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2019-2020 ACE Program Report



BACKGROUND

In the fall of 2018 the Achieving Competitive Excellence (ACE) Project was introduced to 30 students in the 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades at Adams Elementary School (Colorado Springs School District 11). School administrators selected thirty of their most challenged students. ACE returned to Adams for the 2019-20 academic year (AY) and was incorporated into the entire 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade student body for a total of 260 students. Additionally, 300 students at North Middle School (also in District 11) participated in the ACE Program.

ACE was designed to teach students how to analyze situations in real-time and make the best decision at the moment. Using a proven coaching model, *Think-Say-Do*, students were guided through novel decision-making approaches intended to improve behavior, increase attention, and enhance classroom performance. ACE provided students with adaptive skills to enable social and academic success in and out of the school setting. Students received instruction on how to develop a cognitive strategic plan breaking larger issues into smaller ones—affording them the opportunity to internalize both problem solving and mental flexibility skills.

PROGRAM DESIRED OUTCOMES

Intended results included improved decision making, self-efficacy, focus, concentration and attentiveness, concept learning, critical thinking, and memory. Students were expected to demonstrate improvements in personal mastery—the ability to master their thoughts, behaviors and actions; while recognizing performance barriers such as attitude, negative self-talk, current biases, and the filters through which they viewed the world.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a mixed-methods design consisting of both quantitative and qualitative data streams from multiple sources. Collected data included Likert-based survey instruments, open-ended comments from students and teachers, and disciplinary data provided by school administrators. The survey data was a combination of both student self-reported (SSR) and teacher observations (TO) of the students using four survey instruments: (a) Devereaux Student Strengths Assessment-Mini (DESSA-mini) [TO] (Naglieri, LeBuffe, & Shapiro, 2011), (b) a questionnaire related to specific ACE program objectives [TO] (Lee & Lee, 2019), (c) the Panorama Social-Emotional Learning Assessment (Panorama) [SSR & TO] (Panorama Education, n.d.), and the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Assessment (21CLCC) [TO] (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Open-ended responses to questions [SST and TO] concerning the value of the ACE program were analyzed using the NVivo qualitative analysis software to identify themes. Conclusions were made based on the corpus of collected quantitative and qualitative data using a process of triangulation as described by Kelle (2001).

STUDY LIMITATIONS

Teacher observations varied in consistency and quality between Adams Elementary and North Middle Schools. A total lack of variance among student evaluations in the 21CLCC from some

teachers at North Middle School rendered that data meaningless, and the 21CCLC input from North Middle School was not considered. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic halted attendance during second semester of AY 2019-2020, creating a void in disciplinary data for statistical comparison.

SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

DESSA-Mini

Teachers at both Adams Elementary School and North Middle School completed the DESSA-Mini questionnaires for their students. The results from both schools are shown in Figures 1 and 2.

The root question was, *During the last quarter, how often did the child...*

Figure 1

DESSA-Mini, Adams Elementary School, Second Quarter AY 2019-20

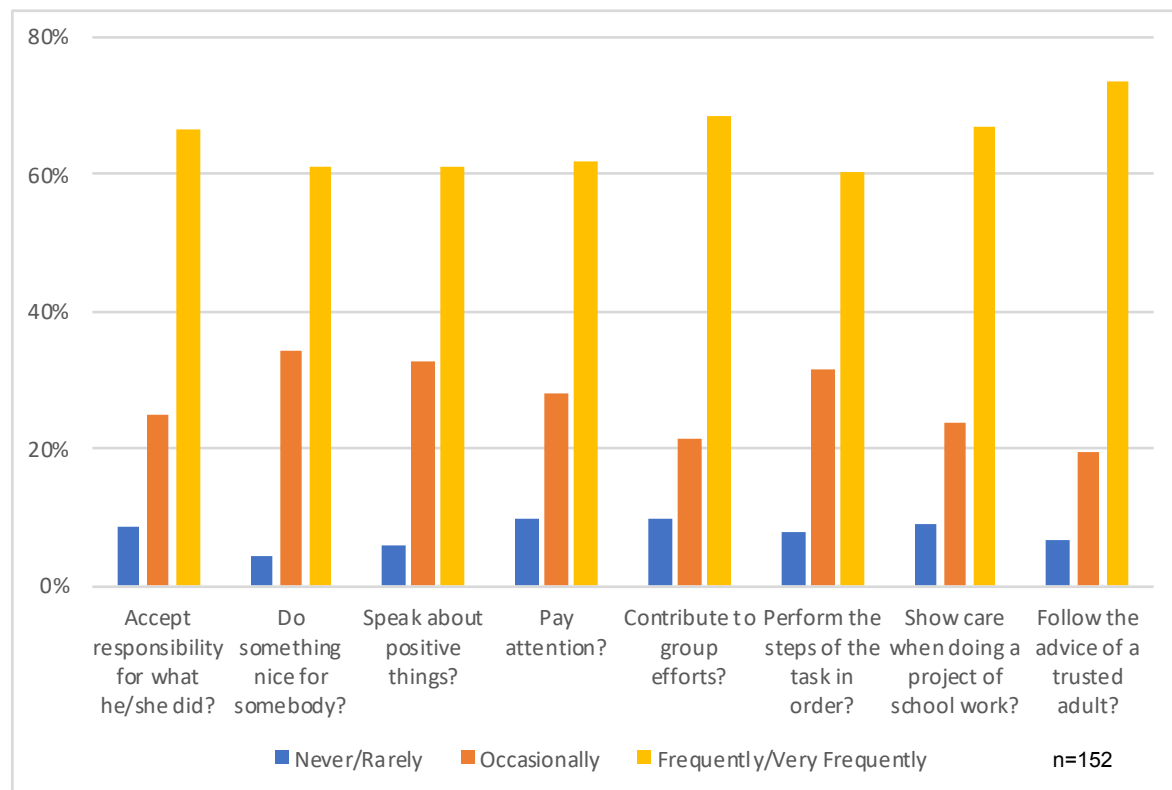
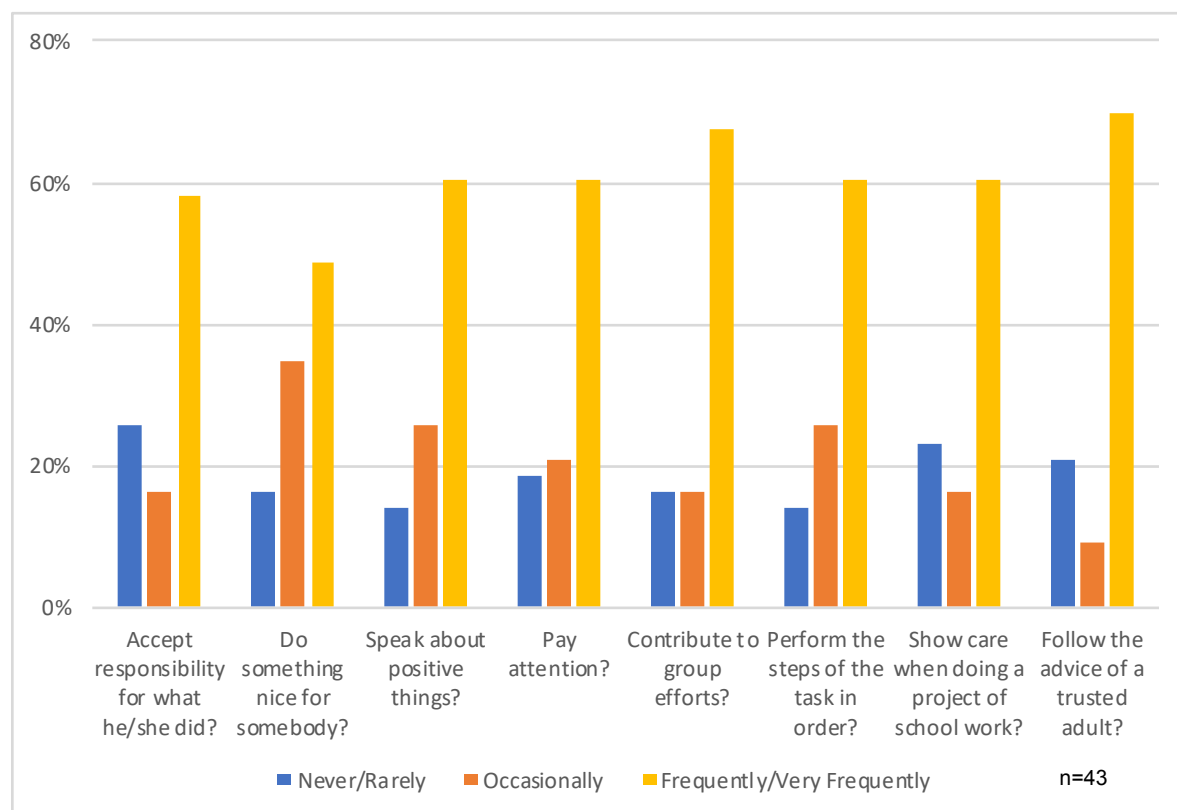


Figure 2

DESSA-Mini, North Middle School, Second Quarter AY 2019-20



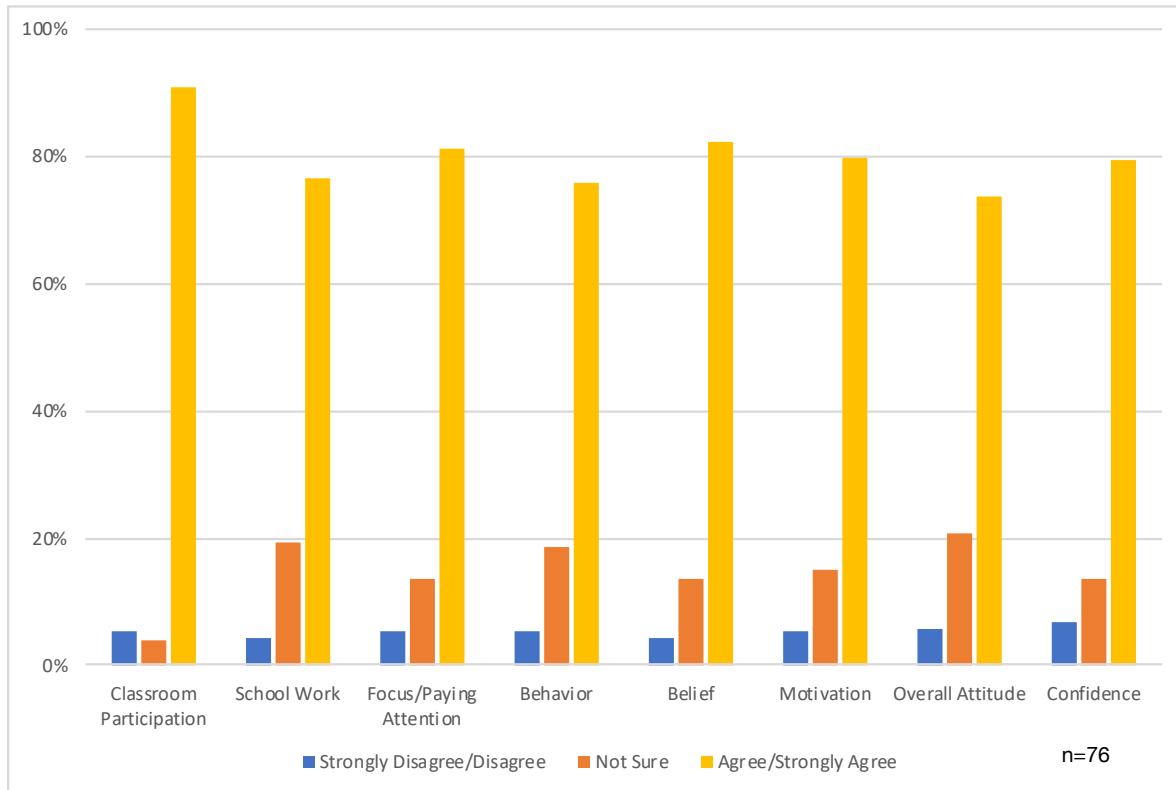
The data indicated that following exposure to the ACE program, 64.1% of students (65% Adams Elementary/61% North Middle) exhibited desired behaviors frequently or very frequently, while 10.4% of students (8% Adams Elementary/19% North Middle) never or rarely did. A two sample t-test for each DESSA-Mini question indicated statistically significant differences ($\alpha=0.05$) in the response means between Adams Elementary and North Middle Schools for questions pertaining to accepting responsibility and performing a nice act for another.

ACE Questionnaire

Students at both Adams Elementary and North Middle Schools completed questionnaires surveying the ACE program's impact. Response distributions for each question are shown in Figures 3 and 4. For both figures, the root question appeared as, *Was ACE effective in influencing your behaviors in a positive way?*

Figure 3

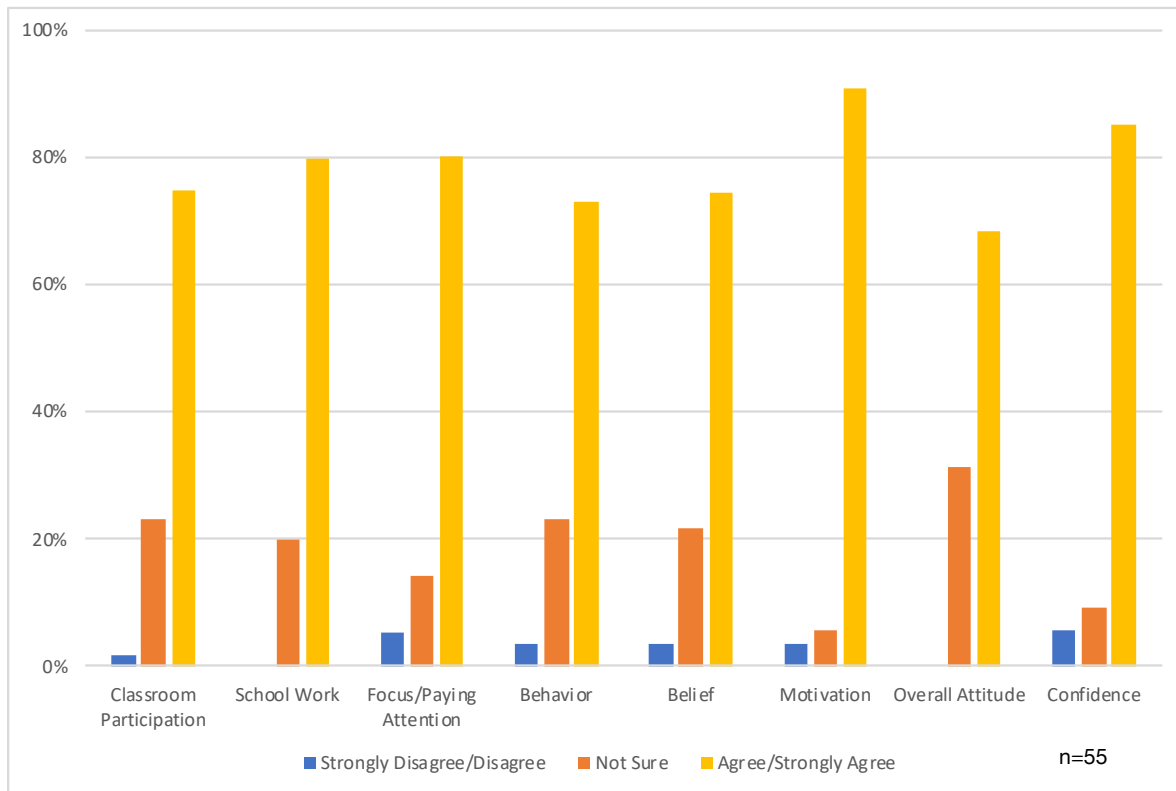
Student Responses to ACE Questionnaire, Adams Elementary School, Third Quarter AY 2019-2020



80% of students at Adams Elementary (n=76) reported agreeing or strongly agreeing that the ACE program positively influenced their behaviors with 78% reporting the same results at North Middle School (n=55). At Adams, *classroom performance* and *belief* were the strongest reported areas (91% and 82%, respectively). At North Middle School students reported the strongest impact in the areas of motivation (91%) and confidence (85%) [statistically significant at $\alpha > 0.10$]. These differences suggest that while students from both schools favorably reported the ACE program in all areas, portions of the ACE program may resonate differently among the grade and middle school populations.

Figure 4

Student Responses to ACE Questionnaire, North Middle School, Second Quarter AY 2019-2020



Panorama SEL

Students at Adams Elementary answered questions from the *Panorama Social-Emotional Learning* (SEL) questionnaire each semester from fall of 2018 to the Spring of 2019. The Panorama SEL is a validated instrument designed to measure various SEL components on a 1-5 Likert scale as shown in Table 1. The administration of the surveys aligned with the introduction of the ACE program in the fall of 2018 and the available longitudinal dataset was used to analyze student perceptions before and after exposure to the ACE program. The sample dataset consisted of 12 purposefully selected at risk students who had exhibited exceptional disciplinary problems for teachers and administrators.

Table 1*Panorama Social-Emotional Learning Results*

SEL Component	Fall 2018	Fall 2019	Change
Compassion	3.1	3.5	0.4
Emotional Regulation	2.8	3.4	0.6*
Engagement	3.4	3.6	0.2
Grit	3.5	3.5	0.0
Learning Strategies	3.6	3.6	0.0
Self-Efficacy	3.0	3.4	0.4
Self-Management	3.2	3.5	0.3
Sense of Belonging	3.7	3.8	0.1
Social Awareness	3.4	3.3	-0.1

* $P < .05$

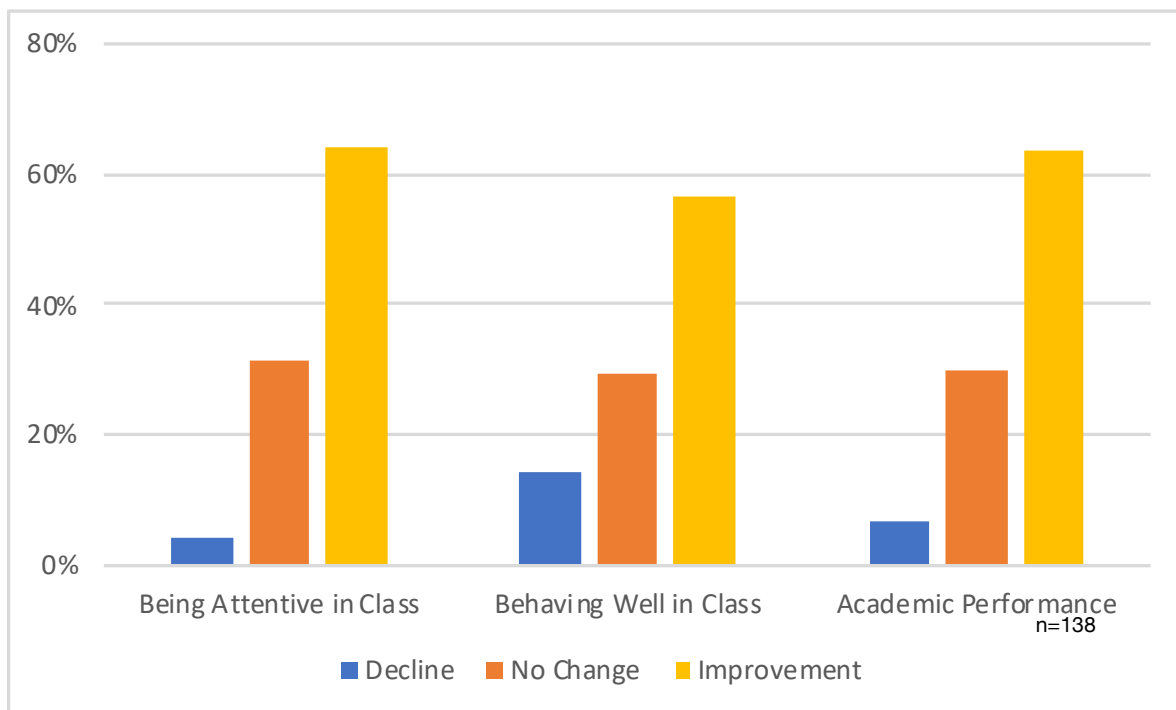
Analysis revealed statistically relevant improvement in the *emotional regulation* category which the school's principal corroborated by noting a reduction in disciplinary problems with those students following ACE program participation.

21st Century Community Learning Centers Assessment

Adams Elementary teachers reported indicators of student attitude and performance (n=171) aligned with the ACE program goals as shown in Figure 7. When completing the assessment, teachers identified those students who both needed (n=138) and did not need improvement (n=33) for each question. For the calculations used to derive Figure 7, only those students identified as needing improvement were included. For the three performance categories shown, teachers reported improvement in 56% and 64% of those students who needed it.

Figure 7

21st Century Community Learning Centers Assessment, Adams Elementary School, Third Quarter AY 2019-2020



STUDENT AND TEACHER COMMENTS

The *word clouds* shown in Figures 5 and 6 highlight the 50 most common words reported by Adams Elementary School students and teachers, respectively, when asked for examples of how they used the Think-Say-Do model taught in the ACE program. (Generated by the NVivo qualitative software package v.12)

Adams Elementary School Student Word Cloud Illustrating the Personal Impact of the ACE Program



When I got mad because my mom took my phone I stopped, and use think say do.
—Third grade student

In the morning I think about three positive things. I also say positive things and I am so, so, so positive at school and at home.

—Fifth grade student

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Figure 6

Adams Elementary School Teacher Word Cloud Illustrating the Impact of the ACE Program on Their Students



Teachers reported:

Mr. and Mrs. Lee did an excellent job engaging the students with practical everyday lessons that the students could use immediately. The brilliance was that while they are daily lessons for the kids, they are helping to set them up for long term success as well. It was a well designed unit and age appropriate. I saw students who would not consider themselves to be good at learning, paying attention and working.

—Seventh Grade Teacher

We are in our second year of the ACE Program at John Adams Elementary. Last year it was for a small group of students, but now Coach Lee has brought it to the masses. One thing I really like is, that what Coach Lee teaches, we can expand on in our class. A main teaching point that ACE has brought is “Think, Say, Do”. We have reinforced that when we made our vision boards for the new year. The students thought about their dreams and goals for life and for school (THINK), and then spoke them out loud in the form of a vision board (SAY). We also talked about steps to take to achieve those dreams which will help them succeed (DO).

—Fifth grade teacher

The ACE program with Charmas and Janice supports what we are doing here at Adams and what we are hoping to accomplish with our students. ACE, CKH, and PBIS all support the extensive need of our population. I know the kids are gaining real world skills that will help them

not only in school but in life. Charmas has been where these kids are and is living proof that we are not the sum of our DNA. He gives these kids hope for a better life. I would love to have more time with the Lees and see them more regularly. My hope is that they could provide boot camps for kids, field trips to training sessions, and be more interwoven in their life outside of the school walls.

—Fourth grade teacher

In the one year I've been with these kids there a few that stand out to me. There were students throwing punches, chairs, and anything they could get their hands on. Their ability for self-regulation was non-existent. This year those same students still have challenges but have drastically improved their ability to control their anger. They breathe, they think, they use strategies and they better communicate their feelings and what they are struggling with. They are starting to believe in themselves like we believe in them. It's a process but it's begun and I'm super proud of them.

—Third Grade Teacher

DISCIPLINE ISSUES

Adams Elementary School administrators provided disciplinary referral data for both before (Academic Year [AY] 17-18 AY 18-19) and after exposure (1st semester, AY 19-20) to the ACE program (table 2). The COVID-19 pandemic halted attendance during the second semester of AY 19-20, creating a void in disciplinary data for statistical comparison. The first semester AY 19-20 results suggest that disciplinary issues were decreasing following the ACE program.

Table 2.

Pre- and Post-ACE Disciplinary Rates among Third, Fourth, and Fifth Grade Students at Adams Elementary School

Student	2017-2018 referrals	2018-2019 referrals	2019-2020 1st semester referrals
1	9	12	3
2	6	10	4
3	5	3	1
4	1	1	2
5	2	4	2
6	5	9	4
7	14	2	2
8	9	13	3
9	NA	11	8

10	2	0	2
11	2	3	4
12	2	2	1

Conclusions

Education is a gateway for upward mobility throughout the world. The data set analyzed in this study suggests that following exposure to the ACE program, students experienced improved focus, concentration and were better able to regulate their emotions. Analysis supports that learning conditions, attitudes and academic performance improved following exposure to the ACE program at both Adams Elementary School and North Middle School. The data indicated that upon completion of the ACE program, students could better regulate their emotions, were less disruptive, and more motivated to learn.

The ACE program covered similar material for the elementary and middle school student populations under study and yielded positive results for both groups. The elementary and middle school student groups perceived different program benefits, suggesting multiple positive results from the single ACE program.

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- Lee, J. & Lee, C. (2019). Achieving competitive excellence: Second quarter student survey. [Survey instrument].
- Naglieri, J. A., LeBuffe, P. A., & Shapiro, V. (2011). *Devereux Student Strengths Assessment-mini*. Lewisville, NC: Kaplan Press.
- Nafzger, N., Vinson, M. (2010). 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) analytic support for evaluation and program monitoring: An overview of the 21st CCLC performance data: 2008-09. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov>
- Panorama Education (n.d.). User guide: Panorama student survey. Retrieved from https://panorama-www.s3.amazonaws.com/files/panorama-student-survey/User-Guide.pdf?__hssc=17850406.2.1535240646705&__hstc=17850406.b8e085b1d91c177bd70ba917eca5018c.1503171287977.1516648515335.1535240646705.7&__hsfp=1434411348



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2017 End of Course Survey of the True Grit Program



Method

Following the Spring 2017 semester at Pikes Peak Community College, 298 students participated in an assessment of the *True Grit* program taught by Charmas and Janice Lee. This report summarizes the participant responses obtained through a survey instrument consisting of both multiple choice (Likert-scaled) and free response questions designed to assess program effectiveness, evaluate the relevancy of program content, and support a decision with respect to the continuance of the True Grit program.

The scaled responses are presented in their raw form and displayed side-by-side where practicable applicable for ease of viewing. The free form qualitative responses were thematically coded and tracked in a qualitative analysis program¹. These thematic response frequencies are provided along with first person verbatim quotations to supplement the graphical information displays.

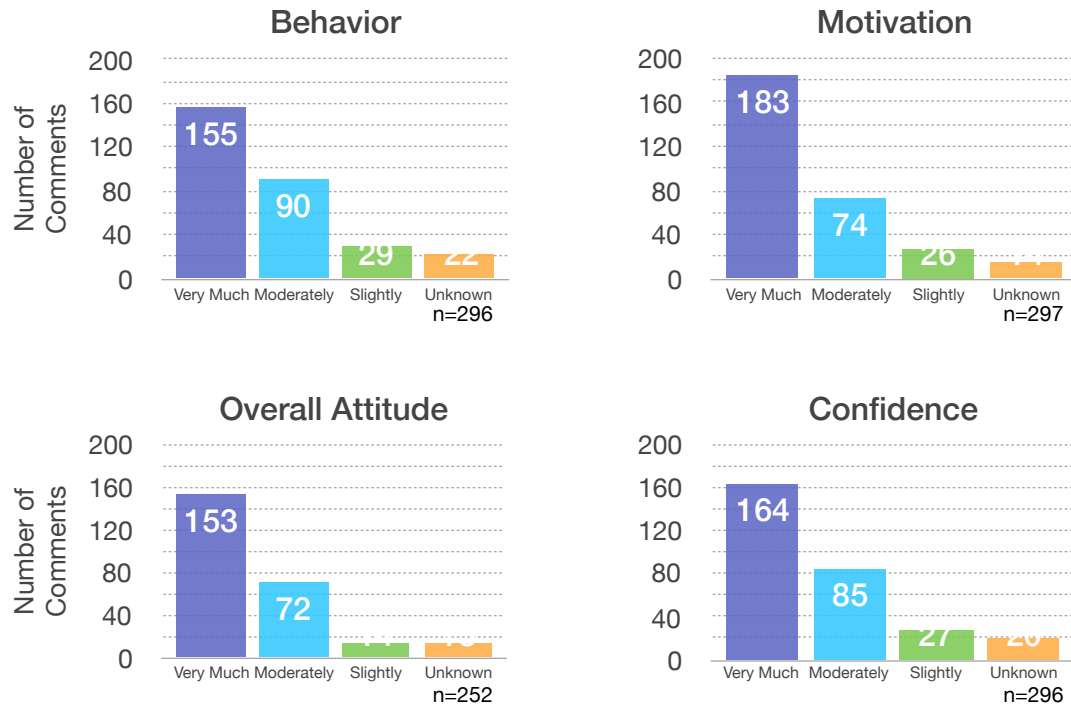
Student Responses

Q1: *How effective was the True Grit program in influencing your behaviors?*



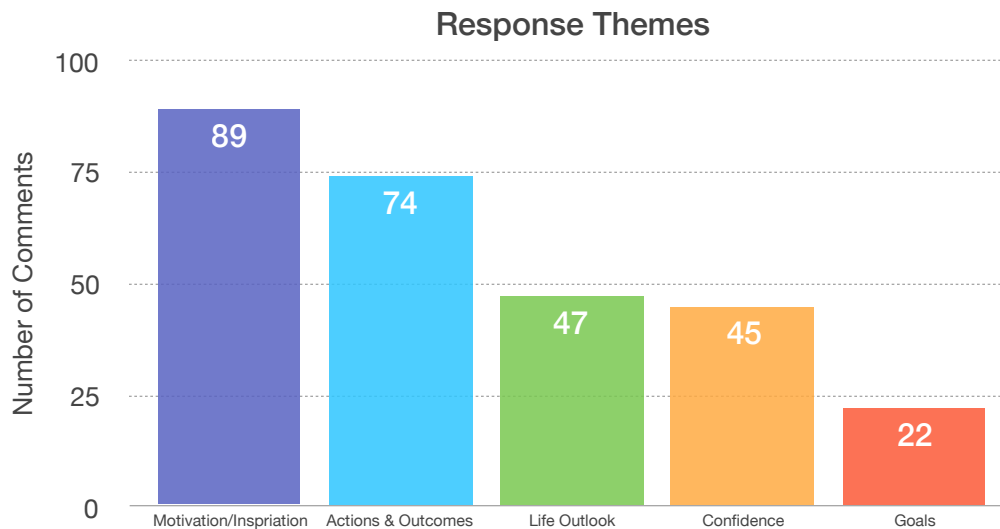
¹ MAXQDA12

Q1: Continued.



Q2: *Please describe how the True Grit program impacted your life, either in or out of the classroom. (n=288)*

A coded thematic analysis of the responses revealed 331 comments about the True Grit program—95.5% of which were positive. Five major themes emerged as represented in the following chart with the number of comments per area depicted.



Similar to the 2016 True Grit study, *motivation* emerged as the most prolific theme as was applied to students' views of life both in and out of the classroom. 27% of comments concerned attitudinal change largely focused around motivation and inspiration. Some examples follow:

"Before I had no motivation but now I strive to succeed and fight for the things I want."

"True Grit helped me both in and out of the classroom. It was very effective in motivating me and showing me the value of my worth."

"I come to class more often and have a positive attitude towards everything."

I already did really well in school, but it really helped with my attitude and confidence outside of class."



Responses concerning *actions and outcomes* comprised 22% of the comments and indicated program participants both contemplated the impact of their actions as well as implemented changes in their lives with positive results.

"Well I quit smoking, so I think that is great."

"I woke up one day and the think-say-do got me out of bed when I did not want to."

"It made me decide to take chances, and now I have a job because I took the chance to ask."

Participants reported (14% of comments) a change in their *outlook on life*, to include fundamental self-image adjustments.

"It taught me how to put myself first."

"The program helped me maintain and improve my self-worth."

"The True Grit program has really helped me to check any negative behavior that I may have had. I'm more aware of how to maintain a positive attitude towards my life."

True Grit participants reported *confidence* improvements (14% of comments). Several students linked confidence with a reduction in risk aversion.

"Gave me the confidence to get through my classes and not to give up on them."

"It made me decide to take chances."

“Before meeting Coach Lee my confidence level was very low. Everyday I work on my confidence and have come a long way since the first class.”

Lastly, students provided comments on goals. These comments were often related to the confidence to achieve them.

“Influenced me to complete my dream of starting my own business.”

“Instead off being confused with my path this allowed me to slow down, see what I want in life, and how to get there.”

“Help(ed) me realize my goals, and procrastinate less.”



Analysis:

This survey revealed that students improved their level of self-awareness, set goals, and were motivated to action with elevated risk acceptance and a reduction in fear. Students reported True Grit program proved beneficial both in an out of the classroom with one participant reporting the program influenced potentially life-extending behavior (smoking cessation).

This survey showed a high-level of participant support for the True Grit program. While some students expressed initial skepticism at being required to take the program, almost all students found value in it. Of the 4.5% of students who did not think the program led to self-improvement, not one participant commented negatively on the program.

As the results of this survey were self-reported, independent quantitative measures are recommended for future study and verification of the program’s efficacy.



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April 11, 2016

End of Course Survey of the True Grit Program



Method

From 4-5 April 2016, 73 students and three teachers participated in an assessment of the *True Grit* program at Pikes Peak Community College.

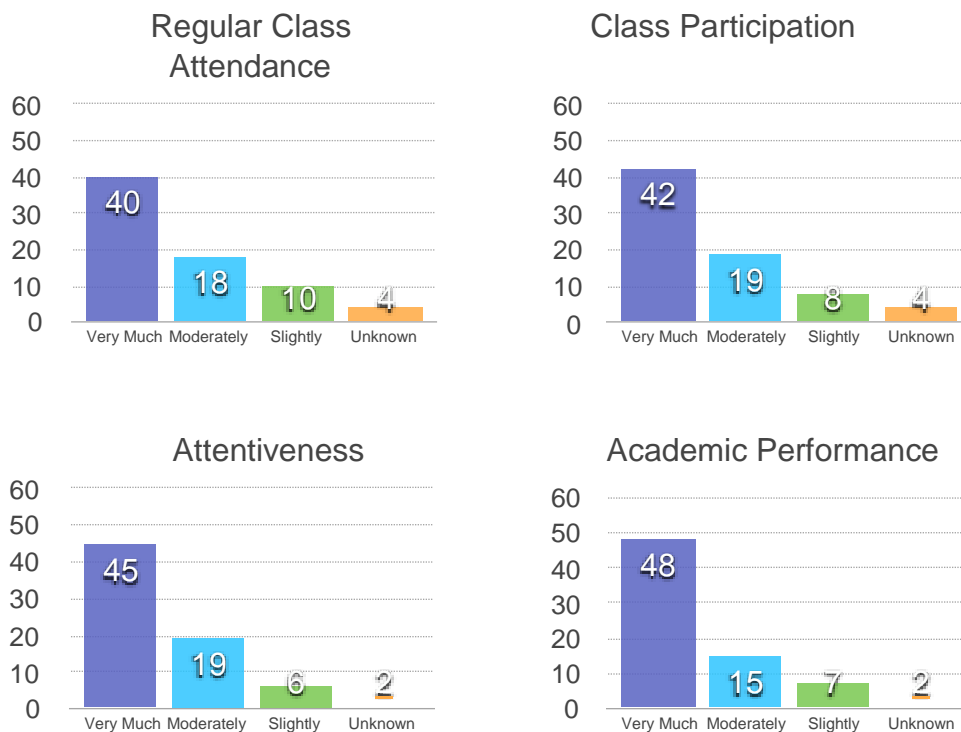
This report summarizes the participant responses obtained through a survey instrument consisting of both multiple choice (Likertscaled) and free response questions designed to assess program effectiveness, evaluate the relevancy of program content, and support a decision with respect to the continuance of the True Grit program.

The scaled responses are presented in their raw form and displayed side-by-side where practicable applicable for ease of viewing. The free form qualitative responses were thematically coded and tracked in a database. The appearance frequencies are provided along with first person verbatim quotations to supplement the graphical information displays.

In the case of instructor surveys, the three responses received were insufficient for meaning collation and trend assessment. As an alternative, these surveys were viewed in the context of supporting or not supporting the student surveys with teacher comments provided to support the viewpoint of individual instructors with classes participating in both True Grit.

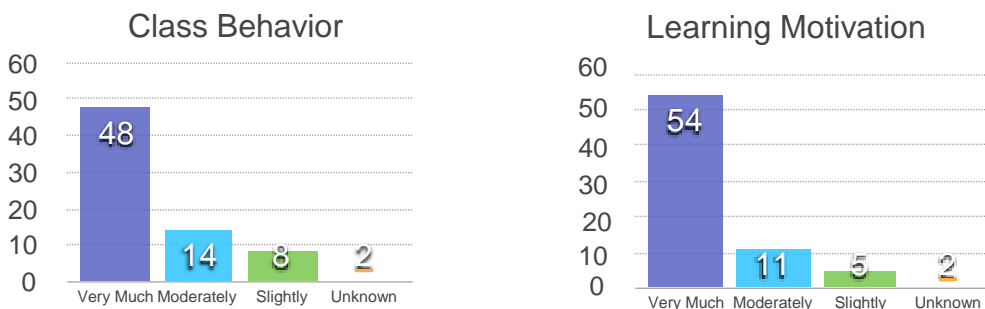
Student Responses

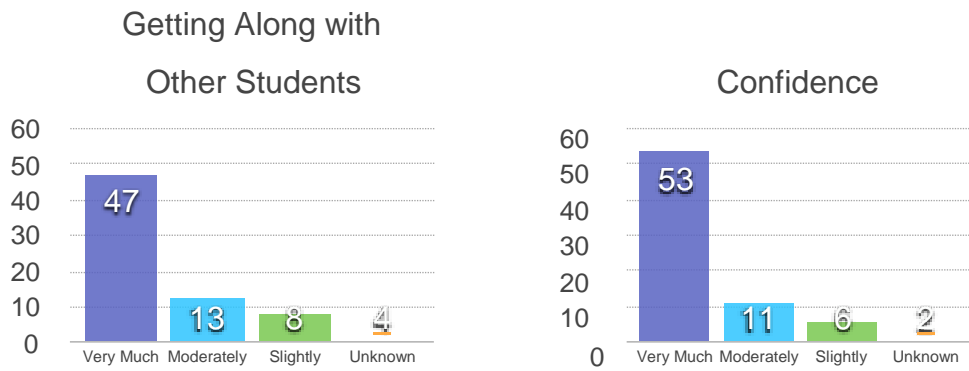
Q1: *How effective was the True Grit program in influencing your behaviors?*



Note: n=72 on all Q1 responses except for class participation where n=73.

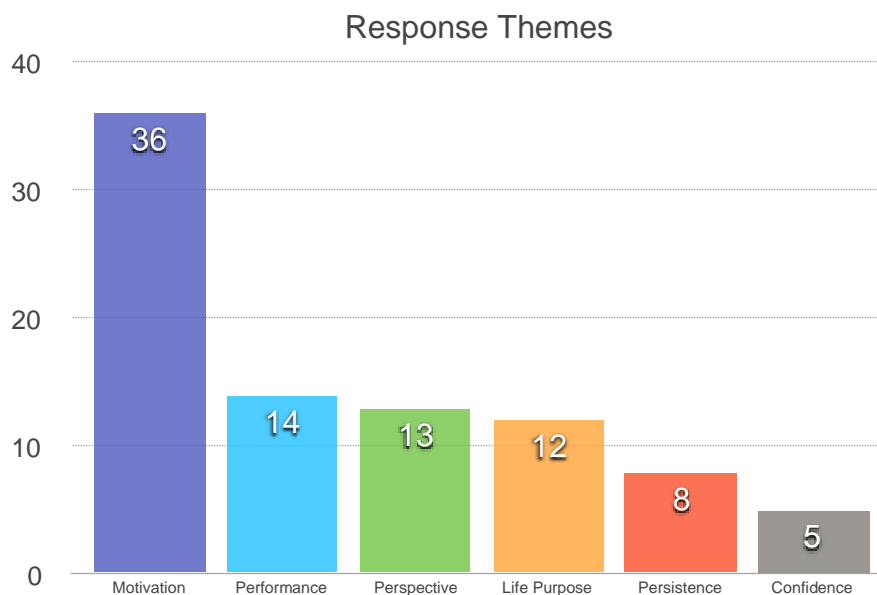
Q1: Continued. Learning Motivation





Q2: *Please describe how the True Grit program impacted your life, either in or out of the classroom. (n=67)*

Six themes emerged from this analysis and are depicted by frequency in the following chart.



Motivation emerged as the most prolific theme as was applied to students' views of life both in and out of the classroom. Some examples follow:

"It gave me more motivation to try at everything."

"Motivation to move forward and take what I want for my life. Passion!"

"It's been a great motivational tool with school."

Performance, Life Purpose, and Perspective were present in similar frequency as students expressed changes in how they accomplished tasks, reevaluated life goals, and gained a new worldview.

“It has made me realize some things that are holding me back and shown me how and what I can improve.”

“True Grit really helped me understand what my purpose was.”

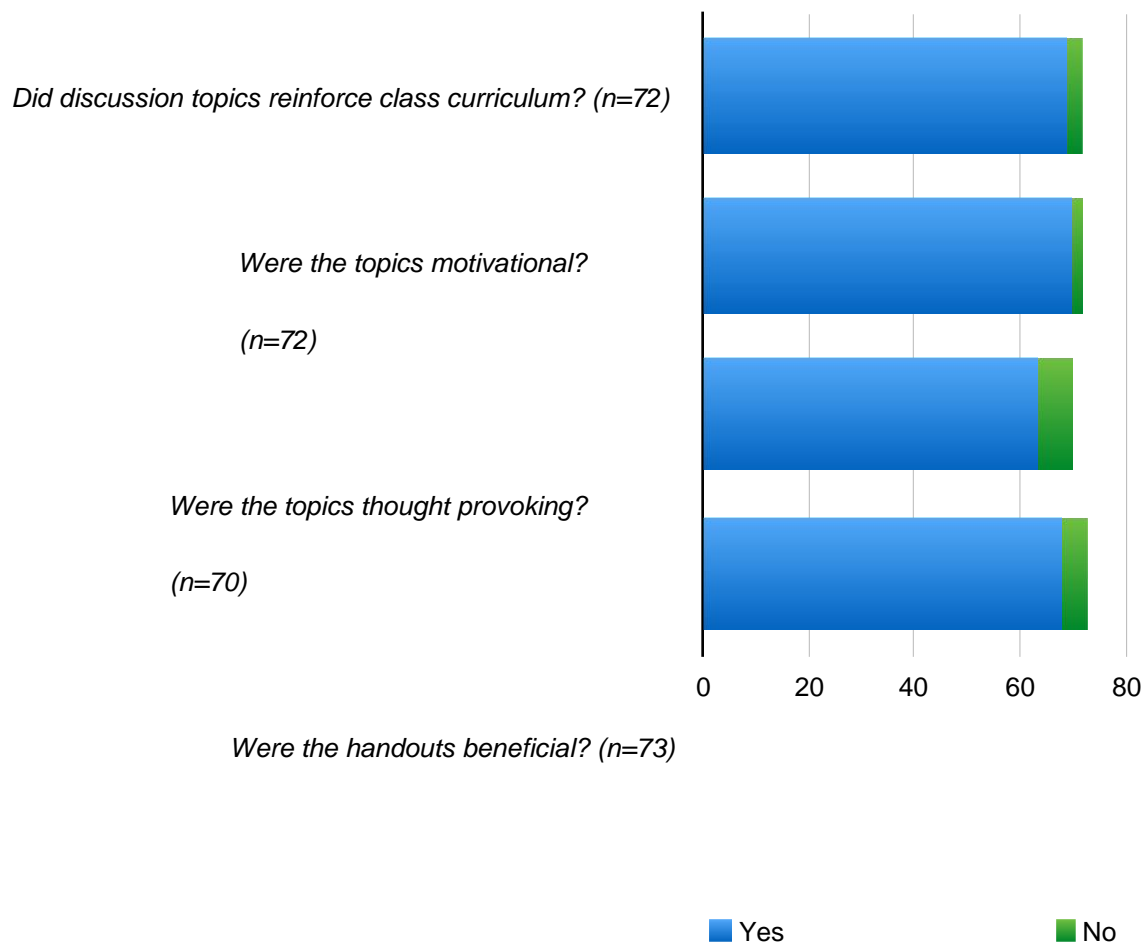
“I gained a new perspective on how to look at things in life.”

Finally, students made comments which could be categorized as reflecting increased *persistence* and *confidence* resulting from the True Grit program.

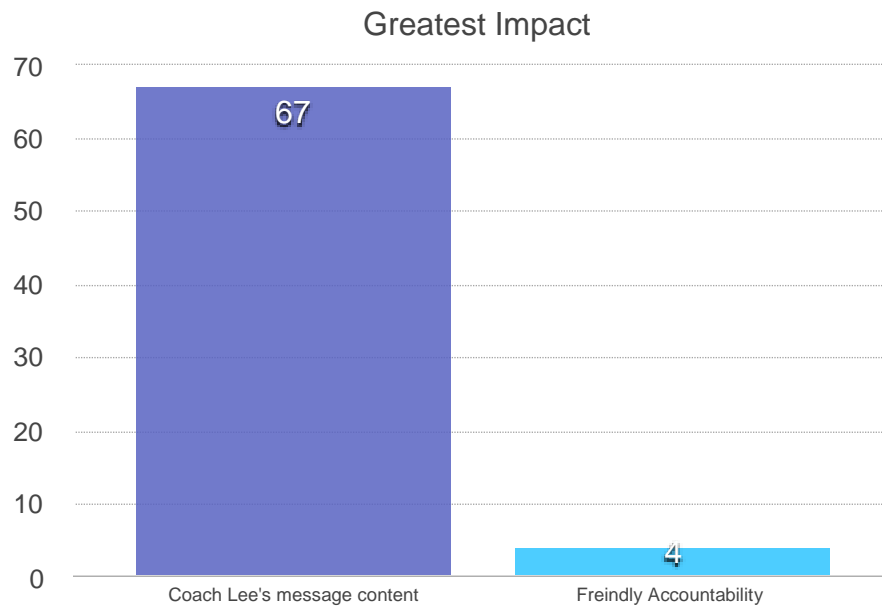
“It impacted me a lot, build (sic) my confidence more.”

“At the age of 44 I still wonder everyday if I can do this...I don't care if it takes me 10 years to finish I will.”

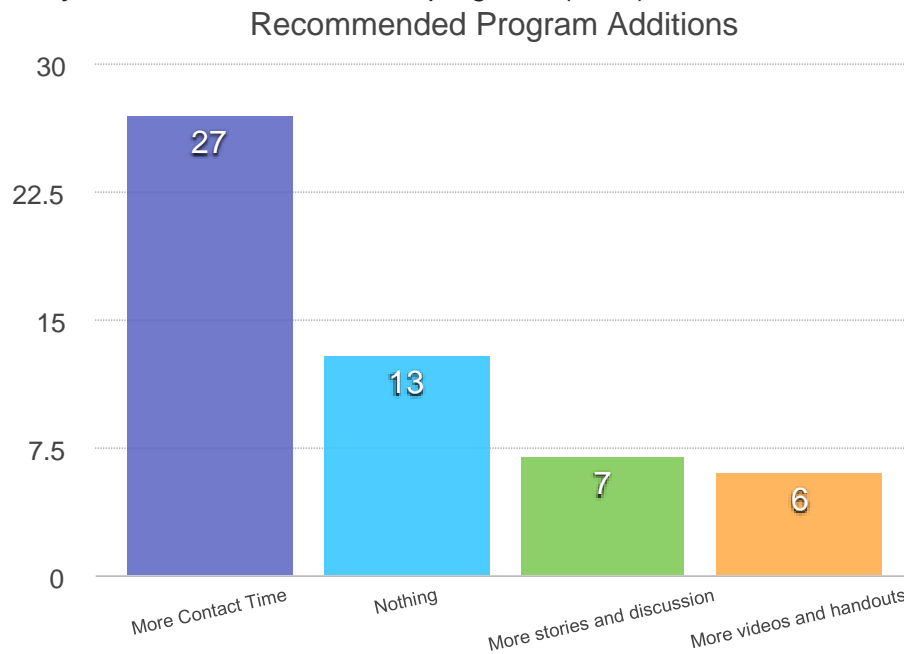
Q3: *Answer the following program content related questions.*



Q4: *Which component of the True Grit program had the greatest impact? (n=71)*



Q5: *What would you like to see added to the program?* (n=57)



The majority of responses to this question asked for additional contact time with Coach Lee, either in the form of more contact sessions, increased time during the existing sessions, or both. Or than the second theme of not changing anything, students requested more content in terms of stories and discussions and takeaways in the form of videos and handouts. Salient

-Instructor



comments included, “Make it a longer program” and “I wish this was required for every semester.”

Recommended Program Deletions

Category	Count
Nothing	47
Other	3

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felt bad because she did not like to compare her relative lack of success with Coach Lee's.

Teacher Surveys:

With only three teacher surveys submitted, it was not practical to report trends with the exception of overall support for the True Grit program and a desire that the program's content be coordinated with the curriculum of the class.

Selected comments included:

"The key area in which True Grit has helped has been in developing confidence & motivation."

"I would like to see a clear collaboration opportunity to insure the content connects well and to manage overlap better."

"My students loved the True Grit class visits. They looked forward to them every week." "More class visits PPCC wide speaking so all the campus can benefit."

Analysis:

This survey showed a preponderance of support from both students and faculty for the True Grit program. Students reported increased levels of motivation and performance, a heightened self-awareness and sense of purpose, and a desire to continue when presented with both academic and life obstacles. From a faculty perspective, instructors supported the program in its current form with the addition of topic coordination between True Grit and course curriculum. Both students and faculty supported continuance of the program and recommended expansion of the program.



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Helen Hunt Survey Analysis



Helen Hunt Survey Analysis

Program Background: The Achieving Competitive Excellence (A.C.E.) program was designed to equip the elementary and middle school student with the confidence, knowledge, skills and ability to develop their own personal plan for success; setting ambitious, yet achievable, goals in the classroom, personal lives, at home and within the community. This program focused on low-income at promise youth. All participants were either on reduced or free lunch and were currently involved in the (Beyond the School Bell Program) at Helen Hunt Elementary school.

Desired outcomes: Through this mind-body step-wise approach we expect the participant to recognize their self-worth, increase overall productivity and increase self-esteem and pride. In addition we believe that if the exercises/drills are applied routinely participants may improve cognitive function i.e. Concentration or attentiveness, concept learning, critical thinking and memory. Participants may also demonstrate improvements in personal mastery, the ability to master their thoughts, behaviors and actions, while recognizing performance barriers, including but not limited to; attitude, negative self-talk, current biases, as well as the current filter in which they view the world.

Evaluation Method

Results will be measured through teacher surveys, feedback or evaluation forms, classroom indicators.

The program initially begin with 52 students ranging from K-5th grade. After the 3rd contact it was determined that the most appropriate grade to implement the instruction was 3rd through 5th. The data below reflects 3rd, 4th and 5th grade students.

Data Analysis: Teachers completed 25 surveys (Teacher Survey – 21st Century Community Learning Centers [21st CCLCs]) after students in the 3rd through 5th grade had completed the program. These surveys were distributed as shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Distribution of Surveys

Grade	# of Students Taking Survey
3rd	12
4th	8
5th	5

In every grade and category, teachers assessed some students as *needing no improvement*. Assuming the program did not induce a regression in these students' behaviors, the program's effectiveness was only measured on students who had demonstrated room for improvement at the start of the program. The following sparkline charts in Figure 1 show a snapshot of the program's impact in 10 assessed performance areas. Full size versions of charts showing the distribution of charts are shown in Annex A.

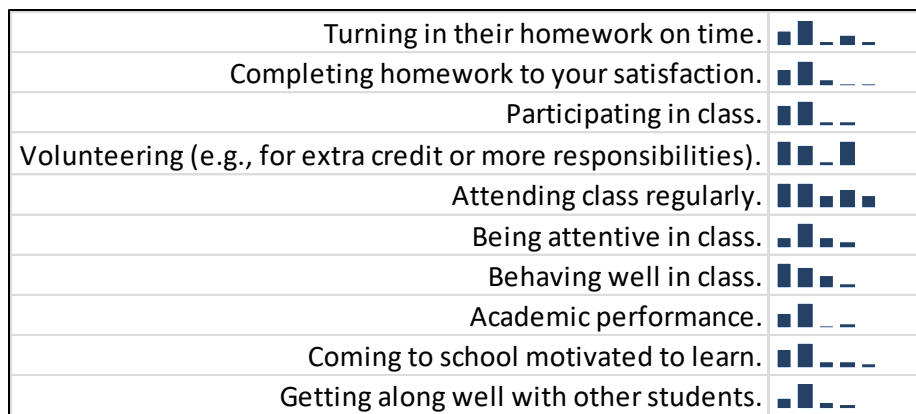


Figure 1. Sparkline of assessed are

Findings: The survey results indicate positive changes were observed in all measured areas following exposure to the program. Although this project constituted a small sample size; when compared against the U.S. Department of Education’s 21st CCLCs afterschool program, the program at Helen Hunt produced markedly better results. James-Burdumy, Dynarski, and Deke (2008) reported that teachers reported student behaviors of 1,055 students following an average of 81 days of contact time in the 21st CCLC program. Analysis of this data indicated student performance and desirable behaviors actually decreased after exposure to the 21st CCLC program compared against a control group of 880 elementary school students. In comparing the A.C.E program at Helen Hunt Elementary to the 21st CCLC, the A.C.E program produced better results in less time at less cost, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2.

Comparison between A.C.E and 21st CLCC Afterschool Programs

Program	A.C.E	21 st CCLC
Contact Days	61 hours over five months.	81 days over two years (James-Burdumy et al. (2008)
Cost per student/day	\$1.79	\$3.98 participant per day (Zhang & Bryd, 2006)
Behavioral Impact	Positive	Negative
Academic Impact	Positive	Negative

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Annex A

