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ABSTRACT

The School, Family, and Community Partnership Program is an integrated, school-based intervention for improving the outcomes of students served in classrooms for children who have emotional and behavioral disabilities. This report briefly describes the intervention, the characteristics of the children, and initial results of measuring fidelity to the intervention model. To test the effectiveness of the Partnership Program, outcomes for the 23 children (ages 11-13) participating at the school where the project was implemented were compared to 24 children at a school where the intervention was not initiated. The study employs a quasi-experimental longitudinal design with data collected on the youth at the beginning of the study, as well as 12 and 18 months after the study was initiated. Initial results from the study indicate no significant differences between the experimental and control site at the point of baseline data collection and that descriptive characteristics of the children were similar to those found in national studies of children who have emotional and behavioral disabilities. The project has demonstrated that it is possible to bring together families, school staff, and community agencies to develop a comprehensive plan to help children who have emotional disturbances. (Contains 13 references.) (CR)

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The School, Family, and Community Partnership Program: Initial Findings

Introduction

The School, Family, and Community Partnership Program is an integrated, school-based intervention for improving the outcomes of students served in classrooms for children who have emotional and behavioral disabilities. The purpose of this paper is to briefly describe the intervention, the characteristics of children who have emotional and behavioral disabilities participating in the study, and report results of measuring fidelity to the intervention model.

Method

To test the effectiveness of the Partnership Program, outcomes for children participating at the school where the project was implemented were compared to children at a school where the intervention was not initiated. This study employs a quasi-experimental longitudinal design with data collected on the youth at the beginning of the study, as well as 12 and 18 months after the study was initiated. Additionally, data were collected on fidelity to the intervention throughout the study.

The Partnership Program consists of the implementation of the School, Family and Community Partnership Program (Duchnowski, Kutash, & Rudo, 1997). Training in the Partnership Program, based on concepts emphasized in such approaches as a system of care (Stroul & Friedman, 1986) and wraparound (Burns & Goldman, 1999), was attended by staff from the experimental school and by members of community agencies. Also included in the training is the specific process by which a partnership approach would be implemented, i.e., the School, Family and Community Team Meeting. The meetings begin with the identification and listing of strengths of the student, followed by a discussion of needs related to the student, the family, and the school. Both individual and system barriers, which serve as obstacles to the student's learning, are then identified. The team members agree upon actions to be taken, and a follow-up meeting is scheduled.

Results

Comparability of Schools and Staff

The experimental and comparison schools were similar in the population from which they drew their students, school size, number of students served in programs for emotional and behavioral disabilities, ethnic composition of the student body, and percent of students receiving free and reduced lunch. Additionally, no differences in competencies and skill levels of teachers and staff assigned to work with children with emotional and behavioral disabilities in the two schools were found.

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Special Education teachers and staff at the experimental site ($n = 7$) and the comparison site ($n = 6$) were administered the Emotional and Behavioral Disorders Teacher Competency Survey (Braaten, 1993; as cited in Cheney, Barringer, Upham, & Manning, 1996) and no statistically significant differences were revealed between staffs at the two schools ($t = 1.38, p = .13$).

Characteristics of Students

Students participating in the study of the experimental site ($n = 23$) and the comparison site ($n = 24$) were in the sixth or seventh grade and ranged in age from 11 to 13 years. The majority of the students were male and Caucasian, with approximately half of the students receiving free/reduced lunches. None of the between-site differences on seven demographic variables, e.g., gender, race, grade level, age, free/reduced lunch status, family income, and living situation, were statistically significant (see Table 1).

Academic Functioning of Students

The mean IQ scores of the participants at both the experimental and comparison sites were in the average to low-average range, as were the mean scores on the reading and math sections of the Wide Range Achievement Test III (WRAT-III; Wilkinson, 1993). The students at both sites spent approximately two-thirds of their day in special education classrooms, and the mean number of days absent during the previous school year was approximately 12. Between group-differences on the variables of IQ, achievement, number of days absent, and percent of day spent in special education settings were not statistically significant (see Table 2).

Emotional Functioning of Students

Sixty-one percent of the students at the experimental site and 50% of the students at the comparison site scored in the clinical range on the total problem scale of the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991). Total scores on the Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale (CAFAS; Hodges, 1990) indicated that approximately 50% of the students at both sites had either a moderate or severe level of functional impairment. There were no significant between group differences on CBCL or CAFAS scores (see Tables 2).

Fidelity to the Training Model

The School, Family, and Community Team Meeting Fidelity Form (Kutash, Duchnowski, & Rudo, 1998), which assessed the degree to which the school staff and community representatives practiced the concepts of the partnership model during team meetings, was completed by project staff at 65 of the 75 partnership meetings held in the first year of the study. Interrater reliability coefficients ($kappa$) were computed for 12 meetings employing multiple raters. Resulting coefficients ranged from .65 to .89 and averaged .78. A "percent of criteria endorsed" was calculated for 65 meetings employing a single rater. This percentage was computed by dividing the number of items that were rated "yes" (i.e., the behavior described in the item occurred at the meeting) by the total number of items. For 65 meetings, the percent of criteria endorsed ranged from 53% to 91%, with a mean of 72%.

Partnership Process

For the first year of the project, 75 partnership meetings were conducted. In all cases, the student's primary teacher and their primary caregiver were in attendance. Additionally, in all but one case, the student was in attendance. Other attendees included: (1) school support staff, such as social workers, psychologists, and guidance counselors; (2) outside agency representatives, such as community out-reach workers from a community mental health center; and (3) community representatives, such as parent advocates.

The initial reactions from parents have been positive. Specifically, they liked the positive nature of the meetings (i.e., a strength-based approach) and were impressed with the amount of support, as represented by the array of meeting participants. Teachers also commented on the positive outcomes that resulted from the process.

Discussion

First, the baseline results indicate no significant differences between the experimental and control site at the point of baseline data collection, which is an important consideration when conducting a quasi-experimental study. Second, the descriptive characteristics of the children in this study were very similar to those found in national studies of children who have emotional and behavioral disabilities (see,

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for example, Cullinan, Epstein, & Sabornie, 1992; Duchnowski, Hall, Kutash, & Friedman, 1998; Silver et al., 1992). Third, this project has demonstrated that it is possible to bring together families, school staff, and members of various community agencies to develop a comprehensive plan to help children who have emotional disturbances. Overall, there was a generally high level of enthusiasm at the intervention site about the Partnership Program.

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Table 1
Number and Percentage of Students
on the Variables of Gender, Age, Race, Monthly Family Income,
Living Arrangement, and Number of People in the Household

Variable	Experimental (n=23)		Comparison (n=24)	
	n	%	n	%
Gender				
Male	20	87	21	88
Female	3	12	3	12
Age				
11	7	30	8	33
12	10	44	11	46
13	6	26	5	21
Race				
Caucasian	18	78	21	88
African-American	3	13	3	12
Other	2	9	0	0
Monthly family income				
less than 1,000	3	13	5	21
1,000-1,999	9	39	10	42
2,000-2,999	3	13	5	21
3,000-4,000	4	17	2	8
greater than 4,000	4	17	2	8
Living Arrangement				
Two-parent	11	48	15	63
Single parent	8	35	9	37
Other	4	17	0	0
Number of people in household				
2-3	5	22	6	25
4	6	26	10	42
5	7	30	5	21
>5	5	22	3	12

Note. χ^2 tests (or Fishers exact test when a cell expected frequency is less than 5) showed no significant group differences, at the .05 level, on any of these variables.

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Table 2
Academic and Emotional Functioning for the Youth at the Experimental School and Comparison School at the beginning of the study

Variable	Experimental (n=23)		Comparison (n=24)		t value	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Wide Range Achievement						
Test-III ^a						
Math	87.1	13.2	81.2	10.8	1.67	.10
Reading	86.9	17.8	78.2	14.7	1.80	.08
IQ scores ^b	89.3	13.3	87.4	13.9	.48	.63
CBCL ^c						
Internalizing	55.9	12.8	56.3	11.2	.12	.90
Externalizing	61.8	11.2	65.3	11.9	1.03	.31
Total	62.1	11.0	63.8	9.7	.56	.57
% of school day spent in special education settings ^d	63.7%	13.3	69.5%	13.6	1.30	.20
Days absent ^e	11.4	13.6	12.4	10.9	.28	.79
	n	%	n	%		
CAFAS Total ^f						
Minimal/No	5	22%	5	21%		
Mild	5	22%	8	33%		
Moderate	11	48%	7	29%		
Severe	2	9%	4	9%		

^a Standard Scores.

^b Standard Scores; n=22 for the comparison group.

^c Child Behavior Checklist; t-scores, M=50, SD=10.

^d Represents the time spent in special education settings at the beginning of the study.

^e Represents total days absent during the prior school year; n=21 for the experimental group and n=22 for the comparison group.

^f The Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale. Higher scores indicate higher levels of functional impairment. Fisher's exact test showed no significant group differences at the .05 level on any of the categories of impairment.



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