EVALUATION OF STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AT ESPERANZA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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A Master's Research Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree
Master of Education

OTTAWA UNIVERSITY

January, 1999
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the Student Assistance Program (SAP) at Esperanza Elementary School to determine whether it is an effective educational intervention/resiliency program that is meeting at-risk students needs by improving grades, attendance, and school behaviors.

The Esperanza Student Assistance Program consists of support groups for at-risk students that are facilitated by trained staff members. Objectives of the program are to help students raise their self-esteem, learn anger management, develop problem-solving skills, and improve their relationships with others.

The development of the Student Assistance Program model on which the Esperanza program is based, began with a focus on student substance abuse prevention and intervention. The program has expanded to include school, family, and personal issues which may contribute to a student becoming at-risk of being unsuccessful at school and elsewhere.

The importance of school administrative support in effective intervention programs and teachers' roles in fostering resiliency in students has been addressed. The significance of family involvement and collaboration with school prevention programs has been reported. Identification of student at-risk factors have been examined and information concerning the selection and development of at-risk programs and indicators of effectiveness have been explored.
A descriptive design was used to research the impact of the SAP on forty-six targeted students who were members of SAP groups during the 1997-1998 school year. Data collection included these students' grades, attendance, and office disciplinary referrals before and after group participation. Questionnaire results from teachers of the students and SAP group facilitators regarding observations of changes were also documented.

School attendance decreased, office disciplinary referrals increased, while the grade point average of the targeted students showed improvement after participation in an SAP group. The facilitator survey results indicated favorable impressions of positive changes occurring as a result of the SAP program while teacher survey results were more divided. Although the data does not appear to indicate significant positive changes for this group of students in the areas that were reviewed, the possible long-term effects on individuals cannot be discounted. Prevention and intervention are ongoing processes whose results may not be outwardly measurable. Any positive growth would seem to indicate program success.
DEDICATION

This research paper is dedicated to my wonderful husband, Sam. Thank you so very much for your unfailing encouragement and support throughout this long and tedious process. I truly couldn't have accomplished this without you. Your constant computer assistance and expertise was absolutely invaluable.

It means more than you will ever know that you took on so many household responsibilities to allow me the time to complete this work. I value you always and, though it is hard to imagine, more with every single day. I love you. Thanks.
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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

The Student Assistance Program (SAP) seems to be prevalent in many schools as a vehicle for addressing the needs of at-risk youth. At-Risk is generally described as a strong likelihood of engaging in behaviors that are linked to school failure and dropping out, depression, violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and other social problems. The SAP is an intervention/resiliency building resource that targets these students to decrease at-risk factors and enhance factors that protect vulnerable youth.

In Phoenix, Arizona, several Deer Valley Unified School District schools at the elementary school, middle school, and high school level have implemented an SAP model that is the product of the Chemical Awareness Training Institute of Phoenix. According to a district office employee who has been working with prevention and intervention programs at the district level since 1990, the SAP program in Deer Valley began slowly with its adoption in only a few schools, generally at the middle school and high school level. Gradually, as word of its success in addressing issues of at-risk students spread, it was implemented at an increasing number of schools, including those at the elementary level. Initial SAP parameters are described in a 1992 Deer Valley District guideline for prevention programs that were federally funded under the government's Title 4 substance abuse prevention monies. This report was distributed to
all Deer Valley schools by the Coordinator of Student Development whose office supervised all prevention and intervention programs in the district at that time (See Appendix A). According to the District description released during the 1991-1992 school year, the program’s format is a network of support groups that help to build self-esteem, teach coping skills and conflict resolution strategies and increase problem solving abilities with students who are at risk in various areas of the social strata. The same District guideline recommends the program be thoroughly planned before being implemented and that evaluations of the program be conducted.

A former Assistant Principal facilitated the institution of the Student Assistance Program at Esperanza Elementary School of the Deer Valley District during the 1994-1995 school year. The Assistant Principal stated that she chose to implement this particular program because of her familiarity with it from her previous school where she observed many positive effects in students’ lives. Additionally, she was concerned about the increasing number of Esperanza student disciplinary referrals to the office and students’ indications of family and personal problems and issues. Over 300 students have participated in the program at Esperanza from the 1994-1995 school year through the 1997-98 school year. During the 1997-1998 school year, 123 students were members of SAP groups. Twelve staff members donated their time and involvement by facilitating weekly SAP support groups for students in grades one through six during the 1997-1998 school year.

The SAP model at Esperanza and other elementary schools in Deer Valley consists of an hour a week meeting in which students are pulled out from their regular classroom to meet with their group. An SAP group at Esperanza consists of one or two
facilitators and approximately five to seven other students who are usually in the same grade level. The older students (grades 4-6) usually are self-referred to a group while students in first through third grades are referred to a group by teachers or parents. Parent permission is not needed for group membership as it is a support group to discuss issues rather than a therapy or counseling situation. In the past at Esperanza, when parents were asked to give permission for their child to be in an SAP group, it was discovered that students who needed the groups the most due to family issues were often not given permission to participate. Parents are now informed of their child's participation in a group and encouraged to seek more information about the program. Parents have rarely taken the initiative to do this.

The SAP facilitator guide outlines detailed lesson plans for eight weekly sessions. Topics include: sharing, anger, feeling safe, defenses, friendships, and feelings. After the facilitator introduces the topic and activities for the day, group members take turns answering questions and sharing examples of experiences they have had or are having that are relevant to the topic. Healthy alternatives and ways of dealing with situations are explored and reinforced with the students who are better prepared to cope with their own life issues and future experiences. The staff at the Chemical Awareness Training Institute where facilitators receive their training state that students who complete an SAP group are less likely to drop out of school, engage in chemical abuse, or be involved in other behaviors that are considered to be at-risk to their ability to lead productive lives.

Development of the Problem

An exhaustive examination of the Esperanza SAP to help ascertain if it is meeting its objectives was never attempted even though this was part of the District's original
program directive. Because the program falls under the auspices of a renewable social services grant at Esperanza, a very brief and limited evaluation of the program is included in the grant proposal for renewal every year. However, the SAP is not targeted in an in-depth manner for this report. It has likewise never been determined if Esperanza SAP objectives adequately address the needs of the school's student population, particularly those considered at-risk. It has not been ascertained how this program's practices compare and contrast with those of other effective educational intervention programs. Esperanza's Principal has agreed to this evaluation of the program. (Appendix E)

The Student Assistance Program was chosen as a resource to assist students with life issues that impact their mental, emotional, and physical health. A determination of how Esperanza's SAP practices compared with researched effective practices of other school-based intervention/resiliency programs needed to be attempted to determine the effectiveness of the SAP at Esperanza. The expectation was to be able to discern whether the SAP is significant and comprehensive in affecting positive changes in at-risk students' lives and supporting students with problems and behaviors which are interfering with their education and life in general.

Being ignorant about these issues raises questions concerning whether the program appears to be an effective vehicle for affecting positive change in students' lives. The time students spend out of the classroom and in their SAP groups has been an issue of concern to some staff members at Esperanza. Some teachers are hesitant to release students from class time and class work to attend their SAP groups. Time on task regarding academic instructional objectives is a priority for the Esperanza administration and the Deer Valley School District. It was suggested by a key proponent and leader of
the program that the Student Assistance Program at Esperanza could be in jeopardy if there was a question of whether the information and assistance students receive in their group meeting times is outweighed by time lost in classroom instruction. The continuation of this program could depend on indications of it being an efficient use of school time and its appropriateness and effectiveness in meeting student needs.

Identifying which students may be at-risk for present or future socially maladaptive behaviors needs to be clarified. Contributing experiences, attitudes, and situations which may be indicators leading to a higher probability of being at-risk need to be defined. Guidelines and interventions that seem to be effective in combating at-risk factors need to be studied for possible consideration and implementation.

As documented effective practices regarding success with at-risk students are reviewed, conclusions can be compared with the operation of the SAP program at Esperanza. The study of available data regarding indications of school-based intervention program effectiveness may help to ascertain probable effectiveness of the SAP program at Esperanza.

Another meaningful reason for this study could be the possibility that some Esperanza at-risk students may be overlooked in their future schools and not be given another opportunity for assistance of this type. While most Esperanza SAP participants are self-referred, these same students may not be open to this kind of support in the future. It would appear to be critical to provide services and assistance that could benefit these students while they are interested and willing to participate and before possible issues and problems escalate in their lives.
Historical background of the Student Assistance Program and its development, goals, and procedures, may help to provide insight into the dynamics of this model. School administrative and staff support as well as family involvement will also be identified and discussed.

The Problem

Objectives that seem likely to help decrease at-risk behaviors and increase resilient behaviors must be established as the foundation of an intervention program. Indicators of whether these objectives have been reached must be evaluated to be able to suggest effectiveness. Existing programs can then be reviewed according to these criteria. The SAP at Esperanza is an integral part of a collaborative social services grant that dictates evaluation and determination of effectiveness in meeting at-risk students' needs as a condition of renewal. In the three years the SAP program has been in existence at Esperanza, no encompassing evaluation of the program has been attempted. Until this time, only a brief general review of the SAP has been included in the evaluative report regarding all of the social service programs under the grant's umbrella.

Objective and subjective examinations of Esperanza SAP group members' behaviors should be presented. Objective components of student behavior should include report card grades, attendance records, and numbers and types of office disciplinary referrals before and after completion of the program. Subjective information should include teacher and facilitator questionnaire answers regarding possible changes that may or may not have been observed in student behavior. Objectives of the Esperanza program should be detailed and evaluated as to whether they are applicable in meeting student needs and affecting positive change in possible at-risk behaviors. An assessment to
determine if it appears that program goals are being attained should help formulate an indication of effectiveness. Comparable educational programs targeting at-risk students should be studied and reviewed. Research concerning effective practices from other programs should provide information to be used to compare and contrast the program at Esperanza.

Need for Study

As one of the primary intervention/resiliency programs at Esperanza Elementary, the Student Assistance Program services many students each year and involves many hours of students' and teachers' time. It is important to ascertain whether it appears to be an effective tool in meeting its' objectives and the needs of at-risk children at Esperanza.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the Student Assistance Program (SAP) at Esperanza Elementary School to determine whether it is an effective educational intervention/resiliency program that is meeting at-risk students needs by improving grades, attendance, and school behaviors.

Research Question:

Is the Student Assistance Program at Esperanza Elementary School effectively meeting its' objectives of addressing at-risk students' needs?

Definition of Terms

1. **Student Assistance Program**: A prevention and intervention program for students in Elementary through the high school level. The program includes an effort to educate, identify, assess, refer, and support students with drug abuse problems and other high-risk behaviors which are interfering with a student’s education and life development (Chemical Awareness Training Institute Manual, 1992, p. A-2).
2. **effective practices**: A wide variety of specific practices that have been documented as successful or even essential with at-risk youth (Barr and Parrett, 1995, p. 94).

3. **at-risk**: ...the "disengaged" or "disconnected" youth of the United States...may frequently be endangered by their own behavior by placing themselves in the "risky business" of sex, drugs, and alcohol or by reacting negatively to upheavals in their home and family (Barr and Parrett, 1995, p. 2).

4. **intervention/prevention**: a strategy that "strengthens the chance of student success in academic areas by pinpointing specific student needs and providing support" (Cooley, 1993, p. 10).

5. **resiliency**: a demonstration of ...social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, and sense of purpose (Bruce, 1995, p. 178).

6. **self-esteem**: A composite picture of perceived self-value. It's the disposition to experience yourself as worthy of happiness, health and wellness, respect, friendship, love, achievement, and success...the integrated sum of self-efficacy and self-respect (Young, 1991, p.7).

The study of Student Assistance Programs encompasses the initial development of the SAP model, data and researched information about school-based intervention programs such as the SAP, and the monitoring and adjustment of the current Esperanza SAP to help determine whether it is in alignment with established effective practices of school-based intervention programs.

**Summary**

The establishment and implementation of educational intervention/resiliency programs will be reviewed and standards and practices that have been researched to be effective with at-risk youth will be examined. An explanation and description of school-based intervention/resiliency programs will help to provide a rationale of why Student Assistance Programs were established in schools and the nature of the student needs they are attempting to address. A definition and description of SAPs will include components of programs and indications of effectiveness. Clarification of the program at Esperanza
will encompass demographics of the school and its population, objectives of the program, and an examination of whether it appears that program goals of reducing at-risk behaviors and improving grades, attendance, and classroom behavior are being met.

It would seem that Student Assistance Programs are being implemented in many schools including Esperanza Elementary, to address behaviors which inhibit students’ capacity to learn and function effectively in the school setting and elsewhere. It appears that if guidelines to establish effectiveness and successful practices were defined, these programs could be more effectively utilized in all schools, including Esperanza Elementary.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The existing Student Assistance Program at Esperanza was will be assessed to establish alignment with effective practices of intervention/resiliency building programs. Effectiveness in meeting student needs and possible future directions will be explored. Evaluation parameters derived from similar researched programs will help to accomplish this assessment.

Factors that contribute to students being considered at-risk will be enumerated. Resulting conditions and situations that can be by-products of continued at-risk behaviors will be examined. Strategies that appear to point to effective prevention and continuation of at-risk behaviors will be documented.

Because self-esteem is a primary stated objective of the program at Esperanza, effects of self-esteem and the lack of self-esteem in children will be addressed in relation to resiliency building and at-risk behaviors. Problem-solving, anger management and relationship skills in children as related to resiliency capabilities will be examined and explored.

The component of administrative and teacher support in developing and facilitating effective at-risk strategies for students will be researched. Parental and family
involvement and interaction with at-risk programs will be reviewed in light of the effects on program success and student behavior.

Development of the Student Assistance Program Model

The Student Assistance Program (SAP) has evolved from the industrial model for employee assistance, the Employee Assistance Program, or EAP. The intended purpose of the establishment of EAP programs was to assist workers with substance abuse and other problems that interfered with employees' abilities and functions in the workplace. "The Student Assistance Program was designed to help students with substance abuse and other problems (physical, emotional, family, social,) and to provide information on sensitive topics" (Milgram, 1989, p. 327).

Elaine M. Johnson, Ph.D., Director of the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention summarizes the intent of programs aimed at addressing needs of at-risk youth such as the Student Assistance Program:

We know that approximately 25 percent of our Nation's 30 million adolescents are at risk for a number of adverse outcomes. We know, too, however, that timely, comprehensive, well-designed programs staffed by trained and compassionate practitioners can make a remarkable difference in the character and resolve of individuals, in the binding strength of families, and in the helping power of communities. We know, in other words, that prevention works. (Gardner, Green, Marcus, 1994, p. iii-iv)

SAPs seem to have evolved since they were initiated in the late 1970s. The formative years of program innovation were 1978-1987 and the movement to professionalism took place between 1988-1991 (Moore and Forster, 1993). The first SAPs appeared to adopt EAP technology directly from the workplace. An initial focus of EAPs was the alcoholic employee who feared job-related reprisals and also experienced the alcoholic symptomatology of problem denial.
SAPs initially attempted to replicate the EAP model by placing substance abuse specialists in school buildings. In the early 1980s, several school districts, notably Phoenix, Arizona and Holstein, Wisconsin, attempted to integrate school counseling services with community referral networks. The student assistance team also provided on-site support groups to help students overcome personal problems related to substance abuse. Administrators began to use SAPs as an alternative to discipline (Moore and Forster, 1993).

Since 1988, several developments suggest a move to higher professionalism in the operation of SAPs. Likely indicators of this movement appear to include more program evaluation, improved training of personnel, and more funding to support SAPs (Moore and Forster, 1993).

It is expected that SAPs will expand in a similar way that EAPs expanded. Just as EAPs evolved to include family dysfunction and mental health problems, SAPs may have similar applications for a broader range of at-risk students (Moore and Forster, 1993).

The Student Assistance Program model appears no longer to be limited to behaviors and problems associated with chemical abuse, although at the high school level especially, this is still an important aspect of the program. A look at demographics and related statistics indicate that today's students come to school with many sociological and psychological problems that affect academics, student behavior, attendance, and the general operation and management of schools. These problems include: 24 percent of youngsters under 18 currently live with only one parent, 51 percent of women return to the labor force before their child reaches the age of one, nearly one of every six families with related children were living in poverty in 1987, suicide is the second largest killer
among persons 14-25, 21.9 percent of the class of 1988 indicated they first used alcohol in grades 7 or 8, and the United States leads all developed countries in teenage births and abortions (Cooley, 1993, pp. 10-11).

These statistics suggest insights into the range of problems that teachers and administrators face.

Teaching and learning are inhibited by problems students bring to school, and educators are forced to assume the role of the extended family and address problems that once were the responsibility of the family. Student Assistance Programs are a mechanism to provide students with support and direction (Cooley, 1993). "With additional support, such as student assistance programs, youth may receive the help they need to resist using alcohol and other drugs and to cope with problems and pressures in other, more useful ways" (Linney and Wandersman, 1991, p. 23).

The Executive Director of the Chemical Awareness Training Institute writes in the Student Assistance Training Manual:

There has been an explosion of knowledge and programs in the field of recovery. Student Assistance Programs have taken this ever-evolving body of knowledge and tailored it to the needs of the educational community...SAPs are one of those important vehicles for personal healing and transformation (Watkins, 1995 p. 28).

**Identification of At-Risk Factors**

Student Assistance Programs were initially formed to address substance abuse and its' effects on young peoples' lives. It appears that research and data relating to student drug and alcohol abuse and prevention and sobriety programs can be transferred to other at-risk behaviors, factors, and programs such as SAPs. The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, a subsidiary of the United States Department of Health and Human Services'
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Division in 1987 funded the High Risk Youth Demonstration Grant Program to develop successful prevention strategies for high-risk youth. Their report identifies groups of risk factors as well as proven effective prevention strategies for the nation's youth. The report documents problems associated with at-risk youth including school failure and dropout, teenage unemployment, teenage pregnancy, addicted babies born to drug-abusing mothers, adolescent depression and suicide, gang activity and violence, increased incidence of AIDS among young people as a result of drug use and sexual activity, and homeless and runaway youth (Doherty, Gardner, Bass, and Kittrell, 1993).

Researchers cite the importance of protective factors as well as risk factors in determining coping strategies for at-risk youth. "Research suggests that major protective factors such as interpersonal skills, long-term goals, planning ability, and a close relationship with a positive role model reduce poor outcomes in youth" (Kumpfer Shur, Ross, Bunnell, Librett, and Millward, 1993, p. 13).

The Signs of Effectiveness report (Doherty et al., 1993) identifies the following as individual-based risk factors: inadequate life skills, lack of self-control, low self-esteem, emotional and psychological problems, favorable attitudes towards drugs and alcohol, rejection of commonly held values, school failure, and early anti-social behavior. The report also cites group or individual counseling as being effective in addressing these risks. Programs that help youth develop communication, problem-solving, and decision-making skills and which help find ways to control anger and identify and understand feelings and emotions were also reported to be effective interventions.
Schools are filled with students who need prosocial skills to handle the many ups and downs of adolescent life. Schools have a key role to play in addressing the rising tide of a-risk students who bring antisocial aggressive behavior patterns with them to school as a result of multiple nonschool factors they have been exposed to early in their lives (e.g. poverty, abuse and neglect, family conflict, weak or incompetent parenting, drug and alcohol involvement of primary caregivers, dysfunctional family situations that are highly chaotic, and so on) (Mehas, Boling, Sobieniak, Sprague, Burke, and Hagan, 1998, p. 20).

**Evaluations of Effectiveness of Student Assistance Programs**

An important evaluative finding regarding SAP programs is that about 50 percent of all students participating in SAP groups are self-referred (Pollard, 1987). This would seem to indicate that students have strong positive attitudes toward the SAPs at their school.

Another finding is that 35 percent of the students referred to an SAP reported a serious personal problem in their life such as parental alcohol/drug abuse, a family divorce or breakup, sexual or physical abuse, depression, delinquency, personal trauma, or gang activity (Pollard, 1987). Apparently, the more severe the student’s presenting problem, the more likely the student was to have referred himself or herself to a SAP. This again seems to indicate that students are placing a great deal of trust in the functioning of SAPs.

Evaluative data from SAPs seem to indicate program success and effectiveness in decreasing violence, improving grades, improving attendance and graduation rates, reducing substance use and abuse, reducing suicides, and increasing staff satisfaction and commitment. Students seem more able to resolve disputes peacefully and Chemical Awareness Training documentation indicates a significant reduction in fighting, property destruction, and weapon possession after involvement with a SAP group. Student
Assistance Programs across the United States have reported statistics to the Chemical Awareness Training Institute indicating a substantial decrease in alcohol and drug use and abuse. These statistics include a Sherman Oaks, California, middle school where 60 percent of the 500 students involved in a SAP group report increased sobriety. At Waialua, Hawaii, high school and middle school students reported a positive increase in their attitude towards school and an increase in positive relationships with family members and peers (Watkins, 1995).

**Educational Indicators of Successful At-Risk Programs**

Student behaviors appear to be one indicator of at-risk program success. Drug and alcohol suspensions, incidents of vandalism, unexcused absences, and discipline referrals are related directly or indirectly to at-risk behavior, particularly drug or alcohol use (Miligram, 1989). Keeping records of student behavior would seem to be an effective tool for program evaluation when pre and post program behavior is documented.

Behavioral indicators that the program is appropriate in meeting the needs of at-risk students seem to include student grades and attendance. In addition..."a program successfully conducted for a period of time would appear to also be reflected in improved standardized test scores and a decreased drop-out rate" (Miligram, 1989, pp. 333-334).

Linney and Wandersman (1989) mention the importance of building resiliency in youth by increasing their commitment to school and involvement in school activities.

It is suggested by Barr and Parrett (1995) and Lezotte and Jacoby (1990) that the beliefs and dispositions of teachers, administrators, and parents associated with a school can lead to success for students at risk. Some of these beliefs that are thought to be critical include a shared vision, a clear and focused mission, frequent monitoring of
student progress, a voluntary agreement to participate in significant school improvement, high expectations of students, and parental involvement.

There also appears to be a strong relationship between a student’s active participation in efforts to overcome at-risk behavior and his or her success in doing so.

To change at-risk to non-risk students they must attend school, commit themselves to seeking an education, exert effort in doing so, and succeed. It is caring and committed relationships that keep at-risk students in school....It is through knowing that one’s efforts contribute to the success of others as well as oneself that gives school its meaning and value. (Johnson and Johnson, 1994, p. 16)

The facilitator training of the Chemical Awareness Training Institute, which is the model for the Esperanza Program, emphasizes what a SAP group is not. In the facilitator handbook it is underscored that in a SAP group there is to be no probing or why questions, no advice giving, no analyzing, and no fixing of problems. Every group member has the right to pass and is free to share as much or as little as he or she wants to share. Emphasis is placed on the student being comfortable with what is right for him or her in the group setting. The main objectives of the support group model is to listen, validate, support, and accept each person as he or she is at that moment (Watkins, 1992).

Self-Esteem in Children

Student Assistance Programs and similar intervention program goals for the elementary level often emphasize self-esteem as a crucial component. At Esperanza, self-esteem is the written primary objective of the SAP program.

Self-esteem appears to do with the inner strength of “the self.” Each child is thought to be born with a blank sheet with no positives or negatives affecting him/her. Through outside influences such as significant people in one’s life and one’s environment, one may compile positives and negatives which affect high or low self-esteem. A positive self-esteem appears to give children confidence in themselves and their abilities and
the freedom to accept the challenge of new experiences. Lack of a good self-esteem often leads to behavior problems. (Mark, 1998, p.1).

Children with high self-esteem seem to perform more successfully in school. A child with high self-esteem may consider himself capable of learning and can more easily overcome frustrations. A child with low self-esteem may be defeated before he begins. A high self-esteem child may be willing to stand up for what he considers to be right. The behavior cycle created is: strong self-esteem encourages actions that allow self-esteem to be strengthened even more in adverse situations while low self-esteem is lowered in similar situations (Young, 1991, p. 34).

Kramer (1994) states that substance abuse, teen pregnancy, teen suicide, violence, and dropouts (at-risk behaviors) are merely symptoms of far more serious problems, the primary of which is low self-esteem. The preventive strategy of helping to build self-esteem in our children may well be the most beneficial step taken to deter the acting out of negative and destructive behavior by children. To reiterate this idea, Kramer (1994) points out the decline in high self-esteem in school children from 80% in first grade to 20% in fifth grade to 5% by twelfth grade. Teachers virtually control the environment in which most students spend more than 1,000 hours a year for twelve to fourteen years. It would seem likely that teachers have much power in the molding and reinforcement of high self-esteem. That self-esteem is the primary goal of Esperanza’s Student Assistance Program appears to be a research-proven valuable objective.

**Selection and Development of Prevention Programs**

A multilevel approach to coordinating a prevention program is an important aspect of program selection and implementation. An effective program would address the child, family, neighborhood, school, and community. Before implementation of any program, a risk assessment would be beneficial to identify the risk and protective factors
of the population to be serviced. This assessment should help to prioritize prevention efforts and guide the selection of an appropriate program (Reynolds, 1998).

Prevention research is also a critical prerequisite to evaluation of program effectiveness. Current research has concluded that programs that foster resiliency in students (and therefore a decrease in at-risk behaviors) encourage the student to bond with positive adult role models and provide a commitment to resilient behaviors that is consistent across many environments – from community to school to family (Reynolds, 1998).

Other factors that are important to selecting and implementing prevention programs appear to be clearly stating a need for intervention, selecting a program with practices that are supported with research, carefully planning and organizing the implementation, inserviceing school staff, collaboration among staff, visible administrative leadership and support, ongoing support for the implementation process, and assessing the quality of implementation (Mehas, et al., 1998).

The Family’s Role in the Implementation of Intervention Programs

"The earliest and most enduring environmental impacts on children are made by the family" (Kumpfer, et al. 1993, p. 14). Research documents the connection between familial environmental, genetic, and physiological factors including poor discipline, poor supervision, poor parent-child communication, poor family management, lack of organization, domestic conflict stress and violence, lack of family cohesion, codependent relationships, and unrealistic developmental expectations and subsequent at-risk behaviors by young people, including substance abuse (Kumpfer, et al.1993) and Linney and Wandersman 1991).
Linney and Wandersman (1991) and Williams (1998) advocate increasing parental involvement in school and school functions as a contributing factor to prevention of at-risk behaviors in youth by increasing identification with school-related values and the sense of community and cohesion in the neighborhood. It appears to be essential for prevention program success to engage parents as essential partners.

Williams (1998) advocates vigorously exploring strategies that involve parents in prevention and intervention and initiating a partnership between home and school. Parent education, parent support, and parent-available resources are recommended as a means of involving parents in their child's school life and thereby offering parents a better understanding of expectations within the school. It appears to be significant to build on parents' strengths and support parents' efforts to become involved.

Programs that provide services for at-risk students are maximizing their effectiveness and benefits by planning ways to support the family as well. When there is collaboration between the family and the school and when parents are involved in the development of goals, interventions are more successful. (Murphy, Lee, Turnbull, and Turbiville, 1995, p. 24)

Administrative and School Support in Reducing At-Risk Behaviors

Administrators and school officials do not seem to be powerless, as is commonly supposed, to intervene in reducing at-risk behaviors. By assuming a viable leadership role, school administrators appear to be able to affect change. Successful intervention may involve identifying and confronting students’ and parents’ denial and by creating a positive school climate. A principal who takes an active part in establishing and overseeing a Student Assistance Program at his/her school and who develops consistency and accountability regarding disciplinary actions and referral procedures will likely help the at-risk student and the school community. Educators who enable a student to continue
at-risk behaviors seem to provide no reason or motivation for the student to change while the establishment of strong policies, discussions with students and parents, and staff education and participation in intervention policies seem to indicate effective practices (Flood and Morehouse, 1986).

In order to change at-risk students to non-risk students, schools have to be transformed. That takes leadership. The trap of believing that minor modifications will have impact has to be avoided. School leadership involves: (a) challenging the status quo of what schools are presently doing, (b) inspiring a mutual vision of what the school could be, (c) empowering students and staff members through teamwork, (d) leading by example by modeling the vision, and (e) encouraging the heart of students and staff members to persist in their efforts day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year (Johnson and Johnson, 1994, p. 3).

School-based risk factors that could foster substance abuse and other unhealthy behaviors are reported by Gardner, et al., (1994) and Quinn et al., (1993) to be ambiguous and inconsistent rules regarding student conduct, poor student management practices and lack of school bonding. These same sources cite school-based approaches involving youth as active partners in the learning process, clear and consistent school policies regarding substance abuse, involving students in exploring their values and attitudes regarding higher education and goal-setting, and the availability of a counselor/mediator/advocate to represent high-risk youth and their parents.

It is suggested that all members of a school staff have access to quality training and staff development that addresses student risk behaviors and promotes prevention. All school personnel should be skilled in identifying at-risk students and be familiar with various intervention strategies based on student needs. Staff reinforcement of resiliency
skills and knowledge of how to access existing support services also appear to be vital to prevention program success (Heller, 1996) and (Williams, 1998).

**Teachers Role in Fostering Resiliency in Students**

Resilient students appear more able to overcome difficulties while other students appear to demonstrate health-compromising behaviors. Teachers can possibly help foster resiliency by using brainstorming, creative problem solving, goal setting, critical thinking, and reflection. Teachers also seem to be able to enhance social learning by helping to develop support networks, creating interpersonal bonds that support students, and exposing students to interpersonal skills that get students involved with each other. Bruce (1995) stresses that individual teachers can play an important role in recognizing and encouraging responsibility and competency in all of their students.

**Collaboration of At-Risk Student’s Family and School Personnel**

It appears crucial that administrators, teachers, and parents develop and maintain a strong support for intervention programs for the programs to be successful. The at-risk student seems more likely to overcome negative behaviors when he or she knows that he or she is supported and his/her dangerous and unhealthy behaviors will not be ignored or tolerated. Students seem more likely to positively respond to well-planned and executed programs that make it clear that the student is responsible for changes in his or her life (Reynolds, 1998 and Mark, 1998).

School personnel and families working together can effectively address the needs of at-risk students. The student’s life (and therefore his or her issues with at-risk behaviors) do not exist within a vacuum; family and school-based influences should be
considered and incorporated into effective intervention programs (Reynolds, 1998 and Mark, 1998).

**Problem Solving**

The goal of teaching students problem-solving skills appears to do with providing skills and coping mechanisms to be successful. Students are taught to bring their social and intellectual resources together, to identify their strengths and magnify them, to be aware of weaknesses and be open to ways to strengthen them, and to understand and celebrate their potential to be productive and successful. Allowing children to choose solutions to problems from among ideas they have created allows practice that results in more appropriate resolutions (Lloyd, 1997) and (Devries and Zan, 1997). "The key to reducing problem behavior seems to be developing students' capacities for evaluating difficult situations and recognizing their own competence to effectively manage them" (Wilcox, Brigham, Nicolai, 1998, p. 19).

**Anger Management**

A secondary goal of the Esperanza SAP program is anger management. The facilitator training manual advises the facilitator to remind students that anger is a common emotion and that it can be felt and expressed in positive as well as negative ways (Watkins, 1992). What seems to be important is that students have the opportunity to learn how to recognize their anger, what situations often trigger their anger, and what coping skills and techniques could be useful for them (Hansen, 1995) and (Watkins, 1992).
Marion (1994 and 1997) indicates that understand, interpreting, and evaluating the emotion of anger precedes the ability to regulate and manage the expression of it. Self-regulation is defined as the ability to control impulses, tolerate frustration, and postpone immediate gratification. Additionally, Marion (1997, p. 66) states that "Skills for understanding and managing anger are not acquired automatically but must be learned and practiced." Children who are guided toward responsible anger management can learn to express angry feelings in constructive not destructive ways. Healthy social development seems more likely to occur in an emotional climate in which children have access to all of their emotions, including anger (Marion, 1994).

Summary

Successful school-based intervention/resiliency-building programs are the result of the combined efforts of parents, administrators, teachers, and students. The Student Assistance Program model, which was based on the Employee Assistance Program that targeted chemical abuse in the workplace, originally was designed as an aid to students affected by drug and alcohol use. The direction of SAP intervention has expanded to also include strategies to help at-risk students address issues concerning low self-esteem, anger management, problem-solving skills, and family issues. Evaluative data from SAPs appears to indicate program success and effectiveness in decreasing at-risk behaviors and increasing pro-social skills in these students.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Type of Research Project

This project will be an evaluative assessment study. An appraisal of the SAP program will be attempted to measure and estimate its value as an intervention program for at-risk students at Esperanza Elementary School. It will be an outcome study of the impact of the Student Assistance Program on students who were members of SAP groups at Esperanza during the 1997-1998 school year. Attendance, grades, and discipline referrals to the office of targeted students will be reviewed as well as teacher and facilitator survey results.

Design

Several methods of research design will be implemented in this paper. The main methodology will be participatory since the intent is to effect change. Questionnaires from SAP facilitators and SAP participants’ teachers will be used as a data collection procedure. The Teacher Questionnaire (Appendix B) consists of nineteen questions concerning the teacher's impressions of changes, attitudes, and observations that he or she may have noticed in a targeted student after completion of an SAP group. Teachers were asked to circle a number ranging from one to five, with one indicating they strongly agree with the statement and five indicating they strongly disagree with it. The Facilitator Questionnaire (Appendix C) follows the same format asking for subjective feedback concerning eleven statements about SAP participants and the SAP program at Esperanza in general.
This research will utilize an experimental design which is described by Merriam and Simpson:

Its purpose is to determine the cause of events and to be able to predict similar events in the future...if two sets of events are alike and something is either added to or taken away from one event, causing a difference between those two events, the difference is attributed to what was added or withdrawn. (1995, p. 52)

What is being added to this set of events, which is student behavior regarding grades, attendance, office referrals and teacher observations, is the completion of an SAP group. An analysis of report card information (grades and attendance), office disciplinary referrals, and teacher survey responses, may help determine if differences or changes occurred in this group of students after they completed participation in an SAP group. If changes did occur, this information could be used to predict probable similar results with other SAP student members. This could also be considered a form of observation since documentation of events associated with SAP participation will be studied.

Threats to validity will be minimized with use of both objective and subjective information and the study of student behaviors before and after SAP participation during the same school year. Objective behavior information will include information from the SAP students' report cards regarding numbers of days absent per semester both before and after SAP group completion as well as any noted grade changes in Reading, Math, and Science. An example of a blank report card is included in Appendix D. The school subjects of Reading, Math, and Science were chosen as representative academic subjects because they are common to all grade level students and they are emphasized in the school system as being significant. All report card information will be taken from the first and fourth semesters of the 1997-1998 school year since the group of students being
studied participated in SAP groups that met during part of the second and third semesters. Before and after effects of group completion could not be studied while students were in their group experience.

A descriptive design was employed in this research. Merriam and Simpson (1995) describe a descriptive design as focusing on the examination of facts about people and their opinions and attitudes. "Its purpose is not to give value to sets of relationships between events, but simply to draw attention to the degree two events or phenomena are related" (Merriam and Simpson, 1995, p. 61). In descriptive design the researcher does not manipulate or control the environment in which the study takes place but rather systematically describes facts and characteristics, and current conditions and practices. This information may be used to assist in future planning and decision-making (Merriam and Simpson, 1995). Information, opinions, and attitudes about the SAP program and its participants were examined. The description will include documented results of implementation of a Student Assistance Program at other schools and the program as it is in place at Esperanza.

**Appropriateness of Design**

The SAP program as it currently exists at Esperanza will be studied with the intention of evaluating its effectiveness in assisting at-risk students. The resulting information could be used to assist with future SAP program planning and decision-making. A longitudinal approach to data gathering will be used. This will involve comparing the performance of the students with their own performance at two different times (before and after an SAP group.)
Assumptions and Limitations

It is impossible to know whether the Student Assistance Program at Esperanza is effective in meeting the needs of at-risk students without investigating information concerning pre and post behaviors if its participants. It was assumed that if improvements were noted in attendance, grades, teacher observation, and less office disciplinary referrals, the student would be encountering a more successful school experience. This information could help to strengthen and better define Esperanza’s SAP program objectives and provide insight into goal direction and attainment. Indications of greater student success academically as well as increased attendance and a decrease in disciplinary problems would confirm and support the continuation of the SAP program at Esperanza Elementary School.

A significant limitation to this research was the lack of documented information concerning the initial implementation of this program. Research appears to strongly indicate that one must assess the school’s needs and then determine desired directions and anticipated outcomes at the onset of any program. Clear objectives can then be formulated and preferred goals to be reached during the process can be specified. There is also a lack of evaluative criteria for educational programs which can be used for program assessment. Additionally, other social services are present in the school and it was not possible to negate or measure their influence on these targeted SAP students.

Population

The population of typical participants in SAP programs are described in the Student Assistance Program Training Manual (Watkins, 1992) as at-risk students with chemical addiction, anger management, self-esteem, dysfunctional family, or other
related issues which interfere with their ability to function at school and elsewhere. This description is a fairly accurate portrayal of the Esperanza participants with the notable exception of widespread student chemical addiction.

Forty-six students who were members of an SAP group during the Spring of 1988 were the targeted student population for this study. Twenty of these students are male and twenty-six are female. Of these students, five were in first grade, six were in second grade, six were in third grade, four were in fourth grade, twelve were in fifth grade, and thirteen were in sixth grade during this time. Regarding ethnicity, thirty-eight of the targeted students are White, three are Hispanic, and five are Black.

Esperanza Elementary School is located just south of the Deer Valley Airport in northwest Phoenix. It is part of the Deer Valley School District which is one of the top four fastest growing districts in the state of Arizona. Esperanza opened in 1990 and currently has a student enrollment of 980 students. There are 78 staff members, 50 of whom are certified teachers. The school’s mobility rate is 9.0%. The population is predominately White (89%). Esperanza is presently a Title I School with over 39% eligibility for Title I services and 30% of the students qualifying for the free and reduced breakfast and lunch programs. There is a full-time social worker whose salary is paid from a three year collaborative social services grant awarded to the school. This grant is co-sponsored by the Arizona Department of Economic Security, Maricopa Association of Governments, and the Association of Children, Youth, and Families.

The Student Assistance Program falls under the auspices of this grant and is supervised by the school social worker. There were 12 staff members who facilitated SAP groups during the 1997-1998 school year. Ten of these staff members were teachers,
one was the school Social Worker, and another was the Assistant Principal. All SAP facilitators for the 1997-1998 school year are women. Facilitator training involves attending a three day workshop presented by the Chemical Awareness Training Institute of Phoenix which offers information about group facilitator skills and the group process, support group structures, and student assistance program components and planning. Four of the twelve Esperanza facilitators have attended an additional two day Advanced Training workshop.

Other social service/intervention programs in place at Esperanza include on-site personal and group counseling by Jewish Family Services, Parents Anonymous Groups, a Primary Health Care Clinic provided on a weekly basis, a parenting grant that oversees parenting services, a liaison with Child Protective Services to staff cases on campus with the Social Worker each week, a partnership with Operation Care for emergency food and clothing, and assistance with dental and vision care.

The target group of this study were the 46 students in first through sixth grade who participated in the Esperanza program from January through March 1998. These students were assessed according to pre and post SAP behaviors. Possible attendance variations and changes in grades in math, reading, and science will be compared for the first and fourth semesters. Additionally, teachers of the targeted students completed a questionnaire regarding changes they observed after the student's participation in an SAP group. Facilitators of SAP groups also completed a questionnaire describing observed changes in SAP students' self-esteem, problem-solving skills, and ability to form healthy relationships. Finally, school administration disciplinary reports concerning this group of
students were analyzed to ascertain changes in pre-group and post-group student disruptive behaviors.

To date, over 300 students have participated in the SAP program at Esperanza. During the 1997-1998 school year, 123 students participated in SAP groups. The primary focus of the Esperanza program is self-esteem. The rationale of this emphasis is that other behaviors that disrupt the student’s life will become more manageable with an increase in self-esteem and that students with higher self-esteem are less likely to become involved in chemical abuse and other unhealthy behaviors.

Other objectives of the Esperanza program for the 1997-1998 school year are to improve students’ abilities to problem solve, build self-esteem, build resistance skills and learn to form healthy relationships. The program was implemented at Esperanza in the fall of 1994 with the training of two facilitators. Student groups began in January 1995. Funding for the program was provided by federal Title 4 Substance Abuse Prevention Funds. The Assistant Principal during this time chose this program based on high numbers of student referrals seen in the office for both disciplinary and home situation/parental issues. No formal evaluation of needs or program direction was done before the program began.

**Sampling Method**

Data gathering techniques included a teacher questionnaire, a facilitator questionnaire, report card information, and administrative disciplinary records. These data techniques provided both objective and subjective evaluations of observed and documented changes in student behavior.
Measuring instruments included semester grades from student report cards (Appendix D), variations in attendance, increases/decreases in office referrals, and teacher and facilitator surveys. Data was collected concerning students who participated in the program during the same time frame of the same school year. Variations of behavior have been established by comparing pre and post behaviors from the 1997-1998 school year only.

Validity was established by comparing pre and post SAP participation behaviors, grades, and attendance rates from the 1997-1998 school year only. Also, grades and attendance records were analyzed from the first and fourth semesters when there was no involvement in an SAP group. Feasible threats to validity could include emotional maturation of some targeted subjects that would have occurred naturally during this time, possible effects of life experiences taking place outside of the school setting such as family issues, the potential influence of other social services available to the targeted students, and the subjective nature of observations made by the SAP facilitators and the targeted group's teachers.

A probable influence on validity concerning evaluation of the effectiveness of the program in affecting student changes was the consistent attendance of group members. Teachers and facilitators noted that absenteeism from the group impacted the significance of the group's influence on a student. Chronically poor school attendance and repeated field trips and special programs interfered with group time significantly detracted from an SAP group's positive benefits and therefore affected outcomes regarding students' grades and other behaviors.
An additional point that could modify a student's progress and growth from an SAP group and therefore influence evaluative results was whether he or she volunteered to be a member of a group or whether participation was the result of teacher or parent referral. SAP facilitators noted student attitude differences regarding this distinction could alter the student's group experience and therefore the results of the group's impact.

These factors were considered when reviewing the research results. Data was collected about every student in the targeted group to maximize the likelihood of representative results and minimize the effects of variables such as those listed above.

**Methods of Analysis**

Information about the targeted students was gathered from student records (report cards and disciplinary referrals) and questionnaires completed by teachers and SAP facilitators. An analysis of this information included grades, attendance, and disciplinary referrals before and after participation in an SAP group. Data concerning primary students was compared with data about intermediate students.
CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Presentation of Data

The Student Assistance Program at Esperanza Elementary School has been evaluated in this study in an attempt to assess whether it is an effective vehicle for addressing the needs of at-risk students. Data was collected about forty-six students who participated in SAP groups from January through March 1998. Student report card information, including grades and attendance were reviewed as well as office disciplinary records and the results of questionnaires completed by teachers of SAP students and SAP group facilitators. An attempt was made to discover positive changes in these areas after the students' participation in a group. This information was presumed to be an indication of more successful adaptations to the school experience, and possibly, ultimately, to life experiences.

Report Card Data

School attendance was chosen as an indicator of more success at school because of the implications of the relationship between the student being physically present for information and materials presented during the school day and the student's ability to understand and master that information. Report card data was collected from fifteen of the seventeen primary SAP students (grades 1-3) and twenty-six of the twenty-nine intermediate students (grades 4-6). The first and fourth semester information was chosen
to study because students participated in groups from the second to third semester of 1998. First semester information would be free of any influence of the SAP experience and fourth semester information would be in light of group completion. SAP report card data is presented in Table 1 for primary students and Table 2 for intermediate students.

The total number of absences for targeted primary students was twenty-nine for first semester and thirty-three for fourth semester. Of the fifteen students studied, five showed attendance improvement, four showed the same amount of absences for both semesters, and six had more absences during the fourth semester than the first semester.

Intermediate students had a total number of forty-three absences during the first semester as compared to eighty absences during the fourth semester. Four intermediate students had less absences during the fourth semester than the first semester while ten students had the same number of absences for both semesters and twelve students had more absences during the fourth semester.

The entire group of targeted SAP students had a total of seventy-two absences for the first semester and one hundred and thirteen absences for the fourth semester.

Attendance improvements were noted for nine students while fourteen students had the same number of absences for both semesters, and eighteen students showed an increase in days absent during the fourth semester.

Semester Grades

Semester grade information was also reviewed from the first and fourth semesters in the subject areas of Reading, Math, and Science. These subjects were chosen as representative of students' grades because of their emphasis within the school curriculum and their commonality across grade levels. Letter grades were assigned a number to
Table 1. SAP Primary Students Report Card Data

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Grade Point Average: 3.20, 3.33, 3.20, 3.27, 3.33, 3.47, 29, 33
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<th>2.13</th>
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<th>3.75</th>
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coincide with grade point average information. An A was assigned four points, a B was assigned three points, a C was assigned two points, a D was assigned one point and an F was assigned zero points.

In Reading, primary students recorded an average grade point average of 3.20 for the first semester and 3.33 for the fourth semester. Six students showed an improvement in their Reading grades, four stayed the same, and five showed a lower Reading grade for the fourth semester.

The grade point average of intermediate students for Reading was 2.13 for the first semester and 3.00 for the fourth semester. Nine students had improved Reading grades, ten had the same grade for both semesters, and seven had decreased scores in Reading.

Of the forty-one students whose report card grades in Reading were analyzed, fifteen students improved, fourteen had the same grades for both semesters, and twelve had a lower grade for the second semester.

In Math, primary students had a total grade point average of 3.20 for the first semester and 3.33 for the fourth semester. Seven students improved their Math grades, four students' grades remained the same, and four had lower grades during the fourth semester.

Intermediate students had a total grade point average in Math of 2.13 for the first semester and 2.75 for the fourth semester. Eight students achieved a higher Math grade during the fourth semester, eleven students received the same grade for both semesters, and seven had lower grades in Math during the fourth semester.
Regarding their Math grades, fifteen members of the targeted student group improved, fifteen students' grades remained the same, and eleven students had lower grades during the fourth semester.

Primary students' report cards revealed a total grade point average of 3.33 for the first semester and 3.27 for the fourth semester. Five students improved their Science grades, seven students' grades were unchanged, and three students lowered their Science grades in the fourth semester.

Intermediate students had a grade point average of 2.63 in Science for the first semester and 3.75 for the fourth semester. Twelve students improved their Science grades ten had the same grade for both semesters, and four had a lower grade during the fourth semester.

When totaled, seventeen SAP students got better Science grades for the fourth semester, seventeen had the same grades, and seven showed a grade decrease.

**Administrative Office Referrals of SAP Students**

Esperanza Elementary students are referred to school administrators when a teacher or other staff member feels that an infraction of school rules or policies is of a very serious nature in and of itself or when a problem or situation is seeming to escalate beyond the scope of the staff member's ability or responsibility to handle it.

Of the 980 students at Esperanza during the 1997-1998 school year, 166 or 17% of them received referrals to the office for disciplinary reasons. Of the 46 targeted SAP students, 12 or 26% of them received disciplinary referrals. Two of the SAP-referred students are female, ten are male. Four were in primary grades and eight were in intermediate grades.
There were thirty-seven total referrals for the twelve SAP students. Two of the SAP students were given one referral each, three were given two referrals, three were given three referrals, three were given four referrals, and one was given eight referrals. Fourteen of these referrals were given to SAP students before their participation in a group while twenty-three referrals were given after completion of a group. Eleven students were referred to school administrators for inappropriate behavior, nine for bus violations, eight for fighting and physical abuse of students, five for inappropriate language and gestures, two for disrespect, one for making threats, and one for stealing. All referral information is described in Table 3. A number of referrals per student pie chart is depicted in Chart 3.

**Questionnaire Results from Teachers of SAP Students**

Teachers of the targeted SAP students were given a questionnaire in May 1998. They were asked for impressions of changes that they may have noticed in their SAP students. These are subjective responses. The questionnaire consists of nineteen statements that the teacher decides on a one to five scale whether he or she strongly agrees with, agrees with, is neutral about, disagrees with, or strongly disagrees with whether the statement is applicable for that particular student. (See Appendix B.) All of the statements in the questionnaire would be considered positive student behaviors. The statements are worded to determine if the teacher observed an increase in more acceptable behaviors from students after participation in an SAP group. Thirty-nine teacher surveys were returned, twelve from primary teachers and twenty-seven from intermediate teachers. Some teachers chose not to reply to a particular statement so there are some items that have fewer responses than others.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Student 1</th>
<th>Student 2</th>
<th>Student 3</th>
<th>Student 4</th>
<th>Student 5</th>
<th>Student 6</th>
<th>Student 7</th>
<th>Student 8</th>
<th>Student 9</th>
<th>Student 10</th>
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<td>Number of referrals per Student</td>
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<td>Referrals After</td>
<td>Group</td>
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</table>

Of the 46 targeted SAP students, 12 received disciplinary referrals to school administrators.
Number of Referrals Per Student

- Student 6: 8
- Student 7: 4
- Student 8: 3
- Student 9: 2
- Student 10: 3
- Student 11: 4
- Student 12: 2
- Student 1: 1
- Student 2: 3
- Student 3: 4
- Student 4: 2
- Student 5: 1
Results of the primary teacher responses are listed in Table 4 and Chart 4 and those of the intermediate teachers are listed in Table 5 and Chart 5. In general, primary teachers tended to indicate more positive changes in their students than did the intermediate teachers. Many intermediate teacher responses were in the neutral category.

A few teachers chose to add comments to their questionnaires even though these were not solicited. Five teachers emphasized that there were no changes whatsoever in their students (even though other teachers chose to say this by circling the neutral response to every statement.) One teacher said that her students (all girls) never had behavior issues in the classroom and were already doing well before group. Another teacher said that her student missed a lot of group sessions due to absences and she thought this was a strong contribution to her seeing no positive behavior changes in him. One student was described by her teacher as a difficult child in all areas before and after group. Another teacher referred to a parental divorce that happened during the school year as having a major effect on the student and therefore her observation that his school behavior had strongly deteriorated. Lastly, a teacher felt it was important to clarify that her student being put on medication during the school year greatly influenced her explanation of behavioral improvements in him.

**Questionnaire Results from SAP Facilitators**

In May 1998, a facilitator questionnaire was also given to the twelve staff members who facilitated SAP groups during the 1997-1998 school year. Eleven surveys were returned. The questionnaire consists of eleven statements that would be considered positive observations about SAP participants and also the SAP program in general as it is
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Total Response</th>
</tr>
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<td>More often displays emotional well-being</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is better able to verbalize feelings</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less verbally impulsive in classroom</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Makes more appropriate choices and decisions</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Accepts consequences of behavior more readily</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>More frequently exhibits healthy boundaries</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Demonstrates increased comfort level with self</td>
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<td>Shows increased cooperation in working with peers</td>
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<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Total Response</td>
</tr>
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<td>-------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>More often displays emotional well-being</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is better able to verbalize feelings</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>Takes better care of own needs</td>
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<tr>
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<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Demonstrates increased responsibility within classroom</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noticeable increase in work quality</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved relationship with teacher</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>General attitude is improved</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Makes more appropriate choices and decisions</td>
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<td>Accepts consequences of behavior more readily</td>
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<tr>
<td>More frequently exhibits healthy boundaries</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Shows increased cooperation in working with peers</td>
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<td>27</td>
</tr>
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</table>
in place at Esperanza. Facilitators were asked to indicate agreement or disagreement with each statement. (See Appendix C.)

More facilitator responses were in the agree area than in the disagree area. (See Table 6 and Chart 6.) The statement regarding parental support of the program was left unmarked by two facilitators. This could be due to the fact that facilitators generally have no contact with the parents of their group members.

Three facilitators chose to add comments to their returned surveys. One suggested that extending the program to last beyond the current eight weeks would allow for more positive gains. She also indicated a lack of teacher and administrative support. Another facilitator said that although she observes changes within the group setting, she is unsure how many positive changes carry over to a student's life outside of group. Finally, a facilitator said that her responses to the questionnaire statements would be very different for every group that she has facilitated. She also suggested that facilitators could support one another with bi-monthly meetings, a practice that formerly was in place at Esperanza.

Summary

It would seem to appear that the information collected about the forty-six targeted SAP students is sufficient to be able to indicate conclusions about the effect of the SAP program on its' participants. Statistics were included about every student in some form even though a few student report cards or teacher surveys were missing. The vast majority of targeted SAP students were represented in all of the data. Subjective teacher and facilitator responses were reported as well as objective report card and office referral information. The intent of this research was to gather as much information as possible
about the influence of SAP group participation on these students. It would appear that this has been accomplished by the data that has been collected and reported.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6. Facilitator Responses</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Total Response</th>
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<td>Facilitator sees positive growth in participants</td>
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<td>Resistance skills of participants are enhanced</td>
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<td>Participants are more skilled in forming healthy relationships</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administration is supportive of SAP program</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents are supportive of SAP program</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training manual is effective and applicable</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group members support each other both in and out of the group setting</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the Student Assistance Program (SAP) at Esperanza Elementary School to determine whether it is an effective educational intervention/resiliency program that is meeting at-risk students needs by improving grades, attendance, and school behaviors.

The Student Assistance model's development was traced from its beginning in the 1970's as a derivative of the Employee Assistance model, the intent of which was treating substance abuse problems as they interfered in the work environment. SAPs' evolution from focusing on chemical abuse to expansion of other topics such as self-esteem, anger management, and problem solving has been documented. The importance of school administrative support and involvement in effective intervention programs as well as teachers' roles in fostering resiliency in students has been addressed. The significance of the student's family being active in the implementation of prevention programs and their collaboration with school personnel throughout the program has been reported.

Identification of at-risk factors for students has been examined. Finally, research has been presented concerning the selection and development of at-risk programs, educational indicators that the program is considered effective, and evaluations of effectiveness of Student Assistance Programs.
This project was an evaluative assessment study that attempted to measure and estimate the value of the SAP program as an intervention/resiliency vehicle for at-risk students at Esperanza Elementary School. This research involved an outcome study of the impact of the SAP program on forty-six targeted students who were members of an SAP group during the 1997-1998 school year. Data collection included these students' attendance, grades, and disciplinary referrals to school administrators. Teachers and facilitators completed surveys regarding their evaluations of the SAP's effects on the targeted students and these results were documented. This was a participatory methodology since the intent is to effect change. The study also utilized an experimental design in that its' purpose was to determine the effects of the SAP program on participants and to be able to predict similar results in the future. A descriptive design was also employed as its' focus was to examine the facts of current conditions and practices rather than manipulating the environment.

Report card data was collected concerning attendance and grades in Reading, Math, and Science for the first and fourth semesters of the 1997-1998 school year for the targeted SAP students. The total number of school absences increased for these students from the first to the fourth semesters. Some students showed an improvement in their attendance while others remained the same. A higher number of students, however, showed an decrease in their attendance at both the primary and intermediate levels.

In the area of grades, both the primary and intermediate students recorded gains in all three subjects of Reading, Math, and Science. The grade point average in all of these subjects improved for the SAP students from the first semester to the fourth semester. Again, there were variations in individuals but there were more students who earned
higher grades in these areas during the fourth semester than students who earned lower grades.

Of the forty-six targeted SAP students, twelve of them, or 26%, received disciplinary referrals to school administrators. There were a total of thirty-seven referral incidents, fourteen before group and twenty-three after group. The most common reasons for these referrals were inappropriate behavior, bus violations, and fighting.

Teachers of primary students indicated a higher level of agreement with positive changes in their students' post SAP behaviors than did teachers of intermediate students. Questionnaire results were somewhat scattered, particularly among the intermediate teachers. Facilitator questionnaire results were strongly in agreement of positive outcomes of the SAP program.

Conclusions

The results of this data do not seem to clearly answer the research question of whether the Student Assistance Program at Esperanza Elementary School is effectively meeting the needs of at-risk students. The hypothesis of the study was that if, after participation in the program, positive changes were reported in the areas of student attendance, grades, and office disciplinary referrals, the SAP was successful in impacting at-risk students. The actual findings were that student attendance decreased and absenteeism increased in the semester following participation in an SAP group, especially among the intermediate students. The number of office referrals also significantly increased in the targeted students after SAP participation. The area of grades did show improvement in all the subjects that were documented (Reading, Math, and Science), though the primary SAP students showed less gains than the intermediate students.
It was supposed that success of the program could be measured by favorable responses from teachers of SAP students and group facilitators about observed changes in student classroom behavior, peer and teacher relationships, and issues related to student self-esteem. Again, these questionnaire results were fairly inconclusive. The primary teacher and facilitator surveys were generally more favorable in indicating positive outcomes for students while the intermediate teachers' results were more divided between favorable, unfavorable, and no positive student changes.

The data obtained in this study does not seem to correlate with the information noted in Chapter 2 concerning documentation by the Chemical Awareness Training Institute of dramatic improvements in grades and attendance and a decrease in fighting and student disciplinary problems. It should be noted, however, that most of the data supplied by the Chemical Awareness Training Institute was the result of information obtained from SAP student surveys regarding changes in themselves. Of the Chemical Awareness Training Institute information that was reviewed for this research study, no analysis of actual student report cards was implied. Results of formal teacher and facilitator surveys were likewise not addressed. It is also important to note that most of the program effectiveness information from the Chemical Awareness Training Institute and other sources noted in Chapter 2 concerned results of SAP programs at the high school level, not the elementary school level. Much of this data documented program success as reductions in substance abuse by students. As was stated previously, substance abuse prevention is not an objective of the Esperanza SAP program, as it is not a significant issue at the school at this time. It would appear to be difficult to draw conclusions about comparisons of the Esperanza SAP and other SAP programs based on
the inequity of the manner in which data was obtained, the influence of the differences in the ages of the SAP participants, and the discrepancy in the focus of the SAP programs.

Another disparity between the SAP program at Esperanza and those documented in the Literature Review concerned the amount of involvement of the school's administration, staff, and parents in the implementation and support of the program. It was noted that this advocacy of the program is vital to its success. The SAP program at Esperanza does not enjoy this level of support and promotion throughout the school. It is viewed as a distinctly separate program that impacts few students and is not near as significant as other causes such as test scores and technology advancements. Parental involvement is negligible.

Likewise, as is recommended in the Literature Review, an assessment of student needs to determine program development and implementation is recommended to ensure maximum effectiveness of the program for the student population it is intended to serve. This was not done at the initial onset of the program. It has also never been attempted at the beginning or the end of a school year to conclude if student needs have changed. This information could possibly change the current direction and focus of the SAP program. It would be helpful to assess whether the program's objectives are applicable to the current student population. Perhaps this information would influence the data concerning program effectiveness.

**Recommendations**

In order to broaden the base of knowledge about the effectiveness of the Esperanza SAP program, several recommendations appear to be in order.
A pre and post SAP survey administered to student participants of the program would seem to be a valuable addition to this research. Because no such survey or questionnaire is currently in place at Esperanza, it is impossible to determine student perceptions of changes that have occurred in their lives as a result of their SAP groups. Collecting data from the same group of students before their group began and after their group has ended would likely provide a record of whether the students themselves perceived positive changes. These student observations of growth could open avenues of assessment exploration that have not been addressed in this study. Examples of this could be self-worth and self-control issues, changes in family relationships, attitudes towards school, and impact on physical and/or mental health.

Another recommendation would be to expand the types of questions asked to SAP facilitators in their questionnaires. The Esperanza facilitator surveys revolved around change issues outside of the facilitator such as those observed in the students and those observed about the program and its practices and implementation at Esperanza. The Chemical Awareness Training Institute literature mentions personal growth changes reported in facilitators themselves. Some of these included being more effective in their ability to offer help to family and friends and gaining more awareness of their own personal growth issues. This avenue of possible positive outcomes of the SAP program was left undiscovered.

Additionally, information disclosed by parents of SAP participants on questionnaires or by personal contact could be very useful in evaluating and assessing the program. Parents may observe significant growth in their child in their home environment while it has gone unnoticed at school. A parent would also likely have a clearer picture of
his or her child's initial starting point at the onset of a group and may be more able to
discern subtle positive changes after the group's ending. This would seem to be a very
valuable source of information about the effectiveness of Esperanza's SAP program.

Even though the data collected does not point towards significant positive growth
in these targeted Esperanza students in the areas that were studied, it is impossible to
ascertain the true effect and impact that the Student Assistance Program has had in their
lives. Prevention and intervention are ongoing processes and often the results of this work
go undetected. Many positive changes may not be outwardly measurable. Much of this
program is about sowing seeds for the future in these young students' lives. Positive
changes have been reported in this research in individual SAP students. Certainly there
have been many students who have profited from this experience, although perhaps not in
ways that were analyzed for this study. At-risk students are diverse in their needs, which
are many. The recommendations in this research paper could further benefit the program,
and ultimately, Esperanza at-risk students. Any positive growth would seem to indicate
program success, therefore that is the conclusion of this research study.


APPENDIX A

DEER VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT PREVENTION PROGRAM GUIDELINES

1992
STUDENT ASSISTANCE:

The Student Assistance Program is a national program that is a product of the Cheryl Watkins Chemical Awareness Institute. This program is an extensive one and should be thoroughly planned before implemented. This program is a network of support groups that help to build self esteem, teach coping skills, conflict resolution strategies and problem solving with students who are at risk in various areas of the social strata. This is not group "therapy" The steps are as follows:

1. Select facilitators from your campus who are energetic, caring, and good communicators.

2. Before support groups are set up, be sure you have an adequate number of facilitators trained (depending upon your student population between 4 and 6 is a good start). The training is expensive, so it may be a program that comes in stages. The facilitators go through a 3 day training session (subs will be necessary) which is usually Thus-Sat. depending upon the session. This training is informative and also lets the facilitator experience some of the same feelings that the students will encounter when in group.

3. When scheduling the group sessions, it is important to find time during the school day for groups to function. It is important in the elementary school not to pull students from core subjects like reading and math. Groups work best in numbers of 5 to 8 for the elementary ages and possibly groups of up to ten for the upper level students in middle school and high school.

4. You need two skills for this program: organization and sales. It is a huge job to organize the schedule for the groups. It is helpful to use some of the budget for a half day sub (the afternoon is good for the elem.) This sub can cover 4 class periods for each of 4 facilitators while they run group. The sub can move every 40 minutes from teacher to teacher, freeing that teacher to facilitate his/her group during that release time. This system works well. Sale= selling this to the faculty can be tricky, but once they realize the positive results on the "problem" student they become very cooperative.

5. This program is one that should be added to the prevention program in a organized and thoughtful manner. Perhaps a new prevention coordinator would want to include it in a second year plan. It is also important to choose a chairman for this project that is very organized and positive, if the coordinators chooses not to chair this project. It takes time and committment to run this program successfully. It is highly effective and helps many of our at risk students to deal and cope with life as they have to live it today.
APPENDIX B

TEACHER SAP QUESTIONNAIRE
Teacher SAP Participant Questionnaire

I am looking for subjective responses from you regarding this student who has participated in the Student Assistance Program. Is he/she more often exhibiting the behaviors listed below since completion of SAP?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student: ____________________________

Grade: _____________

Teacher: ____________________________
APPENDIX C

SAP FACILITATOR QUESTIONNAIRE
SAP Facilitator Questionnaire

I am looking for subjective feedback from you regarding your observations of the Student Assistance Program at Esperanza this year. Are the responses below consistent with your experiences with the program?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1   2   3   4   5</td>
<td>Facilitator sees positive growth in participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1   2   3   4   5</td>
<td>Program is effective in meeting students’ needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1   2   3   4   5</td>
<td>Self-esteem of participants is increased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1   2   3   4   5</td>
<td>Problem-solving skills of participants are improved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1   2   3   4   5</td>
<td>Resistance skills of participants are enhanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1   2   3   4   5</td>
<td>Participants are more skilled in forming healthy relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1   2   3   4   5</td>
<td>Teachers are supportive of SAP program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1   2   3   4   5</td>
<td>Administration is supportive of SAP program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1   2   3   4   5</td>
<td>Parents are supportive of SAP program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1   2   3   4   5</td>
<td>Training manual is effective and applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1   2   3   4   5</td>
<td>Group members support each other both in and out of the group setting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Facilitator: ____________________________
APPENDIX D

SAMPLE DEER VALLEY DISTRICT REPORT CARD
**DEER VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT #97**  
20402 N. 15th Avenue • Phoenix, Arizona 85027  
**STUDENT REPORT CARD**  
**GRADES 1-6**

**SCHOOL**

**STUDENT**

**GRADE**

**TEACHER**

**PRINCIPAL**

<table>
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<td>Math</td>
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<td>Spelling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Handwriting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Science</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Effort</td>
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<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td></td>
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<td>P.E.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Band</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**GRADING SYMBOLS**

- A = Excellent (90% - 100%)
- B = Above Average (80% - 89%)
- C = Average (70% - 79%)
- D = Below Average (60% - 69%)
- F = Failure (0% - 59%)

N/A = No grade given

(✓) areas checked = needs improvement

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<tr>
<th>STUDENT CONDUCT CHECKLIST</th>
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<td>Completes work on time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prepares for class</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listens attentively</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows directions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows class/school rules</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes care of property</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works well alone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works neatly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works accurately</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Displays appropriate behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

**ATTENDANCE - 175 DAYS**

<table>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>RETAINED IN:</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Teacher signature:  
Principal signature:  

**TEACHER COMMENTS**

Existence of grades of F signify the possibility of retention.

**DISTRIBUTION:**  
WHITE - 1st Quarter  
GREEN - 2nd Quarter  
CANARY - 3rd Quarter  
PINK - 4th Quarter  
GOLDENROD - Office
APPENDIX E

PERMISSION LETTER FROM ESPERANZA PRINCIPAL

REGARDING EVALUATION OF SAP PROGRAM
April 22, 1998

I have given my permission and approval to Marie Howell to evaluate the effectiveness of the Student Assistance Program at Esperanza Elementary School. This is to be her Master's Thesis Project for Ottawa University. It is understood that all students' names and identities will be omitted from the paper. This information is for academic research purposes only.

Larry Bauer
Principal, Esperanza Elementary School
Biographical Sketch

This research paper was written and compiled by Marie Elizabeth Howell. Mrs. Howell did her undergraduate studies at Mesa Community College and Northern Arizona University. She received a Bachelor of Education degree from Northern Arizona University with an extended major in Art Education. She is currently certified to teach kindergarten through high school level Art in Arizona. Mrs. Howell will complete her Masters in Education degree in School Counseling from Ottawa University in April, 1999.
1 38927 OTTAWA: THS
11 M1S 01/13/99 5021-