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Improving 5th Grade Attendance and Achievement through Student Success Skills Program

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Abstract

The researcher incorporated an evidence-based Student Success Skills program, to see the impact it made on attendance and achievement rates for a 5th grade classroom, in a suburban elementary school in the Atlanta, GA area. The results show that the Student Success Skills program made no impact on the students when examining absences and standardized testing scores. A thorough discussion explains the limitations that influenced the results from the study.

Keywords: Student Success Skills, achievement, attendance, elementary school

Research shows that rates of student's daily attendance is highly correlated with their performance on mathematics and reading achievement tests (Steven, 2007). Fifth grade students at a suburban elementary school in the Atlanta area, had the highest amount of school absences among the whole elementary school in their 4th grade, 2016-2017 school year (School Data, 2017). Consequently, in the same year, 77 percent scored less than proficient

in English/Language Arts and 74 percent scored less than proficient in Math on their 2017 Georgia Milestones (a comprehensive summative assessment that measures the knowledge and skills that students have been taught and expected to master by the end of the school year) (School Data, 2017). Sarah Peek (2009) explains the necessity of building a solid foundation for students during their elementary years of education. She explains how if a child misses school regularly, their education foundation will likely not be stable. Peek (2009) identified a statistic that, "A correlation between test scores and attendance was taken, and findings deducted that students who attend class 95% of the time were twice as likely to pass state competency tests as students attending class only 85% of the time."

For this research study, the elementary school demographics included 93% Hispanic, 3% African-American, 1% Asian, 1% White and <1% of multi-cultured students (School Data, 2017). The Hispanic population is the fastest growing minority group

in the United States; however, research shows that Hispanics, students from Spanish-speaking countries and who identify as Hispanic on the school demographic report, tend to score the lowest on standardized testing and have the lowest graduation rates (Vela, 2016).

The purpose of this study was to incorporate an evidence-based intervention program called Student Success Skills (Webb & Brigman, 2016) with the 2017-2018 5th graders to see the impact on attendance and milestone scores at the end of the 2018 school year. The program advocates to “helping students develop the academic, social and self-management skills they need to succeed (Webb & Brigman, 2016).”

The questions that the researcher had for the research design were: 1. What was the impact of the Student Success Skills evidence-based intervention classroom program on attendance rates for one pre-selected 5th grade classroom comparing the absences from the previous year? 2. What was the impact of the Student Success Skills evidence-based intervention classroom program on achievement for one pre-selected 5th grade classroom? 3. Did the achievement factors and attendance rates correlate? 4. Compared to similar students in the control group, did the students in the treatment group have higher attendance rates and higher achievement gains?

In this study, there was an examination of yearly attendance and achievement (2016-2017 compared to 2017-2018) to see if this program raised achievement scores and higher attendance rates. After looking at data, talking with administration and teachers, and looking at the demographics of the school, there was a need for an

intervention. Finding a counselor-led intervention that could help students develop the academic, social and self-management skills that they need to succeed was important. Not only could this intervention help the students during the current school year, but these skills were valuable for all future grade levels.

The researcher took a quantitative approach for this research study. She wanted to know if students were having a higher number of absences because they were struggling in school or were they struggling in school because they were missing higher number of absences? Attendance factors in secondary schools have been researched for many years; however, policy makers and educational leaders are starting to see how chronic absenteeism in elementary schools have negative long-term effects (Sugrue, 2016). Across the United States there have been initiatives put into place to help with attendance and increase academic achievement such as the No Child Left Behind Act which requires student to attend a minimum number of school days. Schools will commonly put into effect an initiative to help with local attendance (Bickelhaupt, 2011). Multiple factors have been discovered for chronic absences in the elementary schools. Sugrue, Zuel, and LaLiberte (2016) identify some of these factors as: living with a single parent, family mobility, lack of parental understanding of school policies and procedures, and family poverty. There is a greater importance put on these issues than on school (Sugrue, 2016). Being sensitive and aware of these factors is important when working with families whose child has chronic absences.

After researching different interventions, Student Success Skills Program seemed to be the best fit because research shows

that it impacts academics and achievement (Webb & Brigman, 2016). Student Success Skills Program is an evidence-based intervention, proven to impact learning skills and academic achievement for K-12 students. This counselor-led intervention is provided to the students, through a classroom lesson which is conducted for 5 weeks, each lesson one week apart (Webb & Brigman, 2016). These lessons focused on looking good/feeling good, goal reporting, and performing under pressure (Webb & Brigman, 2016). With the hypothesis that attendance and achievement correlate, the researcher believed that with improving achievement, attendance rates would increase as well. Finding an intervention that is strength and evidence based was important because it showed that the program was beneficial and could impact the students.

For this research study, only one general education 5th grade classroom received the 5 weeks of classroom guidance lessons and were considered the treatment group. Students who needed additional support from the classroom were invited to attend the SSS small group, where strategies and main ideas were reviewed. In the spring time, before Georgia Milestone testing, the selected classroom received booster lessons to help prepare them for their testing (Webb & Brigman, 2016) Attendance and milestone scores for the 2017-2018 school year were compared to the previous year attendance and scores, as well as comparing to other students in the grade level who didn't receive the intervention, known as the control group.

Methods

The classroom guidance lessons occurred mid-October and lasted for 45 minutes/once a week for six weeks long. The design of the curriculum was for five weeks, but

with the great amount of detail that was in each lesson, it took the researcher an extra week to complete. The small group sessions begin in January, meeting once a week for five weeks, which was an expansion on the classroom lessons and covered the same strategies. The researcher and homeroom teacher chose eight students to be a part of the small group, based on performance and participation in the classroom lessons. Three Booster lessons occurred in March for all 5th grade students who received the original five classroom guidance lessons.

The Student Success Skills program provided a CD with PowerPoint slides for each lesson. It also provided a manual with scripted instructions with ideas to get students involved. The manual and scripted instructions for each lesson, caused for it to take longer than 45 minutes with the classroom that the researcher was working with. To show true fidelity to the program, the researcher stuck to the script. However, there were some modifications needed such as: extended time on assignments, further instructions and examples given for explanations, and working one-on-one with some students in the classroom. This program focuses on three key skills for student success: academics, social skills, and self-management skills (Webb & Brigman, 2016). While incorporating these skills throughout the lessons, students are learning to create a community support for each other (Webb & Brigman, 2016). The Life Skills sheet, which was used each week, where students would rate the five keys: nutrition, fun, exercise, social support, and rest and how each of them has affected the students' energy and mood. (Webb & Brigman, 2016). Webb & Brigman (2016) believe that if students can improve these five keys, that it will

help each student look good and feel good. Going over each of these life skills were a consistent conversation each week. Other key strategies and skills used throughout the six-week program were: goal setting, progress monitoring, and success sharing, creating a caring, supportive and encouraging classroom community, memory skills, performing under pressure: managing test anxiety, and healthy optimism (Webb & Brigman, 2016).

The researcher conducted a Quantitative research design. The hypothesis for this research study was that after completing the Student Success Skills Program, students would have significant improvements in their Georgia Milestones, compared to 2017 scores and compared to peers in control group. Another hypothesis focusing on the attendance component is that after completing the Student Success Skills Program, students who had chronic absences in the 2016-2017 school year, would have fewer absences in the 2017-2018 school year.

Results

The researcher completed the intervention in April 2018. The 2018 Georgia Milestones and 2017-2018 attendance report were collected for comparison with previous year scores and attendance. When looking at Milestones data from this school year, 80% of all 5th graders scored less than proficient (level 1 or 2, out of 4) on their Math Milestones for the 2017-2018 school year. 95% of the classroom who received the intervention scored less than proficient on Math Milestones, with only 1 student scoring proficient. When looking at the English Language Arts Milestones data, 85% of all 5th graders scored less than proficient on the English Language Arts Georgia Milestones for the 2017-2018 school year. 90% of the classroom who

received the intervention, scored less than proficient on the English Language Arts Milestones, with only 2 students having proficient scores (School Data, 2018). When looking directly at this classroom, no students improved their scores from the previous year. All students had the same numerical score (1, 2, or 3) or lower (School Data, 2018). When looking at attendance in this classroom, 87% of students had same or less number of absences as in the 2016-2017 school year. 47% of students had less number of absences than in the 2016-2017 school year (School Data, 2018).

Discussion

Student Success Skills is an intervention program designed for grades 4-12. When the researcher received the materials, the materials were not specifically grade focused. With completing this intervention with 5th graders, the material was difficult to understand at times and the amount of material to present in 45 minutes was hard to complete. Many of the students who were in the classroom were academically below grade level. 90% of the students spoke English as their secondary language. Two students in the classroom were newcomers to America and spoke very little English. For these two students, a classmate would have to help translate all assignments because he/she had a tough time understanding the researcher teaching in English. Another limitation for this intervention was the classroom environment. This was the classroom teacher's first year of teaching at this school, and the classroom management was a struggle for her the entire year. Behavioral concerns were addressed all throughout the school year. The researcher spent a lot of time having to manage the classroom, which made it hard for students

to grasp the concept of the lessons with all the distractions. Distractions also came up because this lesson was given at the end of the school day, after the students returned from their Specials (including Art, PE, Music, Spanish, or Media Center). The students seemed un-motivated and walked into the classroom un-focused. With this being the homeroom teacher's first year at this school, the researcher was unable to compare test scores to previous students in this teacher's classroom. Furthermore, this intervention program did not seem developmentally appropriate for the students completing the research study. The principal had chosen this classroom to complete the research study. Not knowing ahead of time, the students who would be completing this program, made it difficult to assess if this program would be appropriate and potentially effective ahead of time. For future, being familiar with the teacher, classroom environment, and students receiving the intervention ahead of time, would help decipher the effectiveness of the program before beginning the first lesson.

In conclusion, this intervention research study concluded no change, in results to attendance and achievement for the 2017-2018 school year. When looking back at the Student Success Skills programs that are available, there is a Spanish Cultural Translation manual (Webb & Brigman, 2007) that would be more beneficial for the demographics of students in this research study, with 90% of the students speaking Spanish as their home language. There were many limitations and factors discussed that resulted in the outcome, as well as what changes could be made when looking to do this research study in the future.

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Supporting First-Generation Students

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Abstract

First-generation college students represent a significant portion of individuals seeking higher education in the United States; yet this population does not perform as well academically as continuing generation peers. Significant research exists exploring barriers preventing college attainment for this population; however, there is limited research recommending targeted interventions in formative years to prepare first-generation students for college life. School counselors play a critical role in helping to bridge this gap by focusing on social-emotional learning.

Introduction

Over the past three decades, in response to the increasingly demanding economy, employers require applicants to obtain postsecondary education and/or complete formal training programs. For example, employers in the technology field are directing their employees to expand their knowledge and skill base aligning with the improvements and advancements in the field (Dockery & McKelvey, 2013). These progressions will only continue in the future, requiring more students to obtain higher education after high school. The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts jobs requiring at least some postsecondary education will grow by 80% in the next