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Cleveland Schools Social Skills Training Program Showing Positive Results

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Abstract

This article reports on research conducted in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District by the Society for Prevention of Violence (SPV). A total of 1500 students and 150 teachers participated in a social skills training program.

Statistically significant positive results were found over the course of the 2009-2010 school year. A positive change in the school environment was documented via a thirty-five item learning survey.

Because of the positive results, during the 2010 – 2011 school year, SPV's social skills training program is being implemented in all three Parma middle schools in the hope of having a similar impact there.

Cleveland Schools Social Skills Training Program Showing Positive Results

Introduction

During the 2009-2010 school year, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District utilized a social skills training program developed by the Society for Prevention of Violence. This program has been in development since 1985, and it has been used in over 200 schools throughout the country. Although received and reviewed positive for years, what the program has lacked was measurable student outcomes and statistical proof of its value. This report begins to rectify what has been missing.

Society for Prevention of Violence

The Society for Prevention of Violence (SPV) is a nonprofit 501 (c) (3) organization dedicated to reducing the prevalence of violent acts and asocial behavior of children and adults through education. The mission encourages the integration of social and academic skills to help the nation's youth reach their potential and contribute to our nation's society. SPV was founded in 1983 in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. Since then, it has developed curricular materials, courses, and a variety of programs to advance its mission.

On May 1, 2009, the SPV became officially affiliated with Ashland University (AU), and it is now housed at the AU Cleveland Center in Warrensville Heights. The affiliation has resulted in a much stronger evaluation component for SPV programs and services.

Program Description

The SPV social skills training program embeds social skills lessons into the curriculum. Students develop important life skills while studying a rigorous curriculum that exceeds state standards and examines their relationships with peers, parents, and communities. Trainers are provided inservice synthesizing character education with project-based learning. Teachers are provided technical support throughout the year. Components of the program include developing

school action plans, social skill workbooks, pre and post student evaluations, parent engagement, a staff satisfaction survey, and a social skills banner. Stipends are provided to trainers and leadership club sponsors.

The eight-step curricular lessons guide students from theory to practice through modeling, role playing, and discussion of performance in real life situations.

Methods

SPV and AU wanted during 2009-2010 to do a more extensive and sophisticated analysis of one of SPV's core components – the social skills training program. Two middle schools and one high school in Cleveland were targeted for involvement. Students in grades six through eight at Clara Westropp and Paul Dunbar schools were selected, as were high school students from the Garrett Morgan School of Science. A total of 1500 students and 150 teachers participated in the social skills training program, which was made possible by a grant from the Jewish Federation of Cleveland.

Key components of the grant proposal included measurable assessment tools and ongoing support throughout the school year. SPV met with the school administrations and school staffs to make sure that the commitment to the program was genuine. The trainers and leadership sponsors from the schools attended a two-hour workshop to help them prepare for their roles as SPV social skills trainers for their buildings. Professional development was provided by Harmony Education Center and other SPV consultants.

Instrument Development

SPV developed a Learning Climate Survey in order to measure program effectiveness.

The student evaluation survey measured 35 social skills listed below:

<u>DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIORS</u>	<u>CLASSROOM HABITS</u>	<u>SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOR</u>
Dislikes classmates	Not easily distracted	Helps other students who are having trouble in class
Difficult time following rules	Hard worker	Good team player

Gets angry when provoked	Pays attention to directions	Initiates positive interactions in class
Teases, bullies classmates	Organized in class	
Breaks classroom rules	Concentrates on tasks	Caring and compassionate to feelings of others
Loses temper, yells during conflict	Focused on learning	Talks to you about problems
Stubborn nature		Classmates like him/her
Fighter		Works well with others
Takes others supplies		Good listener
Difficult time telling the truth		Gives compliments to others
Hits and harms others		Comes to school with a lot of problems
Handles disagreements poorly		Very quiet and introverted in classroom
Hard time calming down after conflict		Parent involvement to help student
Easily irritated or loses focus with some tasks (reading, math)		Participates in extracurricular activities
Loses temper during conflict		Candidate for leadership club

Process

Instruments and surveys were completed at the beginning and end of the school year.

- ✓ A teacher satisfaction survey to chart staff commitment to the program
- ✓ A log of all school visits, programs, meetings, and memos
- ✓ A principal survey to evaluate SPV involvement at the schools
- ✓ Trainer sponsor/ leadership sponsor surveys to highlight the SPV support services offered in each building
- ✓ Job descriptions for trainers and leadership sponsors
- ✓ Principal duties/ responsibilities/ timelines to help the school administrations organize the social skills program
- ✓ Development of an action plan for each school

Results

The Learning Climate Survey, as used by the Society for Prevention of Violence, assessed program participation and individual outcomes related to three primary domains: DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIORS; CLASSROOM HABITS; and SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOR. The instrument examined 35 individual areas that comprised the three domains; results found that 32 out of 35 areas noted a positive outcome. This SPV program finding is statistically significant ($p = .0001$; two tail, sign test); hence, the overall program success is strongly indicated by the Learning Climate Survey.

Likewise, though preventing violence is the primary purpose of the SPV, there is an interesting artifact – specifically, in the development of leadership. This examination found that leadership and disruptive behaviors are negatively related; hence, as leadership increases – disruptive behaviors decrease. This SPV evaluation found four key components of leadership development for students. They are: being caring and compassionate; giving compliments; having positive interactions; and being a good team player. These components of leadership are inherent within the SPV program.

Both qualitative and quantitative findings from the 2009-2010 school year support a positive climate change within the school system as a result of participating in the SPV social skills training program (McKnight & Sikula).

Qualitative Findings

SCHOOL SUPPORT OF SPV

<u>SCHOOL</u>	<u>OVERALL AGREEMENT</u>	<u>COMMENTS</u>
Clara Westropp	88%	The SPV Program
Paul Dunbar	83%	Did an Outstanding Job
Garrett Morgan	100%	

Note. Data reflect returned surveys: Clara Westropp n = 12; Paul Dunbar n = 10; Garrett Morgan n = 14. Survey return rate: Clara Westropp 12 out of 30; Paul Dunbar 10 out of 28; Garrett Morgan 14 out of 25.

HIGHLIGHTS OF TRAINER/LEADERSHIP SURVEY

<u>COMMENTS</u>	<u>COMMENTS</u>
Strong support for SPV program	SPV provided better ways to deal with school problems
Workbooks very helpful	Posters, banners, signs, good visibility
Encouragement to staff	SPV support member was outstanding resource and support to staff
Class meetings needed on a regular basis	Less time on management, more time on instruction

SPV very organized	Want full-year program starting in September 2010
Continue same progress next year	

Note. Trainer N = 9.

TEACHER SATISFACTION SURVEY

<u>SCHOOL</u>	<u>OVERALL</u>	<u>AREA ASSESSMENT</u>
Clara Westropp Paul Dunbar Garrett Morgan	> 90%	Agreed or strongly agreed that the social skills program had a positive impact at the school

Clara Westropp Paul Dunbar Garrett Morgan	<u>Overall</u> >85%	Agreed or strongly agreed that the weekly meetings with students helped eliminate school problems
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Clara Westropp Paul Dunbar Garrett Morgan	<u>Overall</u> 99.9%	Agreed or strongly agreed that the reinforcement of social skills helped reduce classroom management problems
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Note. Data reflect returned surveys: Clara Westropp n = 12; Paul Dunbar n = 10; Garrett Morgan n = 14. Survey return rate: Clara Westropp 12 out of 30; Paul Dunbar 10 out of 28; Garrett Morgan 14 out of 25.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT

<u>SCHOOL</u>	<u>OVERALL AGREEMENT</u>	<u>AREA ASSESSMENT</u>
Clara Westropp	88%	Staff surveyed felt the SPV professional development supported the social skills program
Paul Dunbar	100%	
Garrett Morgan	85%	

Note. Data reflect returned surveys: Clara Westropp n = 12; Paul Dunbar n = 10; Garrett Morgan n = 14. Survey return rate: Clara Westropp 12 out of 30; Paul Dunbar 10 out of 28; Garrett Morgan 14 out of 25.

PRINCIPAL SURVEY RESULTS

<u>COMMENTS</u>	<u>COMMENTS</u>
Continue SPV support on a regular basis	Program will be better with September, 2010 startup
Start more class meetings for next year	Positive effect on school climate
Expand lessons for 2010-2011	More students have a voice in school matters
Workbooks were excellent	Ongoing support appreciated
More speakers next year	

Note. Principal N = 3.

TEACHER SATISFACTION: INSTRUCTIONAL TIME

<u>SCHOOL</u>	<u>OVERALL AGREEMENT</u>	<u>AREA ASSESSMENT</u>
Clara Westropp	100%	Staff surveyed agreed that social skills training increased instructional time
Paul Dunbar	93%	
Garrett Morgan	92%	

Note. Data reflect returned surveys: Clara Westropp n = 12; Paul Dunbar n = 10; Garrett Morgan n = 14. Survey return rate: Clara Westropp 12 out of 30; Paul Dunbar 10 out of 28; Garrett Morgan 14 out of 25.

OAT / OGT RESULTS*

GARRETT MORGAN

READING

MATH

OGT 2008 – 2009	81.1	67.9
OGT 2008 – 2010	77.0	62.3

Note. OGT scores did not increase; overall a decrease of 4.1 in reading and 5.6 in math occurred.

CLARA WESTROPP

READING

Grade	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th
OAT 2008 – 2009	58.6	49.1	80.0	61.2	44.7
OAT 2009 – 2010	64.7	63.9	85.2	77.3	76.0

Note. Improved performance noted in 5 out of 5 grade levels ($p = 0.0313$; one-tail, sign test).

CLARA WESTROPP

MATH

Grade	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th
OAT 2008 – 2009	58.6	34.0	60.0	65.3	46.8
OAT 2009 – 2010	64.7	55.6	68.5	59.1	62.0

Note. Improved performance noted in 4 out of 5 grade levels ($p = 0.1875$; one-tail, sign test).

PAUL DUNBAR

READING

Grade	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th
OAT 2008 – 2009	76.2	65.4	58.8	45.5	53.6
OAT 2009 – 2010	65.5	24.0	59.4	68.0	65.2

Note. Improved performance noted in 3 out of 5 grade levels ($p = 0.50$; one-tail, sign test).

PAUL DUNBAR

MATH

Grade	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th
OAT 2008 – 2009	23.8	50.0	35.3	95.5	
OAT 2009 – 2010	21.4				
	48.3	32.0	34.4	44.0	
	34.8				

Note. Improved performance noted in 2 out of 5 grade levels ($p = 0.50$; one-tail, sign test).

*A working hypothesis was that increased instructional time would increase student achievement; however, the study design did not allow us to specifically address this concern. Future studies will address this question.

The Conditions For Learning Survey was administered to the 1500 students in the program. The following results compare the 2008-09 and 2009-10 school years.

SAFE AND RESPECTFUL CLIMATE: EXCELLENT/ACCEPTABLE RATINGS

SCHOOL	2008 – 2009	2009 – 2010
CHANGE		

Clara Westropp	63%	80%	+17
Paul Dunbar	96%	92%	-4
Garrett Morgan	67%	76%	+9

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

SCHOOL CHANGE

2008 – 2009

2009 – 2010

Clara Westropp	60%	72%	+12
Paul Dunbar	28%	35%	+7
Garrett Morgan	75%	69%	-6

Note. Gain scores were noted in 4 out of the 6 areas ($p = 0.3438$; one tail, sign test).

SERIOUS INCIDENTS

School	2008 – 2009	2009 – 2010
Clara Westropp	25	16
Paul Dunbar	6	6
Garrett Morgan	7	7

Note. Overall decrease in serious incidents was 24%. Clara Westropp noted a 40% decrease in all incidents; Garrett Morgan noted a 50% decrease in “People Incidents;” and Paul Dunbar noted a 30% decrease in “People Incidents.”

Quantitative Findings

STUDENT EVALUATIONS

(Learning Climate Survey Results)

DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIORS

When aggregating scores (fall and summer), there was a significant difference between high school and middle school scores on all items classified as DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIORS; the probability of middle school scores being higher on 15 out of 15 is < 0.0001 (two-tail, sign test: $N = 867$). Hence, middle school students are more likely to show evidence of disruptive behaviors.

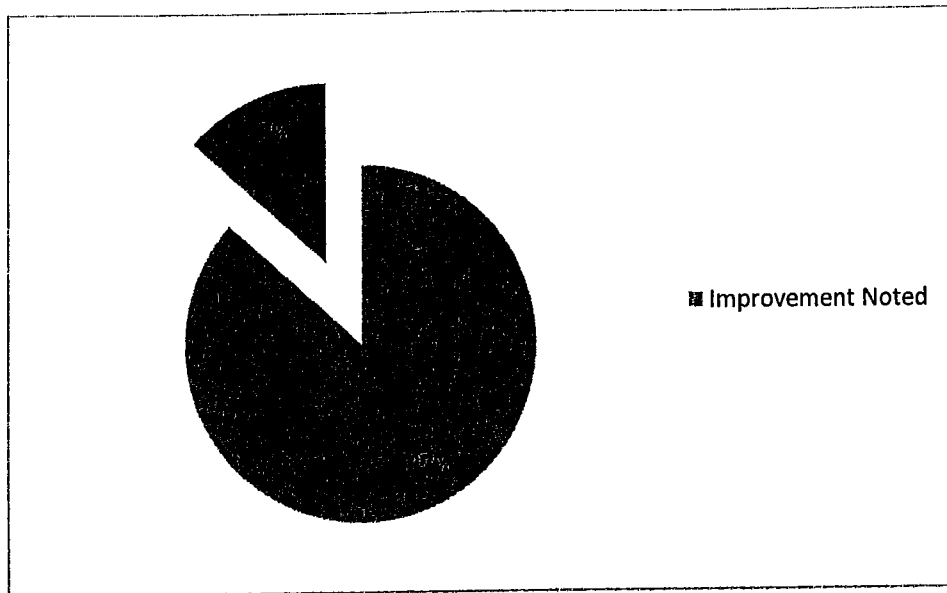
However, in one area: “Difficulty Following Rules” – results found a significant statistical difference overall for both high school and middle school participants when compared with other behaviors of interest. Specifically, this area had the most overall improvement given the items listed as DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIORS, with $p = .000764$ (paired t-test, two tail: $N = 867$).

Overall, the SPV program found significant difference between fall and June scores on DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIORS. June performance scores were significantly lower, representing a decrease in frequency of disruptive behaviors, with $p = 0.030717$ (paired t-test, two tail: $N = 867$).

Two areas that did not show notable improvement: a. Loses temper, yells during conflict, and b. Fighting. However, data indicated a specific probability of finding notable improvement in 13 out of 15 areas, with $p = .0074$ (two tail, sign test). Hence, SPV program participation had significant impact on 86.6% of target behaviors (see Table 1).

Table 1

DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIORS: IMPROVEMENT



The greatest statistical improvement was noted in the following:

Difficult time following rules

Easily irritated or loses focus with some tasks (reading, math)

Breaks classroom rules

The scores were reversed scored conceptually - given the survey format.

CLASSROOM HABITS

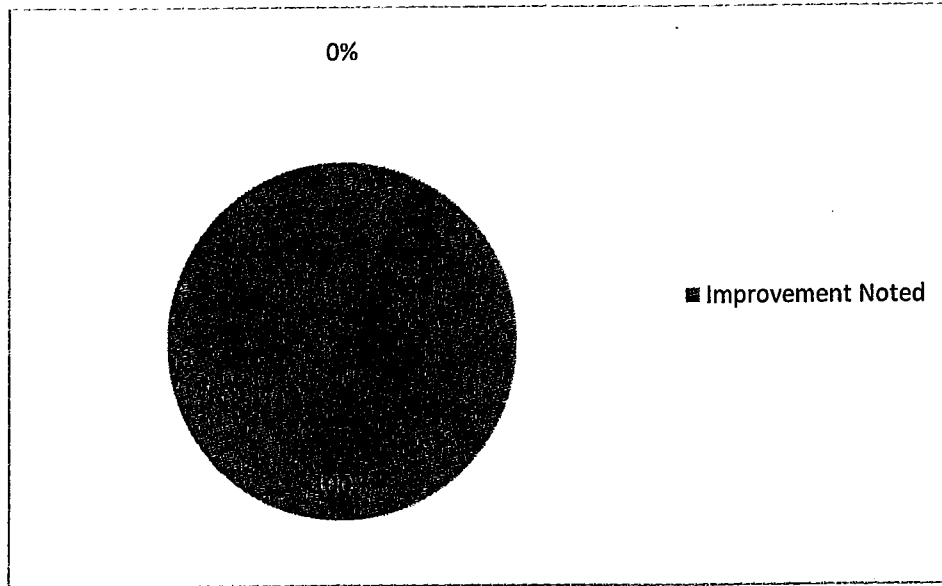
When aggregating scores (fall and summer), there is no significant difference between high school and middle school scores on all items classified as CLASSROOM HABITS.

Overall, the SPV program found significant difference between fall and June scores on CLASSROOM HABITS. June performance scores were significantly higher; in practice, they represent an increase in frequency of appropriate classroom habits, with $p = 4.85797$ (paired t-test, two tail: $N = 867$).

Specific findings found significant improvement in 6 out of 6 areas, with $p = .0313$ (two tail, sign test). Hence, SPV program participation had significant impact on 100% of the target behaviors (see Table 2).

Table 2

CLASSROOM BEHAVIORS: IMPROVEMENT



The greatest statistical improvement was noted in the following areas:

Not easily distracted

Hard worker

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOR

When aggregating scores (fall and summer), there is no significant difference between high school and middle school scores on all items classified as SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOR.

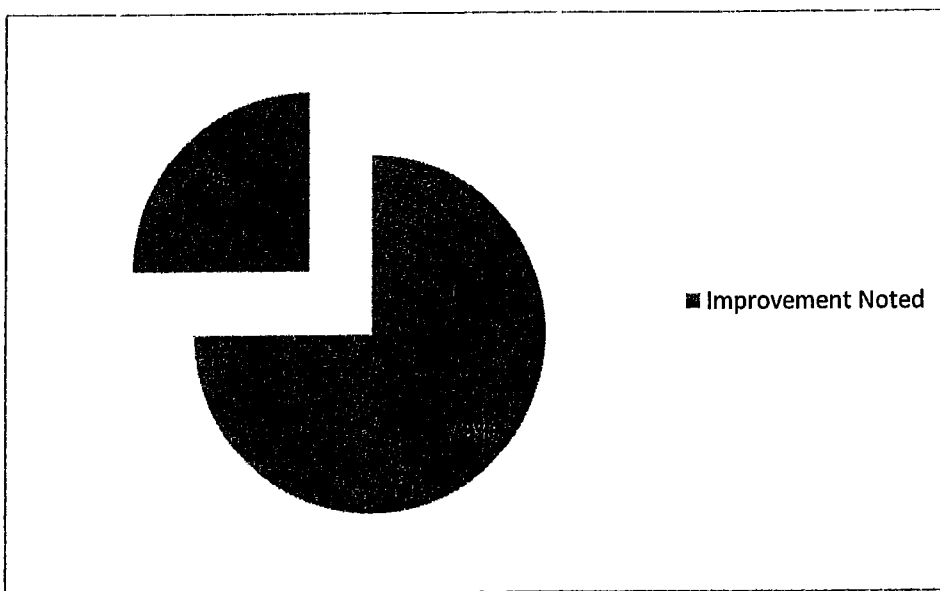
Overall, participating in the SPV program found significant difference between fall and June scores on SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOR. June performance scores were significantly higher; in practice, this represents an increase in frequency of appropriate social and emotional behavior within the classroom, with $p = 6.83296$ (paired t-test, two tail: $N = 867$).

Specific findings found statistically significant improvement in 9 out of 14 listed areas. Hence, SPV program participation had statistically significant impact on 64.2% of the target behaviors. Yet, five areas did not show statistically significant improvement: a. Liked by peers; b. Comes to school with problems; c. Introverted; d. Parental involvement; and, e. Leadership candidate.

However, when assessing the conceptual/content validity of the instrument (factor analysis: Principal Components: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization) – two assessment items appear to be invalid and not conceptually related to the assessment criteria - specifically, “introverted” and “parental involvement.” Therefore, when removing these inappropriate items from the analysis, the specific probability of finding significant improvement in 9 out of 12 areas is $p = .0730$ (one tail, sign test). Hence, SPV program participation had statistically significant impact on 75% of the target behaviors (see Table 3).

Table 3

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOR: IMPROVEMENT



The greatest statistical improvement was noted in the following areas:

Gives compliments to others; Talks to others about problems; Helps other students who are having trouble in the class; Caring/compassionate feelings toward others; and Initiates positive interactions in class.

Conclusion

There is strong professional support for the SPV program as evidenced by the staff surveys. Likewise, principal surveys indicate that they want to start more class meetings next year and they openly noted a positive effect on school climate.

Though it is reasonable to hypothesize a relationship between participating in the SPV program and recorded SERIOUS INCIDENTS within the system or ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE, future study must specifically incorporate an appropriate research design to measure this more precisely.

The current data clearly support a noted positive change in the school environment; thus, supporting the mission of the SPV program to teach children and adults the use of the skills necessary to build their character, helping them acquire a strong value system, motivating them to develop their communication skills, and to realize growth in interpersonal relationships. Such was evident in the Learning Climate Survey (in factor analysis, strong content and conceptual validity were noted).

As a result of these findings, the Society for Prevention of Violence will not only partner with each of the schools indicated previously, but also will expand its social skills training program to include all three middle schools in the Parma City School District for the 2010-2011 school year. This program expansion also is funded through a grant from the Jewish Federation of Cleveland. There is a strong need to take a **proactive** approach to address the asocial behaviors and violent acts by school-age children in our schools throughout the country. This program will provide stipends for two social skills trainers and a leadership sponsor in each school. Speakers will be available on each professional day to discuss topics such as bullying, aggressive behavior, building self-esteem, respect and responsibility.

Teachers will receive social skills workbooks that contain lessons that will be used in each classroom. Each middle school will develop an action plan to prioritize the social skills areas that need improvement for the 2010-2011 school year. Copies of these action plans are available from the SPV. Ongoing assistance for each school will be provided by an SPV specialist who will make weekly visits to each school. In addition, students will be evaluated on social skills goal progress in October 2010 and June 2011.

The authors believe that as we tighten the research design and data collection procedures, even more useful and valid conclusions can be drawn about the SPV and its social skills training program.

Reference

McKnight, O., & Sikula, J. (2010). Society for Prevention of Violence Program Evaluation 2010. Ashland, Ohio: Ashland University.

More extensive information about the SPV and this social skills training program is available from the SPV Executive Director, David Volosin, at 216-591-1876, or spvmail@att.net, or at the website – spvohio.org.