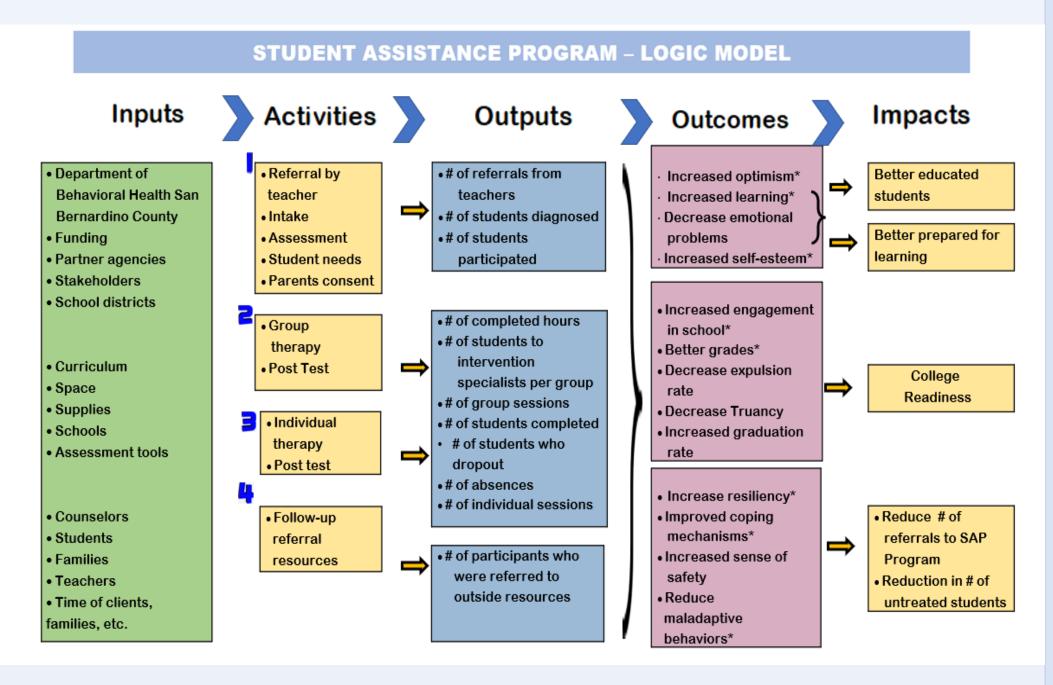# Program Evaluation of The Student Assistance Program: The Effect of Both Individual and Group Counseling Sessions on Increasing Perseverance

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ABSTRACT

The Student Assistance Program (SAP) is a program within the Reach Out organization that provides students, grades kindergarten through twelfth, with resources and support to assist them in school success. Some areas of focus include increasing attendance at school, decreasing behavioral problems, and promoting social and emotional development. The activities include an intake assessment to identify the appropriate services, individual counseling, group counseling, and any necessary resources and referrals. The evaluation objectives included identifying the extent to which SAP participation increases perseverance in students, as well as identifying any differences in program effect based on treatment modality. Participants reported increased perseverance upon completion of the program and there were no differences in program effect based on treatment modality.

INTRODUCTION

- Reach Out is an organization that is located within the Inland Empire that provides resources and services to individuals within the community, one of which is SAP.
- SAP provides students with assistance and support to become successful in school, including increasing attendance at school, decreasing problem behaviors, assisting in social and emotional development, and providing linkages to other community resources.
- SAP collaborates with schools to identify students that are experiencing difficulties regarding attendance, social and emotional development, and problem behaviors and provides them with individual or group counseling sessions.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM – LOGIC MODEL

- The purpose of this outcome evaluation was to assess the impact that the Student Assistance Program had on students' perseverance and to analyze if this impact differs depending on which treatment modality was utilized.

- Evaluation questions included:
  - To what extent did participating in the Student Assistance Program increase perseverance in students?
  - Does the program effect differ by treatment modality?
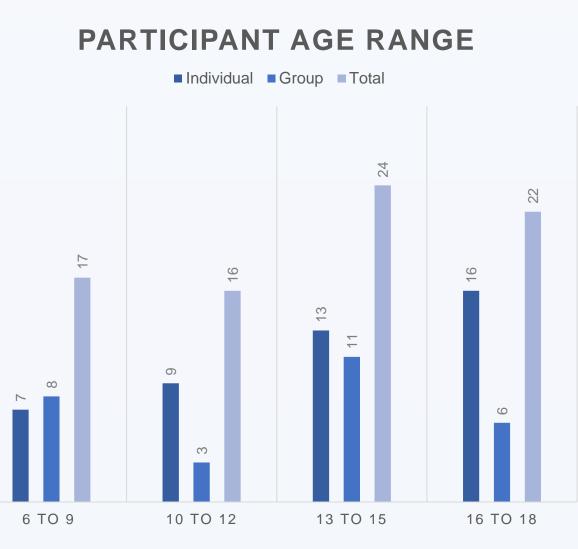
LITERATURE REVIEW

- SAP is rooted in the Positive Youth Development framework (PYD), which identifies and builds upon an individual's strengths in a supportive environment (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017).
- Similar programs increase prosocial behavior, academic performance, conflict resolution skills, and decrease violent behaviors and post-traumatic stress symptoms (Guzman et al., 2015; Kang-Yi, Mandell, & Hadley, 2013; Montanez et al., 2015).
- There was a gap in the research regarding information that compared the efficacy of treatment modalities, but research does explore the relationship between social skills and perseverance.
- According to Sheppard and Clibbens (2015), building social skills and relationships with peers, which can be gained from individual and group counseling, are critical components of a child's resilience.
- Social skills-building is a critical aspect of group counseling, suggesting that there would be an increase in perseverance among group participants.
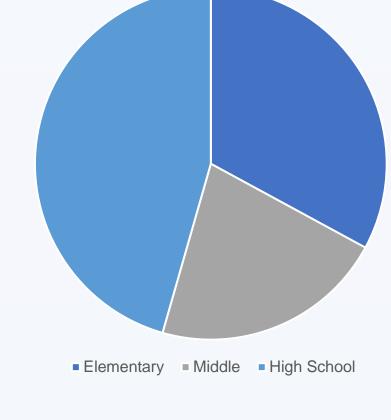
Methods

- The evaluation of SAP is a retrospective study using deidentified secondary data that the Reach Out organization provided, and the research design was a one-group post-test only design.
- The evaluation sample included individuals who participated in the program between 2016 and 2018.
- The sample included all individuals who had ever participated in the program, also known as convenience sampling, and the sample size was 79 individuals.
- The dependent variable was perseverance, which is defined as "persistence in work and problem solving despite obstacles" and was measured by a subscale in the Holistic Student Assessment or HSA (The PEAR Institute, 2019).
- The independent variables included program participation and service type, which is the type of service that a participant received in this treatment, including individual or group sessions.
- Demographic information was collected through the completion of the intake paperwork during the initial intake process and output data were gathered by facilitators by tracking attendance and other programmatic information and entering it into a database.
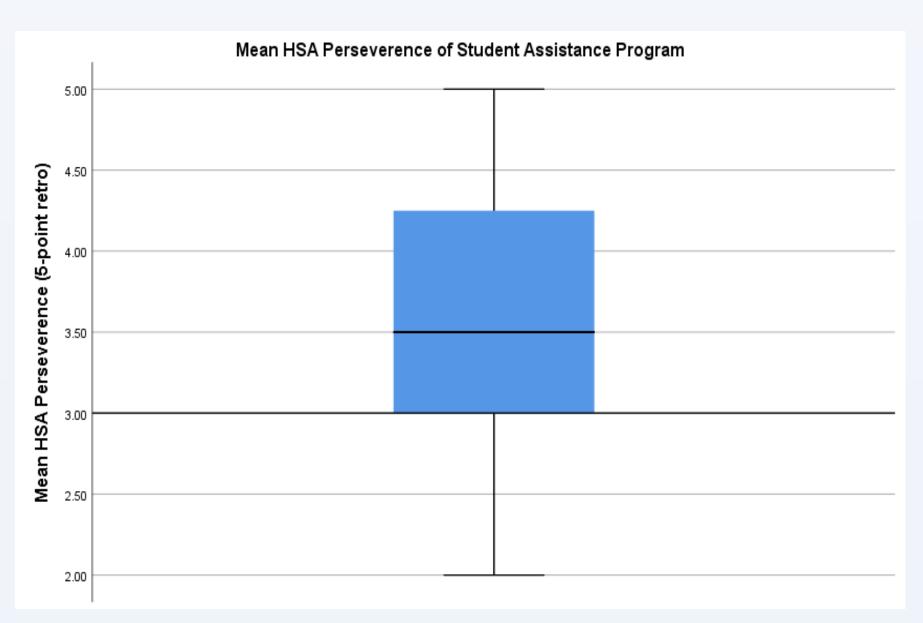
RESULTS

- Participant age range was close to equally distributed.
- Participant school level was a bit skewed, with slightly less than half of the participants being in high school.
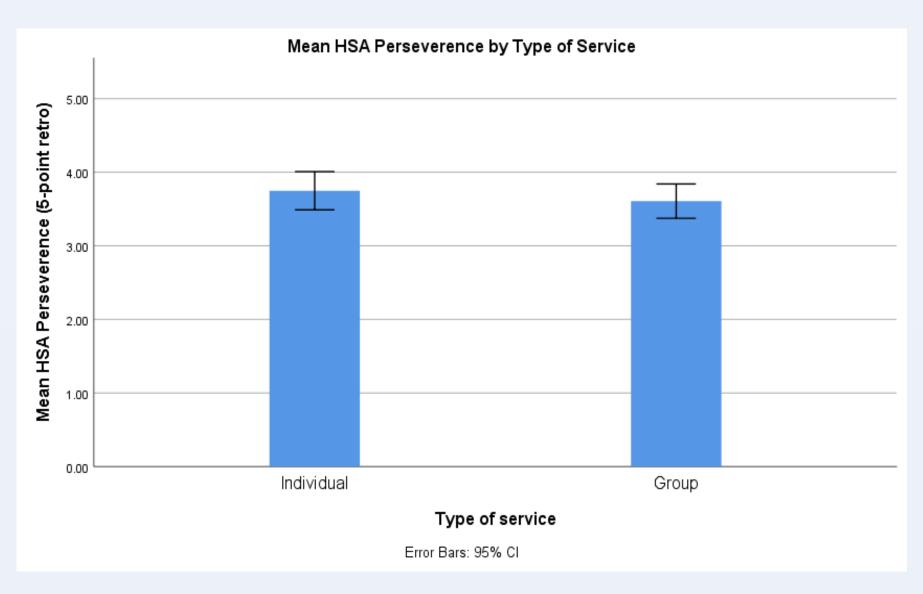

PARTICIPANT AGE RANGE

Total Participants

- A one-sample t test was conducted for both individual and group session participants combined.
- A significant difference was found, meaning participation in SAP did increase perseverance in students.

Mean HSA Perseverence of Student Assistance Program

- An independent-samples t test was calculated comparing the mean HSA for perseverance of participants who participated in individual sessions to the mean HSA for perseverance of participants who participated in group sessions.
- No significant difference was found, meaning the mean HSA for perseverance score did not differ by treatment modality.

Mean HSA Perseverence by Type of Service
Error Bars: 95% CI

DISCUSSION

Implications
- This program evaluation showed that participation in SAP did increase perseverance in students, with no difference in program effect due to treatment modality.

Program Recommendations:
- Create a systematic format for deciding the placement of students in individual or group counseling, potentially in the format of a decision tree.

Future Evaluation Recommendations:
- Implementing a pre-test, along with the existing post-test, for the HSA measurement tool
- Including a larger sample size

Study Limitations
- Small sample size of 79 participants
- Only utilized a post-test measurement tool
- Measurement methodology only incorporated self-reported change, and no other outcome measures
- Does not include a control group

Conclusion
- Findings display the value and positive-impact of school-based mental health services
- Findings could be utilized to advocate for school-based mental health services and funding in the future
- Findings highlight the importance of educating and implementing perseverance among students

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