrating the prosocial behaviors necessary to function within an educational environment have required school systems to examine disciplinary processes, as well as behavior support programs, which provide the social-emotional and behavioral interventions to meet student needs. This study aimed to identify the impact of Rising Stars, an elementary behavior support program, comprised of behavioral and academic interventions, on targeted kindergarten through second grade students’ prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance. This individualized specific intervention program was

created in response to the issues currently facing schools in an attempt to promote the social-emotional, behavioral and academic success of all students.

Background and Historical Perspective

In order to fully understand why current practices in early childhood are not adequately meeting the social-emotional and behavioral needs of students, it is necessary to consider several contributing factors impacting the need for schools to think differently in working to address these issues. The environment in which a child is raised, including their physical surroundings, and the relationships with adults who care for them, contributes to their social, emotional and behavioral development. Children living in and/or experiencing trauma are more likely to experience delays in all areas of development (Cooper, Masi & Vick, 2009; Hemmeter, Ostrosky & Fox, 2006; Statman-Weil, 2015; Walker, Ramsey & Gresham, 2004). These children come to school with well-established patterns of antisocial behavior (Walker, Ramsey & Gresham, 2004), impacting their readiness to successfully engage with classroom demands (Yates, Ostrosky, Cheatham, Fettig, Shaffer & Santos, 2008), which schools can no longer address using traditional disciplinary measures (US Department of Education, 2014). Faced with needing to respond to students who demonstrate challenging behavior which requires more than traditional classroom management strategies can address (Sugai & Horner, 2002), without the use of in or out of school suspension, schools have employed staffing structures which include specialists who are able to provide social-emotional and behavioral support.

Environmental causes of antisocial behavior. Social and personal factors such as poverty, divorce, drug and alcohol use, and physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse cause stress within family units and disrupt normal parenting practices which has contributed to children being more vulnerable to social, emotional and behavioral problems (Cooper, Masi & Vick,

2009; Hemmeter, Ostrosky & Fox, 2006; Tough, 2013; Tough, 2016; Walker, Ramsey & Gresham, 2004). “More than 25 percent of children encounter physically, sexually, or emotionally abusive experiences perceived as traumatizing” and these “experiences can have a lasting impact on their socioemotional, cognitive, behavioral and academic functioning” (Crosby, 2015, p. 223).

An associated aspect of childhood trauma caused by environmental factors receiving national attention is Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), which have been linked to risky health behaviors, chronic health conditions, low life potential and early death (Bethell, Newacheck, Hawes & Halfon, 2014; Burke, Hellman, Scott, Weems, & Carrion, 2011; Felitti, Anda, Nordenberg, Williamson, Spitz, Edwards & Marks, 1998; Purewal, Bucci, Gutiérrez Wang, Koita, Silvério Marques, & Burke Harris, 2016, p. 10; US Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, 2016). ACEs are traumatic experiences occurring before a child turns 18 years old which are known to be associated with poor health, asthma, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism, being overweight, learning difficulties and violent behavior including bullying, physical fighting, and delinquent behavior, in children (Bethell, Newacheck, Hawes & Halfon, 2014; Burke, Hellman, Scott, Weems, & Carrion, 2011; Purewal, Bucci, Gutiérrez Wang, Koita, Silvério Marques, & Burke Harris, 2016). The 10 categories of ACEs include “physical, emotional and sexual abuse; physical and emotional neglect; mental illness of caregiver; incarceration of a relative; violence toward the mother; substance abuse in the home; and parental divorce or separation” (Purewal, Bucci, Gutiérrez Wang, Koita, Silvério Marques, & Burke Harris, 2016, p. 10). National data indicated 46% of children have at least one ACE, with more than 20% having at least two ACEs, “such as the death or incarceration of a parent, witnessing or being a victim of violence, or living with

someone who has been suicidal or had a drug or alcohol problem” (US Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, 2016).

In chaotic, unpredictable and hostile home environments children learn coercive behavior as a means to get what they want (Walker, Ramsey & Gresham, 2004). Diminished social skills, increased internalizing and externalizing behavior and lower levels of school engagement are evident in youth who experience trauma (Crosby, 2015; National Child Traumatic Stress Network School Committee, 2008; Schultz, Barnes-Proby, Chandra, Jaycox, Maher, & Pecora, 2010). Additionally, children who have experienced trauma can experience delays “across developmental domains – physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and language and literacy – that are manifested by difficult and troubling behaviors in the classroom” (Statman-Weil, 2015, p. 74), which interfere with learning, school engagement and academic success (Lane, Wehby & Barton-Arwood, 2005; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014; National Child Traumatic Stress Network School Committee, 2008; Schultz, Barnes-Proby, Chandra, Jaycox, Maher, & Pecora, 2010; Tough, 2013; Tough, 2016). As a result of being easily overstimulated, children have difficulty with self-regulation, displaying anger and physically aggressive behavior as their most readily expressed emotion (Statman-Weil, 2015; Walkley & Cox, 2013; Wright & Ryan, 2014). These children then come to school with “a limited repertoire of cooperative behavior skills, a predilection to use coercive tactics to control and manipulate others, and a well-developed capacity for emotional outbursts and confrontation” (Walker, Ramsey & Gresham, 2004, p. 4). The program, in this study, included strategies to increase young children’s repertoire of social and coping behaviors.

Kindergarten readiness. Assessing kindergarten readiness informs early childhood educators of the knowledge, skills and behaviors students possess, and which have been found

necessary to be successful in school and throughout their lives (Denham, 2006; Yates, Ostrosky, Cheatham, Fettig, Shaffer & Santos, 2008; Zins & Elias, 2007). “The National Academy of Sciences reported that 60% of children enter school with the cognitive skills needed to be successful, but only 40% have the social-emotional skills needed to succeed in kindergarten” (Yates, Ostrosky, Cheatham, Fettig, Shaffer & Santos, 2008, p. 1). Forty states use developmentally appropriate tools to measure school readiness of incoming kindergarten students in four domains of learning: language and literacy, mathematics, social foundations and physical well-being and motor development. Children who enter kindergarten with gaps in their social-emotional, cognitive, and physical development have difficulty demonstrating success in kindergarten, and continue to struggle academically throughout their school career (Maryland State Department of Education, 2018; Yates, Ostrosky, Cheatham, Fettig, Shaffer & Santos, 2008).

While school readiness has been measured for decades, a new Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) measure was implemented in a Mid-Atlantic School System (MASS). Since 2014, data at the state and local school system (LSS) levels have revealed gaps in the numbers of students entering kindergarten demonstrating readiness in the area of social foundations (see Table 1). The social foundations domain includes such skills as “expressing, understanding, and responding to feelings (emotions) of self and others; following routines and multi-step directions; sharing materials and equipment with other children; or demonstrating the ability to delay gratification for short periods of time” (Maryland State Department of Education, 2018, p. 9).

Table 1

Percentage of Students Demonstrating Readiness in Social Foundations on KRA

Year	MASS	LSS
2014	50%	57%
2015	55%	60%
2016	53%	65%
2017	54%	63%

According to the Readiness Matters Equity Matters Report (2018) “Children who do well in a typical 21st century kindergarten class are those who demonstrate strong readiness in the social foundations (social-emotional, approaches to learning, and executive functioning) domain – specifically, exhibiting self-regulation and self-control, taking turns, paying attention, and listening to and following instructions” (p. 8). Recognizing anywhere between 37-43% of incoming kindergarten students within the LSS are not yet demonstrating readiness in the skills, knowledge and behaviors within the social foundations domain, and understanding “focusing on social and emotional skills may actually further improve reading, writing, and mathematics performance” (Maryland State Department of Education, 2018) it is necessary to provide targeted opportunities, experiences and levels of support which promote positive prosocial behaviors and school functioning. This study examined a program that promoted these behaviors in order to improve school success.

Suspension and school discipline. Typical tasks within an early childhood classroom setting such as sharing, negotiating disagreements and participating in cooperative activities are significantly more difficult for children with established patterns of antisocial behavior (Lane, Wehby & Barton-Arwood, 2005; Statman-Weil, 2015; Walker, Ramsey & Gresham, 2004). Additionally, these children “are more than twice as likely as regular children to initiate unprovoked verbal or physical aggression towards peers, to reciprocate peer aggression toward

them, and to continue aggressive behavior once it has been initiated” (Walker, Ramsey & Gresham, 2004, p. 4). Given the severity of these types of challenging behaviors, schools have been faced with considering disciplinary action as a response. One traditional action schools have employed has been either in or out of school suspension.

A joint policy statement from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education (2014) suggested suspension practices hinder social-emotional and behavioral development and recommended expulsion and suspension practices “should be prevented, severely limited, and eventually eliminated” (p. 2). These practices are identified as negative and stressful experiences which young children and their families may encounter in early childhood programs. Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Education’s guiding principles for improving school climate and discipline recommended creating positive climates that focus on prevention, developing clear, appropriate and consistent expectations and consequences to address disruptive student behaviors and ensuring fairness, equity, and continuous improvement (US Department of Education, 2014).

The Committee for Children released a policy brief, Recent Trends in State Legislative Exclusionary Discipline Reform (2018), outlining the trends in state legislative disciplinary reform noting “between January 2017 and April 2018, 20 legislatures (19 states and Washington, DC) have proposed or enacted laws requiring school systems to limit the use of punitive disciplinary measures, such as suspension and expulsion, in favor of positive disciplinary alternatives” (p. 1). The rationale for such reform comes from the negative effects associated with exclusionary disciplinary measures including disrupting the learning process, student disengagement and negative school attitudes, increasing likelihood of repeating grades or dropping out of school, failing to support students in understanding and adjusting their

misbehavior, exacerbating behavioral issues and contributing to a negative school climate.

Recommended alternatives to suspension and expulsion include implementing positive behavior supports, social emotional learning curriculum, and restorative justice practices.

As a result of these recommendations at the national level, new legislation in one Mid-Atlantic State School system (MASS) prohibited the suspension of students in pre-k through second grade, which required district leaders to rethink alternatives, as well as proactive measures to promote social-emotional competency. One LSS created an advisory committee to draft operating procedures and guidelines (See Appendix A) to determine if/when suspension of students in pre-k through second grade is warranted. Additionally, a form (See Appendix B) for consideration of suspension in pre-k through second grade has been developed, to be completed by a school psychologist or mental health professional in conjunction with school administrators. Identifying the appropriate alternatives to suspension necessitates school system leaders to think differently about traditional disciplinary practices. The purpose of the program in this study was to provide such an alternative and to examine its efficacy.

Behavior support. When problem behavior is chronic and intense, the traditional behavior and classroom management strategies schools have been learning and using are insufficient in promoting sustained improvements in student behavior (Sugai & Horner, 2002). As a result, school systems have explored increased staffing and expansions of educational programs in response to the social, emotional and behavioral needs of students. For example, in 2016, the LSS created a central office behavioral supports and intervention team, comprised of a coordinator and four teacher specialists, which was formed to support schools in responding to students' social, emotional and behavioral needs.

A response to student needs through increased staffing is not only seen at the district level, but has also occurred at individual schools, most notable those identified as Title I. According to the U.S. Department of Education Title I, Part A program (2018), a Title I school is one which receives federal funding, allocated through the LSS, based on the percentage of students from low-income families they serve. The funding provided is used to support students most at risk for failing, in an effort to improve their achievement on challenging academic standards. Title I funding during the 2017-2018 school year at the school which serves as the research site was utilized for a school support teacher, behavioral specialist and three program assistants. These four additional personnel supplemented the county funded school counselor position. For example, the high number of office referrals, parent contacts and behavior support calls (see Table 2 and Table 3) in kindergarten through second grade indicated there was an inability to effectively respond to the level of need present in the building.

Table 2

Behavior Support Calls by Month

Month	Total Behavior Support Calls
September 2017	80
October 2017	174
November 2017	92
December 2017	25
January 2018	37
February 2018	59
March 2018	73
Total	540

Table 3

Behavior Support Calls by Grade

Grade	Total Behavior Support Calls
Kindergarten	264
First Grade	181
Second Grade	95
Total	540

Rationale for Action Research

A current topic of conversation in the American educational climate surrounded the importance of social-emotional learning. While cognitive and academic skills will continue to have an important place in measuring students' abilities, there is growing research and support for an emphasis to be placed on supporting the development of social-emotional skills, particularly in the early elementary grades (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013; DePaoli, Atwell, & Bridgeland, 2017; CASEL, 2003; CASEL, 2012; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011; Grant, Hamilton, Wrabel, Gomez, Whitaker, Tamargo, Unlu, ChavezHerrerias, Baker, Barrett, Harris & Ramos, 2017, Payton, Weissberg, Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger, & Pachan, 2008; Sklad, Diekstra, Ritter, Ben & Gravesteyn, 2012; Zins & Elias, 2007; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004). A sign of the increased attention being paid to social-emotional learning comes from federal legislation, HR 4223: The Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act of 2009, which "authorizes the Secretary of Education to award a 5-year grant to establish a National Technical Assistance and Training Center for Social and Emotional Learning that provides technical assistance and training to states, local education agencies, and community based organizations to identify, promote, and support evidence-based [social-emotional learning] standards and programming in elementary and secondary schools" (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011, p. 420).

Additional evidence to support the importance of social-emotional learning comes from the attention paid to the topic in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), first introduced in December 2015. Grant, Hamilton, Wrabel, Gomez, Whitaker, Tamargo, Unlu, Chavez-Herrerias, Baker, Barrett, Harris and Ramos (2017) explain “the policy language includes calls for improving school conditions for student learning, enhancing peer interactions, providing a well-rounded education, and incorporating programs and activities that promote volunteerism, community involvement, or instructional practices for developing relationship-building skills” (p. 9). Additionally, Title I, II and IV federal funding authorized by ESSA may be used to support social-emotional learning interventions and initiatives, as well as preparing “educators to deliver high-quality SEL [social-emotional learning] instruction and assess the learning of students in domains related to SEL” (Grant, et al., p. 14).

Raver and Knitzer (2002) note “across a range of studies, the emotional, social, and behavioral competence of young children – such as higher levels of self-control and lower levels of acting out – predict their academic performance in first grade, over and above their cognitive skills and family backgrounds” (p. 3). Additionally, teaching children to address their social-emotional needs effectively has been shown to improve their academic achievement (Buckley, 2015; Sklad, Diekstra, Ritter, Ben, & Gravesteyn, 2012). Noncognitive abilities such as study skills, work habits, time management, help-seeking behavior, social/academic problem-solving skills, perseverance, self-control and conscientiousness have been identified as critical components for college success and in improving outcomes for low-income children (Tough, 2013; Tough 2016).

Approximately 740 students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade were enrolled in the school serving as the research site during the 2018-2019 school year. Of the total school

population, 85% of students were eligible for free and reduced meals and 80% were English Learners (EL). This Title I school utilized Second Step (<http://www.secondstep.org/>) as a universal social-emotional learning curriculum in kindergarten through fifth grade. A suggested sequence of lessons was provided for each grade level and one lesson was to be taught weekly throughout the year. In addition to the general social-emotional curriculum taught to all students, the Zones of Regulation program (Kuypers & Winner, 2011) was implemented with small groups of students who demonstrated the need for more intensive behavioral intervention. The Zones of Regulation curriculum focuses on teaching student's self-regulation skills in order to demonstrate prosocial behaviors and interact appropriately with others.

Despite the implementation of Second Step as a universal social-emotional curriculum for all students since 2015, and the addition of Zones of Regulation as a targeted intervention for students demonstrating the need for more intensive support during the 2017-2018 school year, the significant student needs required 14 therapists from three mental health agencies to service 52 students. Additionally, 540 total behavior support calls in kindergarten through second grade were made for students in crisis over a seven-month period of time between September 2017 and March 2018. Table 2 outlines the number of behavior support calls monthly and Table 3 indicates the total number of behavior support calls at each grade level. Behavior support calls were made when a student demonstrated a behavior, such as physical aggression which creates an unsafe environment.

Statement of the Problem

“More and more children from troubled, chaotic homes are bringing well-developed patterns of antisocial behavior to school” (Walker, Ramsey & Gresham, 2004, p.1) and anywhere from one-half to two-thirds of incoming kindergarten students do not demonstrate the skills,

knowledge and behavior in the area of social foundations to effectively function in school (Maryland State Department of Education, 2018; Yates, Ostrosky, Cheatham, Fetting, Shaffer & Santos, 2008). Hemmeter, Ostrosky and Fox (2006) note “10-15% of typically developing preschoolers will have chronic mild to moderate levels of behavior problems” and “of the children who engage in problem behavior at a young age it has been estimated that fewer than 10% receive appropriate services for these difficulties” (p. 584). These social and emotional problems negatively impact a student’s school functioning, overall development of social-emotional competency and school-readiness (Buckely, 2015; Cooper, Masi & Vick, 2009; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011; Lane, Wehby & Barton-Arwood, 2005; Tough, 2013). Existing approaches, strategies and resources available to schools are not meeting the social-emotional and behavioral needs of students who have been identified. Additionally, students exhibiting deficits in the area of social-emotional competency require interventions which may not currently be in place, available or implemented with fidelity in all schools (Cooper, Masi & Vick, 2009; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011; Hemmeter, Ostrosky & Fox, 2006; Sklad, Diekstra, Ritter, Ben & Gravesteijn, 2012; Zins & Elias, 2007; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004).

Recognizing a need to proactively teach the prosocial skills kindergarten through second grade students are lacking, develop effective alternatives to suspension and expand the continuum of services currently available to meet students’ social-emotional and behavioral needs, a newly developed behavior support program was established in one LSS during the 2017-2018 school year. Rising Stars, an elementary behavior support program, comprised of academic and behavioral interventions, allowed students who exhibited behavioral challenges to

remain in their comprehensive school setting with access to small group instruction tailored to their individual social-emotional needs.

Conceptual Framework

The environmental influences contributing to children being more vulnerable to developing social, emotional and/or behavioral problems (Cooper, Masi & Vick, 2009; Hemmeter, Ostrosky & Fox, 2006; Statman-Weil, 2015; Walker, Ramsey & Gresham, 2004) coupled with the ineffectiveness of current school-based interventions to meet student needs (Cooper, Masi & Vick, 2009; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011; Hemmeter, Ostrosky & Fox, 2006; Zins & Elias, 2007; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg & Walberg, 2004) and legislative changes to traditional disciplinary practices (US Department of Education, 2014; US Department of Health and Human Services & US Department of Education, 2014) influenced the creation of the Rising Stars program. Theoretical perspectives specific to promoting prosocial behaviors in children, as well as recommendations for providing intensive individualized interventions through a trauma-informed approach, were considered when designing the program. Program participation was aimed at impacting students' prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance. All of these factors informed the conceptualization of the Rising Stars program (see Figure 1).

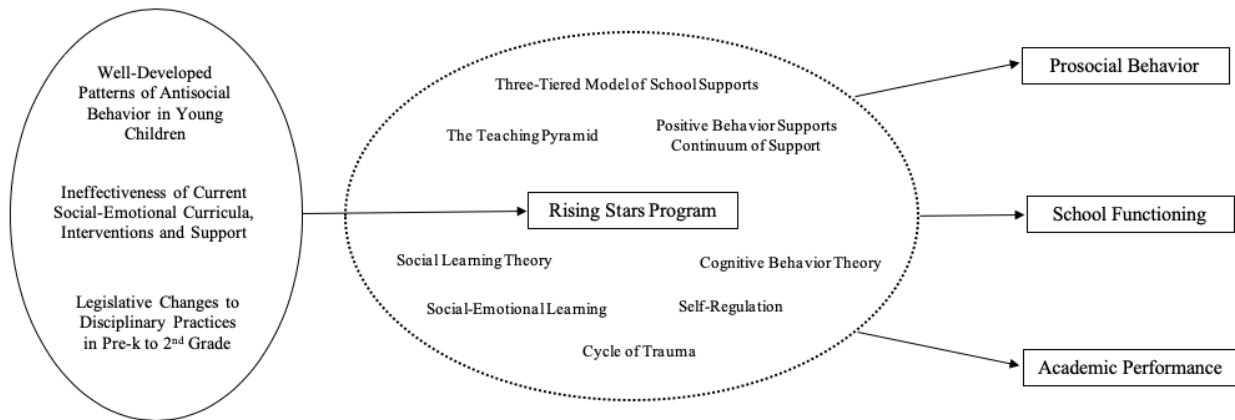


Figure 1. Rising Stars Conceptual Framework.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to identify the impact of participation in the Rising Stars program, an elementary behavior support program comprised of academic and behavioral interventions, on targeted kindergarten through second grade students' prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance. The outcome of the research has potential to impact the larger educational organization, specifically administrators of Title I schools, in determining if the investment in the program and staffing positions to facilitate it are an effective use of fiscal resources.

Research Questions

1. What is the impact of participation in the Rising Stars program, an elementary behavior support program comprised of academic and behavioral interventions, on targeted kindergarten through second grade students' prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance?

- 1.1 What is the impact on students' prosocial behavior after participation in the Rising Stars program?

1.2 What is the impact on students' school functioning after participation in the Rising Stars program?

1.3 What is the impact on students' academic performance after participation in the Rising Stars program?

Overview of Methodology

In order to answer the research questions posed, I conducted an action research study employing both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Quantitative data measured the prosocial behaviors, school functioning and academic performance of students before and after participation in the Rising Stars program was one aspect to consider when identifying if an impact exists. Prosocial behaviors were measured using the Behavior Assessment System for Children, Third Edition (BASC-3) Teacher Rating Scales for Children (TRS-C). Disciplinary referrals and behavior support calls were used to measure school functioning. Academic performance was measured by performance on grade level assessments in reading, writing and math. An additional quantitative measure was a survey provided to Rising Stars program staff, as well as classroom teachers and administrators, aimed at evaluating the degree to which the program achieved its goals. The goal in collecting these data was to determine if a relationship existed between participation in the Rising Stars program and these areas of development.

Qualitative data aided in determining impact as staff facilitating the Rising Stars program, general education classroom teachers of students identified to participate, and school administrators shared observations of students' social-emotional, behavioral and academic performance. Interviews with Rising Stars program staff, general education classroom teachers and the principal of the school were conducted to further explore the impact of participation in the program on students' prosocial behaviors, school functioning and academic performance. An

alignment between the quantitative survey and interview questions posed allowed for identification of themes within both data sets.

Overview of Theoretical Perspectives

Drawing on Bandura's Social Learning Theory, the Rising Stars program incorporated both direct social-emotional and behavioral experiences and modeling of appropriate behavior. Through positive reinforcement and opportunities to develop the acquisition of prosocial behaviors, the Rising Stars program offered individualized intensive support to students. Additionally, recognizing the influence of thoughts and emotions on behavior, aspects of cognitive behavior theory focused on improving overall functioning of cognition and actions guided the social skills lessons which are part of the Rising Stars program. Finally, understanding a multi-tiered intervention approach which promotes both academic and behavioral success, the Rising Stars program provided the most individualized support to students demonstrating the most intensive needs.

Social learning theory. Bandura (1971) identified how patterns of behavior are acquired through either direct experience or modeling in his Social Learning Theory (SLT). In the realm of direct experience, rewards and punishments follow any given action. Responses are viewed to be strengthened as a result of the consequence which follows. Actions "that cause unrewarding or punishing effects tend to be discarded, whereas those that produce rewarding outcomes are retained and strengthened" (p. 20).

Bandura (1971) further cited the importance of modeling in the acquisition of behavior as "most of the behaviors that people display are learned, either deliberately or inadvertently, through the influence of example" (p. 5). Competent models which serve to demonstrate how actions should be performed promote development of complex behaviors, such as the acquisition

of speech. The process of acquiring new behavioral skills can be significantly shortened by providing appropriate models and “under most circumstances, a good example is therefore a much better teacher than the consequences of unguided actions” (p. 5).

Recognizing that explaining the response patterns of behavior is only one aspect of a comprehensive theory, Bandura (1971) also stipulated how expression is regulated and maintained. The regulatory processes of stimulus, cognitive, and reinforcement control are seen as contributing to human functioning in SLT. Stimulus control refers to the anticipation of probable consequences of actions and one’s regulation of his or her behavior as a result. Cognitive factors, such as imagery, representations of action and thought processes, are identified as partly contributing to “what one observes, feels, and does at any given moment” (p. 35). Reinforcement control acknowledges that behavior is extensively controlled by consequences and thus regulated as a result.

The reciprocal relationship between behavior and its controlling conditions is a critical component in the psychological functioning described within SLT (Bandura, 1971; Hersen & Gross, 2008) where “a client is considered both the agent as well as the target of environmental influence” (Herson & Gross, 2008, p. 21). In this view, behavior is seen as contributing to the creation of the environment, and the resultant environment then also influences the behavior (Bandura, 1971).

Symbolic, direct and self-monitoring are intervention procedures based on Bandura’s social learning theory which have been used to treat children’s fears, socially maladaptive behaviors, distractibility, severe deficiencies and academic behaviors. As a result of the emphasis placed on cognition in predicting behavior, Bandura’s theoretical model is now referred to as Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (Herson & Gross, 2008). The Rising Stars program incorporated

aspects of SCT, or SLT, into daily social skills lessons where explicit modeling and direct experiences focused on students acquiring appropriate behaviors to effectively function within the school environment.

Cognitive behavioral theory. Herson and Gross (2008) explain Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT) which emphasizes cognitive processes and personal events that serve as mediators of behavioral change. Based on the notion that thoughts and emotions influence patterns of behavior, as well as interactions with others, the goal of CBT is to make maladaptive thoughts and actions more functional (Jaycox, Kataoka, Stein, Langley, & Wong, 2012). Improving social skills and decreasing avoidance of difficult situations are a focus of the behavioral portion of therapy, while the cognitive techniques focus on stopping automatic negative thoughts and challenging negative patterns of thinking (Jaycox, Kataoka, Stein, Langley, & Wong, 2012).

CBT is based on a combination of other theories including rational-emotive therapy (Ellis, 1962), cognitive therapy (Beck, 1963) and self-instructional training (Meichenbaum, 1977). Centering around the notion that problems are a result of one's "interpretations and attributions of his or her behavior, thoughts, images, self-statements, and related processes" (Herson & Gross, 2008, p. 20), treatment strategies such as "problem solving, stress inoculation, self-instructional training, coping skills training, language behavior therapy, thought stopping, and attribution therapy" (Herson & Gross, 2008, p. 20) may be used.

Initially developed for ethnic minority and immigrant youth exposed to trauma (Ngo, Langley, Kataoka, Nadeem, Escudero, & Stein, 2008), Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS) and Supporting Students Exposed to Trauma (SSET) have been implemented in general education systems (Schultz, Barnes-Proby, Chandra, Jaycox, Maher, & Pecora, 2010). Students experiencing mental health problems and poor academic performance

often also shared an exposure to violence, which informed the development of CBITS (Jaycox, Kataoka, Stein, Langley, & Wong, 2012; Ngo, Langley, Kataoka, Nadeem, Escudero, & Stein, 2008; Schultz, Barnes-Proby, Chandra, Jaycox, Maher, & Pecora, 2010). CBITS “was created to decrease the negative effects of trauma exposure in an ethnically diverse and linguistically diverse group of primarily low-income children while being delivered in the real-world setting of schools” (Ngo, Langley, Kataoka, Nadeem, Escudero, & Stein, 2008). Six techniques are incorporated into the CBITS intervention including education, relaxation training, cognitive therapy, real life exposure, stress or trauma exposure, and social problem solving (Jaycox, Kataoka, Stein, Langley, & Wong, 2012). A key aspect of the CBITS program centers on building relationships and recognizing the unique background of each individual with the group delivered intervention (Ngo, Langley, Kataoka, Nadeem, Escudero, & Stein, 2008).

Schultz, et al. (2010) note CBITS is an evidenced-based intervention program aimed at reducing symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression and general anxiety associated with exposure to violence. The theory suggests maladaptive assumptions about the world, others and one’s self emerge as a result of traumatic events. CBITS emphasizes teaching skills to overcome underlying issues of traumatic events by processing instead of avoiding it, learning how to reduce anxiety and solve problems, building peer support, establishing confidence in handling future stress and correcting maladaptive assumptions.

Schultz, et. al (2010) further explain how SSET was developed to support school staff, including teachers and school counselors, in implementing CBITS. Students who have experienced trauma and/or show signs of PTSD would benefit from SSET as they are taught about the interconnectedness of thoughts, feelings and actions. The goal is to support students in reframing negative thoughts as a way to promote positive behavior. Although both CBITS and

SSET have been used primarily with middle schools students, it is noted that cognitive behavioral therapy is appropriate for use with young children, ages 5-7 years old, who demonstrate the cognitive processes necessary to participate effectively in therapy, although some materials may need to be altered to meet their development needs (Hersen & Gross, 2008). The Rising Stars program incorporated aspects of CBT during daily social skills lessons utilizing guided play opportunities and explicit modeling of strategies which promoted students being able to reduce and effectively respond to stress, solve problems and make corrections to antisocial behavior.

Three-tiered model of school supports. Response to Intervention (RtI) is a model of three-tiered supports designed to identify students at risk and provide preventative intervention aligned to their individual needs, which has traditionally been considered within the context of academic supports (Hawken, Vincent, & Schumann, 2008). Positive Behavior Support (PBS) is a recommended method for preventing and intervening with problem behavior following a similar three-tiered approach (Sugai & Horner, 2002). A “seamless blending of academic and behavioral supports into a comprehensive service delivery model” is recommended (Hawken, Vincent, & Schumann, 2008, p. 216). The basis of both models (see Figure 2) is that “Tier I academic and behavioral interventions address the needs of approximately 80% of a school’s student population; approximately 15% of students are at a risk of school failure and need additional Tier 2 academic and behavioral support, and approximately 5% of students need intensive individualized Tier 3 interventions” (Hawken, Vincent, & Schumann, 2008, p. 214).

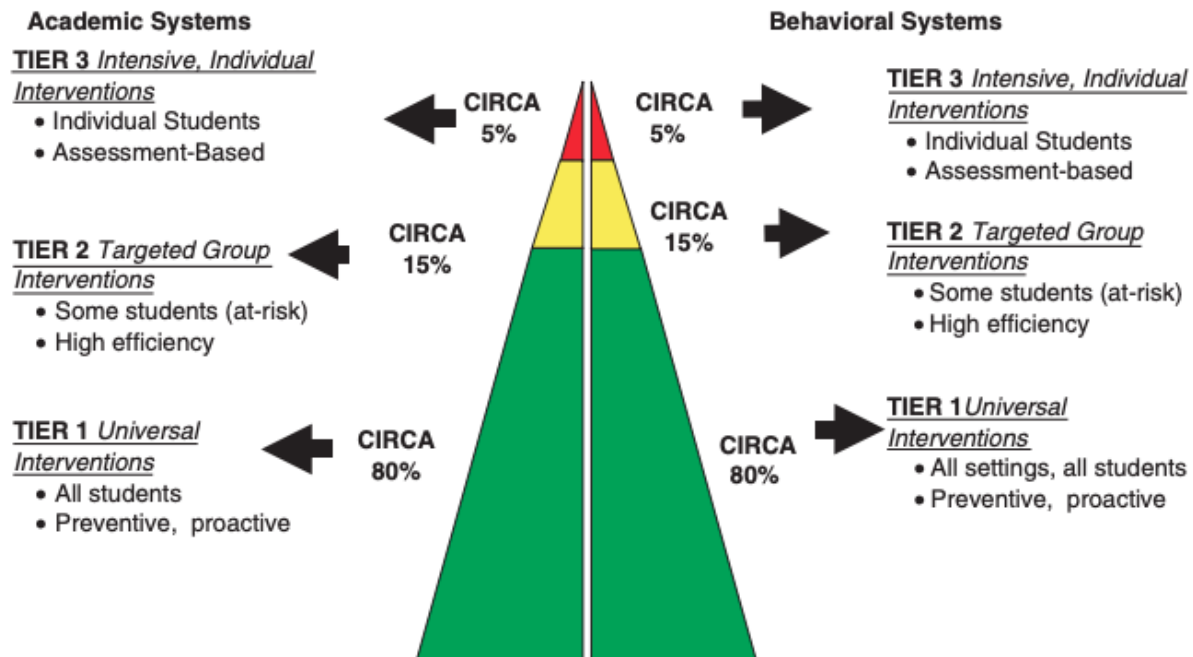


Figure 2. Three-tiered Model of School Supports. (Hawken, Vincent & Schumann, 2008).

In order to meet the behavioral needs of students within a school setting, the three-tiered model of school supports establishes schoolwide behavioral expectations, reinforcement strategies for appropriate behavior and consistently applied consequences for inappropriate behavior at the first level of Tier I universal interventions. Behavioral intervention, with additional supports provided to groups of students, comprises the second level of Tier 2 targeted group interventions. The third level of Tier 3 intensive, individualized interventions are provided to students engaging in the most severe problem behaviors and who do not respond to those supports put in place through the first two tiers of the model. These interventions may include behavior support plans and functional behavior assessments designed to meet the behavioral needs of individual students (Hawken, Vincent, & Schumann, 2008; Sherrod, Getch, & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009; Sugai & Horner, 2002; Walker, Horner, Sugai, Bullis, Sprague, Bricker & Kaufman, 1996).

Following the three-tiered model for school support, the teaching pyramid (see Figure 3) suggests explicit ways to promote social-emotional development of young children, specifically those in early childhood education settings (Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter, Joseph & Strain, 2003).

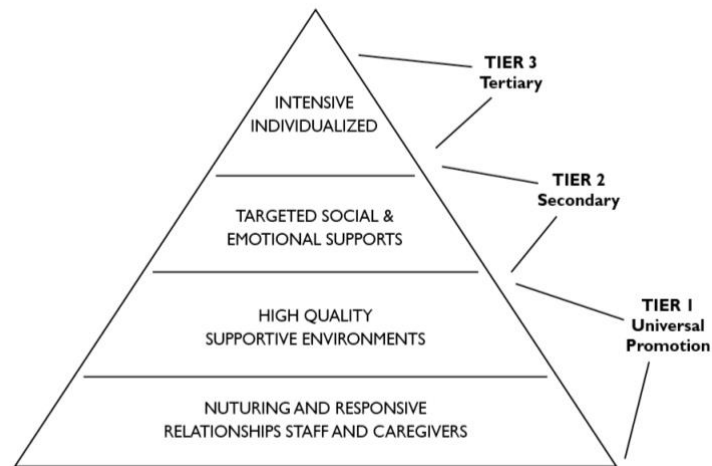


Figure 3. Teaching Pyramid Model. (Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter, Joseph & Strain, 2003).

There are four components of the teaching pyramid: building positive relationships with children, families, and colleagues; designing supportive and engaging environments; teaching social and emotional skills; and developing individualized interventions for children with the most challenging behavior (Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter, Joseph & Strain, 2003; Hemmeter, Ostrosky, & Fox, 2006). Hemmeter, Ostrosky, and Fox (2006) suggest “the need for a multitiered intervention approach that includes universal strategies for supporting the social and emotional development of all children, secondary strategies for supporting children who are at risk, and targeted strategies for children with the most intensive needs” (p. 585). The first two components of the pyramid are practiced and promoted in all early childhood settings and involve supporting all students with the development of social-emotional skills. The second component is targeted to at-risk students who require a systematic approach to teaching social skills. The top level of the pyramid, focused on the students for whom more specialized interventions are necessary, was the focus area of this study.

Drawing on the theories of positive behavior support, the three-tiered model for RtI, and the teaching pyramid, the Rising Stars program has been designed to meet the unique and individualized needs of students for which universal social-emotional and behavioral support has proven ineffective. The behavioral interventions implemented within the program are based on aspects of Social Learning Theory (SLT) and Cognitive Behavior Theory (CBT), which promote development of prosocial behaviors through modeling, direct experience, positive reinforcement and cognitive training. Daily social skills and guided play lessons, along with weekly Zones of Regulation and Second Step lessons, are incorporated into the Rising Stars program schedule to meet students identified social-emotional and behavioral needs.

Significance of the Study

A gap in the research existed as the focus had been primarily on universal social-emotional curricula for general populations of students, such as Second Step. Rising Stars, the behavior support program studied, comprised of academic and behavioral interventions, was geared to the unique and individualized needs of students who were identified to require more comprehensive support than what was available to at-risk students in the general classroom population. This study contributed to the research field by exploring the impact of a targeted and intensive social-emotional and behavioral intervention model.

There are several benefits which come from research on this type of elementary behavior support program. First and foremost, students who demonstrated a need for more intensive and individualized support may have their needs met in ways which schools were unable to do so presently. Secondly, general education teachers received guidance and support when faced with behavioral challenges which were not able to be addressed through typical classroom management strategies. Administrators also benefited from this research by being able to explore

alternatives to traditional approaches when responding to challenging behavior. Finally, there was a potential benefit to the families of students identified to participate in the program as their children will receive social-emotional and behavioral support to develop the skills necessary to function successfully in school and in life.

In addition to the benefit for students, staff and families, this research had the potential to impact the larger landscape of education. Considering more effective social-emotional supports for students in kindergarten through second grade influenced best practices in early childhood settings. Expanding the continuum of services currently available in general education settings to include targeted, intensive and individualized social-emotional and behavioral supports created opportunities for schools, districts and states to promote school success for all children.

Operational Definitions

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) – traumatic experiences occurring before a child turns

18 years old which have been linked to risky health behaviors, chronic health conditions, low life potential and early death in adults as well as poor health, asthma, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism, being overweight, learning difficulties and violent in children (Bethell, Newacheck, Hawes, & Halfon, 2014; Burke, Hellman, Scott, Weems, & Carrion, 2011; Felitti, Anda, Nordenberg, Williamson, Spitz, Edwards, & Marks, 1998; Purewal, Bucci, Gutiérrez Wang, Koita, Silvério Marques, & Burke Harris, 2016)

Approaches to learning – one aspect of the social foundations domain focused on the ways in which children play and carry out tasks within a classroom setting (Maryland State Department of Education, 2018)

Behavioral interventions – supports and strategies implemented by school staff put in place to respond to challenging or difficult student behavior with the intent of teaching

appropriate/expected replacement behaviors (Hemmeter, Ostrosky, & Fox, 2006; Zins & Elias, 2007)

Child traumatic stress – when children and adolescents are exposed to traumatic events or situations which overwhelm their ability to cope (National Child Traumatic Stress Network School Committee, 2008)

Emotional regulation – neurological processes which are responsible for controlling emotions through monitoring, evaluating, and modifying timing and intensity of reactions in order to meet one's goals (Kuypers & Winner, 2011)

Executive functioning – one aspect of the social foundations domain focused on the set of neurological processes for managing one's self involving self-regulation, self-control, cognitive flexibility, working memory and inhibitory control (Galinsky, 2010; Kuypers & Winner, 2011; Maryland State Department of Education, 2018)

Positive behavior support – broad range of systemic and individualized strategies for achieving important social and learning outcomes while preventing problem behavior (Sugai & Horner, 2002)

Prosocial behavior – social behaviors which benefit and demonstrate a concern for others such as helping, sharing, empathizing and cooperating (Denham, 2006)

Relationship skills – establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation; resisting inappropriate social pressure; preventing, managing, and resolving interpersonal conflict; and seeking help when needed (CASEL 2003; CASEL, 2012; Payton, Weissberg, Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger, & Pachan, 2008)

Responsible decision making – making decisions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, appropriate social norms, respect for others, and likely consequences of

various actions, applying decision-making skills to academic and social situations; and contributing to the well-being of one's school and community (CASEL 2003; CASEL, 2012; Payton, Weissberg, Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger, & Pachan, 2008)

School functioning – a student's ability to perform the tasks or activities that enable successful participation in academic and related social aspects of an educational setting (Denham, 2006; Zins & Elias, 2007)

Self-awareness – accurately assessing one's feelings, interests, values and strengths; maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence (CASEL 2003; CASEL, 2012; Payton, Weissberg, Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger, & Pachan, 2008)

Self-management – regulating one's emotions to handle stress, controlling impulses, and persevering in addressing challenges; expressing emotions appropriately; and setting and monitoring progress toward personal and academic goals (CASEL 2003; CASEL, 2012; Payton, Weissberg, Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger, & Pachan, 2008)

Self-regulation – ability to control and manage sensory needs, thoughts, emotions, impulses and behaviors to meet the demands of a given environment, reach goals and behave in socially appropriate ways (Kuypers & Winner, 2011)

Sensory processing – the way you make sense of information perceived through sensory experiences and how information is organized, or integrated, so it can be acted upon in meaningful ways (Kuypers & Winner, 2011)

Social awareness – being able to take the perspective of and empathize with others; recognizing and appreciating individual and group similarities and differences; and recognizing and making best use of family, school, and community resources (CASEL 2003; CASEL, 2012; Payton, Weissberg, Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger, & Pachan, 2008)

Social-emotional competency – students’ capacity to integrate skills, attitudes, and behaviors to deal effectively and ethically with daily tasks and challenges (CASEL 2003; CASEL, 2012; Denham, 2006; Payton, Weissberg, Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger, & Pachan, 2008; Zins & Elias, 2007)

Social-emotional development – developing capacity of children between birth and age five to form close and secure adult and peer relationships; experience, regulate and express emotions in socially and culturally appropriate ways; and explore the environment and learn (Yates, Ostrosky, Cheatham, Fetting, Shaffer, & Santos, 2008)

Social-emotional learning – process by which children and adults acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills to recognize and manage their emotions, set and achieve positive goals, demonstrate caring and concern for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations effectively (CASEL 2003; CASEL, 2012; Payton, Weissberg, Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger, & Pachan, 2008; Zins & Elias, 2007)

Social-emotional skills – skills, knowledge and behaviors related to social interaction and emotion identification (CASEL 2003; CASEL, 2012; Payton, Weissberg, Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger, & Pachan, 2008; Maryland State Department of Education, 2018)

Social foundations – domain of learning within early childhood which addresses social-emotional skills (Maryland State Department of Education, 2018)

Trauma – response to a negative external event, or series of events, which renders a child temporarily helpless and unable to effectively cope (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014; Statman-Weil, 2015; Wright & Ryan, 2014)

Limitations of the Study

As with most studies, there are several factors which limit the researcher from arriving at the intended outcomes. The first limitation in this study was the sample size. The study occurred in one Title I elementary school with a targeted group of students in kindergarten through second grade. Following three-tiered model of school supports (Hawken, Vincent & Schumann, 2008) and positive behavior support continuum (Sugai & Horner, 2002), approximately 5% of students in kindergarten through second grade were represented in the sample size as needing the intensive and individualized intervention the program provided. Students in intermediate grade levels were not included in the study as one focus of the research was on the development of an elementary behavior support program as an alternative to suspension in early elementary grades.

Another limitation is the length of time for which the study took place. Beginning at the start of the school year in September and continuing through the end of the 1st semester in January allowed for five months of data collection. Students who were identified to participate in the program during the second half of the school year were not included within this study. Additionally, due to no data collection taking place during the 2nd semester of the school year, it is unforeseen what the impact of prolonged participation in the program would be on students' prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance.

Finally, because serving as an administrator and stakeholder in the school where the study took place, researcher positionality impacted my study. Being aware of my own prejudices was one way I accounted for bias in an attempt to strengthen the credibility of the study. Explaining my connection to the study to participants in advance helped to ensure there was no misunderstanding as to my role both as an assistant principal and researcher.

Organization of the Dissertation

The remainder of this dissertation is presented as follows: Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature on social-emotional learning, self-regulation, school-based interventions, trauma informed teaching practices and discipline in the educational setting. The rationale for the development of the Rising Stars behavior support program is also provided. Chapter 3 details the methodological approaches employed in the study. Quantitative and qualitative data sources are discussed, as well as providing information detailing the participants of the study. Each individual student participant is introduced and background information specific to their areas of need is included. Chapter 4 provides the analysis of data and findings of the study. Presented in relation to the research questions, key findings are outlined through discussion of quantitative data along with accompanying illustrative examples from qualitative data sources. Chapter 5 includes the summary, conclusions and implications of the study. Recommendations for future research and practice are provided as well as the relationship of key findings to theoretical perspectives.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching social-emotional learning and self-regulation to students who demonstrate deficits in these areas has been linked to academic success (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, 2003; Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, 2012), developing a child's emerging sense of self and belief in their own abilities (Hoyle, 2013) and overall lifelong learning (Akcaalan, 2016, Galinsky, 2010). One way schools consider teaching social-emotional skills to students is through positive behavior support (PBS) which recognizes the relationship between the intensity of support provided and behavioral needs and challenges of individual students (Sugai & Horner, 2002; Walker, Horner, Sugai, Bullis, Sprague, Bricker & Kaufman, 1996). Curricula such as Second Step and Zones of Regulation may be implemented as primary and secondary prevention strategies, which are applicable as school-wide systems and in use with specialized groups of students who demonstrate at-risk behavior. Specialized and individualized systems for students with high-risk behaviors may also be necessary when they do not respond to the universal social-emotional learning supports available. One such group of students who may require this level of support are those who have experienced trauma and demonstrate difficulty learning, playing, communicating, interacting, following directions, creating relationships, responding to social cues and rebounding from disappointments (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014; Statman-Weil, 2015; Tough, 2013). Revising disciplinary practices to address building positive prosocial behaviors instead of punishing inappropriate behavior is widely recommended to meet the individualized needs of students (Skiba, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba & Peterson, 2000).

Social-emotional Learning

Social-emotional learning is defined as “the processes through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (CASEL, 2003; CASEL, 2012; Payton, Weissberg, Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger, & Pachan, 2008, Zins & Elias, 2007). The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) integrated framework promotes intrapersonal, interpersonal and cognitive competence, and is comprised of five key components which contribute to social-emotional learning: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making (CASEL, 2012).

Self-awareness involves the recognition of one’s own emotions and thoughts, as well as the influence of these factors on behavior. Self-management refers to the ability an individual has to effectively regulate emotions, thoughts and behavior in various environments. Social awareness includes showing empathy for others and being able to take on the perspective of another person in order to interact appropriately. Relationship skills involve establishing and maintaining healthy relationships in individual and group settings. Responsible decision making refers to one’s ability to make appropriate and respectful choices about their behavior and interactions with others (CASEL, 2003; CASEL, 2012; Payton, Weissberg, Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger, & Pachan, 2008, Zins & Elias, 2007).

Hersh and Walker (1983) suggest how social skills should be theorized in schools, noting that teachers identify a behavioral repertoire of social competence which contributes to classroom success as promoting academic performance, such as listening, completing tasks and

following directions, and being void of disruptive behaviors which challenge the teacher or disrupt the classroom environment. Additionally, the “model behavioral profile for a given student most likely would be a student who: stays in his/her seat; attends to instruction; completes tasks independently; complies with teacher requests; follows classroom rules; and who does not: defy the teacher; behave in an aggressive or disruptive manner; make loud or obscene gestures; steal; and vandalize or otherwise damage school property” (Gresham, 1997, p. 238). Students who display behaviors which are not consistent with the model behavioral profile are often referred for identification of an emotional disorder, and placement in special education, which may not always be an appropriate diagnosis and also prevents social skills training from occurring within the general education school environment (Gresham, 1997).

Whether diagnosed with an emotional or behavior disorder or not, students who lack social-emotional competency often require support in attaining these skills. Gresham (1997) point outs that “social skills training occurs on three levels: (a) promoting skill acquisition, (b) enhancing skill performance, and (c) facilitating generalization” (p. 238) and intervention procedures “involve some combination of modeling, coaching, and behavioral rehearsal” (p. 243).

Universal social-emotional and behavioral programs have been found to enhance social and emotional skills, self-image and prosocial behavior, reduce antisocial behavior, mental problems and disorders and promote academic achievement. Furthermore, the implementation of programs focused on social-emotional learning support schools in moving beyond traditional academic and cognitive based instruction to address the needs of the whole child (Sklad, Diekstra, Ritter, Ben, & Gravesteijn, 2012).

While positive effects of universal social-emotional learning programs have been found, it has also been suggested that social skills training alone may have a limited impact on improving deficits, and questions regarding the efficacy of such interventions continue despite their implementation and evaluation for more than 25 years (Lane, Wehby, Barton-Arwood, 2005). Recognizing one size does not fit all when supporting students in developing social-emotional competency, the most critical consideration is the necessity to match interventions to individualized student needs (Gresham, 1997). The Rising Stars program was designed to align the supports provided to students' individualized needs as a way to promote prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance. Moving beyond the universal social-emotional curriculum provided to all students, the program focused on the intensive interventions specific to students identified to participate in the program.

Self-Regulation

Self-regulation is an associated skill woven within the five competencies of social-emotional learning. "Self-regulation is the ability to do what needs to be done to be in the optimal state for the given situation" and "includes regulating one's sensory needs, emotions, and impulses to meet the demands of the environment, reach one's goals, and behave in a socially appropriate way" (Kuypers & Winner, 2011). A person who is "metacognitively, socially, motivationally and behaviorally active in his or her own problem-solving skills" (Buckely, 2015, p. 132) is demonstrating successful self-regulation. Students demonstrate self-regulation through their ability to plan and manage time effectively, combine and categorize information and experiences, and uphold a positive sense of self-esteem (Buckley, 2015).

Successful self-regulation requires the integration of three neurological components: sensory processing, executive functioning, and emotional regulation (Kuypers & Winner, 2011).

Sensory processing refers to how information is processed, organized and integrated in order to act upon it in a purposeful way. Executive functioning is defined as one's conscious control of their thoughts and actions, and includes the mental operations of attention shifting, working memory and impulse control. Emotional regulation denotes the processes of controlling emotional reactions to meet a goal, and includes monitoring, evaluating and modifying the intensity and timing of an emotional response (Galinsky, 2010; Kuypers, & Winner 2011).

Explicitly teaching self-regulation skills, specifically to students who show deficits in this area of development, is aimed at not only promoting their social-emotional learning, but also contributing to their emerging sense of self as learners (Hoyle, 2013) and overall lifelong learning (Galinsky, 2010). Additionally, it has been shown to directly shape a child's belief in their abilities (Hoyle, 2013). Akcaalan (2016) found a theoretically significant relationship between lifelong learning and social-emotional learning. Specifically, "a positive relationship between lifelong learning and task description, peer relationships and self-regulation sub dimensions of social-emotional learning" was identified (Akcaalan, 2016, p. 17). Additionally, self-regulation has been linked to academic success as students who set high academic goals, have self-discipline, motivate themselves, manage stress, and organize their approach to work learn more and get better grades (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger, 2011). These findings support the widely accepted understanding of the importance of teaching social-emotional learning and self-regulation, as it positively contributes to lifelong learning (CASEL, 2003; CASEL, 2012; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger, 2011; Payton, Weissberg, Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger, & Pachan, 2008; Sklad, Diekstra, Ritter, Ben, Gravesteyn, 2012; Zins & Elias, 2007). The Rising Stars program took into consideration these recommendations as social-emotional skills were taught through direct modeling and experiences

during daily behavior lessons and self-regulation skills were taught through weekly Zones of Regulation sessions.

School-Based Interventions

Positive behavior supports (PBS). The 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) included considerations for the use of Positive Behavior Supports (PBS), Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBA) as part of both discipline and classroom behavior management policy and practice (Sugai & Horner, 2002; Warren, Bohano-Edmonson, Turnbull, Sailor, Wickham, Griggs, & Beech, 2006). These revisions came as a result of an increased need to create safer schools following 20 years of widespread national attention from the general public, as well as teachers, concerning acts of school violence, bullying, fighting, lack of discipline and student victimization (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Following these legislative advances, “the management and control of problem behavior regardless of whether the student does or does not have a disability” (Sugai & Horner, 2002, p. 25) became a focus for school communities across the country.

School-wide PBS includes a “broad range of systemic and individualized strategies for achieving important social and learning outcomes while preventing problem behavior” (Sugai & Horner, 2002, p. 25). It is further defined as a “prevention-minded approach to student discipline that is characterized by its focus on defining and teaching behavioral expectations, rewarding appropriate behaviors, continual evaluation of its effectiveness, and the integration of supports for individuals, groups, the school as a whole, and school/family/community partnerships” (Warren, Bohanon-Edmonson, Turnbull, Sailor, Wickham, Griggs & Beech, 2006, p. 188). PBS functions on a continuum of behavior support (see Figure 3) where the intensity of support

increases in relation to the behavioral needs and challenges of individual students (Sugai & Horner, 2002; Walker, Horner, Sugai, Bullis, Sprague, Bricker & Kaufman, 1996).

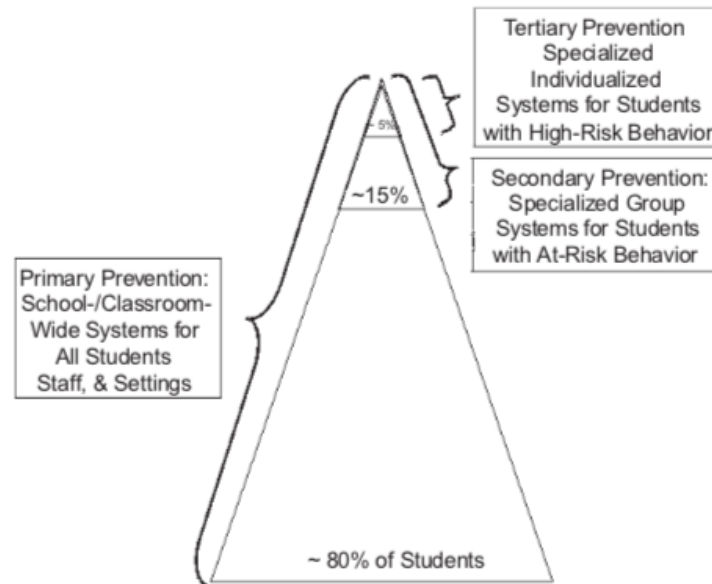


Figure 4. Positive Behavior Supports Continuum of Support. (Sugai & Horner, 2002).

Following the three-tiered model for school support, PBS is applied across all settings and with all students within a school. Sugai and Horner (2002) outline the goals for each aspect of prevention along the continuum of behavior support. The primary prevention strategies focus on inhibiting development of problem behavior by universally teaching desired social behaviors and expectations. The secondary prevention strategies involve increasing availability of protective factors, such as school, family and community support or remedial programming, as a response to risk factors, such as poverty, which accompany students when they come to school. The third tier of prevention strategies are aimed at “reducing the complexity, intensity, severity of problem behaviors that become well-established in the behavioral repertoire of individual students” (Sugai & Horner, 2002, p. 37).

School-wide implementation of PBS has been found to be an effective alternative to traditional punitive and consequence-based discipline systems, resulting in improved academic achievement and increased appropriate behavior when implemented properly (Sherrod, Getch, & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009). Proactive use of PBS assists in creating safer and more disciplined schools which allows teachers to focus their time on instruction rather than behavior management (Warren, Bohanon-Edmonson, Turnbull, Sailor, Wickham, Griggs & Beech, 2006). While universal PBS shows success as a preventative approach to problem behavior, “systems of PBS for students whose behaviors have proven to be unresponsive to general school and classroom-wide systems must be more specialized, comprehensive and individualized, and of higher intensity (Sugai & Horner, 2002, p. 36).

Second Step. Social-emotional learning often occurs naturally in early childhood settings through the use of relationship building, establishing a nurturing environment and teaching about feelings, rules and functioning as part of a classroom community. Additionally, curricula are available to supplement that which a teacher may incorporate into the educational setting. Second Step is research based, and one of the most widely recommended (Low, Cook, Smolkowski, & Buntain-Ricklefs, 2015; Walker, Horner, Sugai, Bullis, Sprague, Bricker & Kaufman, 1996), social-emotional learning curricula available to support teaching social-emotional skills in school settings. The program is aimed at improving social competence, thus reducing impulsive and aggressive behavior, by developing skills in the areas of empathy, perspective taking, social problem solving, impulse control, anger management and conflict resolution (Taub, 2002; Walker, Horner, Sugai, Bullis, Sprague, Bricker & Kaufman, 1996).

Developmentally appropriate practice for students at each grade level is provided through separate curricula which includes scripted lessons, posters for individual skills, brain builder

games and home links for families. Modeling, role play, rehearsal, discussion, question and answer and responding to social scenarios are used to teach the program content (Taub, J. (2002; Walker, Horner, Sugai, Bullis, Sprague, Bricker & Kaufman, 1996). Approximately 30 skills are taught through 22 lessons and organized across four units: (a) Skills for Learning, (b) Empathy, (c) Emotion Management, and (d) Problem Solving” (Low, Cook, Smolkowski, & Buntain-Ricklefs, 2015; Walker, Horner, Sugai, Bullis, Sprague, Bricker & Kaufman, 1996). It is recommended for teachers to implement lessons, which require 25-40 minutes of instructional time, as part of normal classroom activities.

Second Step was found to increase student knowledge of social-emotional skills; however, behavioral and emotional functioning of students did not improve as a result of its implementation (Brown, Jimerson, Dowdy, Gonzalez, & Stewart, 2012; Low, Cook, Smolkowski, & Buntain-Ricklefs, 2015; Taub, 2002). Students who participated in the Second Step program gained prosocial skills but did not show fewer antisocial behaviors, as it is easier for students to acquire new skills than it is to extinguish old habits (Taub, 2002). The Second Step program has been found to strengthen the resilience of at-risk children, while being unlikely to change strongly maladaptive or disruptive behavior patterns (Frey, Nolen, Edstrom, & Hirschstein, 2005; Low, Cook, Smolkowski, & Buntain-Ricklefs, 2015; Taub, 2002). Additionally, Second Step can provide a “stable social base for more intensive interventions by providing consistent school expectations, a shared vocabulary, and complementary behavioral repertoires” (Frey, Nolen, Edstrom, & Hirschstein, 2005, p. 196), but “it is unlikely that Second Step alone is sufficient enough to address the needs of children with severe and complex social-emotional or cognitive difficulties” (Low, Cook, Smolkowski, & Buntain-Ricklefs, 2015, p. 476).

Zones of regulation. Kuypers and Winner (2011), authors of the Zones of Regulation curriculum, note it is a cognitive behavior approach used to support children in gaining skills to consciously regulate their actions, emotions and impulses. By learning to recognize their given emotional states, or zones, children also learn strategies to stay in a desired zone or move successfully from one zone to another. The four color zones are used to categorize alertness and emotions (see Figure 4). Through exploration of calming techniques, cognitive strategies and sensory supports students to learn to effectively function and move within the identified zones, leading to increased control and problem-solving abilities.

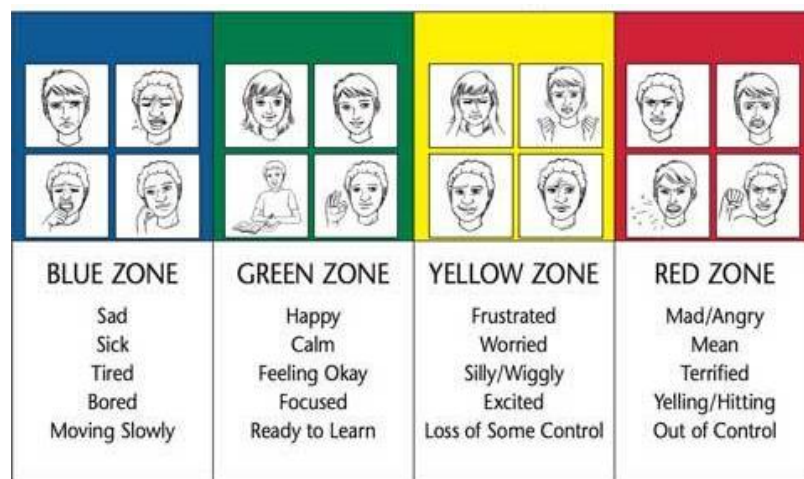


Figure 5. The Zones of Regulation. (Kuypers & Winner, 2011).

Riccomini, Zhang, and Katsiyannis (2005) suggest that typical exclusionary consequences for aggressive behavior are actually counterproductive and have been found to increase rates of grade detention, dropping out of school, academic failure and delinquent behavior. Zones of Regulation was developed for two main purposes: (a) to support students in developing the ability to calm themselves, without disrupting the class and (b) to learn effective ways to think about others and figure out the social expectations of a given situation (Kuypers & Winner, 2011). Recognizing that students often act out because they do not know how to behave,

the curriculum is aimed at teaching children what to do differently while giving opportunities to practice skills in a safe and supportive environment.

Kuypers and Winner (2011) note Zones of Regulation is a conceptual framework through which students are taught self-regulation skills. The sequence of 18 lessons are designed to be taught in school settings by any professional including teachers, special educators, special education service providers, psychologists, counselors, behavior specialists and social workers. In its optimal state, Zones of Regulation lessons are presented to small groups of about two to four students, although the curriculum can be used with larger groups of eight to ten students when co-teaching is possible. As students work through the lessons they learn everyone experiences all of the zones at one time or another, there are no “good” or “bad” zones and the most important goal of their work in the curriculum is figuring out the expected behaviors for given situations and determining how to effectively manage their behavior while in different zones (Kuypers & Winter, 2011).

Trauma Informed Instructional Practices

“Roughly 26 percent of children in the United States witness or experience a trauma before the age of 4” and “in 2012 an estimated 686,000 children were victims of child abuse and neglect” (Statman-Weil, 2015, p. 72). Additionally, “between half and two-thirds of all school-aged children experience trauma” (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). Trauma is not an event itself, or even a series of events, but a reaction to extremely stressful life circumstances which result in the child feeling a sense of helplessness or inability to effectively cope (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014; Schultz, Barnes-Proby, Chandra, Jaycox, Maher, & Pecora, 2010; Wright, 2014).

Trauma is both unexpected and uncontrollable, and “children who are traumatized are likely to frighten easily, experience anxiety in unfamiliar situations, and be clingy, difficult to soothe, aggressive and/or impulsive” (Wright, 2014, p. 88). Attention, organization comprehension, memory, work production, engagement in learning and trust are areas where students who have experienced trauma struggle in school, which is often interpreted as behavior problems (Wright, 2014). Children who have experienced trauma also find it more challenging to pay attention, process new information, interact effectively with peers and adults, respond to social cues, rebound from disappointments and follow directions (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014; Tough, 2013). As a result, children become fearful, distrustful, suspicious, withdrawn and aggressive (Galinsky, 2010; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014; National Child Traumatic Stress Network School Committee, 2008). “These manifestations of early childhood trauma – difficulties learning, playing, communicating, interacting and creating relationships – can exasperate teachers and reinforce children’s negative self-images” (Statman-Weil, 2015, p. 77).

Statman-Weil (2015) noted the “behavioral symptoms of children surviving trauma are often misunderstood and viewed as intentional and controlled acts or as diagnosable disorders not specifically related to trauma, such as oppositional defiant disorder or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, rather than as symptoms of trauma” (p. 77). The first step towards building supportive and emotionally responsive relationships with students who have experienced trauma is reframing the way we think about them (National Child Traumatic Stress Network School Committee, 2008; Wright, 2004). This paradigm shift includes staff focusing on “understanding what happened to a child, rather than focusing on the conduct alone” (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014).

McInerney and McKlindon (2014) note the goal is for schools to “provide a safe, stable, and understanding environment...and prevent re-injury or re-traumatization by acknowledging trauma and its triggers and avoiding stigmatizing and punishing students” (p. 7).

Recommendations for schools to create trauma sensitive environments include fostering positive relationships, supporting children’s transition to school, establishing clear rules and incentives and organizing learning tasks and information (National Child Traumatic Stress Network School Committee, 2008; Wright, 2004). Additionally, creating and maintaining consistent daily routines, offering developmentally appropriate choices, anticipating transitions and offering additional support during these times, implementing techniques to promote self-regulation, using play as a way to help children understand and make sense of experiences, being sensitive to individual triggers and using positive guidance are factors to consider when working with children who have experienced trauma (Galinsky, 2010; National Child Traumatic Stress Network School Committee, 2008; Statman-Weil, 2015). Finally, schools need to be cognizant of the “cycle of trauma” (see Figure 5) when students display behavior problems for actions which do not fit within societal norms and work to avoid punitive action as a consequence for such behavior (National Child Traumatic Stress Network School Committee, 2008). Punishment for those behaviors can have the potential for re-traumatizing students, thus “embedding the trauma further and continuing the cycle of behavioral problems rather than lessening them” (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014, p. 5).

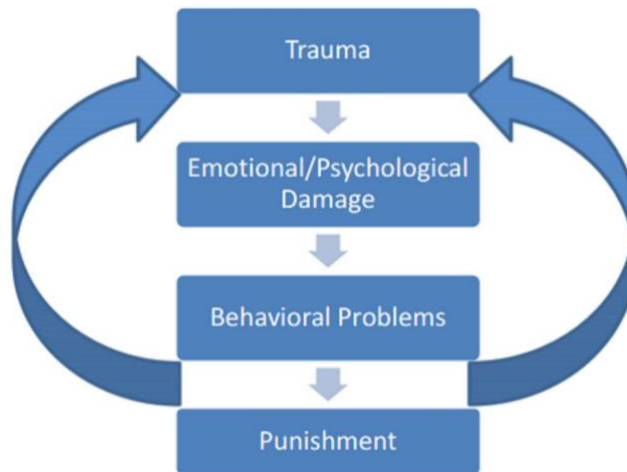


Figure 6. Cycle of Trauma. (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014).

Discipline in the Educational Setting

Skiba and Peterson (2000) noted “the fundamental challenge in developing effective models of school discipline will be to put together an array of options that can teach both general and special education students the skills they need to live together successfully” (p.343).

Additionally, recognizing that children are developmentally incomplete and thus require support to develop the interpersonal skills necessary to effectively interact with one another, “the crux of school discipline turns on how instruction and correction are to be provided” (Skiba & Peterson, 2000, p. 342). Skiba (2000) suggested replacing strict one-size-fits-all discipline models with graduated practices where severe consequences are provided for the most serious offenses and less serious offenses result in more moderate responses.

Traditional disciplinary practices include punishment and exclusion from the school and/or classroom setting for serious antisocial and aggressive behavior (Walker, Horner, Sugai, Bullis, Sprague, Bricker & Kaufman, 1996). Lunch, recess and after school detention are typical consequences employed as a response to referable behavioral concerns in elementary school. Suspension, either in school or out of school, are reserved for the most egregious and severe infractions, although this is now widely prohibited for students in pre-kindergarten through

second grade (US Department of Education, 2014; US Department of Health and Human Services & US Department of Education, 2014). Additionally, one of the most popular responses to problem behavior among teachers is to refer them for counseling. This consequence places responsibility for the change of behavior on students and requires the solution to the problem to take place outside of the classroom (Walker, Horner, Sugai, Bullis, Sprague, Bricker & Kaufman, 1996).

McInerney and McKlindon (2014) recommend “revising school discipline policies to more appropriately address childhood traumatic stress, including avoiding exclusionary discipline practices and criminalizing children, approaching discipline with the assumption that the child is doing the best they can, providing consistency and safety, and following a plan of learning, reassessing and reintegrating children to prevent future behavioral issues” (p. 18). Furthermore, it is also suggested that “school discipline programs might be more effective if they were to focus less on imposing punishment and more on creating a classroom environment in which students who lack self-regulatory capacities can find the tools and context they need to develop them” (Tough, 2016, p. 54).

“As schools have moved beyond simply excluding children with problem behavior to a policy of active development of social behaviors, expectations for discipline systems have changed” (Sugai & Horner, 2002, p. 27). Traditional punitive and reactionary disciplinary measures can have an adverse effect on student behavior, where intensity and frequency of the problem behaviors, specifically antisocial behaviors, attempting to be reduced are inadvertently increased (Metzler, Biglan, Rusby, & Sprague, 2001; Safran & Oswald, 2003; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Sugai & Horner, 2002; Walker, Horner, Sugai, Bullis, Sprague, Bricker & Kaufman, 1996). It is therefore recommended to integrate social-emotional learning “into academic

instruction and schoolwide climate or discipline programs that emphasize social and emotional competencies” (Grant, Hamilton, Wrabel, Gomez, Whitaker, Leschitz, Unlu, Chavez-Herrerias, Baker, Barrett, Harris, Ramos, 2017, p. 6).

One comprehensive preventative effort, the early response model of discipline, is an approach to building positive prosocial behaviors instead of punishing inappropriate behavior (Skiba, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba & Peterson, 2000). The goals of the early response model are to diffuse minor incidents before they develop into more serious offenses and teach all students appropriate alternatives to disruption and violence when resolving social conflicts (Skiba, 2000). The primary prevention approach to mental health and behavior planning provides interventions at three levels: creating a more positive school climate, focusing on early warning signs and at-risk behaviors, and implementing various strategies as a response to disruption and violence (Skiba, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Skiba and Peterson (1999) recognize the importance of individualized behavior plans and functional assessment processes to establish consistent responses to problem behavior, while teaching children alternatives to aggression.

Rationale for Development of the Rising Stars Program

Zins and Elias (2007) noted “many of today’s prevention and promotion initiatives are fragmented, which does not contribute to their collective effectiveness” (p. 3). At the research site it is recognized that the universal social-emotional curriculum, Second Step, was not implemented with fidelity which impacted the overall effectiveness of the program. Additionally, understanding “effective intervention requires a wide spectrum of options that extend significantly beyond a narrow focus on punishment and exclusion” (Skiba & Peterson, 1999, p. 10), as well as “how new programming might help to better meet the identified needs by either supplementing or replacing what is being done” (Zins & Elias, 2007, p. 7), the research site

recognized the need to expand beyond universal approaches for all students and develop a program specific to the individualized needs of the student population it serves.

Rising Stars, the elementary behavior support program studied, was developed in response to the social, emotional and behavioral needs of students in kindergarten through 2nd grade, and also as an alternative to suspension. The program expanded the continuum of services currently available to students within the research site, as well as across the LSS, by providing supports within the comprehensive school setting. At this time, these types of services were only available to students diagnosed with emotional disorders and provided at two school sites within the LSS. Rising Stars offered services to general education students, as well as students identified with a disability, and allowed them to access supports within their home school environment. The program description (see Appendix F) was developed in collaboration with central office administrators within the LSS.

Academic and behavioral interventions were customized to meet individual student needs. Personalized schedules were created for each student identifying the academic and/or behavioral components of the Rising Stars program which were being accessed (see Appendix G). Small group academic instruction was provided by the Rising Stars classroom teacher and program assistant. Modified Second Step lessons, as well as daily social skills lessons, were taught weekly by the Rising Stars classroom teacher. Students also participated in weekly Zones of Regulation lessons which were co-facilitated by the Rising Stars classroom teacher and the behavior specialist. Students continued to participate in art, music, physical education and media classes alongside their peers from the general education classroom. Students also continued to access their small group academic interventions, if applicable, within the general education classroom setting. Proactive push-in support, provided by Rising Stars staff, was available to

assist with the carryover of social skills from the program setting to these general education classroom environments.

Based on the individualized nature of the Rising Stars program, it was necessary for the teacher facilitating the academic and behavioral lessons to be highly flexible, as schedules changed frequently in response to students' needs. While the Zones of Regulation, modified Second Step and social skills/behavior lessons were held at consistent times weekly, the other portions of the teacher's day were dictated by the individualized schedules of each student (see Appendix G). For example, while one student attended specials classes another was receiving push in support from the Rising Stars teacher to participate in Science and/or Social Studies lessons in the general education classroom setting. Similarly, while one student was accessing reading and/or mathematics interventions another was either working with individualized support in the Rising Stars classroom or receiving support from the teacher to join a lesson alongside their peers in the general education classroom.

Students were identified to participate in the Rising Stars program based on the intensity, severity and frequency with which they demonstrated unsafe behaviors including, but not limited to, elopement from the classroom or school building, self-harming behaviors, physical aggression, attacks on peers or adults and threats of physical violence. Utilizing both referral and behavior support data, students were recommended to participate in Rising Stars for three to thirty days at a time when other disciplinary measures had been found to be ineffective and behaviors of concern continued to occur.

Within the Rising Stars program, students worked towards achieving individual social, emotional and behavioral goals which had been identified as a result of their reasoning for being referred to participate. Utilizing a star card, students earned a star token for displaying

appropriate and expected behavior. By earning five stars each morning and afternoon, students demonstrated their social competency in consideration for being able to rejoin their general education classroom.

Conclusion

Across the nation schools have been faced with responding to increasing behavioral challenges of students (Metzler, Biglan, Rusby, & Sprague, 2001; Safran & Oswald, 2003; Sherrod, Getch, & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009; Walker, Horner, Sugai, Bullis, Sprague, Bricker & Kaufman, 1996) while simultaneously needing to explore alternatives to traditional disciplinary measures in early childhood programs (US Department of Education, 2014; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014). Despite efforts to incorporate Second Step as a universal social-emotional learning curriculum for all students and offer Zones of Regulation lessons for small groups of students, antisocial and physically aggressive behavior of students in kindergarten through second grade at the research site continued to be an area of growing concern. Following the three-tiered model for school supports and teaching pyramid, the Rising Stars program was created in response to this need as an alternative to suspension. The program intended to provide students with access to both academic and behavioral interventions within their comprehensive school environment. Drawing on aspects of Social Learning Theory and Cognitive Behavior Theory, the behavioral interventions of the Rising Stars program were aimed at promoting development of prosocial behaviors through modeling, direct experience, positive reinforcement and cognitive training. Conducting an action research study to explore the impact of participation in the Rising Stars program on students' prosocial behaviors, school functioning and academic performance allowed for the examination of actions implemented as a response to student needs with a goal of transforming practices in an applied setting.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

There are several current issues facing schools today: 1) an increase in the disruptive and challenging behaviors of elementary students (Metzler, Biglan, Rusby, & Sprague, 2001; Safran & Oswald, 2003; Sherrod, Getch, & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009; Walker, Horner, Sugai, Bullis, Sprague, Bricker & Kaufman, 1996), 2) the prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and associated impact on learning and behavioral difficulties (Bethell, Newacheck, Hawes & Halfon, 2014; Burke, Hellman, Scott, Weems, & Carrion, 2011; Purewal, Bucci, Gutiérrez Wang, Koita, Silvério Marques, & Burke Harris, 2016, US Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, 2016), 3) recommended prohibition of suspension in kindergarten through second grade (US Department of Education, 2014; US Department of Health and Human Services & US Department of Education, 2014) and 4) current social-emotional and behavioral curricula, interventions and supports which are not adequately meeting the identified needs of students (Cooper, Masi & Vick, 2009; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger, 2011; Hemmeter, Ostrosky & Fox, 2006; Zins & Elias, 2007; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004). This action research study was designed as a response to these areas of concerns and aimed to determine the impact of participation in an elementary behavior support program on targeted kindergarten through second grade students' prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance.

Research Perspective

This action research explored solutions to problems associated with escalating challenging behaviors of students in early childhood programs and the prohibiting of suspension for children in this age group at both the state and local levels. School staff at the research site worked together as a community of practice to improve the way social-emotional and behavioral

support was provided to students who require intensive and individualized services to meet their unique needs. The development of the Rising Stars program served as a proposal for how to go about responding to the physically aggressive and antisocial behavior of students in kindergarten through second grade which prevented them from effectively functioning within their school environment and negatively impacted their educational achievement. Utilizing the interactive inquiry process of action research (Maruyama & Ryan, 2014) allowed for a better understanding of how implementing an elementary behavior support program impacted students' prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance.

The quantitative data collected in this action research was pre/post data in the areas of prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance. Prosocial behavior data were collected using the Behavior Assessment System for Children, Third Edition (BASC-3) Teacher Rating Scales for Children (TRS-C). School functioning was measured using the number of behavior support calls and disciplinary referrals. Academic performance data in the areas of reading and mathematics was gathered based on the enrolled grade level assessments administered to all students. An additional quantitative measure in the form of a survey questionnaire was used to evaluate components related to the implementation of the Rising Stars program from the perspective of staff jointly responsible for its facilitation.

Supplementary qualitative interview data were also gathered and analyzed. Interviews were with Rising Stars staff and a focus group comprised of general education classroom teachers of students identified to participate in the program. An interview with the school principal also yielded qualitative data on the observations of student behavior and data changes associated with the implementation of the Rising Stars program. Table 4 outlines the quantitative

and qualitative data sources aligned to the research questions. Additionally, Table 5 provides the alignments of research questions with survey and interview questions.

Table 4

Alignment of Data Sources and Research Questions

	Quantitative Measures		Qualitative Measures
	Instrument(s)	Data	
Prosocial Behavior (RQ 1.1)	Behavior Assessment System for Children, Third Edition (BASC-3) Teacher Rating Scales for Children (TRS-C) Rising Stars Staff Survey	Internalizing and externalizing behaviors, behavior symptoms and adaptive skills Likert scale	Interviews with Rising Stars Staff and School based administrator Focus group with general education teachers of students identified to participate in the Rising Stars program
School functioning (RQ 1.2)	Disciplinary referrals and behavior support calls Rising Stars Staff Survey	Number of behavioral incidents requiring disciplinary action and/or behavior support Likert scale	Semi-structured interviews with Rising Stars Staff and School based administrator Focus group with general education teachers of students identified to participate in the Rising Stars program
Academic Performance (RQ 1.3)	Enrolled grade level assessments in reading and mathematics	Quantitative - Reading and mathematics proficiency levels	Focus group with general education teachers of students identified to participate in the Rising Stars program

Table 5

Alignment of Research Questions and Survey/Interview Questions

Research Question	Survey Items	Interview Questions	Quantitative Measures
1.1 What is the impact on students' prosocial behavior after participation in the Rising Stars program?	Identifies students for participation based on their social-emotional and behavioral needs?	Tell me about how Rising Stars identifies students to participate in the program based on their social-emotional and behavioral needs.	Behavior Assessment for Children (BASC-3) Teacher Rating Scales (TRS)
1.2 What is the impact on students' school functioning after participation in the Rising Stars program?	Provides a focus area(s) for individualized student success.	What is your experience with identifying specific areas of focus for individual students as part of their participation in the Rising Stars program?	Number of disciplinary referrals
	The Rising Stars program demonstrates an understanding and sensitivity to the academic, cultural, social-emotional, behavioral and developmental needs of students.	Part of Rising Stars is to be sensitive to the academic, cultural, social-emotional, behavioral and developmental needs of students. Tell me about a time when you felt those needs were being met. What happened? How about is one of these was missing?	Number of behavior support calls
	Provides a safe well-maintained environment that promotes social-emotional learning and academic achievement?	Describe the Rising Stars program environment. What do you see and what stands out? What connections between what you described and social-emotional learning and/or academic achievement exist?	
	Provides social-emotional and behavioral services to promote prosocial behaviors and school functioning?	Tell me about a time when services in Rising Stars helped students' prosocial behavior and school functioning. Tell me about a time when Rising Stars services may not have supported these areas.	

	<p>The Rising Stars program demonstrates an understanding and sensitivity to the academic, cultural, social-emotional, behavioral and developmental needs of students.</p>	<p>Part of Rising Stars is to be sensitive to the academic, cultural, social-emotional, behavioral and developmental needs of students. Tell me about a time when you felt those needs were being met. What happened? How about is one of these was missing?</p>	
	<p>Provides a safe well-maintained environment that promotes social-emotional learning and academic achievement?</p>	<p>Describe the Rising Stars program environment. What do you see and what stands out? What connections between what you described and social-emotional learning and/or academic achievement exist?</p>	
1.3 What is the impact on students' academic performance after participation in the Rising Stars program?	<p>Provides academic services to promote student achievement?</p> <p>Offers opportunities for students to return to their general education classroom setting?</p>	<p>Rising Stars is meant to continue student learning. Is that mission being met? If so, in what ways? If not, what is the downfall?</p> <p>When students who participate in the Rising Stars program come back to class what do you notice? Is there a specific instance that stands out, good or bad? In what ways was student behavior different?</p>	<p>Reading levels</p> <p>Math assessments scores</p>

Collected data informed the following research question and sub-questions:

1. What is the impact of participation in the Rising Stars program, an elementary behavior support program comprised of academic and behavioral interventions, on targeted kindergarten through second grade students' prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance?

- 1.1 What is the impact on students' prosocial behavior after participation in the Rising Stars program?
- 1.2 What is the impact on students' school functioning after participation in the Rising Stars program?
- 1.3 What is the impact on students' academic performance after participation in the Rising Stars program?

Subjects, Participants, Population and Sample

The subjects for this study included the targeted kindergarten through second grade students identified to participate in the Rising Stars program. These grade levels are being targeted because the Rising Stars program was being implemented as a response to the prohibiting of suspension for this student group within both the Mid-Atlantic State School System (MASS) and Local School System (LSS) where the research site was located. A total of five students were included within the study, as this sample size aligned with the percentage of students who typically require intensive individualized supports within the total school population (Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter, Joseph & Strain, 2003; Hawken, Vincent & Schumann, 2008; Sugai & Horner, 2002). The prosocial behaviors, school functioning and academic performance of these students before and after participation in the Rising Stars program was measured in order to determine the impact of their experiences within the elementary behavior support program. Four additional students accessed the Rising Stars program but were identified to participate outside the timeline for this study so there was not pre/post data available which would allow them to be included in this study.

One group of study participants included the teacher, behavior specialist and instructional assistants who jointly facilitated the Rising Stars program. It was important to include the

perspectives of these staff members in order to learn about the process of implementing an elementary behavior support program. Their involvement with the program also helped to inform the best practices, as well as barriers to implementation, which was useful in considering how the program could be replicated in other school settings. The information gleaned from this subset of the subjects within the study could also serve as one component of a larger full-scale program evaluation focused on the process of implementation.

Another group of study participants were the general education classroom teachers of students identified to participate in the Rising Stars program. These perspectives were critical in understanding students' prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance both before and after being part of the Rising Stars program. Additionally, when considering the classroom teacher's role in managing student behavior and determining when behavior support or disciplinary action may be needed, their input was necessary to identify students who may require the intensive individualized support available through the Rising Stars program. Lastly, in order to recognize the impact of participation in the Rising Stars program, classroom teachers' observation of students' transfer of skills taught back to the classroom was crucial.

Finally, the school principal was included as a study participant in order to gain insights into observations and data changes related to the Rising Stars program in the areas of prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance. This perspective will also serve to inform the process of implementing an elementary behavior support program, including how other schools could consider establishing this type of program as an alternative to suspension for students in kindergarten through second grade.

All participants were asked to participate in the research study and provided written informed consent (See Appendices C-1 through C-4) outlining the purposes, benefits and risks

associated with their involvement. Informed consent was provided in writing and the aspects of the study were explained in person to each participant. The signed informed consent served as documentation of the agreement to participate in the study, with the understanding that if at any point a participant no longer wished to be included, they could withdraw from participation. Any potential participant who declined being part of the study was not included. Parents who chose not to have their child(ren) participate did not impact their access to the services provided within the Rising Stars program. All data collected as part of the study was kept confidential and anonymous. Additionally, in order to ensure the anonymity of both students and school staff who participated in the study, pseudonyms were used. Pseudonyms were assigned to students and school staff self-selected a pseudonym.

Student Profiles

Table 6 outlines the demographic data as well as programmatic aspects of the Rising Stars program which were accessed over the total number of days each student was identified to participate.

Table 6

Student Demographic and Programmatic Data

Student	Age	Grade	Sex	Race	# of Days in Rising Stars	Rising Stars Components
Fabian	5	K	Male	Arabic	80	Behavioral & Academic
Paige	6	1 st	Female	White	60	Behavioral & Academic
Zeke	6	1 st	Male	African American	18	Behavioral & Academic
Phoebe	7	2 nd	Female	White	18	Behavioral
Isaac	7	2 nd	Male	African American	18	Behavioral

Fabian.

Fabian, a five-year-old male kindergarten student, was identified to access the Rising Stars program due to unsafe and physically aggressive behaviors which prevented him from successfully participating in the classroom environment. A newcomer English Learner (EL) student, Fabian's family moved to the United States in June 2019. Fabian had never attended school prior to enrolling in kindergarten. In his home country, Jordan, he stayed at home with his mother and younger sister. Fabian did not speak English upon entering school and engaged in behaviors including hitting, biting, kicking, scratching, spitting, throwing materials and leaving the classroom. Fabian participated in both academic and behavioral interventions offered through the Rising Stars program for a total of 80 days. Behavioral lessons were specific to Fabian's areas of need including demonstrating safe a body when interacting with peers and adults, as well as remaining in the assigned area. Academic lessons were focused on beginning skills in reading and math including identifying letters and sounds, sight words, numbers and counting. Vocabulary acquisition was an additional area of focus to support Fabian as an EL student. Visuals were used to promote learning and communicating in English.

Paige.

Paige, a white six-year-old female first grade student, was identified to participate in the Rising Stars program for both academic and behavioral concerns. Paige did not demonstrate physically aggressive or unsafe behavior in the classroom but lacked the ability to self-regulate her emotions, becoming both easily distracted and overwhelmed which interfered with learning. A number of strategies were implemented in the classroom to support Paige's social-emotional needs including noise canceling headphones, task analysis cards for work completion, individualized work space, flexible seating and scheduled breaks in the school's sensory room.

Despite the supports being put into place Paige continued to demonstrate behaviors which prevented her from accessing the educational environment. She participated in small group reading and math intervention, as well as Zones of Regulation lessons, offered through the Rising Stars program for a total of 60 days.

Zeke.

Zeke, an African-American six-year-old male first grade student, was new to school for the 2018-2019 school year. Previously, during the 2017-2018 school year, he attended three other schools within the same local school system (LSS) and one outside of the LSS. Zeke was identified to participate in the Rising Stars program for behavioral interventions and support. He was not able to successfully interact with peers in the classroom environment and demonstrated disrespectful and unsafe behaviors including hitting, threatening physical harm, using inappropriate language and leaving the classroom. In addition, environmental factors from Zeke's home life including unstable housing, transiency within the educational system, and inconsistent administration of prescribed medications for anxiety and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder impacted his availability for learning in the classroom. Zeke's regular display of inappropriate behaviors in the school setting coupled with numerous occasions on which he fell asleep during the school day, were considered when identifying him to participate in the Rising Stars program. Zeke participated in the weekly Rising Stars social-emotional and behavioral lessons, including a Zones of Regulation group, for 18 days.

Phoebe.

Phoebe, a white seven-year-old female second grade student, was identified to participate in the behavioral components of the Rising Stars program. Diagnosed with anxiety, Phoebe was provided with accommodations to meet her unique needs through a 504 plan. Despite the

creation and implementation of a 504 plan during Phoebe's first grade school year, she displayed behaviors of concern as a second-grade student including withdrawing from academic tasks, banging on furniture, leaving the classroom, arguing with peers, and attempting to harm herself. The prosocial behaviors Phoebe lacked were associated with her inability to self-regulate emotions and cope with everyday situations in the classroom. Phoebe participated in the Rising Stars program for 18 days, accessing weekly Zones of Regulation lessons in a small group setting.

Isaac.

Isaac, an African-American six-year-old male student, was new to the school during 2018-2019 school year. During the previous academic year Isaac attended a school within the same Mid-Atlantic State School System as where the research site was located. The family's move, and Isaac's enrollment at the school serving as the research site, was prompted by needing to safely remove themselves from circumstances of domestic abuse. Isaac was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and provided accommodations through a 504 plan during his first-grade year at another school within the state. Despite the supports implemented to assist Isaac with accessing the educational environment, he displayed behaviors of concern including wandering around the classroom, using furniture and/or classroom objects in an unsafe manner, leaving his assigned area, throwing materials, and making loud noises. He was identified to participate in the Rising Stars program for 18 days in order to access the weekly Zones of Regulation group focused on developing self-regulation skills and coping strategies.

Research Areas of Impact

The area of influence being studied was participation in Rising Stars, the elementary behavior support program, focused on providing intensive and individualized behavioral and

academic interventions. The dependent variables measured through quantitative data collection methods were: students' prosocial behavior, as measured by the Behavior Assessment System for Children, Third Edition (BASC-3) Teaching Rating Scales for Children (TRS-C) which assesses Externalizing Problems, Internalizing Problems, Behavior Symptoms and Adaptive Skills of students, ages 6-11 years old; school functioning, as measured by number of disciplinary referrals and behavior support calls; and academic performance, as measured by required grade level assessments in reading and mathematics.

Quantitative data collection methods:

1. Measure of prosocial behavior (Behavior Assessment System for Children, Third Edition (BASC-3) Teacher Rating Scales for Children (TRS-C))
2. Measure of school functioning
 - a. Number of disciplinary referrals before/after participation in the program
 - b. Number of behavior support calls before/after participation it the program
3. Measure of academic performance before/after participation in the program
4. Survey of school staff (teacher, behavior support specialist, instructional assistants) facilitating the Rising Stars program

Qualitative data collection methods:

1. Interviews of school staff (teacher, behavior support specialist, instructional assistants) facilitating the Rising Stars program regarding student participation in the Rising Stars program
2. Focus group of general education classroom teachers regarding student participation in the Rising Stars program

3. Interview of school principal regarding student participation in the Rising Stars program, observations and data changes related to the Rising Stars program

There are several control variables which offered alternative explanations to the hypotheses. First, children may have naturally acquired these skills as part of expected developmental milestones occurring during this age period. Second, teacher classroom management strategies and behavioral expectations may have promoted positive social skills and appropriate/expected behavior. Along these lines, instruction, activities and experiences which are part of typical early childhood classroom communities often naturally contribute to increasing children's social-emotional competence. Finally, the differences in the demographics of the student population could have accounted for varying levels of social-emotional competence including, but not limited to, prior care, family dynamics, socioeconomic status and cultural norms.

Research Instruments

The quantitative research instrument used to measure prosocial behavior of students before and after participation in the Rising Stars program is the Behavior Assessment System for Children, Third Edition (BASC-3) Teacher Rating Scales for Children (TRS-C). This research validated tool, and recommended protocol, is used by school psychologists in assessing internalizing and externalizing behaviors of students, behavior symptoms and adaptive skills of children ages 6-11 years old. Additional quantitative data gathered included number of disciplinary referrals, number of behavior support calls and academic performance on enrolled grade level reading and mathematics assessments. These measures were not collected through the use of a research instrument but instead reported through reviewing school data in each area for students who participated in the Rising Stars program.

Another quantitative research instrument employed for this study was a survey questionnaire provided to the school staff facilitating the Rising Stars program, classroom teacher of students identified to participated in the program and the school principal (See Appendix D). The questions were adapted from the “Alternative Education Program Self-Assessment Instrument Form: Alternative Education Program Level” which was used in a research dissertation to evaluate the effectiveness of an alternative education program (Clarke, 2008). The original assessment instrument was created by the State Department of Education as a quantitative measure of the effectiveness of the alternative education program in achieving its goals. While this instrument is not research validated, it serves as a closely aligned measure with the aspects of the Rising Stars program which were being considered. All participants completed a survey through Google Forms. Using a five-point Likert scale, the areas addressed in the survey questions were designed to determine the degree to which the Rising Stars program:

1. Identifies students for participation based on their social-emotional and behavioral needs?
2. Provides a focus area(s) for individualized student success?
3. Provides flexible individualized scheduling to meet students’ social-emotional and behavioral needs?
4. Demonstrates an understanding and sensitivity to the academic, cultural, social-emotional, behavioral and developmental needs of students?
5. Provides clear communication to students, parents and school staff regarding participation in the program?
6. Provides a safe well-maintained environment that promotes social-emotional learning and academic achievement?
7. Ensures school staff works together to monitor individualized learning plans and provide supports necessary for achievement?
8. Provides social-emotional and behavioral services to promote prosocial behaviors and school functioning?
9. Provides academic services to promote student achievement?
10. Offers opportunities for students to return to their general education classroom setting?

Recognizing the survey instrument provided information on aspects of the implementation of the Rising Stars program, and understanding the need to obtain additional data

on the degree to which participation impacts students' prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance, a set of interview questions were developed for staff facilitating the program, classroom teachers of students who participated in the program and the school principal. The semi-structured interview protocol (See Appendix E) was developed to align with the items of the survey questionnaire (See Table 7). The purpose in aligning the questions between both research instruments was to ensure a rich data set was available when analyzing data and synthesizing findings (Miles Huberman & Saldana, 2014; Saldana, 2016). This structure also supported triangulation of data (Miles Huberman & Saldana, 2014; Saldana, 2016) across three different sources: survey questionnaire responses, Rising Stars staff interview responses and classroom teachers' focus group responses. It was important to include the perspective of classroom teachers as the goal of the Rising Stars program was for students to return to the general education setting with the prosocial behaviors necessary to enhance their school functioning and positively influence their academic performance.

Table 7

Alignment of Survey and Interview Questions

Survey Questionnaire Items	Interview Questions
Identifies students for participation based on their social-emotional and behavioral needs?	Tell me about how Rising Stars identifies students to participate in the program based on their social-emotional and behavioral needs.
Provides a focus area(s) for individualized student success.	What is your experience with identifying specific areas of focus for individual students as part of their participation in the Rising Stars program?
Provides flexible individualized scheduling to meet students' social-emotional and behavioral needs?	What is your experience with flexible individualized scheduling provided to students within the Rising Stars program?
Demonstrates an understanding and sensitivity to the academic, cultural, social-emotional, behavioral and developmental needs of students?	Part of Rising Stars is to be sensitive to the academic, cultural, social-emotional, behavioral and developmental needs of students. Tell me about a time when you felt those needs were being met. What happened? How about if one of these was missing?
Provides clear communication to students, parents and school staff regarding participation in the program?	How is communication provided to students, parents and school staff regarding participation in the Rising Stars program? What is your experience with communication provided to students? Parents? School staff?
Provides a safe well-maintained environment that promotes social-emotional learning and academic achievement?	Describe the Rising Stars program environment. What do you see and what stands out? What connections between what you described and social-emotional learning and/or academic achievement exist?
Ensures school staff works together to monitor individualized learning plans and provide supports necessary for achievement?	How does school staff work together to monitor individualized learning plans and student support?
Provides social-emotional and behavioral services to promote prosocial behaviors and school functioning?	Tell me about a time when services in Rising Stars helped students' prosocial behavior and school functioning. Tell me about a time when Rising Stars services may not have supported these areas.
Provides academic services to promote student achievement?	Rising Stars is meant to continue student learning. Is that mission being met? If so, in what ways? If not, what is the downfall?
Offers opportunities for students to return to their general education classroom setting?	When students who participate in the Rising Stars program come back to class what do you notice? Is there a specific instance that stands out, good or bad? In what ways was student behavior different?

Pilot Study

One of the research instruments – the survey provided to Rising Stars program staff – was pilot tested in May 2018 using a Google form sent via email. Neither names nor email addresses of staff who completed the survey were collected. All four staff members who were provided the survey completed it. Three of the four staff who completed the survey had similar responses and one staff member's responses were almost exactly opposite. Without knowing who provided which answers, it is not able to be determined why this occurred, but it did inform the researcher of the need to ensure the scale for responses to survey questions was clearly identified.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection occurred between September and February of the 2018-2019 school year. The quantitative measures of prosocial behavior and school functioning were obtained for students identified to participate in the Rising Stars program. The Behavior Assessment System for Children, Third Edition (BASC-3) Teacher Rating Scales for Children (TRS-C) were completed as the measure of prosocial behavior before and after students accessed the academic and behavioral interventions of the Rising Stars program. It was selected as a recommended research validated instrument by the school psychologist and Supervisor of Psychological Services within the MASS where the research site is located. The BASC-3 TRS-C was provided electronically to classroom teachers of students identified to participate in the Rising Stars program, both before and after their experience. The 156-item survey, which took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete, assessed the prosocial behaviors of students in four categories: Externalizing Problems, Internalizing Problems, Behavioral Symptoms and Adaptive Skills.

School functioning was measured by the number of behavior support calls and disciplinary referrals each student received before and after participation in the Rising Stars program. Behavior support calls were made by classroom teachers when students demonstrated unsafe behaviors which put themselves and/or others at-risk for harm within the educational environment. Disciplinary referrals were written for students whose physically aggressive and unsafe behaviors required consequences beyond that which the classroom teacher would implement on their own. These quantitative data were collected as pre/post measures of students' school functioning in September 2018 and February 2019.

Measures of students' academic achievement were gathered through their performance on enrolled grade level assessments during the first semester of the school year. Assessment information in the areas of reading and mathematics were reviewed in order to monitor students' overall academic achievement towards grade level expectations. The final quantitative measure was a survey questionnaire administered electronically in February 2019 via Google Forms to Rising Stars staff, classroom teachers of students who participated in the Rising Stars Program and the school principal.

Qualitative data were collected in February 2019 through interview and focus group methods. Rising Stars staff were interviewed individually to obtain insights into the implementation process for providing targeted, intensive and individualized services specific to students' social-emotional and behavioral needs. Classroom teachers of students identified to participate in behavior support program were interviewed as a focus group and the school principal was interviewed individually. These qualitative data sources were used in conjunction with the quantitative measures obtained to determine the impact of participation in the

elementary behavior support program on students' prosocial behaviors, school functioning and academic performance.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected throughout the first semester of the 2018-2019 school year, from September to February. The school psychologist provided The Behavior Assessment System for Children, Third Edition (BASC-3) Teacher Rating Scales for Children (TRS-C) via email to general education classroom teachers. The BASC-3 TRS-C was completed electronically by general education classroom teachers of students at the time they were identified to participate in the Rising Stars program and served as a pre-measure of prosocial behavior. In February 2019, at the end of the timeline for the study, teachers completed the BASC-3 TRS-C a second time for any child who participated in the program as a post-measure of prosocial behavior. Comparison of reported T-scores in each of four areas of prosocial behavior, Internalizing Problems, Externalizing Problems, Behavior Symptoms, and Adaptive Skills, occurred in collaboration with the school psychologist to determine the individual skills and abilities of each student before and after participation in the Rising Stars program.

School functioning was measured through the number of disciplinary referrals and behavior support calls for individual students before and after participation in the Rising Stars program. Both disciplinary referrals and behavior support calls are captured through electronic data entry processes at the school level. Disciplinary referrals document any behavior which a staff member feels warrants a consequence more severe than what could be administered without consulting an administrator. Behavior support calls document any time a member of the behavior team and/or administration is called by a classroom teacher to provide assistance to a student for behaviors which disrupt the learning environment. A comparison of pre/post measures for both

disciplinary referrals and behavior support calls was conducted in order to determine if there was improvement in individual students' abilities to successfully access the education environment.

The analyzing of academic performance data occurred through reviewing quantitative assessment information in the areas of reading and mathematics. Students benchmark reading assessments administered at the start of the school year and again at the end of the first semester were compared to determine individual progress. Reading levels, reported as letters, were reviewed to identify growth, as well as if students were meeting enrolled grade level expectations. Additionally, quarterly mathematics assessment data for each student were compared to determine growth in skills and concepts measured. Scores, reported as percentages, were reviewed to identify progress, as well as if enrolled grade level expectations were being met by individual students.

Qualitative data gathered through interviews and a focus group were analyzed utilizing a three-tiered coding process. Each interview transcript and audio recording were reviewed to identify codes of particular significance related to each research question. The initial coding process included identifying key words and/or phrases associated with either prosocial behavior, school functioning or academic performance. These codes served as descriptions for each of the areas where data were collected. The second phase of coding included looking for patterns amongst the codes identified in order to determine categories describing prosocial behavior, school functioning or academic performance. The final phase of coding further examined the categories to determine the themes which emerged from the data set.

In order to move through the three-tiered coding process an analysis of each interview and focus group question was used. An analysis matrix (see Appendix H) was created for each interview question where initial codes were reflected. These codes were then combined, or

collapsed, as patterns were identified for each interview and focus group question. Considering the interview and focus group questions in relation to the research question, as outlined in Table 5, allowed for themes to be further determined.

To provide illustrative examples from data collected, interview transcripts were reviewed for quotes associated with each research question (see Appendix I). Quotes which aligned to themes identified through the coding process were selected as examples of observations of students' prosocial behaviors, school functioning and academic performance. Additionally, quotes which signified the extent to which the Rising Stars Program achieved its goals were included to explain if services provided were meeting student and school needs.

Setting and Environment

A Title I elementary school located in the second largest city within a large Mid-Atlantic School System (MASS) served as the research site for this study. During the 2018-2019 school year there were approximately 740 students in the school which serves pre-k through fifth grade. Pre-k through third grade students were housed within the main school building and the fourth and fifth grade classes were held in a mega pod portable. The school served the highest number of students living in poverty within the Local School System (LSS), with 85% of the total population qualifying for free and reduced meals. The majority of students, and their families, spoke Spanish as their first language and 80% of students were English Learners (EL), which is the highest percentage of EL students in the state.

The Rising Stars classroom, where both academic and behavioral interventions occurred, was created in a space which previously served as a computer lab. The location of the room was selected because of its proximity to primary grade classrooms, the front office and a calm down room. The room was slightly smaller than a typical classroom with about two-thirds of the

overall space, which was conducive to the number of students who were identified to participate in the program. Two tables, with various types of flexible seating around each, were available for small group or independent work. A small carpet area between the two tables allowed for the group to meet as a whole and was located by the board in what served as the front of the classroom. Three computers, which students accessed during independent work and stations, were also made available. A calm down space with sensory items, relaxing techniques and deep breathing strategies was created in one corner of the room. A guided play area was established in the opposite corner of the room.

Four staff members worked in conjunction with each other to facilitate the Rising Stars program. A classroom teacher was responsible for the academic instruction portions of the day. The behavior specialist and classroom teacher shared responsibility for facilitating the behavioral interventions in the program. The classroom teacher led modified Second Step lessons and co-facilitated the Zones of Regulation lessons. The behavior specialist facilitated the social skills lessons, including guided play opportunities. Behavioral instructional assistants supported facilitation of the program by providing individualized support in both academic and behavioral lessons as needed.

In addition to the setting where the Rising Stars program occurred, the school research site also served as the location for the interviews and focus groups. The front office conference room in the school, which has a large rectangle table and comfortable seating, was a familiar space for school staff to gather for the purposes of conducting interviews and focus groups. This location was convenient and allowed all those staff who were interested in participating to do so without having to travel off campus.

Researcher Positionality

As a scholar practitioner, I was connected to the topics of social-emotional learning and self-regulation within the Mid-Atlantic School System (MASS) and Local School System (LSS) where the research was conducted. I presented professional learning experiences on executive functioning and effective mathematics practices for Early Learning Coordinators within the MASS. In addition, I facilitated sessions on social-emotional learning, self-regulation, executive functioning and trauma-informed instructional practices through Early Learning and Leadership Academies offered through the MASS. Within the LSS, I developed a three-credit course on executive functioning in the early childhood classroom, which was taught for four years prior to conducting this research study. I also led a curriculum writing project focused on creating social foundations resources.

My researcher positionality could be considered as a bias, however the potential for bias exists within any research study. Acknowledging such bias increases both the credibility and reliability of the researcher. Within the present study, one source of bias is the researcher's positionality. Serving as the primary researcher while simultaneously acting as a member of the administrative team at the school which served as the research site could be considered a source of bias impacting the study's credibility. To account for such bias, I remained explained my connection to the study, so all participants understood my role as both administrative team member and researcher. I also remained aware of my own prejudices in order to further strengthen my reliability as a researcher. Finally, I clearly delineated between data which was being collected for the purposes of the research study and that which was gathered for all students as part of school processes. This delineation was provided within the written informed consent to all participants and orally as part of the interviewing process with school staff.

Trustworthiness

The collection of both quantitative and qualitative data contributed to ensuring the dependability of findings. Quantitative data in the areas of prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance presented one portion of the impact of program participation. The qualitative data gathered from three groups of participants, Rising Stars program staff, general education classroom teachers of students identified to participate in the program and the school principal, further portrayed the overall impact to prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance. These data from multiple sources were triangulated to establish the credibility and transferability of the findings.

The findings in this study were unique to the sample population under study, because these are the only students who accessed the elementary behavior support program during the timeframe when the study was being conducted. Thus, with such a small sample size an aim of this study was not to generalize findings, but to identify processes used that are able to be replicated. The findings suggest if participation in the Rising Stars program is positively associated with students' prosocial behaviors, school functioning and academic performance. These data contribute to considering effective alternatives to suspension which teach children the social-emotional skills they need to be successful in life.

Reliability

The data collection and analysis methods of this study are able to be replicated and likely to produce similar results. The BASC-3 TRS-C is a research validated tool and recommended protocol used by psychologists in measuring prosocial behaviors of children. The questions and scoring are consistent so that each time the tool is used students are being rated on clearly

established criteria. Additionally, the procedures for administration are standardized so that all teachers asked to complete the BASC-3 TRS-C will do so following the same procedures.

Reporting the number of disciplinary referrals and behavior support calls is a familiar method of data collection for schools as this data is typically used as a measure of school climate and culture. There is reliability in this process as coding and entering of referral data is a consistent procedure required of all schools. Potential for variability in the behavior support calls data exists depending on the way in which the data were collected. There is currently no protocol within the LSS for how these data are collected and recorded, so schools create methods which best meet their individualized needs.

Collecting data on students' academic performance is another process which occurs regularly in schools. Administering standardized assessments throughout the school year assists staff in determining student progress towards achieving grade level expectations. Analyzing performance on reading and math assessments is a typical process which is familiar to school staff making this a reliable source of data, and one that can be replicated.

The reliability of qualitative data rests on the researcher's presentation of questions during interviews and focus groups. Asking the same questions of all participants and following similar interviewing procedures will contribute to increased reliability of data collected. An aspect of ensuring the data yields reliable results is creating the conditions by which participants are comfortable, understand what is being asked and able to effectively contribute to the research conversation.

Summary

Employing an action research design where both quantitative and qualitative data were collected, this study aimed to identify the impact of participation in an elementary behavior

support program on students' prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance. The Rising Stars program was established at a Title I school located in the second largest city within a large Mid-Atlantic School System (MASS) which served approximately 740 students, of whom 85% are eligible for free and reduced meals and 80% speak Spanish as their first language, during the 2018-2019 school year. Participants in the study included students in kindergarten through second grade identified to participate in the Rising Stars program, Rising Stars program staff, general education teachers and a school administrator. Quantitative data was gathered through the Behavior Assessment System for Children, Third Edition (BASC-3) Teacher Rating Scales for Children (TRS-C), number of disciplinary referrals and behavior support calls, and pre/post reading and mathematics assessments. Qualitative data was gathered through interviews and focus groups with school staff regarding observations of student behavior and data changes associated with the implementation of the elementary behavior support program.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Recognizing a need to proactively teach the prosocial skills kindergarten through second grade students are lacking, develop effective alternatives to suspension, and expand the continuum of services currently available to meet students' social-emotional and behavioral needs, a newly developed behavior support program was established in one LSS during the 2017-2018 school year. Rising Stars, a behavior support program, comprised of academic and behavioral interventions, allowed students who exhibited behavioral challenges to remain in their comprehensive school setting with access to small group instruction tailored to their individual social-emotional needs. The purpose of this study was to identify the impact of participation in the Rising Stars program on targeted kindergarten through second grade students' prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance.

The outcome of the research has the potential to impact the larger educational organization, specifically administrators of Title I schools, in determining if the investment in the program and staffing positions to facilitate it are an effective use of fiscal resources. This study answered the following research questions:

1. What is the impact of participation in the Rising Stars program, an elementary behavior support program comprised of academic and behavioral interventions, on targeted kindergarten through second grade students' prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance?
 - 1.1 What is the impact on students' prosocial behavior after participation in the Rising Stars program?
 - 1.2 What is the impact on students' school functioning after participation in the Rising Stars program?

1.3 What is the impact on students' academic performance after participation in the Rising Stars program?

Methodology Summary

In order to answer the research questions posed, an action research study which gathered both quantitative and qualitative data was employed. Prosocial behaviors, school functioning and academic performance of students before and after participation in the Rising Stars program were measured through the collection of quantitative data. The Behavior Assessment System for Children, Third Edition (BASC-3) Teacher Rating Scales for Children (TRS-C) measured students' prosocial behavior. School functioning was measured through the number of disciplinary referrals and behavior support calls. Performance on grade level assessments in reading and math were used to measure academic performance. A survey provided to Rising Stars program staff, as well as classroom teachers and the principal, was used as an additional quantitative measure aimed at evaluating the degree to which the program achieved its goals. The purpose in collecting these quantitative data was to determine if a relationship existed between participation in the Rising Stars program and these areas of development.

Rising Stars program staff, general education classroom teachers of students identified to participate in the program, and the principal shared observations of students' social-emotional, behavioral and academic performance as qualitative measures aimed at further determining impact of the program. Individual interviews with Rising Stars program staff and the principal of the school, as well as focus group interview general education classroom teachers, were conducted to further explore the impact of participation in the program on students' prosocial behaviors, school functioning and academic performance. Identification of themes within both

data sets was made possible through the alignment between the quantitative survey measure and interview questions posed.

Population, Sample and Participants

The research site for this study was a Title I elementary school located in the second largest city within a large Mid-Atlantic School System (MASS). Approximately, 770 students were enrolled at the school during the 2018-2019 school year. Serving the highest number of students living in poverty within the local school system, 85% of the total population qualified for free and reduced meals. Additionally, 80% of the students in the school were English Learners (EL), which was the highest percentage of EL students within the MASS.

Five students in kindergarten through second grade were identified to participate in the Rising Stars program between September 2018 and February 2019. Of the five students who participated in the program, one was in kindergarten, two were in first grade and two were in second grade. Three of the students were male and the other two were female. One of the students was considered an EL newcomer and demonstrated minimal English proficiency. Two of the five students were African American and two were White. The prosocial behaviors, school functioning and academic performance of all students before and after participation in the Rising Stars program was measured in order to determine the impact of students' experiences within the elementary behavior support program.

Four additional students began accessing the Rising Stars program in January 2019 but were not included in the study since all data being gathered was not able to be reported. All of these students were male, two were African-American and two were Hispanic. One student was in pre-kindergarten, two in kindergarten and one in second grade.

Rising Stars program staff, including the classroom teacher, behavior specialist and instructional assistants were also included as participants in the study. Individual interviews were conducted with each staff member and they also each completed the quantitative survey about the Rising Stars program. The perspectives of these staff members were important to consider in order to learn about the process of implementing an elementary behavior support program, and the degree to which it achieved its goals. Their involvement with the program also helps to inform the best practices, as well as barriers to implementation, which will be useful in considering how the program can be replicated in other school settings. The information gleaned from this subset of the subjects within the study could also serve as one component of a larger full-scale program evaluation focused on the process of implementation.

General education classroom teachers of students identified to participate in the Rising Stars program were also included as participants within the study. These five teachers completed the Behavior Assessment System for Children, Third Edition (BASC-3) Teacher Rating Scales for Children (TRS-C) to provide the pre- and post-measures of students' prosocial behavior. They also participated in a focus group interview and completed the quantitative survey measure about the Rising Stars program. Understanding students' prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance both before and after being part of the Rising Stars program through the lens of this group was critical in determining impact. Additionally, their perspectives were necessary to identify the students who required the intensive individualized support of the program as one of their roles is managing student behavior and determining when behavior support or disciplinary action may be needed. Lastly, in order to recognize the impact of participation in the Rising Stars program, classroom teachers' observation of students' transfer of taught skills back to the classroom was crucial.

In order to gain school-wide insights into observations and data changes related to the Rising Stars program in the areas of prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance, the school principal was also included as a study participant. Partaking in an individual interview and completing the Rising Stars program survey were contributions made by the principal towards the study. The perspective of the principal served to inform the process of implementing an elementary behavior support program, including how other schools could consider establishing this type of program as an alternative to suspension for students in kindergarten through second grade.

Findings

Research question 1.1. What is the impact on students' prosocial behaviors after participation in the Rising Stars program?

The Behavior Assessment System for Children, Third Edition (BASC-3) is noted to aid in identifying a child's progress in a specific program, as well as being well suited to research childhood psychopathology and behavior disorders (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2015). The items on the Teacher Rating Scales for Children (TRS-C) are used to determine a student's ability in each of four areas associated with prosocial behaviors: Internalizing Problems, Externalizing Problems, Behavior Symptoms, and Adaptive Skills. Internalizing Problems reflects students' behaviors associated with anxiety, depression and somatization. Externalizing Problems measures students' behaviors related to hyperactivity, aggression and conduct problems. Behavior Symptoms refers to atypicality and withdrawal. Finally, Adaptive Skills indicates students' abilities in the areas of adaptability, social skills, leadership, study skills and functional communication.

Scores for Internalizing Problems, Externalizing Problems and Behavior Symptoms are considered to be At-Risk if they fall between 60-70 and Clinically Significant if they are above 70. Normal, or Developmentally Appropriate, scores in these three categories fall below 59. Scores for Adaptive Skills are considered At-Risk if they fall between 30-40 and Clinically Significant if they are between 20-30. Normal, or Developmentally Appropriate, scores in the area of Adaptive Skills fall above 41. Therefore, lower scores in the areas of Internalizing Problems, Externalizing Problems and Behavior Symptoms are preferred, as opposed to the area of Adaptive Skills where higher scores indicate improved functioning.

As noted in Table 8, students who participated in the Rising Stars program received ratings, reported as T scores, by their classroom teacher both before and after accessing services provided. This information allowed for a comparison between how each student initially demonstrated prosocial behaviors within the school setting and the impact of participation in the Rising Stars program.

Table 8

Behavior Assessment System for Children Prosocial Behavior Ratings

Student	Internalizing Problems		Externalizing Problems		Behavior Symptoms		Adaptive Skills	
	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>
Fabian	58	44	71	54	69	53	30	43
Paige	57	54	64	63	79	81	27	29
Zeke	82	84	74	86	99	100	26	27
Phoebe	70	77	54	66	64	72	33	29
Isaac	55	47	86	74	86	69	33	38

Note: Ratings in boldface indicate a positive impact on student's prosocial behavior

Fabian, who spent the most amount of time, 80 days, accessing the Rising Stars program services exhibited the greatest difference in prosocial behaviors before and after participation across all categories reported. He demonstrated improved prosocial behaviors in all categories

reported, with decreased scores in the areas of Internalizing Problems, Externalizing Problems and Behavior Symptoms and increased scores in Adaptive Skills. Each of these post scores, reported following his participation in the Rising Stars program, fell within the normal or expected developmental range.

Similar to trends observed for Fabian, Isaac demonstrated improved prosocial behaviors in all categories reported following participation in the Rising Stars program. Decreased scores for Internalizing Problems, Externalizing Problems and School Problems, as well as increased scores for Adaptive Skills were noted from the pre to post measures. While this data indicates improvements in all areas of prosocial behavior, Isaac continues to have needs in three of the four categories of development with Clinically Significant classifications for Externalizing Problems, as well as an At-Risk classification for Behavior Symptoms and Adaptive Skills. Isaac's abilities in the area of Internalizing Problems increased to fall within the Normal, or Developmentally Appropriate, expectancy range following his access to services provided in the Rising Stars Program.

As was noted with both Fabian and Isaac, but to a lesser degree, Paige demonstrated minimally improved prosocial behaviors in all categories, with scores decreasing in the areas of Internalizing Problems, Externalizing Problems, and Behavior Symptoms, as well as an increase in Adaptive Skills following her participation in the Rising Stars program. Paige was identified to possess Normal, or Developmentally Appropriate, prosocial behaviors in the area of Internalizing Problems following her participation in the Rising Stars Program. She fell in the At-Risk range for Externalizing Problems and Clinically Significant range for both Behavior Symptoms and Adaptive Skills.

Unlike Fabian, Isaac and Paige, Zeke demonstrated very consistent patterns of prosocial behavior, with little variation between pre- and post- measures in all categories reported, before and after participation in the Rising Stars Program. Zeke continued to demonstrate Clinically Significant behavioral needs in all areas of development. Additionally, Phoebe demonstrated no improvements in prosocial behaviors with scores for each category and was identified as Clinically Significant in the areas of Internalizing Problems, Behavior Symptoms and Adaptive Skills, as well as At-Risk for Externalizing Problems.

In addition to the data gathered on prosocial behavior through the BASC-3 TRS-C, the survey questionnaire provided to school staff included items associated with students' social-emotional and behavioral needs. On the survey questionnaire administered, 80% of both classroom teachers and Rising Stars staff indicated "Always" identifying students to participate in the Rising Stars program based on their social-emotional and/or behavioral needs. The remaining 20% of those surveyed indicated these factors were "almost always" considered. Additionally, the school principal, 80% of classroom teachers and 50% of the Rising Stars program staff responded that social-emotional and behavioral services were "always" or "almost always" provided to promote prosocial behavior and school functioning of students accessing these supports. The remaining staff surveyed indicated these services were "sometimes" provided and noted times where behaviors/needs of some students prohibited others from having access to the social-emotional services offered.

During interviews with school staff regarding the services provided to students within the Rising Stars program, information was gathered specific to students' prosocial behavior. Identification of students who are in need of support to learn the skills they may be lacking is an important consideration of who can/will access the program. The strongest theme acknowledged

through analyzing interview responses indicated students were identified to participate in the Rising Stars program based on their ability to successfully access their education. Additional themes in program participation identification included behavior, social issues and safety.

A kindergarten teacher, Laura, shared her experience of how, and why, a student was identified to require this level of intensive intervention:

There was a conversation because my student came in with identifiers that would make him the perfect candidate for something that would help his growth. My student came in brand new to the country and brand new to the school district and right away there were some red flags that we could tell weren't only language inhibitors for him. He had a lot of social issues with friends, a lot of trouble just following classroom rules and procedures, even with an interpreter in the room and visuals, he needed more of that one-on-one instruction on how to function in a classroom, how to work with other students, how to access education in the United States. (Laura, Kindergarten teacher)

Roxanne, a first-grade teacher, shared her insights into the rationale behind Zeke's participation in the program:

We were very concerned that he [Zeke] would have equal access to reading and math to show where his potentials would lie in both. He is exceptionally well below in both subjects.... He was really struggling because he was struggling academically and struggling socially. He did not know how to interact in a whole group situation, in a small group situation, in a partner situation. (Roxanne, first grade teacher)

Additionally, the behavior specialist, Annie, shared her perspective on identifying students who may benefit from the services provided through the Rising Stars program:

When we have a student, who may be struggling to remain in the classroom, remain safe or engage in the work in an appropriate way or might need additional supports more often than other students do, we are thinking about what kind of supports we can provide for the student. In certain cases, we need to get them learning and we need them to engage in their school experience and they're not having much success doing that or they're having difficulty being successful in the classroom. So, we're providing an alternative space where there are fewer distractions, fewer students, more individualized instruction and more behavior, emotional, social intervention to help them reset and prepare to get back into the classroom and be safe and be engaged in learning that's taking place. (Annie, behavior specialist)

The school principal, Zach, shared the perspective of how prosocial behaviors associated with both safety and student engagement are considered when identifying students to participate in the Rising Stars program:

We look at the behaviors that we want to target and it's very specific. We break it down into calm body, calm hands, safe body, safe hands because their behaviors are really functioning as not doing those things. So, while some students might have to do work and it's like task avoidance and we're trying to keep them on task. Some students we have to look at and think about just managing their body in a safe manner and complying with simple rules first. (Zach, school principal)

In considering the impact of the Rising Stars program on students' prosocial behaviors school staff was asked about a time when the services offered supported this area of development. The strongest theme identified through analyzing interview data indicated positive social interaction with peers as an observation of students improved prosocial behavior following program participation. The ability to identify feelings was also reported as an area where prosocial behavior was positively impacted.

An instructional assistant for behavior support, Sarah, shared the impact observed for a third-grade student who took part in the program during the previous school year:

There's a student in third grade and she participated in the program. She had a lot of needs to be met last year and she had a really difficult time expressing those needs consistently and in a safe way. I feel like this year I've seen a huge difference, not to say that she doesn't have days where she's struggling behaviorally, but she is now able to verbalize what it is that she needs to be able to meet the expectation. I think she has an understanding of what school is to look like and how she can best succeed in this environment, by expressing it to adults that are available to her as to what she needs. I think that's a big success story. (Sarah, behavior support instructional assistant)

Laura, a kindergarten teacher, explained how a student in her class, Fabian, needed support in developing prosocial behaviors which occurred through the use of a play-based therapy social group offered in the Rising Stars program:

We also have been looking at his social skills. And another cultural thing that we found out from his parents was that physical contact and how there's not really personal body space, especially between males. And that's what we were noticing in the classroom was

that the student was very close to other boys and will try and sit on them or kiss them. Kissing them was a big issue on the playground. And we found out that that was cultural. And so, through the rising star program we came up with this social group through a play-based therapy. We bring in two other friends and we've specifically targeted males since you know, the cultural pieces with that and we're teaching him how to use his voice instead of his body and how to be socially appropriate for United States classrooms. (Laura, kindergarten teacher)

Another instructional assistant for behavior support, Lori, discussed the change in prosocial behaviors, as well as engagement in learning, which occurred for a kindergarten student who participated in the program this school year:

He [Fabian] learned that he can't put hands on other people. In the beginning it was really difficult for him to even stay in Rising Stars and work on the curriculum for his social emotional goals or his behavior. He was basically, lashing out at the teacher or anybody else that would be in there. He just couldn't work. But then eventually with the teacher and with the behavior support team, he learns how to do his academics and we've worked first with a goal and then get a break - work and break. He then learned with social-emotional support what was appropriate and what wasn't appropriate in a school setting. And he's made phenomenal progress and it's not even halfway through the year.” (Lori, behavior support instructional assistant)

A second-grade teacher, Lynda, explained how a student in her class, Phoebe, has benefited from the specific social-emotional and behavior support lessons which occur as part of the Rising Stars program:

Unfortunately, my student would always get upset and we had no idea why she would get upset. I mean, very loudly upset. So now that she's in the group, she's able to identify some feelings accurately about why she's getting so upset, why she's having such a difficult time. (Lynda, second grade teacher)

In addition to considering how the Rising Stars program assisted students in developing prosocial behaviors, school staff were also asked about if there was a time when services may not have supported meeting students' behavioral needs. A second-grade teacher, Stacey, shared a drawback to when a student accesses the program:

I think that one-on-one, like the kids wanting that one-on-one attention and knowing that if they act out they're going to go to rising star and they're going to get that one-on-one attention. I think that's one of the biggest struggles because we know that they need that.

And it's important. But giving that balance and teaching them appropriate ways to ask for it because one of our students, he really likes working one-on-one and what he really needs to be able to do is accept that things aren't always going to go his way. So, when he has his, I don't want to call it a tantrum, but that's really what it is. When he has his tantrums, he thinks he can run out of the room and then he's going to spend the rest of the day, in the Rising Stars program, and then it will be all hunky dory for him. (Stacey, second grade teacher)

Quantitative data from the BASC-3 TRS-C measuring students' prosocial behavior indicated a positive impact following participation in the Rising Stars program for three out of five students, Fabian, Isaac and Paige. One of these three students, Fabian, demonstrated skills in all four areas of development within the normal range following his participation in the Rising Stars program. It is noted that Fabian accessed the services provided for the longest period of time, 80 days, and the changes reported on the BASC-3 TRS-C may be associated with the length of time he participated in the program. The two other students had very little variation in their prosocial behaviors as reported on the BASC-3 TRS-C.

Quantitative data gathered through the staff survey, along with the qualitative data obtained through the interview process, indicate a positive impact on students' prosocial behavior following their participation in the Rising Stars program. Being able to remain safe in the classroom environment, keeping hands/feet to self, refraining from harmful behaviors such as biting and interacting appropriately with peers were noted as areas where students' prosocial behaviors improved after accessing services provided through the Rising Stars program.

Research question 1.2. What is the impact on students' school functioning after participation in the Rising Stars program?

In the areas of disciplinary referrals and behavior support calls, pre-measure data was gathered prior to students participating in the Rising Stars program. The post-measures were compiled after students had returned to their general education classrooms for four consecutive

weeks. Table 9 outlines the disciplinary referral data both before and after student participation in the Rising Stars program.

Table 9

Disciplinary Referral Data

Student	Referrals	
	<i>Pre-Rising Stars</i>	<i>Post- Rising Stars</i>
Fabian	5	0
Paige	0	0
Zeke	1	0
Phoebe	1	0
Isaac	2	1

All but one of the students identified to participate in the Rising Stars program received at least one referral prior to accessing the social-emotional and behavioral support provided. Fabian had the highest number of referrals and also accessed the services through the Rising Stars program for the longest period of time. Seven of the total referrals received for these students were for disrespect and the other two were for disruption. Following access to services provided through the Rising Stars program only one of the five students received a disciplinary referral, which was written for disruption.

Table 10 outlines the number of behavior support calls received for students both before and after accessing services provided through the Rising Stars program. A total of 116 behavior support calls were made to school support and/or administration to assist students prior to their participation in the Rising Stars program. Eighteen calls for behavior support were made by classroom teachers of students during the four weeks after they returned to the general education classroom.

Table 10

Behavior Support Call Data

Student	Behavior Support Calls	
	<i>Pre-Rising Stars</i>	<i>Post- Rising Stars</i>
Fabian	92	2
Paige	0	0
Zeke	12	5
Phoebe	9	5
Isaac	3	6

Fabian required the most assistance for demonstrating behaviors within the classroom which were defiant, disruptive, physically aggressive and/or unsafe prior to his participation in the Rising Stars Program. Zeke, Phoebe and Isaac also received support for these types of behaviors, occurring on a much less frequent basis. Paige did not require behavior support for unsafe, dangerous or disrespectful behavior, but was provided assistance for distracting behaviors which interfered with learning and/or work completion in the classroom.

Following participation in the Rising Stars Program a total of 18 behavior support calls were made to school support and/or administration for these five students. Four of the five students required less behavior support from school staff in order to safely access the school environment. In the four weeks which followed Fabian's participation in the Rising Stars Program there were only two instances where the classroom teacher called for support to respond to behaviors interfering with his learning, or that of others. This is the most notable improvement of all students who accessed services through the Rising Stars program, as prior to his participation behavior support was called 92 times to assist Fabian in the classroom during a three-week time frame at the start of the school year.

In the survey provided to Rising Stars program staff, classroom teachers of students identified to participate in the program and the school principal, questions were asked related to areas of school functioning. Eighty percent of both classroom teachers and Rising Stars staff, as well as the school principal, indicated students were “always” identified to participate in the Rising Stars program based on their social-emotional and/or behavioral needs. The remaining 20% of those surveyed indicated these factors were “almost always” considered. Additionally, the school principal and 80% percent of classrooms teachers indicated social-emotional and behavioral services were “always” or “almost always” provided to students in the Rising Stars program to promote prosocial behavior and school functioning. This corresponds to one-half of the Rising Stars program staff who indicated prosocial behavior and school functioning were addressed through the program by providing social-emotional and behavioral services. The additional 20% of classroom teachers and 50% of Rising Stars staff responded that these services are provided “sometimes” with one of the anonymous classroom teacher responses noting that “several times my student was not met with because of the other students’ needs.”

In order to further understand the impact of participation in the Rising Stars program on students’ school functioning, interviews with school staff included questions related to students’ ability to successfully access the educational environment. Students’ ability to function in the general education classroom was identified as the strongest theme through individual item analysis of interview questions. Completing work and following directions were also noted as areas where school functioning improved for students after accessing services provided through the Rising Stars program.

A kindergarten teacher, Laura, shared her observations of Fabian’s progress as a result of accessing supports offered in the Rising Stars program:

So, my student was not able to function at all at the beginning of the school year. Recently he has been able to spend almost the whole day in the classroom completing work. Yes, he needs reminders. Yes, we need to be more in tune to his needs and give him breaks and be very close. But he's completing work and he's moving with his groups and he's following directions. Tremendous growth. He has shown so much growth and I don't think we would have been this successful, or nearly as successful, if we didn't have the support of the rising star program. (Laura, kindergarten teacher)

The school principal, Zach, offered insights into how the Rising Stars program promotes school functioning due to the focus on developing self-regulation skills and a trauma informed approach to providing support:

I think every student we've had there has been able to regain some manageable behavior and self-regulation. It serves our very youngest students so we may have students that require more than one opportunity in that room because of behaviors. I think our view on it is if we can manage that student within the rising stars program and were able to get that student to regain access to the classroom, even if it's for a short time, because the behaviors are pretty intense and we are working to reduce them, we can consider that a success. Our students suffer from the trauma and the behavior is usually a manifestation of that trauma. We know that it's going to be a longer time. I always say a marathon versus the sprint. We understand that. And there's going to be students who require that opportunity and support more than once. (Zach, school principal)

Overall, both quantitative and qualitative data indicated a positive impact on students' school functioning following their participation in the Rising Stars program. Students received fewer disciplinary referrals, required fewer behavior support calls and demonstrated such skills as being able to follow directions, remain in the classroom with their peers and work in group settings.

Research question 1.3. What is the impact on students' academic performance after participation in the Rising Stars program?

One of the goals of the Rising Stars program was to continue student learning. In order to understand the impact of participation in the program on students' academic achievement, data was collected on enrolled grade level assessments in the areas of reading and mathematics. Table

11 outlines the reading achievement data and Table 12 provides an overview of the mathematics achievement data for all students before and after their participation in the Rising Stars program.

Table 11

Grade Level Reading Assessment Data

Student	Reading Achievement			
	<i>Pre-Rising Stars</i>	<i>Expectation</i>	<i>Post- Rising Stars</i>	<i>Expectation</i>
Fabian	A	A	B	C
Paige	D	F	I	G/H
Zeke	Pre-A	F	A	G/H
Phoebe	K	K	O	L
Isaac	L	K	M	L

Note: Reading levels in boldface indicate meeting/exceeding grade level expectations

Table 12

Grade Level Mathematics Assessment Data

Student	Math Achievement			
	<i>Pre-Rising Stars</i>	<i>Expectation</i>	<i>Post- Rising Stars</i>	<i>Expectation</i>
Fabian	100	80	100	80
Paige	60	80	80	80
Zeke	60	80	40	80
Phoebe	92	80	72	80
Isaac	57	80	57	80

Note: Scores in boldface indicate meeting/exceeding grade level expectations

In reading, all five students who participated in the Rising Stars program demonstrated growth from the pre- to post-measure. Three of the five students (Paige, Phoebe and Isaac) were exceeding grade level expectations at the time of the post-measure. One student, Fabian, was performing one level below the grade level expectation by the time of the post-measure of performance. Another student, Zeke, made growth of one reading level between the pre- and post-measures, but was still performing six levels below grade level expectations. Paige was performing two levels below the grade level expectation at the time of the pre-measure and made

growth of five reading levels, which was exceeding expectations by the time of the post-measure. Another student, Phoebe, who was performing on grade level at the time of the pre-measure made growth of four reading levels and was exceeding expectations by three levels at the time of the post-measure.

In mathematics, two students maintained their performance, one student demonstrated growth and two students' scores declined from the pre- to post-measures. Fabian maintained a score of 100, which was exceeding expectations, at both assessment checkpoints. Another student, Isaac, demonstrated a consistent performance on both assessment measures, although both were 23 points from meeting grade level expectations. Paige showed an increase of 20 percentage points between the pre- and post-measures and met grade level expectations at the second assessment interval. Zeke and Phoebe both declined in their performance between the first and second assessment. Phoebe went from exceeding expectations at the first assessment interval to not meeting expectations at the second assessment administration.

On the survey questionnaire provided to classroom teachers of students identified to participate in the Rising Stars program, Rising Stars staff and the school principal, questions were posed related to academic achievement. Academic services promoting student achievement were identified as being provided through the Rising Stars program by 100% of both classroom teachers and Rising Stars staff, as well as the school principal. Sixty percent of classroom teachers and one out of four Rising Stars program staff identified academic services to be provided consistently, or "always." The remaining 40% of classroom teachers and 75% of Rising Stars staff, along with the school principal, indicated these services were "almost always" provided within the program. Additionally, the school principal along with 100% of both classroom teachers and Rising Stars program staff responded that students identified to

participate in the program are offered opportunities to return to their general education classroom, thereby accessing the academic services provided to promote the achievement of all students.

In order to better understand the impact of participation in the Rising Stars program on students' academic performance, questions were posed during interviews with school staff regarding if, and how, the Rising Stars program continues student learning. The ability to access some instruction was the strongest theme identified through individual item analysis of interview questions. Social-emotional supports along with providing instruction which aligned to student interest, as well as offering choice, were also noted as factors impacting academic achievement.

Annie, the behavior specialist, recognized the level of participation in learning as one way to gauge an impact on academic performance:

Students that we have this year that are participating in rising stars are not learning in their regular classroom. Most of them, they are missing out on a lot of instruction in the regular classroom and by going to rising stars they're getting something. They're receiving some instruction, some of them receiving more than others depending on how receptive they are that day or that week or that period of time. But, it's always better than nothing. (Annie, behavior specialist)

The Rising Stars program teacher, Mia, noted access to learning as one way to recognize if an impact on academics occurs as a result of students participating in services offered. She explained the importance of being able to modify work while continuing to maintain rigor within academic content:

If they're able to access learning when they are there, they are meeting academics expected within the classroom. But if they're coming and they're just not able to do work, we kind of modify what's going on in the classroom, simplify it and chunk it, and then slowly bring them back to the content within the class. So, it's good because there's no break in academics and we try, no matter what, to make sure that they're getting some kind of academic throughout the day. Even if it's kind of simplified, like hands on, and modified of what the curriculum is doing within the classroom and then slowly kind of building that rigor in that academic content that they're getting. (Mia, Rising Stars Program Teacher)

A kindergarten teacher, Laura, shared how the Rising Stars program provided for academic opportunities to meet the unique language needs of, Fabian, a student in her class:

We also had to look at his language and the vocabulary that he was using and make connections for him. So, within the rising star program, when they were transitioning between activities, they would pull up pictures of things from his country and he would get excited and he would talk about that and he would make connections and use his English vocabulary with his Arabic vocabulary, which I think made him more comfortable and got him speaking more within that program. And he connected that to the reading that he was doing in the Rising Stars room. (Laura, kindergarten teacher)

Sarah, an instructional assistant for behavior support, recognized the critical role of the teacher within the Rising Stars program in order for student learning to continue. She described the importance of understanding individual student needs in order to allow them to experience success:

I think that we have a great teacher in there who understands the needs of children, so she does really creatively try to meet the students where they're at academically. And also giving them activities that they have interest in and also giving them choice. And I think that that's the biggest thing, you know if our schedule says math first and then reading, but the student isn't prepared to do math and they prefer to do reading and then math, she's not getting into a power struggle about those kinds of things. She's really trying to meet them and allow them to see success. (Sarah, behavior instructional assistant)

Zach, the school principal, shared his perspective on how the Rising Stars program works towards academic achievement, recognizing that in order for this occur student behavior must first have been managed effectively:

Once the behavior is managed and we work through some of those pieces every day a student is spending time in there. There's always an academic component. This is versus a time when a student might be in a consequential or behavior crisis situation and we're working through that several times in the front office, and rarely is there a consistent academic goal met. The rising stars program allows for the plan to chunk that opportunity in a manageable amount of time so the student can gain access to some things or they're able to go back into the classroom and not be so far behind. Every time a student is in there, there's a very strong balance of social, emotional support and academic support. (Zach, school principal)

Roxanne, a first-grade teacher, identified how a student in her class, Zeke, has not yet been able to access academics, despite these services being offered through the program:

For my student, I think his social emotional needs are being met. However, we haven't accessed the academic yet. That's where we're still working for that foundation and because of his medication it is very, very difficult to have consistency there. (Roxanne, first grade teacher)

As a result of the Rising Stars program continuing student learning, both quantitative and qualitative measures indicated a positive impact on students' academic performance after accessing services provided. All students demonstrated growth in the area of reading and three out of five students demonstrated growth in the area of mathematics. Overall, students demonstrated an ability to engage in learning within the general education classroom environment, which contributed to the academic growth in both content areas.

Summary of Findings

This study was designed to identify the impact of participation in the Rising Stars program on students' prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance. Data was collected in each of these areas before and after students were identified to access services provided through the Rising Stars program. These pre- and post-measures were then used to determine the program's impact on students in each of the identified areas: prosocial behavior, school functioning, and academic performance. Table 13 outlines the global impact of the program by highlighting the individual progress of all students in each of the areas studied.

Table 13

Global Impact of Program Participation

Student	Prosocial Behavior	School Functioning	Academic Performance
Fabian	Improved ratings in all four areas	Decreased referrals from five to zero	Increased one reading levels (approaching expectations)
	Achieved normal, or developmentally appropriate, ratings in all areas	Decreased behavior support calls from 92 to two	Maintained mathematics performance (exceeding expectations)
Paige	Improved ratings in three out of four areas	Maintained zero referrals	Increased five reading levels (exceeding expectations)
	Achieved normal, or developmentally appropriate, ratings in the area of Internalizing Problems	Maintained zero behavior support calls	Increased mathematics performance (meeting expectations)
Zeke	Improved ratings in one out of four areas	Decreased referrals from one to zero	Increased one reading level (not meeting expectations)
		Decreased behavior support calls from 12 to five	Decreased mathematics performance (not meeting expectations)
Phoebe	Maintained ratings in all four areas	Decreased referrals from one to zero	Increased four reading levels (exceeding expectations)
		Decreased behavior supports calls from nine to five	Decreased mathematics performance (approaching expectations)
Isaac	Improved ratings in all four areas	Decreased referrals from two to one	Increased one reading level (exceeding expectations)
	Achieved normal, or developmentally appropriate, ratings in the area of Internalizing Problems	Increased behavior support calls from three to six	Maintained mathematics performance (approaching expectations)

In the area of prosocial behavior, three of the five students demonstrated improved skills in all areas of development: Internalizing Problems, Externalizing Problems, Behavior Symptoms and Adaptive Skills. One of the students demonstrated increases in all prosocial

behavior categories resulting in normal, or developmentally appropriate, expectations following his participation in the Rising Stars program. Two other students demonstrated increases in skills associated with all areas of prosocial behavior measured and fell in the normal range for Internalizing Behavior. Two of the five students demonstrated consistent patterns of prosocial behavior from the pre- to post-measures.

All five students demonstrated more positive school functioning following their participation in the Rising Stars program. Receiving fewer disciplinary referrals and requiring less frequent behavior support was evident for all students. Four of the five students had no referrals in the four weeks following access to services provided through the Rising Stars Program. One student had one referral for disrespect. In addition, school staff recognized improvements in students' abilities to manage behavior, self-regulate their emotions, follow directions and remain in the general education classroom environment.

All five students demonstrated academic growth in the area of reading after their participation in the Rising Stars program. Three students were exceeding enrolled grade level expectations following the academic and behavioral support received. One student increased five reading levels, moving from performing below to above grade level. Another student increased four reading levels, moving from meeting to exceeding expectations. Two students each increased one reading level but were still performing below the grade level expectation. One of these students was reading one level below the enrolled grade level expectation and the other was six levels below.

Three students either maintained or improved their academic performance in the area of math following their participation in the Rising Stars program. One of these students demonstrated growth to achieve grade level expectations. Another student maintained the same

level of proficiency but was still below the grade level expectation. Two students regressed in the area of mathematics achievement, each by 20 percentage points. Unlike reading, which progresses with increasing text complexity and associated behaviors to successfully read a given level, the mathematics assessments are designed to evaluate specific skills/content at a given period in time. This means the pre- and post-measures used as part of data collection were not necessarily measuring the same mathematics behaviors and could account for the variation in academic achievement of students in this content area.

Completing work, being engaged in learning and participating in group activities were identified by school staff as areas where students improved following their access to services provided through the Rising Stars program. These aspects associated with students being available to learn contributed to their individual academic progress in the areas of reading and mathematics.

School staff shared their observations of students returning to the classroom environment following their participation in the Rising Stars program. This information highlights how students responded to services provided, as well as impact on their behavior, school functioning and/or academic performance. The ability to successfully reintegrate with the group was the strongest theme identified through individual item analysis of interview questions. Interacting appropriately with peers was also noted as a theme for students who access services provided through the Rising Stars program.

Mia, Rising Stars Program Teacher, noted the excitement she observes from students when they go back to their general education classroom:

Usually when they get back to class, they're excited to be back. They know that like they've had this refreshing kind of reset and I see that they're ready to engage. Sometimes it's too soon, and you see automatically that they're not ready and it's usually seen with

the way they interact with their peers or how they're accessing the academic expectations that are being given. (Mia, Rising Stars Program Teacher)

Sarah, second grade classroom teacher, recognized the observable difference in the demeanor of a student associated with his participation in the program:

Our student usually spends the rest of the day in the Rising Stars program, so he's not back in the classroom until the next day. But I do notice that he'll go to specials and by the end of specials he's smiling and he's happy and he can't wait for [Mia] to come pick him up again so he can go back to the program, which is very different than how he would have been leaving specials on any other day of the week. (Sarah, second grade classroom teacher)

Summary and Transition to Chapter 5

This chapter outlined the individual student data which informed the overall programmatic impact of participation in the Rising Stars program on prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance. Improved ability to demonstrate appropriate behavior was observed for three out of the five students included in the research study. All five students who participated in the Rising Stars program demonstrated an increased ability to access the educational environment. Academic progress in the areas of reading was observed for all five students and growth in mathematics was observed for three out of five students. Overall, participation in the Rising Stars program positively impacted students in all areas measured: prosocial behavior, school functioning, and academic performance. The next chapter further discusses these findings, as well as presents future recommendations and implications for both research and practice.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSIONS

Exploring solutions to problems associated with escalating challenging behaviors of students in kindergarten through second grade, along with the prohibiting of suspension for children in this age group at both the state and local levels, served as the rationale for conducting this study. The development of the Rising Stars program served as a proposal for how schools respond to the physically aggressive and antisocial behavior of students in early elementary grades which prevented them from effectively functioning within their school environment and negatively impacted their educational achievement. School staff at the research site worked together as a community of practice to improve the way social-emotional and behavioral support was provided to students who required intensive and individualized services to meet their unique needs. Drawing on aspects of Social Learning Theory and Cognitive Behavior Theory, the behavioral interventions of the Rising Stars program were aimed at promoting development of prosocial behaviors through explicit modeling, direct experience, guided play, positive reinforcement and cognitive training. In order to better understand how to implement these interventions within an elementary behavior support program, and its impact students' prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance, the interactive inquiry process of action research was utilized.

Gathering pre and post data in the areas of prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance the study employed a mixed methods design. Prosocial behavior data was collected using the Behavior Assessment System for Children, Third Edition (BASC-3) Teacher Rating Scales for Children (TRS-C). School functioning was measured using the number of behavior support calls and disciplinary referrals. Academic performance data in the areas of reading and mathematics was gathered based on the enrolled grade level assessments

administered to all students. An additional quantitative measure in the form of a survey questionnaire was used to evaluate components related to the implementation of the Rising Stars program.

In addition to quantitative data sources, interviews served as illustrative examples of the insights, perspectives, experiences and observations of school staff regarding student participation in the Rising Stars program. Interviews with Rising Stars staff and a focus group comprised of general education classroom teachers of students identified to participate in the program served as sources of qualitative data. An interview with the school principal also yielded qualitative data on the observations of student behavior and data changes associated with the implementation of the Rising Stars program.

Data collected was aimed at answering the following research questions:

1. What is the impact of participation in the Rising Stars program, an elementary behavior support program comprised of academic and behavioral interventions, on targeted kindergarten through second grade students' prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance?
 - 1.1 What is the impact on students' prosocial behavior after participation in the Rising Stars program?
 - 1.2 What is the impact on students' school functioning after participation in the Rising Stars program?
 - 1.3 What is the impact on students' academic performance after participation in the Rising Stars program?

Summary of Findings

This study was designed to identify the impact of participation in the Rising Stars program on students' prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance. Data were collected on each of these variables before students were identified to access services provided through the Rising Stars program and again following their participation. These pre- and post-measures were then used to determine the program's impact on students in each of the identified areas: prosocial behavior, school functioning, and academic performance.

Improvements in each of the three identified areas, prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance, were observed for at least some of the students who accessed services in the Rising Stars program. In the area of prosocial behavior, three of the five students demonstrated improved skills in all areas of development: Internalizing Problems, Externalizing Problems, Behavior Symptoms and Adaptive Skills. One of these students demonstrated increases in all prosocial behavior categories resulting in normal, or developmentally appropriate, expectations following his participation in the Rising Stars program. Two of these students demonstrated normal expectations in the area of Internalizing Problems after accessing services provided.

All five students demonstrated more positive school functioning following their participation in the Rising Stars program. Four of the five students required less frequent behavior support and all five students received fewer disciplinary referrals after accessing services provided through the Rising Stars Program. School staff recognized improvements in students' abilities to manage behavior, self-regulate their emotions, follow directions and safely remain in the general education classroom environment.

All five students demonstrated academic growth in the area of reading after their participation in the Rising Stars program. Three students were exceeding enrolled grade level expectations following the academic and behavioral support received. Two students each increased one reading level but were still performing below the grade level expectation.

Three students either maintained or improved their academic performance in the area of mathematics following their participation in the Rising Stars program. One of these students demonstrated growth to achieve grade level expectations. Another student maintained the same level of proficiency but was still below the grade level expectation. Two students regressed in the area of mathematics achievement, each by 20 percentage points. Unlike reading, which progresses with increasing text complexity and associated behaviors to successfully read a given level, the mathematics assessments are designed to evaluate specific skills/content at a given period in time. This means the pre- and post-measures used as part of data collection were not necessarily measuring the same skills/content and could account for the fluctuation in scores.

School staff reported students being available to learn as a factor contributing to academic progress in the areas of reading and mathematics. Completing work, being engaged in learning and participating in group activities were identified by school staff as areas where students improved following their access to services provided through the Rising Stars program.

Discussion of Findings

The primary goal of education is for students to participate in classroom, and school, experiences in order to achieve academic success. Unfortunately, not all students are poised or prepared to effectively function within the school environment when they enter school.

Environmental factors, such as poverty, and adverse childhood experiences, such as emotional,

physical or sexual abuse or neglect, contribute to the well-developed patterns of antisocial behavior many students bring to school (Walker, Ramsey & Gresham, 2004).

Prior to accessing the Rising Stars program, students identified as needing to participate were displaying antisocial, physically aggressive and/or unsafe behaviors. Fabian, Zeke and Phoebe eloped from the classroom, or school building, posing a safety risk and requiring adult support. Both Fabian and Zeke also engaged in aggressive behaviors including scratching, hitting, kicking and biting when behavior support attempted to intervene and assist them in the classroom setting. Paige, Zeke and Isaac were frequently unavailable for learning as a result of refusing to participate or being distracted when expected to work independently. Phoebe and Isaac exhibited additional disruptive behaviors including a lack of impulse control resulting in making noises which interfered with the learning of others. All five students lacked the ability to interact appropriately with peers in both academic and social situations.

The Rising Stars program was designed to teach the prosocial behaviors students were lacking, develop effective alternatives to traditional disciplinary practices and expand the continuum of services available to meet students' social-emotional and behavioral needs. Establishing the program within the comprehensive school setting and making services available to students who were not yet identified with a disability, allowed access to targeted intensive intervention and social-emotional instruction tailored to individualized student needs. The goals of the program included continuing student learning, by providing ongoing academic instruction, while simultaneously teaching students the prosocial behaviors necessary to effectively function within the school environment.

During the interview process, the school principal, Zach, shared his perspective as to why the Rising Stars program was created and the opportunities it provides to students:

The real reason behind why we are doing it, because we know it's right for kids. We want to keep them at school, we want to keep them here in an academic setting, want to give them as many chances to access that academic opportunity as possible. So really, it's coming down to what's right for kids. (Zach, school principal)

Being able to remain safe in the classroom environment, keeping hands/feet to self, refraining from harmful behaviors such as hitting, kicking or biting and interacting appropriately with peers were noted as areas where students' prosocial behaviors improved after accessing services provided through the Rising Stars program. Students' ability to function in the general education classroom, including being engaged in learning and participating in group activities, was identified as the strongest theme through individual item analysis of interview questions. Completing work and following directions were also recognized as areas where school functioning improved for students after accessing services provided through the Rising Stars program. The ability to successfully reintegrate with the group and successfully engage with peers was observed by general education teachers for students who accessed services provided through the Rising Stars program upon their return to class.

Mia, the Rising Stars Program Teacher, further identified the overall benefit of having the program available in the comprehensive school setting:

I think the program is a great idea. It allows students to learn the behavior, the social-emotional aspects that they need to be successful without leaving the school. So many of the students are coming with behaviors and they're not able to access the information and academics then they lose it. So, having this here and having them quickly reset in the fastest way possible, it is really awesome to see because then they do get back in and they are fully implemented with their peers in the general education classroom, it's awesome to see the change that's gone on. And when they need it again, they can quickly come and reset. (Mia, Rising Stars Program Teacher)

The findings of this study are important because of the justification provided as to why teaching the prosocial skills students are lacking can, and should, be a focus of behavioral interventions and supports provided in all elementary school settings. The improvements in

students' prosocial behavior, school functioning and academic performance, as a result of the targeted intensive and individualized services provided, highlight the need for elementary behavior support programs, such as Rising Stars, to be available within comprehensive school settings. Administrators are faced not only with responding to antisocial, physically aggressive and/or unsafe behaviors of students through establishing alternatives to traditional disciplinary practices, but also must consider the concerns from families of students who are not in crisis and the impact to the overall educational environment. The design of the Rising Stars program, including the theoretical perspectives which informed the behavioral interventions provided, are areas where school administrators can expand their understanding of social-emotional learning, self-regulation and trauma informed instructional practices in order to be better equipped at leading in situations where students may not respond to universal systems of support.

For school administrators considering implementing an elementary behavior support program, there are several findings from the interview process with school staff which can inform the process. Careful selection of staff who will facilitate the program is a priority. Identifying a teacher who is able to manage the demands of planning and instructing multiple grade levels of academic content is necessary. Training staff, including the teacher, school counselor, behavior specialist and instructional assistants, is critical to ensure consistency when behavioral interventions and support are provided.

In addition to thoughtful decision-making regarding staffing, administrators must also consider program location as part of the implementation process. The space identified where the program will be housed needs to be conducive to the services being provided. Areas for small group, as well as independent work, are needed for academic instruction to occur. Sensory

materials, a space to employ self-regulation skills and calm down coping strategies and an area for guided play, social skills and behavior lessons are all also necessary.

Finally, once decisions concerning staffing and space have been made, administrators need to lead the communication regarding availability of the program to support students who demonstrate social-emotional and behavioral challenges within the comprehensive school setting. Sharing information with school staff, specifically general education teachers of students who may be identified to access services, as well as families is critical to ensure the smooth functioning of the program. Ongoing communication between staff facilitating the elementary behavior support program and classroom teachers of students identified to participate is also a crucial aspect of the program's success. Such communication, and collaboration, contributes to students being able to successfully reintegrate into the classroom community, applying social-emotional, behavioral and academic skills learned through the program into the everyday aspects of their school experiences.

Summary Statement

The Rising Stars program was designed to provide intensive individualized behavioral interventions to students lacking the prosocial behaviors necessary to effectively function within the school environment. Students who were unresponsive to universal social-emotional curriculum, as well as traditional classroom management techniques, were identified to participate in the program. Rather than provide punitive consequences for disruptive, defiant, aggressive and unsafe behavior, the social-emotional and behavioral skills students required to interact appropriately with others and successfully access their educational environment were taught through direct experiences, explicit modeling, guided play, and positive reinforcement. While the sample size in this action research study is too small to generalize findings, it is noted

that access to services provided through the Rising Stars program positively impacted students in the areas of prosocial behavior, school functioning, and academic performance.

Implications for Further Research

This study opens the door for ongoing action research related to the implementation of an elementary behavior support program and its impact on students' prosocial behavior, school functioning, and academic performance. Several important considerations emerged from this research as needing to be explored further: 1) including parents of students identified to participate in the Rising Stars program as part of the study sample, 2) looking at the lasting effects of participation in the program, 3) considering the severity of student needs and 4) completing a full-scale program evaluation are all areas where further research could be conducted.

First, collecting information, through both interviews and survey methods, with parents of students identified to participate in the program would be highly beneficial. In order to further triangulate the data gathered from school staff, learning the perceptions parents have of the program, as well as observations related to their child's participation would be meaningful. This information would also help to better understand if, and how, students' behavior was impacted outside of the school setting. Additionally, gathering demographic data from parents specific to environmental causes of antisocial behavior, such as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), would allow for further alignment with theoretical perspectives underpinning the current research. Knowing more about the context of a child's life experiences outside of school, as well as if parents observed changes in their child's behavior at home during or following their participation in the Rising Stars program, would further contribute to understanding planning for

and providing intensive individualized interventions which meet the unique needs of children served.

In addition to considering parental input regarding a student's participation in the Rising Stars program, including student perspectives and voices as part of the research process would further solidify findings. Interviewing students about their behaviors, school functioning and academic performance would yield insights into additional areas of interest such as perceptions of the program, ability to transition in/out of the general education classroom setting, and areas where the program meets its intended goals to promote prosocial behavior and school functioning, as well as continue student learning. Additionally, by interviewing students who accessed services provided, data could be gathered regarding the program environment and learning experiences which most supported behavioral and academic progress. This information would help to inform enhancing both the academic and behavioral interventions provided through the Rising Stars program by hearing directly from those who it is designed to support.

Considering any immediate changes to behavioral development observed by parents, as well as student perceptions related to their experiences, is one step towards understanding the full effects of participation in the Rising Stars program on prosocial behavior. An additional step would include research aimed at following students to determine the lasting effects of participation in the program on prosocial behavior, as well as school functioning and academic performance. This process is recommended to include following students over the course of a full school year, as well as, at minimum, the following year, in order to fully recognize the impact of participation in the Rising Stars program. Additionally, a longitudinal study would also allow for following students who change schools and inform such recommendations as how

Rising Stars staff communicates with other schools regarding individual student needs to ensure ongoing success.

Following students over time, through a longitudinal study, would also provide information regarding how schools are meeting the severity of student's mental health needs. Considering the environmental factors and demographic information for students who participated in the Rising Stars program as part of this study, the coordination of services and collaboration with outside agencies to meet student needs is an additional area of research to explore. In order to further inform the design of the Rising Stars program, information about how, what, when and why to communicate with outside agencies, including but not limited to therapists providing individual counseling to students in the school setting, should be contemplated.

Determining how to best partner with outside agencies to meet students' social-emotional and behavioral needs is one piece of a full-scale program evaluation, which could be completed. In order to inform the ongoing development and enhancement of the Rising Stars program, and potential expansion or adoption of the program by other schools, it will be necessary to evaluate all aspects of the program. This would include studying both processes and outcomes, as well as including a larger sample size to attempt to determine if there is statistical significance in the findings.

Implications for Practice and Recommendations

Learning from future research by conducting a full-scale program evaluation would also lead to implications for practice, as well as recommendations in both continuing the program at its current location and considering expanding to other schools throughout the Local School System (LSS). Data collected on implementation of the program would yield insights as to

barriers and best practices in meeting the needs of students, staff and families. This information would also allow for mid-course corrections and adjustments to be made both efficiently and successfully. In addition, program milestones, benchmarks and progress monitoring points could be identified to ensure the program remains on track throughout the course of a school year to meet its mission and goals. Finally, the data gathered from a full-scale program evaluation would also inform areas such as staffing, resources and capacity building to ensure the social-emotional, behavioral and academic components of the program are being implemented effectively.

In order to enhance the success of the Rising Stars program, information gained through this research study can also inform future practices. Areas of need identified through the interview process, and also recognized in the staff survey, include improving communication with school staff regarding student participation in the program. Considering the establishment of processes or procedures for communication with classroom teachers is a necessary first step to ensure they are both aware of student progress during their participation in the program, as well as prepared to support them when returning to the general education classroom. Additionally, sharing with classroom teachers the communication which has occurred with families will assist in strengthening the relationships of all those working to support an individual student.

Focusing on improved communication practices is one area where the Rising Stars program can be enhanced in the future. Another implication for improving practices related to the design of the program, obtained through interviews with Rising Stars staff, is considering the staffing needed to adequately provide the most consistent and effective services specific to the students being served. One example as an area for improvement was including a Spanish speaking staff member who can better meet the language needs of English Learners (EL). This

recommendation was brought to light from having a Spanish speaking instructional assistant supporting the program when it was first established in the spring of 2018, but who was not on staff to continue in this role during 2018-2019, the school year in which the study was completed. Considering the population of students served, and how their language needs may impact their social-emotional and behavioral development, is a critical aspect to ensure the optimal environment for interventions to be successful.

For schools considering establishing an elementary behavior support program this study can support the rationale for allocating both funds and resources to this purpose. Additionally, the design of intensive and individualized social-emotional and behavioral lessons founded on theories of self-regulation, social learning and cognitive behavior theory can be gleaned through this research. The types of strategies implemented in the Rising Stars program, such as guided play, explicit modeling of appropriate behaviors, direct experiences, and positive reinforcement, along with curriculum such as Zones of Regulation, can inform the types of experiences considered to meet the individualized needs of students who demonstrate behaviors which interfere with their ability to successfully access the educational environment and/or interact appropriately with others.

Relationship of Findings to Theory

All of the students identified to participate in the Rising Stars program had social, emotional, behavioral and/or academic needs in the classroom which were not being met. Aligning with theories of Positive Behavior Supports (PBS), the Three-Tiered Model of School Supports, and the Teaching Pyramid, the five students who accessed the Rising Stars program were representative of the anticipated five percent of pre-kindergarten through second grade students who would require specialized systems for high-risk behavior (Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter,

Joseph & Strain, 2003; Hawken, Vincent & Schumann, 2008; Sugai & Horner, 2002). Academic supports and/or behavior management strategies employed by classroom teachers for all students were not successful for this small subset of the overall primary grade level population. While these students participated in Second Step lessons alongside their peers, this universal social-emotional skill intervention was not effective in meeting the types of behavioral needs exhibited. Additionally, these students required targeted, intensive and individualized training in the areas of social skills, behavior and self-regulation.

Teaching social-emotional and self-regulation skills occurred in the Rising Stars program through the use of Zones of Regulation, direct experiences, modeling of appropriate behavior, positive reinforcement, social skills lessons, and play-based therapy sessions. The Zones of Regulation curriculum was used to provide specific lessons focused on developing self-regulation skills. Students participated in weekly Zones of Regulation lessons aimed at recognizing emotional states, or zones, and promoting conscious regulation of actions, emotions and impulses (Kuypers & Winter, 2011). Positively interacting with peers and identifying feelings were the two strongest themes derived from the interview analysis data on prosocial behavioral differences. Additionally, three of five students demonstrated improved prosocial behavior in all areas of development on the Behavior Assessment System for Children, Third Edition (BASC-3) Teacher Rating Scales for Children (TRS-C): Internalizing Problems, Externalizing Problems, Behavior Symptoms and Adaptive Skills. These findings indicate the Zones of Regulation lessons provided in the Rising Stars program were successful in supporting students development of prosocial and self-regulation skills.

Direct experiences, modeling of expected behaviors and positive reinforcement were incorporated into the Rising Stars program environment based on understanding how patterns of

behavior are acquired through Social Learning Theory (SLT). Each student in the Rising Stars program was provided an individual star card where tokens were earned every time positive, or expected, behaviors were observed. Following either direct experiences or modeling of expected behavior, students were positively reinforced when they engaged in prosocial behaviors and successfully demonstrated social skills taught. When students earned five tokens on their star card, they then also earned a preferred break. This practice aligns with the reinforcement control aspect of SLT which acknowledges that behavior is extensively managed by consequences, either positive or negative, and thus regulated as a result (Bandura, 1971).

Understanding that thoughts and emotions also influence patterns of behavior (Herson & Gross, 2008), aspects of Cognitive Behavior Theory (CBT) were incorporated into experiences provided within the Rising Stars program. Social skills lessons were aimed at improving interactions with others, as well as decreasing avoidance of difficult situations and/or tasks. Additionally, focusing on stopping automatic negative thoughts, and associated patterns of thinking, occurred in conjunction with learning how to manage challenging experiences. Academic tasks which students perceived as difficult were often an antecedent to observed antisocial, unsafe and/or physically aggressive behavior of students identified to participate in the Rising Stars program. Through explicit modeling of strategies and guided play opportunities students were taught how to reduce and effectively respond to stress, solve problems and make corrections to antisocial behavior. Being able to remain safe in the classroom environment, keeping hands/feet to self, refraining from harmful behaviors such as biting and interacting appropriately with peers were noted by classroom teachers as areas where students' prosocial behaviors improved after accessing services provided through the Rising Stars program.

In addition to the connections between theory and the design of experiences provided within the Rising Stars program which promoted acquisition of social skills and self-regulation, further relationships between the findings of this study and the literature exist. The behavioral repertoire of social competence identified by teachers as contributing to academic performance include listening, completing tasks and following directions (Hersh & Walker, 1983) and a model behavior profile is a student who “stays in his/her seat; attends to instruction; completes tasks independently; complies with teacher requests; follows classroom rules; and who does not: defy the teacher; behave in an aggressive or disruptive manner” (Gresham, 1997). Consistent with these pieces of the literature, classroom teachers of students identified to participate in the Rising Stars program noted an ability to follow directions, complete classwork, appropriately join group activities and remain engaged in learning as differences in school functioning following access to services provided. Additionally, all five students received fewer disciplinary referrals, and four of the five students received fewer behavior support calls, following their participation in the Rising Stars program, indicating improved overall school functioning.

Improved prosocial behavior and school functioning put students on a path for increased opportunity to experience academic success. McInerney and McKlindon (2014) note the importance of reintegrating children and following a plan of learning to prevent future behavioral issues. The Rising Stars program was designed to offer students the opportunity to rejoin their general education classroom environment as soon as their behavior indicated they were able to do so. Classroom teachers of students who participated in the program identified the ability to successfully reintegrate with the group and interact appropriately with peers as two observations of behavior when students returned to class. Additionally, teachers noted being able to access instruction as the top theme derived from interview data associated with academic performance.

Consistent with teachers' identification of students being available for learning following participation in the Rising Stars program, all five students demonstrated academic growth in the area of reading and three of five students either maintained or improved their performance in the area of mathematics.

Limitations

As is the case with any study, this research is not without its limitations. Given the time needed for students to acclimate to the start of a new school year, and observations of social-emotional and/or behavioral needs to occur, students were not identified to participate in the Rising Stars program until October 2018. As the school year progressed, additional students were recommended to access the academic and/or behavioral interventions offered through the program. Based on this process, as well as the individualized nature of the intensive interventions provided and program design, students did not participate in the program for the same periods of time. Variations in program participation, coupled with the small sample size of five students, preclude the generalizability of the findings.

Summary and Conclusion

Imagine a kindergarten classroom filled with curious and imaginative five-year old children. They are learning about letters, sounds, numbers and counting. They are developing the foundational skills to become readers, mathematicians, writers and problem solvers. Perhaps you can envision songs, hands-on learning materials and opportunities to build friendships. In your image do you see a child who screams or throws materials when not given their way, or a child who climbs on furniture when it is time to come to the class meeting area? Do you see a child who pushes, hits, kicks, spits or bites when asked to work cooperatively with others, or a child who runs out of the room when given a direction? Sadly, the often-joyful images of a child's first

full day school experience may at times also include these disruptive, defiant and aggressive behaviors of children who lack the prosocial skills to successfully participate in their classroom community.

School administrators are faced with leading the response to students who demonstrate unsafe, aggressive, defiant and disruptive behaviors within early childhood classrooms. Environmental factors including, but not limited to, adverse childhood experiences, poverty and living through trauma have contributed to increased numbers of children bringing well developed patterns of antisocial behavior to school. Given legislation that prohibits suspension of students in pre-kindergarten through second grade, new alternatives to disciplinary consequences are necessary. Additionally, recognizing the need to teach children the social-emotional skills they are lacking in order to effectively function with the school environment requires a new approach to providing targeted, intensive and individualized behavioral support within the comprehensive school setting.

By establishing an elementary behavior support program, such as Rising Stars, schools are able to focus their efforts on teaching the prosocial behaviors necessary for children to interact appropriately with others and successfully participate in their educational experiences. The benefits of allocating staffing resources to facilitate a program which mirrors Rising Stars include increased prosocial behaviors, increased ability to function within the school environment, and increased academic achievement as a result of being available for, and able to continue, learning. If schools truly consider themselves responsible for preparing young people to become competent adults who are able to effectively function within, and contribute to, society, it is time to begin thinking about how we respond to antisocial behaviors.

According to The National Academy of Sciences, 60% of children enter school with the cognitive skills needed to be successful, but only 40% have the social-emotional skills to function effectively in the school environment (Maryland State Department of Education, 2018; Yates, Ostrosky, Cheatham, Fetting, Shaffer & Santos, 2008). Gaps in this area of development contribute to students having difficulty demonstrating success in kindergarten and continuing to struggle academically throughout their school career. Social-emotional learning is no longer an aspect of education that we can choose to incorporate into school environments. It is a critical component of the work we are doing to support young children in developing the skills necessary to become successful adults. When children display antisocial, physically aggressive and/or unsafe behaviors, we need staff who are as equipped in providing social-emotional learning experiences, where students can develop the prosocial skills they are lacking, as we have for when students require academic interventions and support. We also need elementary behavior support programs, such as Rising Stars, which are as readily accessible as the reading and mathematics programs available for students demonstrating deficits in academic content areas.

Knowing the way in which educators respond to student misbehavior has the potential to shape a child's entire academic career and lifelong success brings great responsibility to the decision makers in each and every school system across the country. One of my longtime mentors has a framed quote hanging on the wall in her office which suggests considerations regarding what, and when, we teach children:

"If a child doesn't know how to read, we teach. If a child doesn't know how to swim, we teach. If a child doesn't know how to multiply, we teach. If a child doesn't know how to drive, we teach. If a child doesn't know how to behave we...teach?...punish? Why can't we finish the last sentence as automatically as we do the others?"

In order to equip school staff in responding appropriately to student misbehavior, by teaching rather than punishing, we must establish processes, practices and programs focused on

providing social-emotional learning for all students and offer intensive individualized instruction for those students demonstrating at-risk behaviors. The Rising Stars program paves the way for administrators to revise disciplinary practices and create an environment where students learn the prosocial behaviors necessary to effectively function within the school setting, while continuing their learning and being afforded an opportunity for academic success.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Operating Procedures to Determine if Suspension of Students Grades Pre-K – 2 is Warranted

Defining Suspension and Expulsion

In-school Suspension: The removal within the school building of a student from the student's current education program for up to, but not more than, ten (10) school days in a school year for disciplinary reasons by the school principal.

Out-of-School Suspension: The removal of a student from the school, by the principal, for up to ten (10) school days for disciplinary reasons.

An in-school removal is not considered a day of suspension as long as the student is afforded the opportunity to continue to:

- Appropriately progress in the general curriculum;
- Receive the special education and related services specified on the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP), if the student is a student with a disability in accordance with COMAR 13A.05.01;
- Receive instruction commensurate with the program afforded to the student in the regular classroom; and
- Participate with peers as he/she would in his/her current education program to the extent appropriate.

Standard for Suspension of Students in Grades Pre-K – 2:

A student enrolled in a public prekindergarten program, kindergarten, first grade or second grade may not be suspended or expelled. The law is effective July 1, 2017. Local Education Agencies are required to ensure that practice, policy, and local regulations related to suspensions and expulsions of students incorporate the provisions of the law.

The student may only be:

- Expelled from school if required by federal law;
- Suspended for not more than five (5) days if the school administration, in consultation with the school psychologist or other mental health professionals, determines that there is an imminent threat of serious harm to other students or staff that cannot be reduced or eliminated through interventions or supports.

Schools are required to provide intervention and support to students who are suspended or who commit any act that would be considered an offense subject to suspension but for the student's grade.

The following MUST be in place at the school level BEFORE a suspension is considered:

Multi-tiered system for academic and behavior support that includes the following critical elements:

- An active Student Support Team to identify additional academic and behavior supports including Tier I, II, and III interventions and a manner to document interventions and supports, including the data related to the impact of these interventions and supports
- An analysis of data for root causes and/or trends
- Parent engagement and relationships
- A BIP Team

The following SHOULD be considered BEFORE a suspension of a specific student:

- Document interventions and supports that have been attempted including the data related to the impact of these interventions and supports
- Solicit family support
- Consider the need for an Emergency Petition for evaluation and, if appropriate, contact the School Resource Officer
- Obtain releases of information and attempt to communicate with outside agencies (e.g., psychiatrist, therapist) if applicable
- Work collaboratively with the School Psychologist, school therapist, and/or behavior support specialist
- Work collaboratively with Behavioral Intervention Team if applicable
- Work with Special Education Coordinator if appropriate

The following MUST be in place DURING the process of considering a suspension of a specific student:

- Work with the Instructional Director
- Work collaboratively with the School Psychologist, LCPC, or LCSW-C
- The School Psychologist/LCPC/LCSW-C and the building administrator will complete the attached form indicating support for or against the suspension
- If the student is suspended, 1 copy of the form will be kept by the building principal, 1 copy sent to the instruction director and, for those students receiving special education services or for students suspected of having a disability or who are in the process of determining the existence of a disability, 1 copy to the office of special education.

The following MUST be in place AFTER a suspension of a specific student has occurred:

1. Meet as a collaborative problem-solving team (SST, IEP, and/or BIP team) to include as appropriate, the student's parent, general education teacher, administrator, school psychologist, school counselor, school therapist, behavior support specialist, intervention teacher, and special education teacher and/or coordinator and:
 - a. Analyze data for root causes and/or trends
 - b. Consider appropriate Academic Supports
 - c. Consider appropriate Behavioral Supports which may include initiating the FBA/BIP process and/or developing a specific plan to address behavioral challenges
 - d. Document interventions and supports, including the data related to the impact of these interventions and supports
 - e. Document who has responsibilities for each suggested intervention and supports
 - f. Document what ongoing data will be collected
 - g. Document when the team will meet again to review progress

- h. Create a specific plan to facilitate the student's return to school and develop a comprehensive plan to support the student and reduce the disruptive behavior
 - i. Collaborate with parents to develop a comprehensive plan
 - j. Collaborate with outside professionals if applicable
- 2. Central Office Support:
 - a. If a school-based request is made for the District Behavioral Support Team, staff will make it a priority and respond and provide intensive consistent short term support in an effort to modify the student's extreme behavior
 - b. The school psychologist and/or the LCPC or LCSW-C will make it a priority to collaborate with the school team to develop a plan to modify the student's extreme behavior
 - c. If appropriate, the Special Education Coordinator will make it a priority to collaborate with the school team to develop a plan to modify the student's extreme behavior
 - d. If appropriate, Special Education Services will streamline and prioritize the consideration of requests for supports for students demonstrating extreme behaviors
 - e. The Instructional Directors will streamline and prioritize the consideration of requests for supports for students demonstrating extreme behaviors

Appendix B

Consideration for Suspension of PreK-2nd Grade Student

Must be completed by a school psychologist or school based mental health professional (LCSW-C or LCPC) in conjunction with an Administrator

Student Name:

School:

Grade:

Does the school have a Multi-tiered system for academic and behavior support that includes the following critical elements?

Yes No

☐ ☐ An active Student Support Team to identify additional academic and behavior supports including Tier I, II, and III interventions and a manner to document interventions and supports, including the data related to the impact of these interventions and supports

☐ ☐ An analysis of data for root causes and/or trends

☐ ☐ A BIP Team

What interventions and supports have been attempted specifically for this student? Include the data related to the impact of these interventions and supports.

Has the family been contacted for support? Yes ☐ No ☐

What was the result?

Has an Emergency Petition been considered? Yes ☐ No ☐

What was the result?

Has the School Resource Officer been contacted? Yes ☐ No ☐

What was the result?

Has school staff communicated with outside agencies (e.g., psychiatrist, therapist)? Yes ☐ No ☐

What was the result?

Has the school psychologist and/or the school based mental health professional been contacted regarding this student? Yes ☐ No ☐

What was the result?

Has the Behavioral Intervention Team been contacted regarding this student?

Yes ☐ No ☐

What was the result?

Has the Special Education Coordinator been contacted regarding this student? Yes ☐ No ☐

What was the result?

At this time, is there an imminent threat of serious harm to other students or staff that cannot be reduced or eliminated through interventions or supports?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If “no”, list the interventions and supports that could be put in place to eliminate the imminent threat of serious harm to other students or staff

For very low frequency, high intensity behaviors, suspension may be considered to allow time for the school team to create a plan for the student to return to school and to address the disruptive behavior.

Disciplinary measures must align with District Regulation XXX-XX Discipline. For students receiving special education services or for students suspected of having a disability or who are in the process of determining the existence of a disability, ensure compliance with District Regulation XXX-XX, Suspension and Expulsion – Students with Disabilities.

Date: _____

Name:

Name:

Title:

Title:

Copy to:

Principal

Instructional Director

Office of Special Education, if appropriate

Appendix C-1

Parent Participants Informed Consent Form

The Impact of Participation in an Elementary Behavior Support Program on Students' Prosocial Behavior, School Functioning and Academic Performance Consent Form

1. INTRODUCTION

Your child was selected as a possible participant in a research study because of his/her participation in an elementary behavior support program. Your child was selected because of his/her participation in the Rising Stars program where he/she is accessing academic and behavioral interventions within their school. You are asked to read this document and ask any questions you may have before agreeing for your child to be in the study. The study is being conducted by Michele Baisey, Assistant Principal at your child's school, in affiliation with Hood College.

2. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to identify the impact of participation in an elementary behavior support program, Rising Stars, on kindergarten through second grade students' prosocial behaviors, school functioning and academic performance. The primary area of focus in current social-emotional research is on universal curriculum. This study will add to the research field by exploring an individualized behavior support program targeted to the specific social-emotional and behavioral needs of students.

3. DURATION

The length of time your child will be involved with this study is September 2018 through February 2019.

4. PROCEDURES

If you agree for your child to be in this study, the following information will be collected about your child: 1) prosocial behaviors by asking his/her classroom teacher to complete an observation checklist, 2) school functioning by keeping track of any disciplinary referrals and/or support provided by the school behavior team and 3) academic performance by reviewing their grade level assessments in both reading and mathematics.

5. RISKS/BENEFITS

There are no anticipated risks associated with participation in this study.

The benefits of participation include supporting staff, students and families at your child's school by identifying interventions which would promote students in being able to effectively function within the educational environment. The information gathered about your child's experiences

before and after participation in the Rising Stars program will also benefit school-based administrators and central office executives in determining how funding can be used to support meeting the social-emotional and behavioral development of students in kindergarten through second grade.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

The records of this study will be kept private. The researcher will be the only person who will have access to the records. All records will be housed on a secure and private storage device kept in the personal possession of the researcher at all times. Your child's identity will be kept confidential by removing any identifying information and using a letter coding system to organize, categorize and analyze student data. In any sort of report that is published or presentation that is given, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant.

7. VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY

Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. He/she will have access to the Rising Stars program, and associated academic and behavioral interventions, regardless of your consent for participation in this study. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Frederick County Public Schools or Hood College or any of its representatives. If you decide to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without affecting those relationships. If you wish to withdraw from the study please contact the researcher, Michele Baisey, directly using the information provided below.

8. CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

The researcher conducting this study is Michele Baisey. You may ask any questions you have right now. If you have questions later, you may contact the researchers at 301-639-9864 or mdb8@hood.edu.

If you have questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to speak with someone other than the researcher(s), you may contact Dr. Joy Ernst, Institutional Review Board Chair, Hood College, 401 Rosemont Ave., Frederick, MD 21701, ernst@hood.edu.

9. STATEMENT OF CONSENT

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

The procedures of this study have been explained to me and my questions have been addressed. The information collected about my child will be kept confidential and will be used for research purposes only. I am at least eighteen years old. I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw anytime without penalty. If I have any concerns about my experience in this study (e.g., that I was treated unfairly or felt unnecessarily threatened), I may

contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board or the Chair of the sponsoring department of this research regarding my concerns.

Signature of Parent/Guardian [if applicable]

_____Date_____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

_____Date_____

Appendix C-2

Rising Stars Staff Informed Consent Form

The Impact of Participation in an Elementary Behavior Support Program on Students' Prosocial Behavior, School Functioning and Academic Performance Consent Form

1. INTRODUCTION

You are invited to be a participant in a research study about an elementary behavior support program. You were selected as a possible participant because of your participation in the Rising Stars program where you are supporting implementation of academic and behavioral interventions for students with identified social-emotional and behavioral needs. You are being asked to read this document and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. The study is being conducted by Michele Baisey, Assistant Principal at your school, in affiliation with Hood College.

2. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to identify the impact of participation in an elementary behavior support program, Rising Stars, on kindergarten through second grade students' prosocial behaviors, school functioning and academic performance. The primary area of focus in current social-emotional research is on universal curriculum. This study will add to the research field by exploring an individualized behavior support program targeted to the specific social-emotional and behavioral needs of students.

3. DURATION

The length of time you will ask to be involved with this study is September 2018 through February 2019.

4. PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to 1) complete an online survey questionnaire comprised of 10 items to be rated on a scale of 1 to 5 which is anticipated to take no longer than 10 minutes and 2) participate in a one-on-one interview about your experiences with the Rising Stars program which will take no longer than one hour. These two activities are outside the scope of your normal job functions associated with delivering intervention services which are part of the Rising Stars program.

5. RISKS/BENEFITS

There are no anticipated risks associated with participation in this study.

The benefits of participation include supporting staff, students and families at your school by identifying interventions which would promote students in being able to effectively function

within the educational environment. The information gathered about your experiences in the Rising Stars program will also benefit school-based administrators and central office executives in determining how funding can be used to support meeting the social-emotional and behavioral development of students in kindergarten through second grade.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

The records of this study will be kept private. The researcher will be the only person who will have access to the records. All records will be housed on a secure and private storage device kept in the personal possession of the researcher at all times. Your identity will be kept confidential by removing any identifying information and using a letter coding system to organize, categorize and analyze data. In any sort of report that is published or presentation that is given, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant.

7. VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Frederick County Public Schools or Hood College or any of its representatives. If you decide to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without affecting those relationships. If you wish to withdraw from the study please contact the researcher, Michele Baisey, directly using the information provided below.

8. CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

The researcher conducting this study is Michele Baisey. You may ask any questions you have right now. If you have questions later, you may contact the researchers at 301-639-9864 or mdb8@hood.edu.

If you have questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to speak with someone other than the researcher(s), you may contact Dr. Joy Ernst, Institutional Review Board Chair, Hood College, 401 Rosemont Ave., Frederick, MD 21701, ernst@hood.edu.

9. STATEMENT OF CONSENT

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

The procedures of this study have been explained to me and my questions have been addressed. The information collected will be kept confidential and will be used for research purposes only. I am at least eighteen years old. If I have any concerns about my experience in this study (e.g., that I was treated unfairly or felt unnecessarily threatened), I may contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board or the Chair of the sponsoring department of this research regarding my concerns.

Participant signature

_____Date_____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

_____Date_____

Appendix C-3

Classroom Teacher Participants Informed Consent Form

The Impact of Participation in an Elementary Behavior Support Program on Students' Prosocial Behavior, School Functioning and Academic Performance Consent Form

1. INTRODUCTION

You are invited to be a participant in a research study about an elementary behavior support program. You were selected as a possible participant because of students in your class who were identified to participate in the Rising Stars program where they are accessing academic and behavioral interventions. You are being asked to read this document and ask any questions you may have before agreeing for your child to be in the study. The study is being conducted by Michele Baisey, Assistant Principal at your school, in affiliation with Hood College.

2. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to identify the impact of participation in an elementary behavior support program, Rising Stars, on kindergarten through second grade students' prosocial behaviors, school functioning and academic performance. The primary area of focus in current social-emotional research is on universal curriculum. This study will add to the research field by exploring an individualized behavior support program targeted to the specific social-emotional and behavioral needs of students.

3. DURATION

The length of time you will be involved with this study is September 2018 through February 2019.

4. PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following: 1) complete an online survey questionnaire comprised of 156 items about identified students' prosocial behavior before and after participation in the Rising Stars program, which is anticipated to take less than 30 minutes 2) take part in a focus group interview with other classroom teachers who also had students participate in the Rising Stars program, which is anticipated to take approximately one hour and 3) complete an online survey questionnaire comprised of 10 items to be rated on a scale of 1 to 5 which is anticipated to take no longer than 10 minutes. These three activities are outside the scope of your normal job functions as a general education classroom teacher.

5. RISKS/BENEFITS

There are no anticipated risks associated with participation in this study.

The benefits of participation include supporting staff, students and families at your school by identifying interventions which would promote students in being able to effectively function within the educational environment. The information gathered about your experiences with students who participated in the Rising Stars program will also benefit school-based administrators and central office executives in determining how funding can be used to support meeting the social-emotional and behavioral development of students in kindergarten through second grade.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

The records of this study will be kept private. The researcher will be the only person who will have access to the records. All records will be housed on a secure and private storage device kept in the personal possession of the researcher at all times. Your identity will be kept confidential by removing any identifying information and using a letter coding system to organize, categorize and analyze student data. In any sort of report that is published or presentation that is given, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant.

7. VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Students from your classroom will have access to the Rising Stars program, and associated academic and behavioral interventions, regardless of your consent for participation in this study. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Frederick County Public Schools or Hood College or any of its representatives. If you decide to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without affecting those relationships. If you wish to withdraw from the study please contact the researcher, Michele Baisey, directly using the information provided below.

8. CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

The researcher conducting this study is Michele Baisey. You may ask any questions you have right now. If you have questions later, you may contact the researchers at 301-639-9864 or mdb8@hood.edu.

If you have questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to speak with someone other than the researcher(s), you may contact Dr. Joy Ernst, Institutional Review Board Chair, Hood College, 401 Rosemont Ave., Frederick, MD 21701, ernst@hood.edu.

9. STATEMENT OF CONSENT

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

The procedures of this study have been explained to me and my questions have been addressed. The information collected will be kept confidential and will be used for research purposes only. I am at least eighteen years old. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw anytime without penalty. If I have any concerns about my experience in this study

(e.g., that I was treated unfairly or felt unnecessarily threatened), I may contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board or the Chair of the sponsoring department of this research regarding my concerns.

Participant signature

_____ Date _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

_____ Date _____

Appendix C-4

Administrator Participant Informed Consent Form

The Impact of Participation in an Elementary Behavior Support Program on Students' Prosocial Behavior, School Functioning and Academic Performance Consent Form

1. INTRODUCTION

You are invited to be a participant in a research study about an elementary behavior support program. You were selected as a possible participant because of students in your school who were identified to participate in the Rising Stars program where they are accessing academic and behavioral interventions. You are being asked to read this document and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. The study is being conducted by Michele Baisey, Assistant Principal at your school, in affiliation with Hood College.

2. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to identify the impact of participation in an elementary behavior support program, Rising Stars, on kindergarten through second grade students' prosocial behaviors, school functioning and academic performance. The primary area of focus in current social-emotional research is on universal curriculum. This study will add to the research field by exploring an individualized behavior support program targeted to the specific social-emotional and behavioral needs of students.

3. DURATION

The length of time you will be involved with this study is September 2018 through February 2019.

4. PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to 1) participate in a one-on-one interview regarding your experiences with students who accessed the Rising Stars program, which is anticipated to take no longer than one hour and 2) 1) complete an online survey questionnaire comprised of 10 items to be rated on a scale of 1 to 5 which is anticipated to take no longer than 10 minutes.

5. RISKS/BENEFITS

There are no anticipated risks associated with participation in this study.

The benefits of participation include supporting staff, students and families at your school by identifying interventions which would promote students in being able to effectively function within the educational environment. The information gathered about your experiences with students who participated in the Rising Stars program will also benefit other school-based

administrators and central office executives in determining how funding can be used to support meeting the social-emotional and behavioral development of students in kindergarten through second grade.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

The records of this study will be kept private. The researcher will be the only person who will have access to the records. All records will be housed on a secure and private storage device kept in the personal possession of the researcher at all times. Your identity will be kept confidential by removing any identifying information and using a letter coding system to organize, categorize and analyze data. In any sort of report that is published or presentation that is given, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant.

7. VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Students from your school will have access to the Rising Stars program, and associated academic and behavioral interventions, regardless of your consent for participation in this study. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Frederick County Public Schools or Hood College or any of its representatives. If you decide to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without affecting those relationships. If you wish to withdraw from the study please contact the researcher, Michele Baisey, directly using the information provided below.

8. CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

The researcher conducting this study is Michele Baisey. You may ask any questions you have right now. If you have questions later, you may contact the researchers at 301-639-9864 or mdb8@hood.edu.

If you have questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to speak with someone other than the researcher(s), you may contact Dr. Joy Ernst, Institutional Review Board Chair, Hood College, 401 Rosemont Ave., Frederick, MD 21701, ernst@hood.edu.

9. STATEMENT OF CONSENT

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

The procedures of this study have been explained to me and my questions have been addressed. The information collected will be kept confidential and will be used for research purposes only. I am at least eighteen years old. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw anytime without penalty. If I have any concerns about my experience in this study (e.g., that I was treated unfairly or felt unnecessarily threatened), I may contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board or the Chair of the sponsoring department of this research regarding my concerns.

Participant signature

_____ Date _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

_____ Date _____

Appendix D

Survey Questionnaire for Rising Stars Staff

On a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) the Rising Stars program...

1. Identifies students for participation based on their social-emotional and behavioral needs?
2. Provides a focus area(s) for individualized student success?
3. Provides flexible individualized scheduling to meet students' social-emotional and behavioral needs?
4. Demonstrates an understanding and sensitivity to the academic, cultural, social-emotional, behavioral and developmental needs of students?
5. Provides clear communication to students, parents and school staff regarding participation in the program?
6. Provides a safe well-maintained environment that promotes social-emotional learning and academic achievement?
7. Ensures school staff works together to monitor individualized learning plans and provide supports necessary for achievement?
8. Provides social-emotional and behavioral services to promote prosocial behaviors and school functioning?
9. Provides academic services to promote student achievement?
10. Offers opportunities for students to return to their general education classroom setting?

Appendix E

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about how Rising Stars identifies students to participate in the program based on their social-emotional and behavioral needs.
2. What is your experience with identifying specific areas of focus for individual students as part of their participation in the Rising Stars program?
3. What is your experience with flexible individualized scheduling provided to students within the Rising Stars program?
4. Part of Rising Stars is to be sensitive to the academic, cultural, social-emotional, behavioral and developmental needs of students. Tell me about a time when you felt those needs were being met. What happened? How about if one of these was missing?
5. How is communication provided to students, parents and school staff regarding participation in the Rising Stars program? What is your experience with communication provided to students? Parents? School staff?
6. Describe the Rising Stars program environment. What do you see and what stands out? What connections between what you described and social-emotional learning and/or academic achievement exist?
7. How does school staff work together to monitor individualized learning plans and student support?
8. Tell me about a time when services in Rising Stars helped students' prosocial behavior and school functioning. Tell me about a time when Rising Stars services may not have supported these areas.
9. Rising Stars is meant to continue student learning. Is that mission being met? If so, in what ways? If not, what is the downfall?
10. When students who participate in the Rising Stars program come back to class what do you notice? Is there a specific instance that stands out, good or bad? In what ways was student behavior different?

Appendix F

Rising Stars Program Description

Rising Stars is a general education program which provides extra supports for students with a need for more structure to meet their social-emotional, behavioral and/or academic needs. Students attend for short periods of time, usually from 3 to 30 days. Based on individual student need, student may be identified to participate in the program for a period of time which exceeds 30 days. During the time students access the program, they receive their regular academic curriculum, as well as individualized behavior support. Participating in a class with a smaller student-to-staff ratio allows individualized needs to be met and provides greater opportunities to teach students positive behaviors and strategies for coping with everyday challenges.

Appendix G

Sample Student Schedules

Fabian's Rising Stars Program Schedule

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:30-9:00am Arrival/Breakfast	8:30-9:00am Arrival/Breakfast	8:30-9:00am Arrival/Breakfast	8:30-9:00am Arrival/Breakfast	8:30-9:00am Arrival/Breakfast
9:00-10:30am Reading & Writing	9:00-9:40am Reading & Writing	9:00-9:40am PE	9:00-9:40am Reading & Writing	9:00-9:40am Modified Second Step Lesson
	9:40-10:25am Zones of Regulation Lesson	9:40-10:20am Reading & Writing		9:40-10:20am Reading & Writing
10:30-11:30am Math	10:25-11:30am Math	10:20-11:30am Math	10:20-11:30am Math	10:20-11:30am Math
11:30-12:00 Lunch in Rising Stars	11:30-12:00 Lunch in Rising Stars	11:30-12:00 Lunch in Rising Stars	11:30-12:00 Lunch in Rising Stars	11:30-12:00 Lunch in Rising Stars
12:00-12:20pm Recess	12:00-12:20pm Recess	12:00-12:20pm Recess	12:00-12:20pm Recess	12:00-12:20pm Recess
12:25-1:10pm Music	12:25-1:10pm Art	12:25-1:10pm Art	12:25-1:10pm PE	12:25-1:10pm Music
1:10-1:55pm Science/Social Studies	1:10-1:55pm Science/Social Studies	1:10-1:55pm Science/Social Studies	1:10-1:55pm Science/Social Studies	1:10-1:55pm Science/Social Studies
1:55-2:40pm Social Skills/Behavior	1:55-2:40pm Social Skills/Behavior	1:55-2:40pm Social Skills/Behavior	1:55-2:40pm Social Skills/Behavior	1:55-2:40pm Social Skills/Behavior
2:40-3:20pm Push in Classroom Support	2:40-3:20pm Push in Classroom Support	2:40-3:20pm Push in Classroom Support	2:40-3:20pm Push in Classroom Support	2:40-3:20pm Push in Classroom Support
3:20pm Dismissal	3:20pm Dismissal	3:20pm Dismissal	3:20pm Dismissal	3:20pm Dismissal

Zeke's Rising Stars Program Schedule

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:30-9:00am Arrival/Breakfast	8:30-9:00am Arrival/Breakfast	8:30-9:00am Arrival/Breakfast	8:30-9:00am Arrival/Breakfast	8:30-9:00am Arrival/Breakfast
9:00-9:40am PE	9:00-9:40am Reading & Writing	9:00-9:40am Push in Classroom Support	9:00-10:20am Reading & Writing	9:00-9:40am Modified Second Step Lesson
9:40-10:10am Reading & Writing				9:40-10:20am Reading & Writing
10:10-10:30am Reading Intervention	10:20-10:45am Reading Intervention	10:20-10:45am Reading Intervention	10:20-10:45am Reading Intervention	10:20-10:45am Reading Intervention
10:30-11:20am Math	10:45-11:20am Math	10:45-11:20am Math	10:45-11:20am Math	10:30-11:20am Math
11:20-12:15pm Lunch/Recess	11:20-12:15pm Lunch/Recess	11:20-12:15pm Lunch/Recess	11:20-12:15pm Lunch/Recess	11:20-12:15pm Lunch/Recess
12:25-1:10pm Push in Classroom Support	12:25-1:10pm Push in Classroom Support	12:25-1:10pm Push in Classroom Support	12:25-1:10pm Push in Classroom Support	12:25-1:10pm Push in Classroom Support
1:10-1:55pm Art	1:10-1:55pm Music	1:10-1:55pm PE	1:10-1:55pm Art	1:10-1:55pm Music
1:55-2:40pm Social Skills/Behavior	1:55-2:40pm Social Skills/Behavior	1:55-2:40pm Social Skills/Behavior	1:55-2:40pm Social Skills/Behavior	1:55-2:40pm Social Skills/Behavior
2:40-3:00pm Math Intervention	2:40-3:00pm Math Intervention	2:40-3:00pm Math Intervention	2:40-3:00pm Math Intervention	2:40-3:00pm Math Intervention
3:00-3:25pm Independent in Classroom	3:00-3:25pm Independent in Classroom	3:00-3:25pm Independent in Classroom	3:00-3:25pm Independent in Classroom	3:00-3:25pm Independent in Classroom

Appendix H

Sample Interview Question Analysis Matrices

Analysis Matrix for Interview Question 1: Tell me about how Rising Stars identifies students to participate in the program based on their social-emotional and behavioral needs.

	Behavior	Discussion	Social issues	Difficulty in class	Following rules	Accessing education	Safety	Anxiety or stress
Annie				X		X	X	
Lori	X						X	
Sarah			X				X	
Mia	X			X		X		
Zach	X					X	X	X
Focus Group								
Laura		X	X		X	X		
Lauren		X		X				
Roxanne			X	X		X		
Lynda								
Stacey								

Analysis Matrix for Interview Question 2: What is your experience with identifying specific areas of focus for individual students as part of their participation in the Rising Stars program?

	Time of Day	Academic Content	Data	Engagement	Social Skills	Specific	Safety	Behavior of Concern
Annie						X	X	X
Lori		X				X	X	X
Sarah		X				X	X	
Mia		X		X	X			X
Zach				X		X	X	X
Focus Group								
Laura	X	X	X					
Lauren	X		X	X	X			
Roxanne		X		X	X			
Lynda								
Stacey								

Appendix I

Sample Alignment of Research Questions, Interview Questions and Participants' Quotes

<p>Research Question 1.3: What is the impact on students' academic performance after participation in the Rising Stars program?</p>	<p>Interview Question # 9: Rising Stars is meant to continue student learning. Is that mission being met? If so, in what ways? If not, what is the downfall?</p>	<p>"Once the behavior is managed and we work through some of those pieces every day a student is spending time in there. There's always an academic component. This is versus a time when a student might be in a consequential or behavior crisis situation and we're working through that several times in the front office, and rarely is there a consistent academic goal met. The rising stars program allows for the plan to chunk that opportunity in a manageable amount of time so the student can gain access to some things or they're able to go back into the classroom and not be so far behind. Every time a student is in there, there's a very strong balance of social, emotional support and academic support." (Zach)</p> <p>"I think so because the students that we have this year that are participating in rising stars are not learning in their regular classroom. Most of them, they are missing out on a lot of instruction in the regular classroom and by going to rising stars they're getting something. They're receiving some instruction, some of them receiving more than others depending on how receptive they are that day or that week or what period of time. But, it's always better than nothing." (Annie)</p> <p>"For my student, I think his social emotional needs are being met. However, we haven't accessed the academic yet. That's, where we're still working for that foundation and because his has made it very, very difficult to have consistency there." (Roxanne)</p> <p>"So, it really depends on the student and how they're coming to rising stars. If they're able to access learning and be there they are meeting academics within the classroom. But if they're coming and they're just not able to do work, we kind of modify what's going on in the classroom, simplify it and chunk it, and then slowly bring them back to the content within the class. So, it's good because there's no break in academics and we try, no matter what, to make sure that they're getting some kind of academic throughout the day. Even if it's kind of simplified, like hands on, and modified of what the curriculum is doing within the classroom and then slowly kind of building that rigor in that academic content that they're getting." (Mia)</p> <p>"I think that we have a great teacher in there who understands the needs of children who might need to be in our special education program and things of that nature. So, she does really creatively try to meet the students where they're at academically. And also giving them activities that they have interest in and also giving them choice. And I think that that's the biggest thing, you know if our schedule says math first and then reading, but the student isn't prepared to do math. They prefer to do reading and then math, she's not getting into a power struggle about those kinds of things. She's really trying to meet them and allow them to see success." (Sarah)</p>
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