

The Prevention and Intervention Services Program's Link to Academic Improvement: Highlights

Ryan D' Ambrosio, RMC Research Corporation

Introduction

The Prevention and Intervention Services Program, operated by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), places intervention specialists in schools to implement comprehensive student assistance programs that address problems associated with substance use and violence. The focus of the program is preventing and intervening in student substance use and violent behavior with the ultimate goal of enabling students to be ready to learn and achieve academically. While the intent is to intervene early before substance use is a major problem, the statewide evaluation has shown that students entering the program after developing a dependence on alcohol or other drugs tend to show dramatic long-term improvement in attendance and grades after participation in the program.

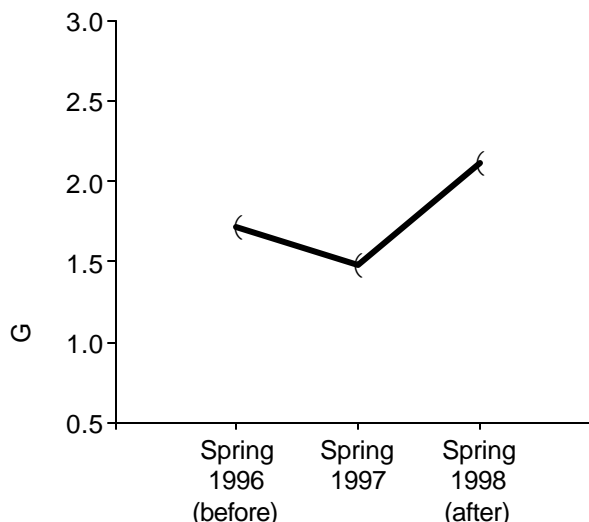


Figure 1. Improvement in GPA after program participation for a sample of 62 students first referred to the program during 1996-97 school year and met criteria for drug dependence.

The purpose of this report is to document strategies that Prevention and Intervention Services Program grantees have developed to coordinate with school personnel to more directly influence the achievement of participating students consistent with the intent of educational reform.

Methodology

Telephone interviews were conducted with six grant coordinators and five intervention specialists to gather the strategies used broadly in local projects and specifically by intervention specialists to address the academic issues of program students. The information obtained through the interviews illustrates the types of activities employed to support the academic achievement and attendance of the students participating in the Prevention and Intervention Services Program and indicates the types of links this nonacademic program has to classroom performance.

Strategies Employed

Although the Prevention and Intervention Services Program is primarily a substance use and violence prevention and intervention program, local projects and intervention specialists employ a variety of strategies that directly address academics, attendance, and education reform. These strategies tend to be at three levels: the project level, the school level, and the student level. The strategies at the project level are apt to be global in nature—that is, used across several or all of the local projects. The strategies of the intervention specialists interviewed encompassed these broad approaches while also including specific school-level techniques for coordinating services within schools. The student-level strategies include academic-related activities that intervention specialists employ when working directly with students both in groups and individually.

Project-level strategies include:

- Aligning program activities with the Educational Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs)—this alignment is predominately focused on the Health and Fitness and Communication EALRs.
- Training contracted intervention specialists to work in the school setting.

- Providing a continuum of services from prevention through treatment—achieving a broad continuum of services has been most successful in local sites that have leveraged outside funding sources with program funds (e.g., funding from Readiness to Learn [RTL] and county treatment resources).

School-level strategies include:

- Providing outreach to and training of school staff—often in the form of communication with principals, teachers, counselors, core teams, and school nurses, about the services available to students through the program.
- Coordinating with school staff and other school-based programs—such as coordinating with and referring to guidance counselors or RTL and 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs.
- Coordinating with after-school programs.
- Providing alternative learning opportunities—these are alternative programs or classes for students failing school or transitioning back from a treatment setting.
- Establishing linkages to educational enrichment programs—for example, coordinating services for students involved in district programs that support the educational goals of low-income students.
- Providing comprehensive prevention activities—often in roles outside of the program where an intervention specialist may provide prevention services outside of the context of the program.
- Participating in parent conferences—as an opportunity to follow-up with students and their parents, and to reinforce with parents the effects of substance use on behavior and schoolwork.

Student-level strategies include:

- Using skill-building curricula—to foster the building of positive social skills, positive decision-making, refusal skills, violence prevention, and anger management.
- Coteaching classes—may take the form of implementing prevention curricula in regular elementary school classrooms or in health or physical education middle school classes, or coordinating lesson plans within the health curriculum at the middle and high school levels.
- Journal writing—is a counseling activity that helps students express and work through life experiences while also providing a venue for practicing reading and writing skills.
- Identifying educational needs of students referred to the program—in elementary schools with limited resources, intervention specialists often use the counseling process to identify the educational needs of students referred for low attachment to school or behavior problems.
- Providing groups for academically challenged students—with the goal of preparing students for the future and life beyond school.
- Providing task-oriented activities for students with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)—to help students with ADD pay attention during class and organize notebooks and homework assignments.

References

D'Ambrosio (2001). *The Prevention and Intervention Services Program's Link to Academic Improvement*. Olympia, WA: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (Discusses strategies used in the Prevention and Intervention Services Program in more depth)

Deck, D.D. and D'Ambrosio, R. (1999). *Intervening in adolescent substance abuse: An evaluation of Washington's Prevention and Intervention Services Program. 1999 Final Report*. Olympia, WA: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (Provides results of the statewide evaluation of the Prevention and Intervention Services Program)

Washington Kids Count. (2000). *Impact of peer substance use on middle school performance in Washington: Interim Report*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington. (Provides more information about the link between substance use and achievement)