

**EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT PROGRAM: 2005-06 REPORT**

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## Executive Summary

This report presents findings from the evaluation of the Los Angeles Unified School District's IMPACT program during the 2005-06 school year. IMPACT is the District's prevention and early intervention program for middle and high school students who exhibit behaviors related to possible substance use, violence, or other crises and are consequently not performing well in school. The program is designed to provide students with the skills and support necessary to make positive life choices. The goals of the IMPACT program are to improve student achievement and attendance, provide students with coping skills, and develop resiliency. This is accomplished via schoolwide awareness activities and education, as well as curriculum-based instruction for students who need additional support. This report provides findings regarding the characteristics, uniformity, school climate, quality of instruction, curriculum fidelity, and effectiveness of the program.

### *Research Questions*

1. What are the characteristics of the IMPACT program?
2. Is IMPACT coherent (e.g., integrated into the school culture) and uniform?
3. What are the characteristics of support provided to IMPACT administrators, coordinators, and facilitators?
4. To what extent is the school climate conducive to the successful implementation of IMPACT?
5. What is the quality of social-emotional skills instruction in IMPACT groups?
6. What is the level of fidelity with which the IMPACT curriculum is implemented?
7. What are administrator, coordinator, facilitator, and student perceptions of the program?
8. To what extent does IMPACT affect students' resiliency, coping skills, perceived support, grades, and attendance?

### *Findings and Recommendations*

#### *Attendance and Tardiness*

Nearly half of the facilitators who were interviewed (11 of 25) stated that student attendance and/or tardiness was a problem in their groups. When students do not attend

their groups regularly, they are not able to reap the full benefits of the program. Poor attendance and tardiness may also make it more difficult for groups to “bond” and become safe spaces for sharing. The attendance logs indicated that, on average, students attended approximately two-thirds of the sessions for their group(s). While this number in itself does not seem particularly low, coordinator and facilitator interviews revealed that often the same core group of students consistently attended, while others consistently exhibited poor attendance. Since attendance is voluntary for most students, Central Office staff should explore ways to make students more aware of the importance and value of the program in order to encourage students to attend consistently. Additionally, more coordinators may need to meet individually with those students who consistently do not attend IMPACT sessions to discuss their attendance problems.

Tardiness was frequently reported by facilitators and was also noted in our classroom observations. Facilitators often mentioned that students were late because their regular classroom teachers did not allow them to leave on time. Some coordinators and facilitators felt that teachers did not see the value of the IMPACT program and thus resisted releasing their students in a timely manner. Making attempts to increase teacher awareness and knowledge of the IMPACT program may help to lessen this problem. Tardiness also resulted when summonses were distributed late. Coordinators should attempt to create a systematic and efficient way of summoning students so that they can arrive at their group sessions on time.

### *Communication Among IMPACT Staff Members*

Facilitator, coordinator, and administrator surveys revealed that poor and/or infrequent communication was a common problem. When asked how often they met with their coordinators during the 2004-05 school year, the largest proportion of facilitators (5 of 16) stated that they never met, and only half of the facilitators met with their coordinators more than once or twice a semester. Frequent communication among staff is necessary in order to prevent confusion and to assure that the program is implemented in the way it was intended. This could take the form of brief but frequent informal meetings if it is difficult to reserve large blocks of time to meet. Additionally, providing facilitators with feedback, encouragement, and advice not only improves the quality of facilitation in group sessions, but can also increase the self-efficacy, program buy-in, and morale of the

facilitators. This also provides coordinators with the opportunity to obtain valuable information about how the program is doing and what adjustments can be made to improve it.

The core team provides a valuable means for communication among all IMPACT staff at a particular school. However, fewer than half of coordinators reported that there was a core team at their school. In fact, some coordinators did not even know what a core team was. If the core team is an essential part of IMPACT, coordinators should be encouraged to form a core team at their schools. The purpose of the team and the responsibilities of its members should be clearly defined. Additionally, the team should meet regularly in order to be most effective.

### *Support*

Overall, facilitators were very satisfied with the level of support they received for the IMPACT program. The vast majority (21 of 24) indicated that the support met their needs *well* or *very well*. Nearly all coordinators (29 of 30) also reported receiving some type of support. However, only about a third of the coordinators (10 of 27) reported receiving any type of support from administrators. When support was provided, it was generally constrained to logistical assistance (e.g., providing locations for group sessions, assisting with paperwork). Since increased administrative support for a program can lead to more positive outcomes, administrators should be encouraged to increase their knowledge of the program and consult with the coordinator to promote the program within the school and provide support in whatever way it would be helpful. This may also help to increase teacher support for the program, which was mentioned earlier as a problem at many schools in our sample.

### *IMPACT Training*

Interviews revealed that overall, training was perceived as very effective. Twenty-three of 26 facilitators felt that it prepared them *well* or *very well* for implementing the program. When asked to provide suggestions to improve the training, nearly half of the facilitators felt that the training was fine as it was. However, one aspect of the training that Central Office staff may want to consider is its frequency. At the time of their interviews, about a third of facilitators (9 of 25) had been trained at least four years

earlier, and 3 facilitators had been trained more than 10 years earlier. As suggested by one facilitator, Central Office staff may want to consider offering refresher trainings on an annual or biannual basis so that facilitators can stay current in terms of their knowledge about social-emotional issues affecting adolescents, group facilitation issues, and the rules and regulations of the IMPACT program.

Students who attend IMPACT typically need assistance with using social-emotional skills to deal with their issues in an adaptive manner. These students need direct instruction in the use of these skills. Therefore, it is particularly important that the topic of modeling the use of social-emotional skills be addressed during professional development. Additionally, students need to be able to transfer the use of their newfound social-emotional skills from IMPACT into their regular classrooms and their personal lives. Processing of group activities is one means to facilitate the transfer of learning across contexts. Hence, facilitator use of group processing techniques must also be addressed during professional development.

### *Integration of IMPACT*

Implementing interventions in an integrated manner is associated with more positive outcomes and long-term sustainability. The majority of IMPACT staff felt that the program was *well integrated* or *very well integrated* into their school's structure. However, several integration problems were either mentioned or observed, including lack of schoolwide support, awareness, and resources. Coordinators should be encouraged to continue their efforts to increase awareness and support for the program at their schools, and to investigate physical as well as social resources to enhance the program.

### *Instructional Quality and Curriculum Fidelity*

For the most part, the quality of instruction in IMPACT groups was high. The most notable exception was the level of interaction during sessions. Discussion during sessions was primarily recitative, with the facilitator leading most of the conversations. Students need to be active participants if learning is expected to occur. Therefore, as suggested previously, group processing and discussion facilitation techniques should be addressed more heavily during professional development. Facilitators implemented the

IMPACT curriculum with a moderate degree of fidelity. We found that when facilitators supplemented the lessons, the activities only aligned with the lesson goals as intended about half of the time. It is possible that facilitators modified the lessons to such an extent because many facilitators felt that the curriculum needed to be revised. Central Office staff should look into revising the curriculum. In addition, on-site coordinators or administrators should provide facilitators with sufficient support to ensure that the curriculum is being implemented with a high degree of fidelity.

### *Summary of the Effectiveness of IMPACT*

The IMPACT program is targeted at students who are experiencing non-academic issues, and possibly academic issues, that are interfering with their achievement. The goal of the program is to increase student achievement. We found that participation in IMPACT did not result in a change in students' GPAs or attendance rates. However, some students who were not passing their English and/or math class prior to IMPACT passed these classes after participating in IMPACT. These results must be interpreted with caution for several reasons. The first reason is that since we did not have a comparison group, we cannot attribute these results, or lack thereof, to the program. Second, students did not attend more than 65% of IMPACT sessions, on average. Therefore, it is possible that they did not attend enough IMPACT sessions to make a difference in their achievement. Third, it is possible that the modifications that facilitators made during sessions changed the core components of the curriculum to such an extent that the effectiveness of the program was diminished. Finally, IMPACT may not directly affect academic outcomes. Rather, IMPACT may increase students' social-emotional skills, thereby indirectly facilitating their academic learning. Furthermore, it is not clear that increasing students' social-emotional skills immediately results in an increase in academic achievement. Our findings indicate that the IMPACT program did result in an increase of social-emotional skills in students. In addition, results suggest that student use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs decreased. Studies show that building children's social-emotional competence and reducing risky behaviors are significantly linked to academic performance. Hence, we theorize that the aforementioned changes may result in future positive changes in academic achievement for these students.



## Introduction

This report presents findings from the evaluation of the Los Angeles Unified School District's IMPACT program during the 2005-06 school year. IMPACT is the District's prevention and early intervention program for middle and high school students who exhibit behaviors related to possible substance use, violence, or other crises and are consequently not performing well in school. The program is designed to provide students with the skills and support necessary to make positive life choices. The goals of the IMPACT program are to improve student achievement and attendance, provide students with coping skills, and develop resiliency. This is accomplished via schoolwide awareness activities and education, as well as curriculum-based instruction for students who need additional support.<sup>1</sup>

The IMPACT program has seven curriculum-based and teacher-facilitated educational support groups (ESGs). While each group has specific objectives and its own curriculum, the overall IMPACT goals apply to participants of all ESGs. The group types are:

1. Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs (ATOD): This group is for students who have substance abuse problems with alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.
2. Crisis: This group is for students troubled by concerns for safety or survival associated with family, peers, or their environment.
3. Concerned Persons (CPG): This group is for students experiencing trauma caused by a family member or someone close to them using alcohol or other drugs.
4. Grief Crisis: This group is for students dealing with the recent death of someone close to them.
5. IMPACT Drug Information Group (IDIG): This group is used to pre-assess students to determine if they may benefit from IMPACT services. This group provides information on alcoholism and drug use.
6. Recovery: This group is for students who need continued support for sobriety.

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<sup>1</sup> IMPACT Overview. Information gathered from IMPACT materials (<http://www.lausd.k12.ca.us/lausd/offices/hep/programs/04.html> and Coordinator's handbook)

7. IMPACT Plus: This group is for “natural and traditional” student leaders who are willing to accept responsibility for the school climate and are committed to bring about positive change.

Student participation in IMPACT may be mandatory or voluntary. Student placement in IMPACT is mandatory if the student is caught in possession or under the influence of alcohol or other drugs, or if the student is assigned by a probation officer. Students participate voluntarily if they exhibit problem behaviors at school, home or in the community and are referred to IMPACT by a teacher, friend, counselor, parent or other concerned person. Students can also refer themselves to the program. The referred student is interviewed and assessed by the IMPACT coordinator, who determines what resources would best serve the student. The coordinator may recommend an IMPACT group or may refer the student to an outside agency if the student requires different or more intensive treatment. IMPACT is not designed to replace professional counseling, treatment, or therapy. For example, only students who are in stages 1 or 2 in the four phases of addiction are placed in the ATOD group. Those who exhibit more severe chemical dependency are referred to external service providers to receive the necessary treatment, which is beyond the scope of IMPACT.

The IMPACT groups are ESGs that aim to relieve student stress and provide protective factors that foster resiliency in students. They are designed to provide a safe setting in which students can discuss feelings and personal concerns, allowing them to concentrate on learning while in their regular classes. IMPACT groups meet roughly once a week during the school day for one class period in small, confidential groups led by a teacher facilitator. The groups meet for 10 to 12 sessions<sup>2</sup>.

### *Literature Review*

A large body of research shows that social-emotional well-being is integral, not incidental, to learning (Ragozzino et al., 2003). Students dealing with crises, grief, addiction, abuse, or other mentally or emotionally stressful life events cannot fully concentrate on academic learning in the classroom. Schools provide a natural context in children’s lives to address these concerns as they relate to learning. School-based

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<sup>2</sup> Except for the IDIG group, which meets for 5 sessions

programs that reduce risk factors and increase protective factors to build students' resiliency have shown to produce immediate and long-term positive effects on students. Allowing students a confidential, safe environment to participate and interact with each other, a trained facilitator using a curriculum that teaches social-emotional competencies, and a supportive school climate, are critical elements of successful educational support groups. The IMPACT program was designed to provide such support to students in the District.

Research has confirmed that social-emotional well-being is linked to successful academic outcomes for adolescents. Studies show that building children's social-emotional competence and reducing risky behaviors (e.g., substance abuse, teen sexual activity, delinquency and violence) are significantly linked to academic performance (Hawkins, 1997; Ragozzino et al., 2003). In a longitudinal study, Fleming et al. (2005) followed 576 students from 7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> grade, measuring social and behavioral characteristics and 10<sup>th</sup> grade academic achievement. They found that higher levels of school bonding and better social, emotional, and decision-making skills correlated with higher test scores and higher grades. Conversely, lower scores and grades were predicted by increased attention problems, negative behavior of peers, and disruptive and aggressive behavior. In addition, early use of alcohol and cigarettes was also associated with lower test scores. Other studies support these findings and, furthermore, show that social-emotional health is associated with higher attendance and lower dropout rates (Ragozzino et al., 2003; Zins et al., 2004).

### *Educational Support Groups*

Because social-emotional well-being is integral to learning, schools provide a practical place to address students' social-emotional needs through ESGs. Unlike therapy groups led by psychologists or counselors, school-based ESGs are led by teacher facilitators in a classroom setting. The goal of ESGs is to build protective factors, enhancing students' strengths and resiliency in dealing with stressful situations in order to allow the students to ultimately improve their academic achievement levels. The goal is not necessarily to focus on the risk factors or treat the problem behaviors.

While particular ESGs focus on specific risk factors (e.g., drugs, grief, crisis), strengthening overall social-emotional health benefits all at-risk students because

research finds that maladaptive behaviors such as antisocial behavior, poor academic performance, and substance abuse tend to co-occur and on the contrary, pro-social behaviors lead to improved academic outcomes (Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003; Hawkins, Farrington, & Catalano, 1998). Elias, et al. (2003) assert that improving students' social-emotional competencies will decrease or prevent drug use and improve academic functioning. These findings support school-based programs that have the overarching goal of promoting social-emotional health, regardless of the students' particular problem.

### *Risk and Protective Factors*

Effective ESGs build on the “risk and protective factor” framework in which the goal is for students to accumulate protective factors and reduce risk factors. A risk factor is an “attitude, belief, situation, or action” that may put someone at risk for alcohol, drug, or mental health problems (SAMHSA, 2001). Examples of risk factors are low self-esteem, low parental support, and stressful life events, such as a crisis or violence in the home. Other risk factors include poverty, minority status, low levels of maternal education, and large household size (Robertson et al., 1998; Fleming et al., 2005). Protective factors are attitudes, beliefs, situations, or actions that build resiliency and counteract risk factors. Protective factors include internal assets, such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, goals and aspirations, and an internal locus of control. External protective factors that build resiliency include caring relationships; high expectations by peers and adults; meaningful participation in activities at school, home, and in the community; academic achievement; and parental support (Robertson et al., 1998; Fleming et al., 2005). There are numerous models and theories that explain how risk and protective factors work together to influence outcomes, but the consensus is that building protective factors will strengthen student resiliency to improve social-emotional health, leading to improved academic outcomes (Rutter, 1983). Immediate and long-term positive results can result from reducing risk factors and increasing protective factors. Successful intervention programs can have the power to prevent substance abuse or other risky behaviors by building resiliency and protective factors without acting directly on the problem behavior (CSAP, 1998).

Related to increasing protective factors is using a “strengths-based” approach, which has shown to be a successful component of ESGs. This approach entails “establishing positive relationships with children based on their assets and their potential contributions as resources to their schools” (Elias et al., 2003 p. 305). In one study, researchers describe a Newspaper Club formed for students in an anger control group. These children engaged in a project in which they interviewed members of the community and learned how to communicate with people, schedule events, and keep calm under pressure. Instead of a program based on the students’ deficits (their anger problems), a strengths-based approach utilizes the talents of at-risk students, which can have a positive effect on their social-emotional well-being. Furthermore, the relationships cultivated through such programs should occur in “naturally occurring contexts” where students take on positive roles and learn skills to be successful (Elias et al., 2003). Schools and classrooms provide these contexts for students to build their strengths.

### *Characteristics of Effective Educational Support Groups*

Several studies discuss characteristics of effective ESGs, which include building social-emotional competencies, high-quality group interaction level, program fidelity, and supportive school climate.

*Core competencies.* Social-emotional learning core competencies shown to be integral to successful ESGs include self-awareness (identifying and recognizing emotions), social awareness (empathy, respect for others), responsible decision making, self management (impulse control, stress management, motivation), and relationship management (communication, cooperation, help seeking and providing) (Zins et al., 2004; Ragozzino et al., 2003). Tobler & Stratton’s (1997) classification of program content is similar. They include knowledge (knowledge of drug effects, facts), affective skills (self-esteem), drug refusal skills, generic skills (communication, problem solving, coping, goal setting), safety skills (to protect oneself and peers), extracurricular activities, and other competencies (could include peer counseling, parent involvement). These program components are aligned with the goals of IMPACT, which aim to foster students’ self-awareness and teach life skills (decision making, goal setting, coping, assertiveness, conflict resolution, and safety) in a supportive and caring environment.

*Interaction level.* Another characteristic critical to the success of ESGs is the group environment and interaction level among participants. In a meta-analysis of 207 school-based drug prevention and intervention programs, Tobler et al. (2000) found that interaction level is the most important predictor of program effectiveness. Tobler's classification of four continuous interaction levels starts with didactic (first level) as the least effective, in which the facilitator simply presents facts and information to students in a highly structured manner, with little to no interaction among students. The second level is also characterized by structured activities, but students participate in teacher-led discussions. In the third level of interaction, all participants are included in interactions but the facilitator continues to lead the groups. The fourth and highest level of interaction is the least structured group in which students regularly interact with each other and the facilitator. This level is optimal and was found to be the most effective type of group.

*Program fidelity.* Another factor found to affect program success is fidelity to the curriculum (USDHHS, 2002; Dane & Schneider, 1998). Several research studies suggest that implementers should generally adhere to the program and deliver it as it was designed (Pentz et al., 1990; Botvin et al., 1989; Blakely et al., 1987). However, some research shows that some adaptation and "reinvention" of the curriculum is acceptable and can still lead to program effectiveness (Pentz et al., 1990). In fact, Elias et al. (2003) report that interventions are rarely delivered as planned. Examples of types of adaptations include additions to or deletions of program components, modifications in the nature of the components, changes in the manner of administration or the intensity of administration, changing materials or activities, cultural or other modifications required by local circumstances (US DHHS, 2002), and changes in the roles or behaviors of the implementers (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977). Blakely et al. (1987) actually found that adding a component to the prescribed program was more effective than adhering only to the curriculum. Some researchers have found programs to be effective if a minimum percentage (e.g., 60 to 89%) of the curriculum is followed (Botvin, 1995; Spoth, Redmond & Shin, 1998).

Although the research is somewhat mixed, most conclude that it is important to balance fidelity and adaptation, recognizing that the two do not necessarily conflict (US DHHS, 2002). Retaining the core components of the program, which are the

theoretically-based or research-based components (e.g., overall goals, appropriate interaction level, maintaining confidentiality and a safe environment for students to share their thoughts and feelings) is most critical. Elias et al. (2003) also caution that program implementers should be aware of not only how the program is delivered, but also how it is received by students. Students bring their attention levels, skills and experiences to the class that can also impact program fidelity.

*School climate.* Any school-based program needs a supportive climate to be successful. Researchers have delineated a number of characteristics of schools that are supportive of ESGs and social-emotional learning (SEL). Firstly, ESGs need adequate logistical support including facilities and resources. Teacher facilitators need time and spaces (classrooms) available to conduct meaningful, uninterrupted groups (Greenberg et al., 2005). When possible, ESGs and intervention programs should be linked with other school services, such as counseling or student support services. Programs should be integrated into the school structure using available resources, such as volunteers or teachers as facilitators. Such programs should be sustainable with a limited budget and easy to deliver (Wassef et al., 1995). ESGs should also fit in with the academic year, for example, be offered on a semester basis and during the school day, instead of scheduled as a fixed number of sessions outside of the school day, which may be inconvenient for students and teachers. Finally, ESGs should be promoted as a way to assist students in distress or those who need extra support, not as a way of treating students with mental problems or who cause trouble. The schools' personnel and culture should avoid stigmatization while maintaining confidentiality for program students.

An open, supportive school environment that encourages sharing of ideas and information has also been linked to program success (Greenberg et al., 2005). Regular communication between school teachers and the staff members implementing the intervention is important in supporting teacher morale and a sense of self-efficacy, the belief that teachers can effect positive change for students (Ringeisen, Henderson, & Hoagwood, 2003). Positive principal-teacher relationships and a supportive administration in general also contribute to a healthy school climate, especially when the administration believes in and supports the intervention program. All school staff members should be aware of the ESGs and their purpose; the program should have high

visibility and acceptance at the school. School-based interventions cannot successfully operate in isolation. Furthermore, research shows that finding ways to include parents can help the program succeed (Ringeisen, Henderson, & Hoagwood, 2003). For example, letters to parents about positive student outcomes or behaviors can be sent home to support and encourage student social-emotional growth (Gottfredson, Gottfredson, & Hybl, 1993).

*Professional development and support.* Ongoing formal and informal training of group facilitators, and other program implementers, is important to program success (Elias et al., 2003). Furthermore, Elias et al. (2003) suggest involving mental health experts, when possible, in the continuing support of facilitators and program staff. Additionally, Gottfredson et al. (1993) found individualized feedback provided to teachers twice a year was associated with successful programs.

The characteristics of adults delivering the program are important but are often overlooked in studies of school-based SEL programs. These adults are forming critical relationships with vulnerable students, and need the requisite time, preparation and ability to focus on the issues addressed in the ESGs. Teachers and counselors are often limited by multiple responsibilities, and their ongoing support and training should not be neglected (Elias et al., 2003).

## Methods

In this section, we present the methodologies employed for the IMPACT evaluation. We utilized surveys, interviews, observations, and assessments, and school documents to inform our study. To examine different levels of program implementation and outcomes, several research questions guided our data collection and analyses:

1. What are the characteristics of the IMPACT program?
2. Is IMPACT coherent (e.g., integrated into the school culture) and implemented uniformly across classrooms?
3. What are the characteristics of support provided to IMPACT administrators, coordinators, and facilitators?
4. To what extent is school climate conducive to the successful implementation of IMPACT?
5. What is the quality of social-emotional skills instruction in IMPACT groups?
6. What is the level of fidelity with which the IMPACT curriculum is implemented?
7. What are administrator, coordinator, facilitator, and student perceptions of the program?
8. To what extent does IMPACT affect students' resiliency, coping skills, perceived support, grades, and attendance?

Here, we discuss the sample selection, data collection, and data analysis procedures used to address these research questions.

### *Sample Selection*

A multistage probabilities proportional to size (PPS) method was used to select the schools, classrooms, and students included in this study. At the first stage, 10 schools were selected with probabilities proportional to the estimated number of groups at each school. At the second stage, four classrooms/teachers per school were selected for classroom observation after stratifying by IMPACT group type (e.g., ATOD, Crisis, Grief). Each of these groups was observed for two sessions. In addition to classroom observations, two IMPACT students per classroom were interviewed. We began the study with an equal probability sample of IMPACT classrooms representative of the district as a whole. Due to challenges in scheduling and data collection, we were not able to collect complete data from one of our sample schools. However, for nine of our sample

schools, all requisite data was gathered successfully. A data collector assigned to each school collected all necessary data from his/her particular site. All data was collected in Spring 2006.

### *Observations*

Trained data collectors conducted observations of two sessions for each selected group, one during the first three sessions and one during the last three. Typically, the sessions lasted one class period (45 to 60 minutes) each. Observers took scripted notes in narrative form, capturing as much detail as possible, including direct quotations from group participants. Using an observation protocol, data collectors recorded the group type, session, curricula used, activity, lesson plan, and objectives for the day's session, and everything that actually occurred throughout the sessions.

At the end of each observation, data collectors recorded reflective notes. Reflection questions guided these notes, and asked observers to comment on such issues as the overall effectiveness of the session and the general group environment and atmosphere. In addition, these notes provided observers with a place to document their thoughts and opinions of a classroom observation experience. It allowed the observer to intentionally insert any subjective comments they had regarding their observation so that they could avoid expressing these comments within the context of the objective fieldnotes during the observation.

Observations were documented using handwritten fieldnotes that were later transcribed and analyzed qualitatively using a coding scheme developed by the research team. The coding scheme was created based on a review of the literature and research studies indicating characteristics of effective educational support groups (e.g., a supportive environment, setting clear and specific goals, and teaching life skills such as coping and problem-solving skills). Observation data was analyzed using Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software.

### *Interviews*

Interviews were conducted with IMPACT students, facilitators, coordinators, and administrators. IMPACT students were interviewed once after completing only a few group sessions and once after completing all or nearly all of the sessions. IMPACT

students were asked about the goals of their group, support from adults in their lives, support from peers and friends, risky behaviors (e.g., drug use), group climate, and effectiveness of IMPACT.

Facilitators were interviewed directly after their group session ended. For example, if a teacher facilitated a group that ran from February 1 to March 1, the facilitator was interviewed after March 1. Interviewers asked them about their training as facilitators, how they became facilitators for their particular groups, support they received from their administrators, how effective they felt the IMPACT groups were, and what specific impact they thought the program had on students. Facilitators were also asked how they thought IMPACT could be improved to make the program more successful. They were asked specific questions about each group they facilitated, e.g., what the purposes of the groups were, how often they met, how well the group served the students, and how closely they adhered to the group's curriculum.

Coordinators and administrators were also interviewed once, near the end of the spring semester. They were asked about the training they received, what types of support they received and provided to facilitate the implementation of IMPACT, how well they thought IMPACT was integrated into their school's culture, how effective they thought the program was, and how it could be improved. Coordinators were asked additional and more specific questions pertaining to the student referral process, the school's core team, how IMPACT operated at their school, and successes and challenges of the program.

All interviews were audio recorded with the respondents' explicit permission. If permission was not granted, handwritten notes were taken and typed up after the interview. Interviews yielded both quantitative and qualitative data that were coded and analyzed using SPSS and Atlas.ti.

### *Surveys*

As described in the previous section, we interviewed the IMPACT facilitators, coordinators, and administrators in our sample schools. While we did not have the resources to interview IMPACT staff at the remaining schools in the District, we sought to extend our data collection to include as many participants as possible. Therefore, we sent surveys to facilitators, coordinators, and administrators at all schools that were currently implementing IMPACT. The content of the surveys was similar to that of the

interviews; they included questions about the facilitators' training, how effective they felt IMPACT was, how well it was integrated into their school climate, and how the program could be improved.

The survey response rates were moderate to high. Out of 133 facilitator surveys distributed, 84 were returned, for a response rate of 63%. The administrator surveys yielded the lowest response rate of 56% (15 out of 27). Of the 27 non-sample coordinator surveys, 21 were returned for a response rate of 78%.

### *School Climate Case Studies*

Using observation, interview, and survey data, we created case study profiles of the climate at 8 of the 10 sample schools (2 schools were excluded due to lack of data).

A case study is a type of descriptive research that examines detailed information about a particular participant or group in order to gain as complete an understanding about a situation as possible (Palmquist, 2006). We created the case studies of our IMPACT schools in order to gain a thorough understanding of how the various aspects of the school climate functioned together in each school.

We considered the following aspects of school climate in our case studies: support and communication among IMPACT staff, involvement and awareness activities, integration of the program into the school structure, teacher buy-in, administrator support, student awareness and support, and program stability. These characteristics have been identified in various research literature (e.g., Greenberg, et al., 2005; Ringeisen, Henderson, & Hoagwood, 2003) to be important aspects of school climate. We examined the various data sources at each school (including facilitator, coordinator, administrator, and student interviews; coordinator surveys; observation fieldnotes and reflective notes; school reflective notes, and call logs) in order to determine the quality of each of these characteristics. This enabled us to form an overall impression of each school in order to determine how conducive the school's climate was to successful IMPACT implementation.

### *Student Assessments*

As part of our study of changes in students' attitudes and behaviors related to risk and protective factors, we administered two assessments to the students in our sample.

The first was the Individual Protective Factors Index (IPFI), a measure of adolescent resiliency. The IPFI is a questionnaire that measures risk and protective factors, and was administered pre- and post-IMPACT. The IPFI data was analyzed using SPSS software. Factor analyses were conducted to reduce the data to clusters of related items (factors). The pre- and post-test scores for these factors were then compared using t-tests.

The second assessment consisted of a series of vignettes. The vignettes contained scenarios that presented students with various stressful situations (e.g., losing one's pet). Students were instructed to indicate how they would react to those situations. The vignettes measured how students cope with crises, solve problems, and resolve conflicts. The vignettes included quantitative and qualitative portions. The quantitative components were analyzed using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, a non-parametric technique for computing pre- and post-response differences. The open-ended responses were analyzed qualitatively by identifying themes and common categories across the student responses. In analyzing the vignettes, we also looked for pre-/post-IMPACT growth.

### *Student and Group Data*

We collected various school documents regarding IMPACT groups and students. Coordinators of our sample IMPACT schools provided us with lists of IMPACT awareness activities for students, faculty and parents, student referral forms, and student attendance rosters for all IMPACT groups held at their schools.

### *Limitations*

A limitation of this study was the lack of a control group. We selected a representative sample of four students per sample school, who were either on a waiting list or recommended for IMPACT but did not attend, to serve as a comparison group. However, we were only able to interview and test a few students who were on waiting lists at the time we collected pre-test data, and many of those students subsequently were added to an IMPACT group and could no longer serve as a part of a comparison group, since they had become IMPACT students. We were also given names of a small number of students who were referred but chose not to participate in IMPACT. Therefore we obtained a convenience sample rather than a truly representative group. Although we collected some data from these students, this group was too small and non-representative

to serve as a true comparison. In this report, we primarily present findings that pertain to students who participated in the IMPACT program.

## Findings

### *IMPACT Program Characteristics*

In this section, we present the characteristics of the IMPACT program Districtwide and of the groups in our sample. The characteristics discussed in this section include the number of groups and sessions held, student attendance and referral information, awareness activities held, core team activities, facilitator and coordinator training information, and degree of program fidelity.

#### *Educational Support Groups*

A total of 178 groups were held in our IMPACT sample schools during the 2005-06 school year. About half of the groups were held in the fall (53%) and half in the spring (47%). As shown in Table 1, a majority of the IMPACT groups held were Crisis (44%) and ATOD (22%) groups, followed by Concerned Persons (12%) and IDIG (11%). The majority of groups were led by a single facilitator; only 18% of groups were co-facilitated.

Table 1

#### IMPACT groups

| Group        | Number of Groups (N = 178) |
|--------------|----------------------------|
| Crisis       | 79                         |
| ATOD         | 39                         |
| CPG          | 21                         |
| IDIG         | 19                         |
| Grief        | 13                         |
| Grief Crisis | 5                          |
| IMPACT Plus  | 2                          |

*Referrals.* Students joined the IMPACT program as a result of being referred by school staff, family, friends, or through self-referral. Most students (70%) in our sample schools were referred to IMPACT by a staff member at their school, usually a teacher (Table 2). About 18 percent referred themselves to IMPACT, and for 9 percent of the

students, placement was mandatory. A few students were referred by parents, friends, or others.

Table 2

Referral source of IMPACT students

| Source    | Number of Students<br>(N = 1717) | Percent |
|-----------|----------------------------------|---------|
| Staff     | 1206                             | 70      |
| Self      | 301                              | 18      |
| Mandatory | 156                              | 9       |
| Parent    | 26                               | 2       |
| Other     | 28                               | 2       |

Once referred, students were placed in an IMPACT group or provided an alternative service. Table 3 shows what decisions were made regarding students referred to IMPACT. Most were placed in IMPACT groups, with the highest proportion enrolling in the Crisis groups (33%), the ATOD groups (18%), and the Concerned Persons groups (15%). A smaller percentage were referred to the Grief Crisis (5%), IDIG (3%) and IMPACT Plus (1%) groups. Thirteen percent of students were referred to a school counselor. Some students were referred to multiple services. About 4% of students were referred to more than one IMPACT group; usually the additional group of referral was Crisis or Grief Crisis. Some students were not placed or declined IMPACT or other services. Three percent fell into the Other category, which included referral to a recovery program, administrator, community agency, or other service.

Table 3

Service decisions for students referred to IMPACT

|                          | Number of Students<br>(N = 1708) | Percent |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|---------|
| Crisis                   | 555                              | 33      |
| ATOD                     | 308                              | 18      |
| CPG                      | 252                              | 15      |
| Grief Crisis             | 87                               | 5       |
| IDIG                     | 53                               | 3       |
| IMPACT Plus              | 14                               | 1       |
| Multiple group referrals | 69                               | 4       |
| School counselor         | 226                              | 13      |
| Not placed in a group    | 76                               | 4       |
| Declined                 | 69                               | 4       |
| Other                    | 54                               | 3       |

*Note:* "N" column may add up to more than 1708 and "Percent" column may add up to more than 100% due to the Multiple group referrals category.

*Attendance.* Overall, students in our sample attended an average of 7 out of 10 sessions. Attendance was fairly even across group types (Table 4), with the exception of the IDIG group that consisted of fewer sessions than the other groups. The few IDIG students in our sample attended, on average, all 5 IDIG sessions. Since the number of sessions varied across groups, a proportion was calculated to indicate the attendance level of students. This figure was calculated by dividing the number of days attended by the total number of sessions for that group. Overall, students attended about 65% of sessions on average. IMPACT students did not take full advantage of the support the District provided. Since they did not complete the program as it was intended, it is possible that their lack of attendance reduced the effectiveness of the program. Further investigation into what factors hinder students' attendance is warranted.

Table 4

Number of sessions attended

| IMPACT Group | Number of Students (N = 384) | Average Number of Sessions Attended | Average Percentage of Sessions Attended |
|--------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| ATOD         | 117                          | 7                                   | 63                                      |
| CPG          | 36                           | 6                                   | 61                                      |
| Crisis       | 196                          | 7                                   | 65                                      |
| Grief Crisis | 31                           | 7                                   | 63                                      |
| IDIG         | 4                            | 5                                   | 90                                      |

*Training and experience.* While about half of coordinators surveyed did not report having a core team, all IMPACT schools had a group of individuals trained in IMPACT. According to the coordinators in our sample, the schools had an average of 18 IMPACT-trained certificated staff members at each site. In addition, schools had an average of 2 IMPACT-trained administrators.

On average, 10 of the 18 trained staff members were facilitators. Coordinators reported facilitating an average of 7 IMPACT groups this year and having one period off. Only 1 of 9 coordinators reported that there were community agencies co-facilitating groups at their school. According to the IMPACT program guidelines, community agency representatives may co-facilitate groups with a trained facilitator, but should not facilitate groups on their own. The coordinators in our study reported that no groups were facilitated solely by administrators or community agencies (Table 5). This assertion is supported by the fact that we did not observe any ESGs being facilitated solely by an administrator or community service agency.

Table 5

IMPACT-trained staff and facilitators

|   | Number of Schools | Average Per School |
|---|-------------------|--------------------|
| IMPACT-trained certificated staff                     | 8                 | 18                 |
| IMPACT-trained certificated staff facilitating groups | 9                 | 10                 |
| IMPACT-trained administrators                         | 9                 | 2                  |
| IMPACT-trained administrators facilitating groups     | 9                 | 0                  |
| Community agency co-facilitating groups               | 9                 | 1                  |
| Community agency facilitating groups                  | 9                 | 0                  |
| Periods off   | 9                 | 1                  |
| Groups Facilitated by Coordinator                     | 9                 | 7                  |

Facilitators could volunteer or be designated to lead IMPACT groups. Of 124 facilitators surveyed, a vast majority (89%) volunteered, while the remainder were designated. Slightly more than half (73 of 123) of facilitators chose the type of group they facilitated. Hunter and Elias (as cited in Fagan & Mihalic, 2003), found that facilitator buy-in is a key aspect of successful program implementation. Choosing to both participate in IMPACT and facilitate a particular group or groups may bode well for program implementation. Facilitators provided various explanations for why they chose to facilitate a particular group, such as having content knowledge about the group topic (4 of 11), having personal experience with the topic (3 of 11), and leading the group out of necessity because no one else was available (3 of 11). In addition, 78% of the facilitators surveyed this year had facilitated groups before. For 22% of facilitators, it was their first time facilitating an IMPACT group.

Most administrators had supervised the IMPACT program at their school for four years or less (Table 6). Almost half (48%) have been overseeing the program for two years or less.

Table 6

Administrator experience

|                 | Number of<br>Administrators<br>(N = 23) | Percent |
|-----------------|---|---------|
| 2 years or less | 11                                      | 48      |
| 3 - 4 years     | 5                                       | 22      |
| 5 - 6 years     | 4                                       | 17      |
| 9 - 10 years    | 1                                       | 4       |
| 10 + years      | 2                                       | 9       |

Most IMPACT coordinators had been serving in that role between one and 5 years (Table 7). Only 7% had been coordinators for less than one year, and 10% had been coordinators for 15 years or more. About half (54%) of coordinators who had served for less than 2 years received one-on-one training or mentorship regarding implementation.

Table 7

Coordinator experience

|                  | Number of<br>Coordinators<br>(N = 29) | Percent |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|---------|
| Less than 1 year | 2                                     | 7       |
| 1 - 2 years      | 10                                    | 35      |
| 3 - 5 years      | 8                                     | 28      |
| 6 - 8 years      | 4                                     | 14      |
| 12 - 14 years    | 2                                     | 7       |
| 15 + years       | 3                                     | 10      |

### *Program Fidelity*

In an effort to ensure that group facilitators “maximized the usefulness” of each group session, Central Office staff provided facilitators with guidelines.<sup>3</sup> IMPACT groups were to have between 8 and 12 students per session. However, we found that in 43 of 56 observed sessions, the number of students who attended did not meet the guidelines. Typically, the number of students was lower than recommended, ranging from four to six. It was also policy that no new students were to be enrolled in a group after the first session. This is important because group membership needs to be stable in order for group cohesion to occur. During the initial stages of group formation, one of the main foci is to build trust. If group membership is constantly in flux, it is hard to establish that sense of trust. The majority (23 of 30) of observed groups adhered to this guideline.

Having students sign in provided the Central Office with a means to determine the number of students who were utilizing the program. This information could have been used to inform decision-making such as addressing budgetary concerns. As indicated in Table 8 below, students signed in during the majority (78%) of observed sessions.

Table 8

#### Adherence to guidelines

| Guideline                       | Number of Observations<br>(N = 58) | Percent |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------|
| Students sign attendance roster | 45                                 | 78      |
| Session starts on time          | 16                                 | 28      |
| Legal reporting disclaimer      | 7                                  | 12      |

Effective group facilitators use structure to provide students with feelings of safety and continuity (DeLucia-Waack, 2006). Therefore, structural devices such as the setting of group expectations and norms (e.g., sessions start on time) must be present in order for learning of social-emotional skills to occur. Group sessions occasionally (28%) started on time. The three most frequent causes of sessions starting late were delays due

<sup>3</sup> Allocation of Funds for IMPACT Program 2005-06, Student Health and Human Services Division, June 6, 2005

to issues with summoning students (22 of 42), students arriving to session late (18 of 42), and the facilitator arriving to session late (9 of 42). These delays possibly speak to lack of teacher support of the IMPACT program (e.g., a teacher may have felt that the instruction in his or her class was more valuable than the social-emotional instruction and support during IMPACT, so he or she delayed the summoning process). The delays also speak to a lack of student buy-in, lack of facilitator buy-in, scheduling of IMPACT sessions during students' core classes, or structural hindrances that resulted in the facilitator arriving late to the session. Finally, at the beginning of each session, facilitators were to inform students of what they are legally required to report (e.g., incidents of abuse, thoughts of homicide or suicide). Nevertheless, facilitators were rarely (12%) observed doing so.

As stated previously, with the exception of IDIG, each group was expected to meet a minimum of 10 weeks. The average duration of a group was 11 weeks consisting of 10 sessions. This discrepancy between group duration and number of sessions held may be due to the fact that all groups did not meet each week. The majority (70%) of facilitators stated that their group met between 10 to 15 weeks (see Table 9).

Table 9

Group duration

| Duration        | Number of Facilitators <sup>a</sup><br>(N = 118) | Percent |
|-----------------|--|---------|
| 5 weeks or less | 1  | 1       |
| 6 – 9 weeks     | 34   | 29      |
| 10 – 15 weeks   | 83   | 70      |

<sup>a</sup>Facilitators were asked this question for each group we observed. A facilitator may have been observed facilitating multiple groups. Therefore, a particular facilitator may be represented more than once, for different groups. The responses of facilitators who were surveyed but not observed are also included in this table.

As mentioned previously, IMPACT groups, with the exception of IDIG, were to meet at least 10 weeks. When asked why their group met less than 10 weeks, the three most frequently cited reasons were scheduling complications due to block scheduling (5 of 14), interruptions due to student testing (4 of 14), and having a late start date for the group which caused them to run out of time (2 of 14).

### *Uniformity of IMPACT Implementation Across Classrooms*

This section discusses various aspects of the IMPACT program, including professional development; curriculum fidelity; student referrals; and group placement, formation, and scheduling. We examined the extent to which of each of these aspects of the program was uniform across IMPACT schools.

#### *IMPACT Training*

Effective training is critical to the successful implementation of a school program. Several research studies (e.g., McCormick, Stecker, & McLeroy, 1995; Perry, Murray, & Griffin, 1990) found that the provision of adequate training increases the likelihood that teachers will implement the curriculum fully. We asked administrators, coordinators, and facilitators how long it had been since they were trained, how their training prepared them to implement IMPACT, and in what ways the training could have better met their needs.

*Administrators.* Most administrators (17 of 23) indicated they attended the IMPACT facilitator training. There were 6 administrators who did not attend training, which is problematic. According to Han and Weiss (2003), administrators who are knowledgeable about the programs at their schools are better able to encourage teachers and promote schoolwide support for the program. Nearly half of the administrators (4 of 9) who did attend training indicated that their training took place 6-10 years before the 2005-06 school year. There was also one administrator whose training was more recent (1-5 years ago), and four administrators whose training occurred more than 10 years prior. A majority of administrators (15 of 21) thought that an IMPACT supervisor/administrator training would be useful.

*Coordinators.* We first asked coordinators about their training regarding IMPACT facilitation. We asked how long it had been since they were trained to facilitate IMPACT. While 4 of the 7 interviewed coordinators had received training in the previous 10 years, 3 of them had been trained more than 15 years prior. Over half of the coordinators (5 of 8) indicated that the training prepared them *very well* to facilitate IMPACT groups. There were 2 coordinators who thought the training prepared them *well* and one who felt it

prepared him *somewhat*. The largest proportion of coordinators (3 of 7) indicated that what they found most helpful about the training was the use of mock groups/role playing. Half of the coordinators mentioned that the training could have been improved by making it more hands-on (e.g., having groups with actual students or doing additional role playing). When asked if they received one-on-one training or mentorship regarding implementation, over half (7 of 13 coordinators) indicated that they did.

We also asked coordinators about their training to coordinate the IMPACT program. Most of them had been trained fairly recently (14 of 28 were trained in the last five years). There were also 3 coordinators who never received coordinator training, and the remaining 9 were trained at least 6 years prior to the 2005-06 school year. When asked how well the training prepared them to coordinate IMPACT, most (23 of 26) stated that it prepared them *well* or *very well*. Others indicated that it prepared them *somewhat well* (2 of 26) or *not at all* (1 of 26). When asked when aspect of the coordinator training they found to be most helpful, some coordinators (4 of 22) mentioned that they benefited from learning from the experiences of others. Four coordinators felt that the group work/role-playing aspect of the training was helpful. When asked how the coordinator training could be improved, the most common suggestions were to make the timing of the training better (e.g., more than two weeks before the first IMPACT group began) (17%), to discuss multiple curricula instead of just ATOD (17%), and to make the training more hands-on (17%).

Table 10

Suggestions for improving coordinator training

| Suggestions                      | Number of Coordinators<br>(N = 12) | Percent |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------|
| Better timing                    | 2                                  | 17      |
| Discuss multiple curricula       | 2                                  | 17      |
| Provide more hands-on activities | 2                                  | 17      |

*Facilitators.* We also asked the IMPACT group facilitators about their training experiences. When asked how long ago they were trained, nearly half (11 of 25) indicated

that they had been trained within the last year. Of the remaining facilitators, 5 were trained 2-3 years ago, 6 were trained 4-10 years ago, and 3 were trained more than 10 years ago. When asked what they felt was particularly helpful about the training, the facilitator responses were quite consistent with those of the coordinators. About a third of the facilitators (8 of 25) mentioned that the opportunity to engage in role playing was beneficial. As one facilitator commented,

Well, learning how to do the group process, and learning ways of getting people in the group involved was very helpful. Strategies to help people open up and be able to talk about problems that normally people find personal or feel that no one wants to know.

An equal number of facilitators felt that practicing the sequence of the curriculum and using it in a hands-on way was helpful. Finally, there were 5 facilitators who felt that learning how to relate to students was beneficial. When asked what improvements could be made to the training, nearly half of the facilitators (11 of 25) indicated that the training was good as it was. The most common suggestion (made by 5 facilitators) was that the training should include other curricula in addition to ATOD. One facilitator stated,

Maybe we could have gone for another day and done Grief. We did the drug and alcohol and I ended up doing an IMPACT group with Grief, so when a child says, "I remember holding my 2 year old sister die in my arms", dealing with that better so maybe an extra day of Grief and Crisis training. Maybe that, maybe an extra day for that, a little more variety, you've done drugs and alcohol guys here's Grief and Crisis.

This suggestion was also consistent with some of the coordinator responses. There were also 2 facilitators who suggested having follow-up training, 2 who felt the training should be longer, and 2 who wanted to be presented with more information regarding the various issues adolescent students encounter.

We also asked the facilitators how well the training prepared them to facilitate their particular group(s). Most facilitators (101 of 131) felt that it prepared them *well* or *very well*. There were also 22 facilitators who felt that it prepared them only *somewhat* and 7 who felt it prepared them *not very well* or *not at all*.

## *Student Referrals*

One important characteristic of the IMPACT program is that coordinators are instructed to recognize that the program has a limited scope and thus cannot serve the needs of all students. Therefore, coordinators are directed to refer students who require more intense intervention to outside agencies that have personnel who are trained to perform such services.<sup>4</sup> We asked coordinators as well as facilitators to explain the process they used for providing students with these services. Over half of coordinators and facilitators indicated that these students were referred to an onsite person, i.e., a school social worker, psychologist, or nurse. There was also a significant number of staff (48% of coordinators and 24% of facilitators) who referred students to outside agencies, and some (17% of coordinators and 18% of facilitators) who referred students to another onsite program, such as Healthy Start (see Table 11).

Table 11

### Methods of providing services for students with greater needs

| Methods                           | Number of Coordinators<br>(N = 29) | Percent | Number of Facilitators<br>(N = 17) | Percent |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------|------------------------------------|---------|
| Refer to onsite staff             | 18                                 | 62      | 9                                  | 53      |
| Refer to outside service agencies | 14                                 | 48      | 4                                  | 24      |
| Refer to other school program     | 5                                  | 17      | 3                                  | 18      |

## *IMPACT Group Placement*

We were interested in determining the uniformity with which group placement was determined. All six coordinators indicated that students were placed into groups according to whatever adverse situation the students were currently encountering in their lives (e.g., drug use, a death in the family). Two coordinators also mentioned that the Crisis group was used as a “catch all” group at their schools.

## *Formation of IMPACT Groups*

We asked coordinators to describe the process for forming IMPACT groups. The

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<sup>4</sup> IMPACT Coordinator’s Handbook

following response is indicative of the majority of coordinator responses: “When I have enough students with a particular need and I have a facilitator who is available to lead a group, then a group is formed.” Two coordinators mentioned making sure to conform to group size restraints (between 8 and 12 students) and two mentioned attempting to start groups as soon as possible in order to address the urgency of student needs.

Coordinators were fairly evenly divided regarding when they began the process of forming groups. Three of 7 coordinators stated that they began the process at the beginning of each semester. Of the remaining 4 coordinators, 2 said they began at the beginning of each school year, and 2 said that it was a year-round process.

We also asked coordinators how they dealt with potential group formation problems. When asked what they did when they had too many students and not enough groups, all 6 coordinators stated that the students were required to wait until another group could be formed. When the opposite situation occurred and there were too few students to form a group, the largest proportion of coordinators said that a group would not be formed until the minimum number of students was obtained.

### *Scheduling of IMPACT Groups*

We asked coordinators to describe the process used to schedule IMPACT groups. The majority of the coordinators (4 of 6) stated that groups were scheduled to take place during facilitators’ conference periods. There also were 2 coordinators who indicated that they rotate periods in order to keep student students from having to miss the same class every week. Nearly half of the coordinators (12 of 27) mentioned that they experienced difficulty in scheduling groups. The most commonly reported difficulties were problems with accommodating a year-round school calendar (e.g., 3-track) and scheduling groups around other school activities, such as standardized testing.

### *School Climate*

We examined various aspects of the climate at our sample of IMPACT schools, including the level and type of support from administrators, coordinators, and facilitators; the core team; the integration of IMPACT into the school climate; and awareness of the program in the schools.

### *Administrator Support*

Adequate administrative support is crucial to the success of any school-based program. The presence of knowledgeable and supportive administrators at a school can be instrumental in making a program a priority within the school. According to Han and Weiss (2003), “When [administrators] are made aware of the importance of their support for implementation and are explicitly requested to encourage and monitor teachers’ implementation, teachers’ program implementation has been found to correspondingly increase” (p. 668). IMPACT administrators were asked about the support they provided to IMPACT staff at their school. The majority of administrators (8 of 9) indicated that they provided some type of support to their staff. Most administrators provided support to facilitators (5 of 7) and nearly as many (4 of 7) provided support to coordinators. Two administrators indicated that they provided support to teachers, which likely meant facilitators.

When asked what types of support they provided, more than half of the administrators (57%) indicated that they provided support by accommodating the schedules of IMPACT training and IMPACT groups, (e.g., by providing locations for sessions and coverage for classes). Fewer than half of administrators helped by referring students to IMPACT and other programs, and/or assisting with paperwork completion (see Table 12).

Table 12

Types of support provided by IMPACT administrators

| Type of Support                                 | Number of Administrators<br>(N = 7) |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| Accommodating coordinator/facilitator schedules | 4                                   |
| Referring students to IMPACT and other programs | 3                                   |
| Assisting with paperwork                        | 3                                   |

### *Coordinator Support*

*Characteristics of support received.* We asked coordinators if they received any type of support in addition to IMPACT training. Nearly all coordinators (29 of 30)

reported receiving additional support. Support was often provided by IMPACT Office staff (reported by 20 out of 28 coordinators). Additionally, 8 coordinators received support from their school’s previous coordinator. Although the majority of the administrators who were interviewed stated that they provided support to their coordinators, only about a third of the coordinators (10 of 28) reported receiving support from administrators, which is an interesting discrepancy. It is possible that coordinators who received very little support from their administrators simply didn’t think to mention them. At any rate, given its importance, administrative support should be provided to all coordinators in some form.

When asked what types of support they were provided, the largest group of coordinators (41%) reported that they received support in the form of having their questions answered (generally by IMPACT Office staff). Thirty-seven percent of coordinators received support in terms of individual attention (e.g., a school site visit from IMPACT Office staff, one-on-one mentoring), 30% felt supported in terms of accessibility (coordinators felt they could contact IMPACT Office staff via phone, e-mail etc. and receive a prompt response), and 22% received support in terms of information and advice (see Table 13).

Table 13

Types of support provided to IMPACT coordinators

| Type of Support        | Number of Coordinators<br>(N = 27) | Percent |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|---------|
| Questions answered     | 11                                 | 41      |
| Individual attention   | 10                                 | 37      |
| Accessibility          | 8                                  | 30      |
| Information and advice | 6                                  | 22      |

Note: Respondents could have provided multiple responses. Therefore, the percentages may not total 100%.

Overall, coordinators were quite satisfied with the level of support they received. When asked how well the support they received met their needs, 7 of 8 coordinators responded with *very well* and the remaining coordinator responded with *well*.

Interestingly, nearly half of coordinators mentioned in their interviews that they felt burdened by the time-consuming responsibilities of their job. This indicates that while coordinators generally felt well-supported, there were still areas in which support could have been improved.

*Characteristics of support provided to facilitators.* In addition to the support coordinators received, we also were interested in learning about the support they provided to their facilitators. For a program like IMPACT, which addresses difficult subject matter dealing with social, emotional, and psychological issues in addition to providing social-emotional skills instruction to students, providing adequate support to teachers (facilitators) is imperative. All 8 of the coordinators who were interviewed stated that they assisted their facilitators with attendance, summoning students to groups, and/or scheduling. Five of the coordinators indicated that they assisted facilitators by providing them with materials and 4 coordinators provided facilitators with student information, including class schedules, grades, etc. (see Table 14).

Table 14

Types of support provided to facilitators

| Type of Support                       | Number of Coordinators<br>(N = 8) |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Attendance, summoning, and scheduling | 8                                 |
| Provide materials                     | 5                                 |
| Provide with student information      | 4                                 |

*Facilitator Support*

More than half of the facilitators (18 of 31) stated that they received support with implementing their group(s). Overall, facilitators were very satisfied with the support they received. The majority of facilitators (21 of 24) indicated that the support met their needs *well* or *very well*. There were also 2 who indicated that their needs were met somewhat, and only 1 who felt his/her needs were not met at all.

When asked who provided the support, two-thirds of facilitators (14 of 21) mentioned their IMPACT coordinator, while fewer numbers reported receiving support

from other facilitators (5 of 21) or teachers/counselors/TAs (4 of 21). Although most facilitators stated that they received support from their coordinator, nearly a third of facilitators (5 of 16) reported that they never met with their coordinator during the school year. The remaining facilitators met with their coordinator somewhere between 1 – 2 times per semester and once a week (see Table 15).

Table 15

Frequency of meetings with coordinators

| Frequency              | Number of Facilitators<br>(n = 16) | Percent |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|---------|
| Never                  | 5                                  | 31      |
| 1-2 Times per semester | 3                                  | 19      |
| 3-4 Times per semester | 1                                  | 6       |
| Once a month           | 2                                  | 12      |
| Once every 2 weeks     | 3                                  | 19      |
| Once a week            | 2                                  | 12      |

We asked facilitators what types of support they received. The largest proportion of facilitators (6 of 21) received support in terms of guidance in handling students’ problems and issues. Interestingly, no coordinators mentioned providing this type of support to facilitators in their interviews. Perhaps this type of support was more salient to facilitators than to coordinators. Facilitators also reported receiving support regarding class content (5 of 21), providing materials (4 of 21), and with administrative tasks (e.g., setting up groups, completing paperwork) (4 of 21), which was consistent with the coordinator responses.

Table 16

Types of support provided to facilitators

| Type of Support                      | Number of Facilitators<br>(n = 21) | Percent |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------|
| Support with student problems/issues | 6                                  | 29      |
| Support with class content           | 5                                  | 24      |
| Providing materials                  | 4                                  | 19      |
| Administrative tasks                 | 4                                  | 19      |

When asked to suggest ways that support could have been better, a third of facilitators (8 of 24) stated that the support was fine as it was and that no additional support was needed. There were also 4 facilitators who would have liked to have a co-facilitator.

*Designated Space for IMPACT*

Most administrators and coordinators indicated that a designated space, such as a classroom or office, was provided for IMPACT. Nearly all (20 of 22) administrators indicated that they provided a designated space for the IMPACT coordinator. This is consistent with the coordinator responses: 28 of 30 coordinators indicated that they were provided with a designated space for storing IMPACT materials, and 26 of 30 reported that they were given space for meeting with students.

*Core Team*

Each school should have a core team that operates and oversees the IMPACT program at their schools. Fewer than half of the coordinators (14 of 30) indicated that there was a core team at their school, while the remaining 16 reported that they did not have a core team. In fact, several coordinators did not appear to understand what a core team was. This is very problematic given that the core team is supposed to guide the activities of the IMPACT program.

As indicated in Table 17, among those who did report having a core team, the greatest proportion (5 of 14) indicated that they met with their core team members a few

times a semester. Four coordinators indicated meeting with the core team on an as-needed basis, 1 did not meet at all, and only 3 met with the team as often as once a month.

Table 17

Frequency of meetings with core team

| Frequency              | Number of Coordinators<br>(N = 14) |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Once a semester        | 1                                  |
| A few times a semester | 5                                  |
| Once a month           | 3                                  |
| As needed              | 4                                  |
| Did not meet this year | 1                                  |

Coordinators were asked to indicate who the members of their core teams were. Most coordinators (9 of 14) mentioned administrators (e.g., principals, APs, deans), followed by counselors (7), school support staff (e.g., nurse, psychologist, social worker) (7), and teachers/facilitators (6).

When asked what duties the core team performed at their schools, several (5 of 13) coordinators indicated that they discussed effectiveness and made decisions regarding ways to improve the program. Four coordinators stated that they assessed students for participation in IMPACT and other programs/services, and 4 indicated that they received, made, and/or discussed referrals (see Table 18).

Table 18

Core team activities

| Activities  | Number of Coordinators<br>(N = 17) |
|---|------------------------------------|
| Discussed program effectiveness and make decisions regarding improvement  | 5                                  |
| Assessed students for participation in IMPACT and other programs/services | 4                                  |
| Received, made, and/or discussed referrals                                | 4                                  |

Note: Respondents could have provided multiple responses. Therefore, the percentages may not total 100%.

*Integration of IMPACT*

*Administrators.* Implementing interventions in an integrated manner is associated with more positive child outcomes and long-term sustainability (Clark, Hawkins, Murphy, & Sheeber, 1993; Greenberg, Kusche, Cook, & Quamma, 1995). The majority of administrators (16 of 23) felt that IMPACT was *well integrated* or *very well integrated* into the structure of their school. The remaining 7 administrators felt that the program was *somewhat integrated*. When asked what factors contributed to the integration of the program, 7 administrators mentioned the successful promotion of IMPACT by various staff at the school. The most frequently mentioned factor that detracted from successful integration of the program was not having enough time to serve students without reducing students' instructional time. When asked how the program could be better integrated into the school, 4 of 17 administrators felt that facilitators should be paid more and/or provided with more resources to encourage participation. Additionally, some administrators suggested that more teachers should be trained, parents should be more involved in the program, attempts should be made to have the program interfere less with instructional time, and that teacher assemblies/in-services should be held to increase awareness of the program (see Table 19).

Table 19

Suggestions for increasing IMPACT integration into school structure

| Suggestion  | Number of Administrators<br>(N = 17) |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| Provide more money/resources for facilitators               | 4                                    |
| Train more teachers   | 2                                    |
| Interfere less with instructional time                      | 2                                    |
| Teacher assemblies/in-service meetings to promote awareness | 2                                    |

Note: Respondents could have provided multiple responses. Therefore, the percentages may not total 100%.

*Coordinators.* In concordance with the administrators, most coordinators (27 of 30) felt that the program was either *integrated* or *very well integrated* into their school structure. The remaining 3 coordinators found the program to be *somewhat integrated*. The coordinators gave different suggestions than the administrators for improving the program’s integration. Nearly half of the coordinators (10 of 24) felt that schoolwide awareness should be increased in order to improve the program’s integration. One coordinator commented,

I think...well, we the coordinators and the facilitators have to continue to discuss the IMPACT program with the teachers at the beginning of the school year, and at the end of the school year. To provide the information, to continue to put up flyers around the campus, so the teachers and the students are becoming informed.

Six coordinators felt that the integration could be improved by giving coordinators more time for planning and pre-assessing students. Four coordinators felt that increasing teacher and staff support and understanding of IMPACT was necessary, and 4 indicated that increasing parent awareness was important (see Table 20).

The one suggestion reported by both coordinators and administrators for making IMPACT a more integral part of the school structure was to increase teacher, parent, and/or schoolwide awareness of the IMPACT program. As we will discuss in further detail later in this report, coordinators generally used several different methods to

promote awareness of the program. However, these methods apparently were not entirely effective, since some administrators and almost half of coordinators felt that this was an area in which improvement could occur.

Table 20

Suggestions for increasing IMPACT integration into school structure

| Suggestion                                       | Number of Coordinators<br>(N = 24) |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Improve schoolwide awareness                     | 10                                 |
| Provide more time for planning and pre-assessing | 6                                  |
| Increase teacher and staff support/understanding | 4                                  |
| Increase parent awareness                        | 4                                  |

*Facilitators.* IMPACT facilitators generally agreed with administrators and coordinators in that 84% of them (101 out of 120) felt that the program was *well integrated* or *very well integrated* into the school structure. Only 11 facilitators felt that the program was *somewhat integrated*, 7 felt that it was *not very well integrated*, and 1 felt that it was *not at all integrated*.

**Awareness**

An important part of a supportive school climate entails schoolwide awareness of the IMPACT program. Coordinators and IMPACT core teams are responsible for bringing awareness of the IMPACT program to students, teachers, parents and others in their school community. Coordinators used a variety of means to raise awareness of IMPACT. According to Table 21, the three most frequent ways the 9 coordinators in our sample advertised the IMPACT program were PA and bulletin announcements (100%), educational theater company (89%), and classroom presentations (67%).

Table 21

Awareness Activities

|                              | Number of Coordinators<br>(N = 9) | Percent |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------|
| PA or bulletin announcements | 9                                 | 100     |
| Educational Theater Company  | 8                                 | 89      |
| Classroom presentation       | 6                                 | 67      |
| Student newspaper            | 5                                 | 56      |
| Drug awareness assemblies    | 4                                 | 44      |
| Flyers                       | 4                                 | 44      |

All coordinators held at least one awareness meeting for school staff. The majority of coordinators (7 of 9) held Positive Alternative Activities, which included Red Ribbon Week; L.A. Bridges; Beyond the Bell programs; a Smoke-Free Hike; Tobacco Use Prevention Education (TUPE) assemblies; and sports, clubs, and performing arts activities. All coordinators reported some sort of contact with parents (contracts, phone, or personal contact). Seven of 9 coordinators reported holding parent awareness meetings. None held parent support groups.

*School Climate Case Study Results*

In addition to analyzing each component of IMPACT implementation individually across schools, as we have done throughout the report thus far, we also sought to gain a thorough understanding of how the components functioned together at each school as a part of the school climate. As stated earlier in this report, the presence of a positive school climate is important for the successful implementation of schoolwide programs.

Eight of our 10 sample schools were included in the case study analyses. Two schools were not included because there was not enough data from those schools to form an accurate overall impression of the school climate. All relevant data were used in creating the case studies, including facilitator, coordinator, administrator, and student

interviews; coordinator surveys; observation fieldnotes and reflective notes; school reflective notes; and call logs. It should be stated at the outset that the case studies are limited to the various types of information we gathered during data collection. The case studies are not exhaustive and cannot be expected to perfectly represent the school. However, they provide valuable insight regarding the various aspects of the school climate as it pertains to IMPACT.

We considered the following aspects of school climate in our case studies: support and communication among IMPACT staff, involvement and awareness activities, integration of the program into the school structure, teacher buy-in, administrator support, student awareness and support, and program stability. These categories have been identified in various research literature (e.g., Greenberg, et al., 2005; Ringeisen, Henderson, & Hoagwood, 2003) as important aspects of school climate. We analyzed the quality of each of these characteristics at each school by examining all data sources that contained information on each characteristic in order to come to reliable and meaningful conclusions (a process called “triangulation”). For example, for some schools, evidence of teacher buy-in might be present in the administrator, coordinator, and facilitator interviews as well as the observation fieldnotes and reflective notes. In this case, when analyzing teacher buy-in, we examined each of these documents in order to gain an overall impression of the teacher-buy in at that school. We engaged in this same process for all the other characteristics of school climate. We then synthesized the findings for each characteristic in order to form an overall impression of the climate at each school. Each school was found to fall into one of the following categories: *slightly conducive*, *moderately conducive*, or *mostly conducive* to successful IMPACT implementation.

The analysis of the school case studies revealed that 2 schools had climates that were only *slightly conducive* to the successful implementation of IMPACT. There also were 4 schools that were found to be *moderately conducive* to successful IMPACT implementation. Finally, 2 schools in our sample had climates that were *mostly conducive* to the successful implementation of IMPACT.

*Schools That Were Slightly Conducive to Successful IMPACT Implementation.*  
The schools that were *slightly conducive* had several weak elements as well as a few stronger ones. One of the most significant shortcomings of both schools’ IMPACT

programs was the lack of support provided by the coordinator. Since the coordinator is the organizer and leader of IMPACT, his/her role is crucial to the program. Providing feedback, consultation, and support to teachers is associated with successful program implementation (Gottfredson, Gottfredson, & Hybl, 1993). At both schools, some of the facilitators did not feel well supported by the coordinator. There also appeared to be little communication between the coordinator and the facilitators, and most facilitators did not meet with coordinators during the school year. The few facilitators who met with their coordinator did so only twice. At one of the schools, the coordinator was not on the same track as the facilitators, which made communication more difficult. There was also no core team at one school, and at the other, the coordinator did not seem to be aware of what the core team was.

The coordinator at one of the *slightly conducive* schools did not know how many staff at his school were trained in IMPACT, which provided additional evidence of poor communication. This coordinator also stated that he ran nearly 80% of the groups at his school. He later complained of being overwhelmed with his responsibilities. However, if he had increased the communication with other IMPACT-trained staff, he may have been able to have more facilitators conduct groups, thus easing some of his own burden and allowing him to devote more time to other IMPACT activities. In addition, IMPACT guidelines state that each coordinator may only facilitate two groups each semester per period off. Therefore, he facilitated more groups than was allowed.

Making all school staff aware of a program and promoting their involvement is an important factor in establishing acceptance of the program (Shamai & Coombs, 1992). Although the coordinators at the *slightly conducive* schools attempted to promote awareness and involvement of the program via presentations, meetings, handouts, and other activities, low teacher buy-in remained, which indicated that the coordinators' efforts were not entirely successful. One facilitator commented,

A lot of teachers think that these groups are a stupid way that [students] get out of class, so there needs to be more to talk about as a school, you know teenage psychology, instead of just ignoring it and assuming that it is not as important as curriculum.

Additionally, students participating in the program did not exhibit high levels of awareness about the program and its goals. For example, during an interview, one facilitator stated,

...The group had such low buy-in, like they didn't know who [the coordinator] was, or how they got into IMPACT, I mean you saw, they really were not into it, I was under the impression that it was voluntary because there was only one mandatory person on my list, so I didn't know why they were so resistant, there were like two of them that really liked it and if I had my choice I would have been like you two let's do a group, because that would have been really productive, but the rest of them were like I don't know why I'm in IMPACT, dah, dah, dah.

At the *slightly conducive* schools, the IMPACT program did not appear to be well integrated into the school structure. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, many teachers did not buy into the program, which prevented successful integration. Also, at one of the schools, a facilitator mentioned that the school had additional support services, including Healthy Start. However, there was no mention from any of the IMPACT staff about whether IMPACT was being integrated with those additional resources.

The *slightly conducive* schools' IMPACT programs also exhibited some instability. Facilitators as well as students consistently did not show up for the observed group meetings on time. The observer also noted that in one school new students were continuously added to some of the groups, which potentially disrupted the groups' cohesiveness. Additionally, student attendance was not consistent. In fact, at one of the schools, a group had to be closed due to low attendance.

As stated earlier in this report, administrative support is an important factor in the success of school-based programs. The administrators at these schools appeared to provide mediocre support for the program, and the support was mostly organizational. The support took the form of assisting with scheduling, helping the coordinator meet deadlines, and summoning students. The administrators also provided a location for IMPACT pre-assessments and storing materials.

Despite the numerous shortcomings of the climate variables at this school, there were some areas in which the climate was somewhat conducive to successful program

implementation. One such variable was facilitator buy-in for the program. In order for a program to succeed, program staff must be aware of a need for change and committed to bringing about that change (Greenberg, Domitrovich, Graczyk, & Zins (2005). The facilitators and the coordinator believed that the program was valuable and effective. One coordinator commented,

Well, I would guess, some of the feedback that I've gotten from students who have graduated, in fact one of them actually became an honor student [...] and I hear from other students, a lot of former students come back and they praise the time that they've had to be in a group process and how it has helped them and they'll use those strategies in their own lives.

Additionally, at both of the schools, most of the students who were interviewed supported the program and believed it helped them. One student stated,

Well I think I have more confidence; I have more friends. And I don't [get] so mad easily no more. [...] I would really, um, I would want to say, like well since everything, I think everything is like helping. I learned a lot from IMPACT, and I think I got better at it.

*Schools that Were Moderately Conducive to Successful IMPACT Implementation.* At most schools in our sample, the climate was *moderately conducive* to the successful implementation of IMPACT. The climate at these schools was characterized by both positive and negative elements. At these schools, the coordinator generally exhibited moderately strong leadership. There generally was more frequent and higher quality communication than at the *slightly conducive* schools. Some of these schools also appeared to have a functioning core team. Most facilitators felt adequately supported by the coordinator but some felt that improvements could be made. Generally the support provided by the coordinator was organizational (e.g., providing materials, providing help with summonses) as well as emotional. For example, when one facilitator was asked what type of support she received, she stated, "Just always being there if I [had] a question um, very, very encouraging when I thought that things might not have gone so well." In addition to providing support, the coordinator made attempts to promote IMPACT involvement and awareness to staff, students, and parents via a variety of means.

However, as with the *slightly conducive* schools, some IMPACT staff felt that these attempts at promoting the program were not entirely successful.

The involvement level of the administrators at the *moderately conducive* schools generally was moderate. At most of these schools, the support was organizational in nature (e.g., providing a space for IMPACT materials and pre-assessments, providing coverage for facilitators, assisting with paperwork). Generally there was also evidence that the administrator supported the program and believed that it worked.

Non-IMPACT teacher buy-in was a problem at these schools, even though the IMPACT staff generally showed strong buy-in. The issue of removing students from their classes was still a point of contention for some teachers, and there were many who did not see the value of the program. This issue was cited by IMPACT staff as one of the primary reasons for the difficulty with integrating IMPACT into the school structure.

In general, the stability of the IMPACT program at the *moderately conducive* schools was equal to or better than the *slightly conducive* schools. However, student tardiness and inconsistency in attendance was still a problem.

*Schools that Were Mostly Conducive to Successful IMPACT Implementation.*  
There also were two schools where the climate was *mostly conducive* to the successful implementation of IMPACT. At these schools, most of the elements of school climate were either moderate or strong. What generally set these schools apart from the schools that received lower ratings was the support and accessibility provided by the coordinator, the communication among IMPACT staff, and the integration of the program into the schools' structure.

The coordinators at the *mostly conducive* schools provided extensive support to their facilitators, as one coordinator stated:

Basically I put together a folder for their IMPACT group, it's got their curriculum, their register, summonses, class schedules, and notes on particular students, anything they need to know. I contact the parents for them and I notify the kids when their group will begin. Whenever there is a problem in terms of getting parent permission, I am always a last ditch effort to call and try to convince the parents [...] I meet with [the new facilitators] periodically to discuss how their group is going.

These coordinators also were highly accessible to the facilitators. One facilitator commented about her coordinator, “She’s always keeping us informed, and when we talk to her about a student, she is always available.” The coordinators also met with their facilitators frequently, and the meetings were often of an informal nature. One facilitator stated,

Well, I wouldn’t call them formal meetings but I do meet with her. You know, she’ll stop by my classroom or I’ll call her. [...] I would say per semester, five or six [times] per semester. And we write notes to each other too, so we stay connected.

Only one of the *mostly conducive* schools had an official core team, but the school that did not have an official core team still engaged in regular meetings among IMPACT staff.

Coordinators at both schools appeared to be committed to promoting the awareness and involvement of students, staff, and parents at their schools. Awareness activities for students included PA or bulletin announcements, classroom presentations, articles in the student newspaper, and Education Theater Company performances. Staff awareness took the form of presentations at faculty meetings. A teacher at one school mentioned, “...When we have faculty meetings the coordinator always talks about the fact that she can pass out forms for us to, for our students; and she explains what qualifies a child for IMPACT, what kinds of groups there are.” Parent awareness activities occurred in terms of activities for Back to School Night, Open House, and PHBAO (Predominantly Hispanic, Black, Asian, and Other) Conferencing.

The efforts to promote IMPACT may have contributed to the generally positive teacher buy-in that was exhibited at both schools. As one coordinator stated,

I think getting teacher buy-in, that is always a tough one and we have done well with it the past few years, so getting teacher buy-in, I get a lot of teacher referrals now, umm, getting a good core team, really narrowing it down to a good core team, umm, and I do a teacher open house thing, it is good, but it is just small, it is the beginning of something really great.

The IMPACT program was fairly well integrated into the structure at both of the schools. The administrator at one school mentioned that the program had become known

schoolwide as a place where students with social-emotional concerns could go for help:

I think most of the faculty knows the positive results, they know, [the coordinator] has explained to them what IMPACT is and how they would make a referral and it has been a part of [our school] for so long that most people just kind of know and expect it and when they come across a kid who is in distress in some kind of way, they just kind of know that it is there, and they can easily avail themselves or the students of the services.

The coordinators at both of the *mostly conducive* schools also appeared to be aware of the other mental health resources available at the school, and attempted to utilize them in conjunction with IMPACT. For example, one coordinator mentioned that she invited a representative from a mental health organization to speak to students. Additionally, several facilitators mentioned having co-facilitators from outside facilities.

Interestingly, at both of the *mostly conducive* schools, the students rotated periods each week for IMPACT. This was different from the majority of the schools with lower ratings, in which students were removed from the same class each week. This appeared to be an important factor in achieving teacher buy-in and successfully integrating the program, as stated by one facilitator:

Yes, we meet on a weekly basis and the kids know it's every single week. And um, it's integrated well because we'll meet you know like third period one week, fourth period the next week and keep alternating. That way they're missing one hour of class every two weeks for that particular teacher. So the teacher doesn't mind, the student doesn't fall behind. [...] And then the teachers are very supportive because of that too, it's not a problem for the teacher.

There were a few drawbacks to this approach, however. One was that students sometimes became confused about what period their IMPACT group took place. At the beginning of one group meeting, the facilitator asked, "Where are the students? I don't know because of change of schedule and the different room. I'm not sure how many people are coming." Another problem was that facilitators sometimes arrived late to their groups (although this was only mentioned for one of the schools).

The two *mostly conducive* schools had varying levels of administrator support. At

one school, the administrator was significantly involved with the program, while at another, the coordinator mentioned that the administrator did not know much of what was going on in IMPACT and left nearly all of the responsibility for IMPACT to the coordinator. This lack of administrator involvement could partially explain why this school had fewer schoolwide activities to promote IMPACT than did the other school.

Both of the *mostly conducive* schools exhibited only moderate stability in terms of their IMPACT groups. As mentioned earlier, students often were tardy for their groups. Attendance also was not consistent. Both of these problems seemed to occur across the majority of the schools in our sample. Therefore, this issue should be addressed in order to insure that students are able to reap all the benefits of the program.

The buy-in from IMPACT staff and students was high at both schools, which undoubtedly contributed to the success in promoting a positive climate at these schools. One facilitator stated,

I think our school [IMPACT] program is a model program. It's one of the three best things about our school in general. I'm really proud about our program, our facilitator is wonderful and the people that have been trained and been working in IMPACT really make a difference.

The IMPACT students who were interviewed were generally supportive of the program as well. Students were aware of the groups' goals, and several students felt that the program helped them accomplish their goals. One student stated,

Through the years that I've been in IMPACT, umm, I've found where I stand in society and how to deal with my problems with my parents and home life...I've met new people who are just like me and have problems just like I do and I've gained knowledge on how to deal with certain situations.

When the qualities of a positive school climate are present, programs are more likely to be successful. Ideally, all IMPACT schools would be characterized by high levels of support for program coordinators and facilitators. Administrators would be aware of the goals and activities of the program and would be active participants in the program's implementation. The core team would meet regularly, and communication among all staff involved in the program would take place frequently. The program would be well integrated into the schools, and would make use of other mental health resources

available at the school. Staff, students, and parents would be highly aware of and involved in the program. Additionally, non-IMPACT teachers would support the program and release students to their groups in a timely manner. Finally, IMPACT groups as well as IMPACT staff would exhibit high stability. Although none of the schools in our sample met this ideal, we can learn from the positive and negative aspects of each type of school and use them to work toward building a school climate that is more conducive to successfully implementing IMPACT.

### *Successes and Challenges of IMPACT*

#### *Administrator Perceptions*

Administrators were asked about the successes and challenges they experienced while implementing IMPACT. Among the 6 administrators who spoke of successes, the most frequently cited successes were the organization of the program (2 of 6), and increasing student participation and/or attendance (2 of 6).

Regarding challenges, the most commonly mentioned problem was low student awareness and/or support for IMPACT (3 of 6). Other challenges included choosing/finding teachers to train (2 of 6), transitions of new staff (2 of 6), and not having enough space to hold groups (2 of 6).

#### *Coordinator Perceptions*

In addition to administrators, coordinators were also asked about their perceptions of successes and challenges of IMPACT. Of the 8 coordinators who were interviewed, 5 felt that the increased level of support from school administrators and staff contributed to the success of the program. Three coordinators felt that increased support from students contributed to the successful implementation of IMPACT.

When asked about the challenges to program implementation, three coordinators named time constraints (i.e., having to start IMPACT too soon after training, not having enough time to meet with students). Three coordinators stated that a lack of support (e.g., from previous coordinator, teachers, and/or parents) made implementation a challenge. One coordinator stated, "I think convincing the parents of the kids that need it most, to let their kids do it is always a big one." There were also two coordinators who named student absences and/or lack of student participation as a challenge.

### *Facilitator Perceptions*

More than half of the facilitators who were interviewed (52%) reported that the greatest success of IMPACT was providing students with an opportunity and a safe space for sharing their feelings and discussing their problems (Table 22). Some facilitators described even the most guarded students opening up gradually over the course of the IMPACT session. As one facilitator reported,

One of the greatest successes was seeing at least two of the students open up throughout. You could definitely see the trust barriers and the walls that the students had built, and just watching them slowly come down. . . when I first started, I thought they may never come down.

Some facilitators reported that in general, IMPACT provided a safe place for students to share, and others discussed individual students and how they had changed throughout the duration of the session. As one facilitator described, “One student when she came to me was real bitter like wouldn’t open up at all, but towards the end she opened up and finally smiled... that was like a real dramatic change...”

Forty-four percent of the facilitators reported that an important success of IMPACT was that students built better relationships, whether it was with other students or friends, with their teachers, facilitators, or family members. As one facilitator reported, “I’ve had teachers ask me to speak to the students if they are having a problem, so the fact that the teachers and the students feel that there is a relationship there is important.” Another describes a success as “the connection that had grown between the kids themselves, especially in the last three or four sessions...They became extremely connected to each other.” Another success included better personal and academic choices, such as improving effort and academic marks, pulling away from gang activity, and staying sober (reported by 32% of the facilitators).

Some facilitators (27%) also perceived improved emotional well-being as a success of IMPACT. Other facilitators mentioned that students were more focused in school, and that students seemed happier and less isolated.

Learning and applying IMPACT skills and strategies were also mentioned by 20% of the facilitators as benefits to students. Examples provided by facilitators were:

students learned about the grief process and that everyone reacts to grief differently, they learned what to expect from depression, and learned how to deal with anger.

Other facilitators reported that they saw positive feedback from students as a success of IMPACT (20%). One facilitator reported that a student told him he looked forward to IMPACT sessions. Another reported that former IMPACT students who had graduated from his high school came back and talked to younger students about the benefits of “the time that they’ve had to be in a group process and how it has helped them and they’ll use those strategies in their own lives.”

Table 22

Successes as reported by facilitators

| Successes   | Number of Facilitators<br>(N = 25) | Percent |
|---|------------------------------------|---------|
| Provided a safe space for sharing                               | 13                                 | 52      |
| Better relationships  | 11                                 | 44      |
| Better personal/academic choices                                | 8                                  | 32      |
| Overall improved emotional/ behavioral well-being               | 7                                  | 28      |
| Learn to apply IMPACT strategies/skills (e.g., problem solving) | 5                                  | 20      |
| Positive feedback from students                                 | 5                                  | 20      |

Note: Respondents could have provided multiple responses. Therefore, the percentages may not total 100%.

The challenge reported most often (44% of facilitators) related to students’ poor attendance and/or tardiness to sessions. Facilitators found it frustrating that not all students attended each session. In most groups, a core of students was present at most or all sessions, but there were always students who did not attend consistently. Thirty-two percent of facilitators named several logistical challenges. One challenge, which was associated with attendance, was teachers not releasing students from their regular classes to attend IMPACT. Even teachers who believed in the program sometimes did not allow students to miss class to go to their IMPACT session. Time was another logistical concern. Class and school scheduling, especially around testing time, sometimes made it

difficult for facilitators to spend enough time with IMPACT students, particularly since some students' attendance was already inconsistent.

Another challenge was facilitators' difficulty with getting students to share and participate (20%). As one facilitator reported, "it takes a long time for some of these kids to trust. Sometimes it isn't until their second year that they're in the program that they really start to open up." Some facilitators reported that a challenge was their own lack of training, skill, or expertise regarding how to address students' problems. For example, one facilitator mentioned being unsure as to how much to probe when a student is discussing a loss in the family. Another challenge to facilitators was when there was an issue being dealt with in a group that was too close to home for them – something they had experienced themselves, e.g. losing a sibling or drug addiction.

Other challenges included student behavior (e.g., disruptive or unfocused), limitations of the curriculum, lack of resources, and not seeing an improvement in students' behavior after IMPACT.

Table 23

Challenges as reported by facilitators

| Challenges                                      | Number of Facilitators<br>(N = 25) | Percent |
|---|------------------------------------|---------|
| Students' tardiness/lack of attendance          | 11                                 | 44      |
| Logistical problems                             | 8                                  | 32      |
| Getting students to open up, trust, participate | 5                                  | 20      |
| Facilitator problems                            | 5                                  | 20      |
| Student behavior                                | 5                                  | 20      |
| Problems with curriculum                        | 4                                  | 16      |
| Lack of resources                               | 4                                  | 16      |
| Not seeing improvement in student behavior      | 4                                  | 16      |

Note: Respondents could have provided multiple responses. Therefore, the percentages may not total 100%.

## *Attendance*

Since student attendance was commonly reported by IMPACT staff as a challenge to IMPACT implementation, we asked coordinators if they had any difficulty with students attending IMPACT groups. Over two-thirds of the coordinators (20 of 27) indicated that attendance was a problem at their schools. Half of the coordinators (8 of 16) indicated that they addressed this problem by reminding students via summons slips or reminders sent to their classrooms. Other coordinators (5 of 16) indicated that they referred students with attendance problems to the school administrators. Three coordinators stated that they met with students individually in order to stress the importance of attendance.

## *Instructional Quality*

As mentioned previously, ESGs are not intended to provide students with therapeutic intervention. Rather, ESGs are a means to provide information regarding subjects such as ATOD and to facilitate students' use of social-emotional skills. Therefore, in addition to providing students with emotional support, group facilitators are expected to provide students with social-emotional skills instruction and ATOD-related information, if applicable. It is for these reasons that we decided to look at the quality of instruction in the ESGs.

Observations were conducted in 30 ESGs during Spring 2006, as Table 24 shows. Twenty-eight groups were observed for two days, and two groups were only observed for one day.

Table 24

### IMPACT groups observed

| Group Type   | Number of Groups (N = 30) |
|--------------|---------------------------|
| ATOD         | 8                         |
| CPG          | 3                         |
| Crisis       | 14                        |
| Grief Crisis | 4                         |
| IDIG         | 1                         |

The sessions were recorded using fieldnotes. Trained experts analyzed the fieldnotes using a rubric to judge the quality of instruction on the following dimensions: a) clarity of goals, b) alignment of the stated goals and the goals of the observed lesson, c) lesson implementation, d) student engagement, e) student participation, f) interaction, and g) group atmosphere.

The *Goals* scale focuses on the clarity of the instructional goal stated by facilitators regarding the observed lesson's learning objectives. The goal was told to the observer prior to the lesson. The *Alignment* scale rates how closely the stated instructional goals correspond with the goals stated in the curriculum for the corresponding IMPACT lesson. *Classroom management* refers to the overall organization of the activities during the session which facilitate student acquisition of social-emotional skills. *Student engagement* is a measure of the overall proportion of students on task during the session. A student may be on task (e.g., paying attention) while not participating actively in the discussion. *Student participation* is a measure of individual students' participation in discussion. *Interaction* refers to the level of exchange of ideas between facilitator and students and among students during the session. *Group atmosphere* is an overall rating of the atmosphere of safety and support that has been established in the group. The *Goals* and *Alignment* scale consist of a 3-point rubric that ranges from 1 (low) to 3 (high). The remaining scales are on a 4-point rubric.<sup>5</sup> The following pages contain an analysis of content covered in the groups followed by a more detailed look at each of the aforementioned scales.

*Content.* High quality social-emotional skills instruction includes the following core competencies: a) self-awareness, b) social awareness, c) responsible decision-making, d) self-management, and e) relationship management. At least one core competency was observed being taught in all of the observations.

*Connecting IMPACT to academics.* One effective SEL lesson implementation technique is making an explicit connection between social-emotional skills and academic achievement. We observed facilitators mentioning academics in 27 of 58 lessons.

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<sup>5</sup> The goals-related scales are on a 3-point rubric due to the fact that there was not enough difference between the highest rating and the middle rating to justify creating another point on the rubric which would create a 4-point scale.

However, they only made an explicit connection between the IMPACT lesson and academic achievement 8 of 27 times. For example, a facilitator discussed alcohol usage with a student:

F: Is there other things you could have drank?

S: Water.

F: Let's be real. Water doesn't taste as good. Try some virgin drinks, without the alcohol. I drink virgin drinks all the time. You need to get out of the gratification point and see what it will be costing you in the end. Since you're going to high school, I want you to follow up, so you won't fall into the same pattern. I want you to go to high school and finish. And if you keep drinking, you won't be able to.

This facilitator explicitly made the connection between alcohol use and the potentially detrimental effects it may have on the student's academic achievement.

*Clarity of goals.* According to the Institute for Learning (IFL), students must be explicitly told what they are to learn if they are expected to learn at high levels (Resnick, 1999). Therefore, it follows that teachers must be aware of and be able to articulate goals to students. Facilitators presented students with goals in only 4 of 58 observations.

A facilitator must clearly have an instructional goal in mind in order to effectively implement a lesson and provide students with learning goals. It is for these reasons that we rated the clarity of the goals facilitators stated to the observer prior to the lesson. Table 25 below details facilitators' learning goals ratings. The most common goal received a rating of 3 out of a total possible score of 3. An example of this type of goal statement is, "Finding out about behaviors and triggers for alcohol and tobacco [use]. Go through different scenarios to recognize alcohol and tobacco [use]." This goal received a rating of 3 because the sub-goals are clear and specific.

Table 25

Overall ratings of goals and alignment

| Rating   | Observations (N = 52) |           |           |
|--|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|
|  | 1                     | 2         | 3         |
| Clarity of goals for student learning                            | 4                     | 19        | <b>29</b> |
| Alignment between facilitator and IMPACT curriculum lesson goals | 8                     | <b>21</b> | 16        |

Table 25 also demonstrates the alignment between the facilitators' goals and the lesson goals. The most frequent rating was 2 out of 3. The following example illustrates this rating. In the previous section, the teacher's goal as stated to the observer prior to the lesson was, "Finding out about behaviors and triggers for alcohol and tobacco [use]. Go through different scenarios to recognize alcohol and tobacco [use]." The actual lesson goals in the IMPACT curriculum were: a) to help students establish a sense of belonging and trust, b) to help students recognize the stages of use, and c) to help students identify exactly in which stage of drug use they are. The facilitator's goals were only somewhat aligned with the IMPACT lesson goals.

*Classroom management.* Classroom management is the overall organization of the instructional activities so that learning is maximized and the amount of lost time is minimized. Executive functions (e.g., creating norms and roles, focusing on goals, managing time) are those facilitator behaviors which provide structure to the group and facilitate lesson implementation (DeLucia-Waack, 2006). Executive functions have been found to have a curvilinear relationship with successful group outcomes. This means if a facilitator engages in too much or too little of these behaviors, positive group outcomes are compromised (DeLucia-Waack, 2006). Effective implementation will result in increased student engagement rates (students actively involved in the lesson) and decreased student off-task behavior (Borich and Martin, 1999).

Table 26 below shows that most facilitators received a rating of 3 out of 4 with respect to classroom management. For example, a facilitator received this rating for the following reasons. The facilitator was effective at engaging the students. However, the

facilitator ran out of time and was unable to do a closing. Consistent with the strong classroom management observed in the groups, student engagement and participation was rated as either a 3 or 4 out of 4 in almost all or all of the observations. For the most part, students in these classes were on-task and participated regularly during activities.

Table 26

Overall ratings of classroom management, student engagement and student participation

| Rating                |                        | 1 | 2  | 3         | 4         |
|-----------------------|------------------------|---|----|-----------|-----------|
|                       | Number of Observations |   |    |           |           |
| Classroom management  | 56                     | 4 | 15 | <b>28</b> | 9         |
| Student engagement    | 37                     |   |    | 7         | <b>30</b> |
| Student participation | 55                     | 3 | 11 | <b>22</b> | 19        |

*Interaction.* The learning process has been said to be a social process (Wilkinson & Silliman, 2000). Facilitators and students interact with one another to further the understanding of the students and oftentimes the facilitator. Discussion is the primary means by which socially-constructed learning occurs. With respect to ESGs, quality discussion has been shown to provide students with the chance to participate in meaningful discussions about what they have experienced during group sessions. Active participation in discussion enhances student conceptual understandings (Mazzoni & Gambrell, 2003). It is through discussion that students are able to practice expressing themselves coherently. Students are also able to create new understandings by incorporating other students' knowledge into their own prior knowledge. As important as facilitator-to-student interaction during discussions may be, student-to-student interaction is of even greater value. While providing models of good discussion techniques, facilitators should gradually turn over the responsibility of leading discussions to the students. It is by gradually handing off the responsibility for discussion from the facilitator to the students that the greatest amount of student learning occurs (Mazzoni &

Gambrell, 2003). Processing is an essential element of effective group discussion. According to DeLucia-Waack (2006), Morran and Nitza describe processing as capitalizing on significant happenings in the here-and-now interactions of the group to help members reflect on the meaning of their experience, better understanding their own thoughts, feelings, and actions, and generalize what is learned to their life outside of the group. (p.345)

Processing questions facilitate students' meaning-making process by requiring them to reflect upon their reactions to activities, learn about themselves, and apply their learning to their real lives (DeLucia-Waack, 2006). According to DeLucia-Waack (2006), research has indicated a "positive relationship between higher levels of group processing and greater outcome gains related to both group productivity and individual member achievement." (p. 75) Processing was rarely (7 of 58) observed during group sessions. The following example details a facilitator's attempt to process an activity. In the following exchange, a facilitator asked processing questions to help students identify what they learned from participating in the day's activities. They completed worksheets pertaining to stress and identifying personal support systems.

F: Well, we did all three worksheets for today. Take a minute to think about what's one thing you can take away from today. Is there anything we learned?

S1: Different ways to deal with stress?

F: Okay, good.

S2: I got more people to count on than I thought, when I did this worksheet.

F: Excellent!

The facilitator prompted students to identify what they learned from the group session. However, the facilitator could have pursued this topic with more depth. For example, he could have had the student who learned different ways to deal with stress give an example of a coping skill that he used. Or, the facilitator could have asked the student to explain why it's important to know how to deal with stress in a positive manner. Given that processing has been associated with positive outcomes, facilitators should engage their students in this activity more often.

The table below details the most common ratings of Interaction (Table 27). The

majority of observations received a rating of 2 out of 4. This level of discussion is characterized by structured activities, with students participating in teacher-led discussions (Tobler et al., 2000). As previously discussed, quality discussion in which students actively participate facilitates student learning. IMPACT students would be best served if their teachers could engage them in student-directed discourse more frequently.

Table 27

Overall ratings of interaction

| Observations (N = 54) |   |           |    |   |
|-----------------------|---|-----------|----|---|
| Rating                | 1 | 2         | 3  | 4 |
| Interaction level     | 1 | <b>33</b> | 16 | 4 |

*Atmosphere.* Effective and lasting academic and social-emotional learning occurs in groups that are characterized by a caring and safe atmosphere in which high expectations are expressed (Zins, et. al., 2004). In this type of atmosphere, students and the facilitator are accepting of each other’s ideas and values, participants respond to each other’s comments appropriately, and flow of conversation is natural and comfortable. The table below details the most common ratings of atmosphere (Table 28). There was an almost equal number of observations that received a 3 as received a 4. An example of an observation that received a rating of a 3 was one in which there was a fairly positive atmosphere in which the students regularly participated. A student even asked how the facilitator was when he walked in. However, the students were not comfortable enough to share very personal information about themselves. An example of an observation that was rated as a 4 also had a predominately positive atmosphere. The students openly shared very personal information about their lives and often volunteered information without being directly solicited by the facilitator.

Table 28

Overall ratings of atmosphere

| Rating                                      | Observations (N = 54) |    |           |    |
|---|-----------------------|----|-----------|----|
|   | 1                     | 2  | 3         | 4  |
| Degree of supportive and caring environment | 1                     | 10 | <b>23</b> | 20 |

*Summary.* Overall, with the exception of level of classroom interaction, IMPACT ESGs received ratings on the higher end of the scales. This means that in a typical ESG, the facilitator clearly stated lesson goals to the observer and the goals were somewhat aligned with the IMPACT curriculum goals. However, facilitators rarely provided students with instructional goals. The facilitator managed the classroom so that learning was maximized and correspondingly, student engagement and participation was high. The quality of discussion was generally low, with facilitators being the primary leaders of discussion and student-to-student interaction rarely occurring. Furthermore, processing, an activity that has been shown to facilitate the learning and application of social-emotional skills, rarely occurred. Finally, a caring and supportive atmosphere in which high expectations were expressed characterized the groups.

### *Curriculum Fidelity*

In addition to indicators of instructional quality, the level of fidelity with which IMPACT facilitators implemented its curriculum was examined. The following pages will detail how closely facilitators followed the curriculum.

Before we begin to discuss fidelity, we must discuss facilitator buy-in with respect to the IMPACT curriculum. Hunter and Elias (as cited in Fagan & Mihalic, 2003) assert that since facilitators are the individuals most directly responsible for putting programs into practice, their buy-in is crucial to successful implementation. We asked all facilitators how well they felt the curriculum met the needs of their students. Sixty-three percent of facilitators felt that the curriculum met their students' needs *very well* or *well* (see Table 29). Correspondingly, we observed facilitators using the required curriculum in the majority (48 of 57) of observations.

Table 29

How well curriculum met students' needs

| Needs Met     | Number of Facilitators <sup>a</sup><br>(N = 128) | Percent |
|---------------|--|---------|
| Very well     | 37   | 29      |
| Well          | 44   | 34      |
| Somewhat      | 43   | 34      |
| Not very well | 4  | 3       |

<sup>a</sup>Facilitators were asked this question for each group we observed. A facilitator may have been observed facilitating multiple groups. Therefore, a particular facilitator may be represented more than once, for different groups. The responses of facilitators who were surveyed but not observed are also included in this table.

Despite the fact that most facilitators felt that the curriculum met their students' needs *very well* or *well* and were observed using the appropriate materials, most (27 of 28) of them reported that they modified the curriculum in some way. This is not necessarily a negative finding, as research has suggested that curriculum modification is acceptable (Pentz et al., 1990). The litmus test for curriculum modification is whether the modification meets the students' needs. As a proxy for measuring whether curriculum modifications met students' needs, we were able to determine whether the modifications aligned with the goals of the observed lessons. In order to determine whether a lesson was modified, we compared the observed lessons to the corresponding lesson in the IMPACT curriculum. A lesson was considered modified when a facilitator conducted an activity that was stated in the lesson plan, but adapted it in some manner. A lesson was considered supplemented when a facilitator conducted an activity that was not noted in the lesson plan. If the modified or supplemented activities during the observed lesson ostensibly met the goals of the corresponding lesson in the curriculum, we considered the activities aligned. We observed facilitators modifying and/or supplementing 32 of 58 lessons. We found that 81% of modified lessons aligned with the lesson goals (see Table 30). We also found that at 55% alignment, supplemented lessons aligned with the lesson goals to a lesser extent than modified lessons. When facilitators modified their lessons they tended to do so in ways that coincided with the intended goals of the curriculum.

Whereas, when they supplemented their lessons with their own material, sometimes they pushed out the intended goals.

Table 30

Alignment of curriculum modifications to corresponding lesson goals

|                    | Number of Observations <sup>a</sup><br>(N = 16) | Percent |                        | Number of Observations <sup>a</sup><br>(N = 22) | Percent |
|--------------------|---|---------|------------------------|---|---------|
| Modified aligned   | 13  | 81      | Supplemented aligned   | 12  | 55      |
| Modified unaligned | 3   | 19      | Supplemented unaligned | 14  | 64      |

<sup>a</sup>An observed lesson could have contained multiple modified and/or supplemented activities. Therefore, percentages may not equal 100%.

In order to evaluate the level of fidelity with which facilitators implemented the curricula, a team (which consisted of project directors and research assistants) identified each lesson observed being taught. Once the lessons were determined, observations were evaluated with respect to proportion of elements covered during the lesson. Every lesson is comprised of several activities and each activity is comprised of several components. If a facilitator attempted a component of an activity, he or she was considered as having completed that component. We then calculated a proportion for each observed lesson by dividing the number of components attempted by the total number of components in the lesson. Analysis revealed that, across all types of IMPACT groups, 66% of the essential elements of the lesson were covered during instruction. We anticipated that curriculum fidelity would positively be related to buy-in with regards to curriculum. This means that we postulated that facilitators who thought that the curriculum met students' needs would implement the curriculum with greater fidelity than facilitators who did not feel the curriculum met student's needs. Nevertheless, correlational analysis revealed that there was no relationship between facilitators' ratings of how well the curriculum met students' needs and the level of fidelity with which they implemented the curricula.

*Sessions.* With the exception of IDIG, an IMPACT group curriculum was designed to be taught in 10 to 12 sessions or lessons. Slightly fewer than half (46%) of facilitators covered all of the lessons (see Table 31). This means that many students in the

IMPACT program did not receive the full dosage of the curriculum. One could speculate that being exposed to less than the intended amount of content may diminish the effectiveness of the curriculum in particular and the IMPACT program itself.

Table 31

Lesson coverage

| Lessons        | Number of Facilitators <sup>a</sup><br>(N = 116) | Percent |
|----------------|--|---------|
| All            | 53   | 46      |
| More than half | 38   | 33      |
| About half     | 17   | 15      |
| A few          | 7  | 6       |
| None           | 1  | 1       |

<sup>a</sup>Facilitators were asked this question for each group we observed. A facilitator may have been observed facilitating multiple groups. Therefore, a particular facilitator may be represented more than once, for different groups. The responses of facilitators who were surveyed but not observed are also included in this table.

*Suggestions for Curriculum Improvement.* We also asked facilitators what suggestions they had to improve the IMPACT curriculum. The top four requested modifications are listed in Table 32.

Table 32

Curriculum improvement suggestions

| Suggestions  | Number of Facilitators<br>(N = 63) |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Make curriculum more hands-on/interactive/facilitate student discussion  | 22                                 |
| Make curriculum more relevant/current (e.g., updated ATOD information, culturally relevant scenarios)                      | 21                                 |
| Add specific lessons (e.g., anger management, self-esteem, increased academic focus, opening/closing/follow-up activities) | 10                                 |
| Give facilitators a choice of which activities to use in a lesson  | 10                                 |

The most frequently requested modification was to make the curriculum more interactive (22%). An almost equal number (21%) of facilitators suggested that the

curriculum needed to be updated. As one facilitator stated, “[You need to] update [the curriculum] with current statistics; add [a] curriculum that deals with popular inhalants and crystal meth.” Another facilitator teacher spoke to the need for increased student interaction and curriculum relevancy

Try to keep it more current, try to make it interactive, some of the Crisis materials are scripted, they are like little skits or plays. Sometimes they don’t particularly allow [a] forum for the kids to talk about their particular crisis. It needs to be more personal . . . In order for it to be more personal, it needs to have more open-ended questions, or open-ended materials.

Still another facilitator spoke to the need for students to identify with others who have participated in IMPACT:

“Maybe some more current DVD or video presentations would be helpful to our students. I think seeing ‘real’ students share their pre- and post-IMPACT experiences on a video presentation might make it more believable for them; that IMPACT really helped kids pull through hard times.

Some facilitators (10%) suggested that lessons be added to the curriculum. One facilitator spoke to the need for both an anger management and academic achievement component to the lessons:

A lot of kids have some issues with [anger management]. A second thing is that [there needs to be lessons that focus on] how to motivate kids. I hear a lot of, it’s almost like a mantra in the school about, ‘I’m bored’ or ‘It’s boring’. You know, they can’t really express why they are bored or why they think that school is boring, but they still like to say that it is. If we could have some things in that curriculum that could help them focus on those two issues, I think it would strengthen it. The anger component is in there, it is just not as strong a part.

Another facilitator noted how important it is for the curriculum to facilitate group leaders’ use of techniques such as activating prior knowledge and providing a thematic thread throughout the lessons. She stated, “I would say [you need to add] follow-through activities because the way [the curriculum] is set up, it’s pretty much a one-time shot. But, if kids learned for example a new coping skill, it would be nice if there was some sort of, I mean, I follow up on it anyway, but if it were in the book, that would be even

better.” This facilitator’s suggestion corresponds with research which states that being able to connect new ideas with what is already known enhances student learning (Borich & Martin, 1999). Finally, some (10%) of facilitators stated that the curriculum needs to provide them with activity choices. One facilitator suggested, “Each lesson should have at least three different activities to choose from; which all meet the goal/objective of the lesson.” Another facilitator stressed the need for choices when it comes to meeting the needs of students who have previously attended another IMPACT group, “For repeat students in IMPACT, we need some new alternative lessons.” One facilitator made a suggestion regarding how to go about updating the curriculum, noting the importance of the skills of the facilitator:

Gather a team of veteran and dedicated new coordinators to make suggestions.

Also, don’t reinvent the wheel. If other good curricula exist, obtain the copyright.

The focus should be the facilitation, not the curriculum. A good facilitator can use almost any curriculum.

*Coordinator monitoring of curriculum fidelity.* Our finding that most of the facilitators did not implement the curriculum fully is consistent with the lack of fidelity monitoring as reported by coordinators. Only half of the coordinators who were interviewed (4 of 8) stated that they used a system for determining whether facilitators implemented with high fidelity. For those coordinators who did have a system, the most commonly mentioned system involved informal discussion with the facilitators. One coordinator stated, “Basically they let me know how much of the curriculum they use and how often they let discussions that come up in group guide what they do.”

We also asked coordinators what action they would take if they discovered that a facilitator was not implementing the curriculum with high fidelity. The most common response (3 of 6 coordinators) was that the facilitator would not be asked to facilitate in the future. Two coordinators also mentioned that they would talk to facilitators individually to address the issue.

### *Effectiveness of IMPACT*

In this section, we attempt to characterize the effectiveness of the IMPACT program. We will begin our discussion with a presentation of perceptions of the effectiveness of the IMPACT program and suggestions for program improvement. We

will then discuss student outcomes, namely student interviews, coping vignettes, IPFI, grades, and attendance.

### *Perceptions of Group Effectiveness*

The goal of the IMPACT program is to provide students who are experiencing non-academic difficulties with emotional support and social-emotional skills instruction so that their behavior and academic achievement improves. Therefore, we asked group facilitators whether they noticed changes in their students in four key areas: behavior, academic achievement, coping skills, and problem-solving skills.

*Behavior.* Slightly more than half (62%) of facilitators stated that they noticed a very significant or significant change in their students’ behavior. The most frequent types of change they observed were that students (a) became more open/increased participation in group (11 of 29), (b) reacted better to situations/were less confrontational (6 of 29), (c) became more academically focused/ increased attendance (4 of 29), and (d) became more aware of their own feelings (4 of 29). One facilitator’s comments spoke to a change in student’s use of self-management strategies, “What I noticed was in things that we talked about, like as far as confronting issues in their life like in a nonviolent way like in a more mature way. They talked about you know not getting into fights and actually being assertive, being more honest with [their] parents.”

Table 33

#### Change in behavior

| Degree of Change | Number of Facilitators <sup>a</sup><br>(N = 116) |
|------------------|--|
| Very significant | 12   |
| Significant      | 50   |
| Moderate         | 44   |
| Slight           | 10   |
| None             | 0  |

<sup>a</sup>Facilitators were asked this question for each group we observed. A facilitator may have been observed facilitating multiple groups. Therefore, a particular facilitator may be represented more than once, for different groups. The responses of facilitators who were surveyed but not observed are also included in this table.

*Academic achievement.* Only 29% of facilitators stated that they noticed a very significant or significant change in their students' achievement. The most frequent types of change they observed were (a) students became more academically focused/ increased attendance (8 of 24), (b) grades improved (7 of 24), and (c) grades decreased (4 of 24). A facilitator noted that degree of change was individualized, "We actually reviewed grades. . . . Although there was more of an awareness, some of them did not improve their grades and some of them did. It just depended on each individual student." Another facilitator spoke to a change in citizenship, "I would say at least 85 – 90% have made a difference in work effort and cooperation. Looking at their report cards each five weeks... [for example] it may be two less U's or maybe they got rid of the U's and got all E's." These findings are not surprising due to the fact that research has shown that ESGs may not directly affect academic achievement. Instead, students are expected to gain social-emotional skills which in turn may result in a positive change in academic achievement.

Table 34

Change in academic achievement

| Degree of Change | Number of Facilitators <sup>a</sup><br>(N = 103) |
|------------------|--|
| Very significant | 2  |
| Significant      | 27   |
| Moderate         | 44   |
| Slight           | 22   |
| None             | 8  |

<sup>a</sup>Facilitators were asked this question for each group we observed. A facilitator may have been observed facilitating multiple groups. Therefore, a particular facilitator may be represented more than once, for different groups. The responses of facilitators who were surveyed but not observed are also included in this table.

*Coping skills.* The majority (75%) of facilitators stated that they noticed a very significant or significant change in students' coping skills. The most frequent types of change they observed were students (a) learned better ways to cope/sought help with coping (13 of 25), (b) changed their perspective/way of thinking/recognized choices and consequences (7 of 25), and (c) learned to share feelings more (6 of 25). One facilitator

stated, “They have picked up some skills that have helped them to at least approach things, it didn’t solve the issues, or many of them, but they become aware of the strategies that they could use. . . . Conversations don’t talk so much about punching and hitting. I heard less of that and more about talking their way through issues.” This finding was expected because the IMPACT curriculum was anticipated to provide students with coping skills-utilization instruction with the expectation that their skills would improve.

Table 35

Change in coping skills

| Degree of Change | Number of Facilitators <sup>a</sup><br>(N = 117) |
|------------------|--|
| Very significant | 15   |
| Significant      | 60   |
| Moderate         | 32   |
| Slight           | 10   |
| None             | 0  |

<sup>a</sup>Facilitators were asked this question for each group we observed. A facilitator may have been observed facilitating multiple groups. Therefore, a particular facilitator may be represented more than once, for different groups. The responses of facilitators who were surveyed but not observed are also included in this table.

*Problem-solving skills.* Slightly more than half of facilitators stated that they noticed a very significant or significant change in students’ problem-solving skills. The most frequent types of change they observed were students learned/applied new ways to deal with problems (14 of 27) and were able to express emotions constructively and non-violently (4 of 22). One facilitator noted, “When I would ask the student or students ‘How do you respond in a situation when you are angry?’ I was able to get more appropriate responses as time passed in the group.” Another facilitator stated that a student applied problem-solving skills learned during IMPACT in the classroom: “One of my students mentioned how he had started to talk to his teachers to find out how he could pass their classes. He said he was passing all but two, versus failing all of them.” As with coping skills, this finding was expected because the IMPACT curriculum was expected to

provide students with problem-solving skills utilization instruction with the expectation that their proficiency would improve.

Table 36

Change in problem-solving skills

| Degree of change | Number of Facilitators <sup>a</sup><br>(N = 111) |
|------------------|--|
| Very significant | 10   |
| Significant      | 45   |
| Moderate         | 38   |
| Slight           | 15   |
| None             | 3  |

<sup>a</sup>Facilitators were asked this question for each group we observed. A facilitator may have been observed facilitating multiple groups. Therefore, a particular facilitator may be represented more than once, for different groups. The responses of facilitators who were surveyed but not observed are also included in this table.

*Perceptions of IMPACT Program Effectiveness*

The majority of administrators (77%), coordinators (93%), and facilitators (90%) felt that the IMPACT program met students’ needs either *very well* or *well*. The most frequently cited reason for the program’s effectiveness was that IMPACT provided students with a safe place to talk and receive guidance. A coordinator commented on the safety of the IMPACT groups and the sense of connectedness the program engenders amongst students:

It gives the kids a voice. It gives them a place, a safe confidential place to discuss what’s going on in their lives. They have an open ear and they have a group where they know that other students are experiencing the same problems. So they are not in it by themselves, alone.

Table 37

IMPACT program effectiveness

| Degree of effectiveness | Number of Administrators (N = 22) | Percent | Number of Coordinators (N = 30) | Percent | Number of Facilitators <sup>a</sup> (N = 92) | Percent |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------|---------------------------------|---------|--|---------|
| Very well               | 7                                 | 32      | 12                              | 40      | 30   | 33      |
| Well                    | 10                                | 45      | 16                              | 53      | 53   | 57      |
| Somewhat                | 5                                 | 23      | 2                               | 7       | 9  | 10      |
| Not very well           | 0                                 | 0       | 0                               | 0       | 0  | 0       |
| Not at all              | 0                                 | 0       | 0                               | 0       | 0  | 0       |

<sup>a</sup>Facilitators were asked this question for each group we observed. A facilitator may have been observed facilitating multiple groups. Therefore, a particular facilitator may be represented more than once, for different groups. The responses of facilitators who were surveyed but not observed are also included in this table.

*Suggestions for program improvement.* There were two themes that ran throughout respondents’ suggestions for program improvement. The first was a need to improve and/or update the curriculum. Specific suggestions as to how to modify the curriculum were detailed earlier in the report. The other theme was a need for additional resources and support across all levels. Some examples of suggested resources were additional funding, additional facilitators, and continuous professional development. One coordinator commented on the need for additional support:

They make us run too many groups. I had to run six groups this semester, it’s too much. . . . It’s mentally draining, it’s emotionally draining, and it’s just too time consuming. I think they really underestimate the amount of paperwork and planning that this job takes. . . . It’s just enormous, to organize assemblies and trips and awareness, you know, it’s just overwhelming. We need to run less groups and have more time to actually run the program. . .

*IMPACT Student Interviews*

We interviewed a sub-sample of IMPACT students in order to determine pre/post differences in their goal-setting skills, perceptions of adult and peer support, group climate, and alcohol/drug use. In order to further characterize the students, we also asked

them about their IMPACT participation and school performance. Students were interviewed once after completing only a few group sessions and once near the end of the group duration or after the group ended.

*IMPACT Participation.* The interviewed students were members of one of five IMPACT groups: 1) Crisis; 2) Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs (ATOD); 3) Concerned Persons (CPG); 4) Grief; and 5) Drug Information (IDIG). Sixty-four students participated in the pre-program interviews. The post-program interviews yielded 47 sets of student responses resulting in a 73% pre/post match (see Table 38).

**Table 38**

**IMPACT student interview response rates**

| Group  | N  | Pre-Interview | Post-Interview | Pre/Post Response Rate |
|--------|----|---------------|----------------|------------------------|
| Crisis | 29 | 29            | 20             | 69%                    |
| ATOD   | 16 | 16            | 12             | 75%                    |
| CPG    | 9  | 9             | 6              | 67%                    |
| Grief  | 8  | 8             | 7              | 88%                    |
| IDIG   | 2  | 2             | 2              | 100%                   |
| Total  | 64 | 64            | 47             | 73%                    |

The groups offered at each school site were based on student need. As Table 38 shows, the Crisis and ATOD groups were more prevalent than the other groups across the study schools. Interviews from Crisis and ATOD students accounted for two-thirds of the total respondent group.

Student participation in IMPACT groups was either voluntary or mandatory. Mandatory assignment occurred when students were discovered in possession or under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or tobacco, or were assigned by a probation officer. Seven students (4 from ATOD and 3 from Crisis) reported that their participation was mandatory.

Interviewers asked IMPACT students if they had previously participated in the program. Fourteen of the 64 students (22%) interviewed at pre-program replied that they

had previously participated in IMPACT. Thirty-six percent of the repeating students reported participation in the same group while 28% reported previous participation in a different group. The remaining 36% were not sure which group they had previously attended. Post-program interviews revealed that 40% of the students could not remember the name of the group that they had just completed.

*Group and student goals.* Goal awareness and personal goal-setting were viewed as positive indicators of success in the program. Interviewers asked students about the goals of their groups and what, if any, personal goals they had set for themselves.

The majority of the students (70%) were able to provide a description of their group's goal at pre-program that was generally aligned to their groups' actual goals, as defined in the groups' respective curriculum manuals. Conversely, 26% of the students described goals that were vague and not clearly aligned, such as "to have a better education." By post-program, 96% of all students were able to describe their groups' goals with greater specificity and alignment. Four percent of the students responded with "I don't know" for both pre- and post-program interviews.

Eighty-one percent of the IMPACT students set personal goals for themselves at the start of the program (see Table 39). These goals tended to vary by group affiliation and many were specific to the type of group. Seventy-five percent of the ATOD students set personal goals specifically related to alcohol and drug use. In CPG, 83% of the students described goals that pertained to their parents; in most cases, their fathers. These students described aspirations of becoming "better" people through deeper understanding of their parents and the problems their parents face. All students in the Grief group set goals related to overcoming problems that had surfaced as a result of death in their families. The personal goals set by Crisis students were the most diverse. Because this group supports students facing various life changes and personal problems relating to family and friends, the personal goals set were more specific to the individual. In many cases, goals were either interpersonal ("making new friends, having someone to talk to") or school-related ("to get better grades").

Table 39

Personal goal setting by IMPACT students

| Group  | N  | Students              | Accomplished? |         |         |
|--------|----|-----------------------|---------------|---------|---------|
|        |    |                       | With Goal     | Yes     | No      |
| Crisis | 20 | 16 (80%) <sup>a</sup> | 9 (56%)       | 3 (19%) | 2 (13%) |
| ATOD   | 12 | 8 (67%)               | 4 (50%)       | 2 (25%) | 2 (25%) |
| Grief  | 7  | 7 (100%)              | 6 (86%)       | ---     | 1 (14%) |
| CPG    | 6  | 6 (100%)              | 5 (83%)       | ---     | 1 (17%) |
| IDIG   | 2  | 1 (50%)               | 1 (100%)      | ---     | ---     |
| Total  | 47 | 38 (81%)              | 25 (66%)      | 5 (13%) | 6 (16%) |

<sup>a</sup>Two students from this group did not respond to whether or not they had accomplished their personal goals.

By the end of the program, students who had set goals at the beginning were able to articulate them (sometimes with increased specificity) and to describe whether or not these goals had been accomplished during the program. Twenty-five of the 38 students with personal goals (66%) reported accomplishing them by the end of the program. More than half of these students attributed their goal accomplishment to IMPACT participation. In general, across the different groups, students described new-found confidence, trust, and knowledge of “how to handle” different situations as part of their goal accomplishment. Specifically, many ATOD students described a gain in new knowledge about the consequences of drugs and alcohol and the effects of personal expression and social interaction. The Crisis and ATOD students who did not accomplish their personal goals generally attributed this to continued drug usage and other “problems with life.” Other students who were “in process” of accomplishing their personal goals were generally very positive and believed that with time and effort their goals would be met.

Nine students overall (19%) reported that they had set no personal goals for themselves while in the program. Seven of these students had also reported mandatory

placement into IMPACT. It was clear that these students did not believe that they had to make an effort at successful outcomes because it was not their choice to be there.

*Adult and peer support.* Adult support from home, community, and school provides a strong framework within which the IMPACT student may be successful. For the purposes of these interviews, a supportive adult was defined to the students as someone “who you can talk to when you are having problems.” Interviewers asked students to list the supportive adults at home and at school and to describe the different types of support these adults provided. In addition, students were asked to describe the qualities or attributes of these adults that facilitated this support. Interviewers asked similar questions regarding peer support.

At the start of the program, 35 students (74%) listed at least one adult from home that provided some form of support for them (see Table 40). Eighty-four percent of these responses indicated a family member, the majority listing one or both parents. Aunts and/or uncles were the second most common family members listed. Twelve IMPACT students (26%) reported that there were no supportive adults at home or in their community that they could turn to with problems. All but one of these students expressed desires to have an adult to talk to, to be listened to by an adult, and to have help with personal problems. One student openly shared, “I would like adults to help me, to tell them how I am feeling and why I’m doing these things.”

Table 40

Support from adults at home and/or community

| Group  | N  | Pre-program |          | Post-program |         | Change in Perceived Support |
|--------|----|-------------|----------|--------------|---------|-----------------------------|
|        |    | Yes         | No       | Yes          | No      |                             |
| Crisis | 20 | 13 (65%)    | 7 (35%)  | 17 (85%)     | 3 (15%) | 20%                         |
| ATOD   | 12 | 9 (75%)     | 3 (25%)  | 9 (75%)      | 3 (25%) | 0%                          |
| Grief  | 7  | 6 (86%)     | 1 (14%)  | 7 (100%)     | ---     | 14%                         |
| CPG    | 6  | 6 (100%)    | 0        | 5 (83%)      | 1 (17%) | -17%                        |
| IDIG   | 2  | 1 (50%)     | 1 (50%)  | 2 (100%)     | ---     | 50%                         |
| Total  | 47 | 35 (74%)    | 12 (26%) | 40 (85%)     | 7 (15%) | 11%                         |

We found an increase in the perceived support from adults at home between the beginning and the end of the program. Table 40 shows an 11% overall increase across the program. Although the table shows a positive change of five students, the actual changes were both positive and negative. Specifically, seven of the 12 students who described no support at pre-program reportedly gained the support of family members and adults in the community. This effect was counteracted by the responses of two students (1 ATOD, 1 CPG) who indicated a loss of support but offered no reasons for this change.

The most common type of support that students received from the adults at home was “advice.” Specifically, students described how these adults gave them advice on things that were “good or bad” and “right or wrong,” as well as advice on what to do in certain situations and how to “handle yourself.” For the most part, students plainly responded that they were supported by adults who gave them “good advice.” Having someone to listen and talk to without judgment was the second most common type of support. Being provided comfort (sometimes described as “calms me down” or “relaxes me”) was another type of support typically described as coming from “mom” or another maternal-type adult (e.g., aunt or grandmother). Sharing of past experiences, particularly about how adults overcame detrimental periods in their lives and who took time to explain things was also described as a type of support.

Students described the various qualities of these supportive adults in their lives. Most student responses consisted of a reiteration of their previous “types of support” responses. Specific supportive qualities described by students included “being there” for them, “they know me best,” and “they show they care.” Other descriptions included “trust,” and “I know them.” Some students responded simply with “because she’s my mom” or “he’s my dad.”

Interviewers asked students the same series of questions regarding support from the adults at school. At the start of the program, 77% of the students listed at least one adult from school that provided them with some form of support, most of whom were teachers. School counselors were the second most common adults listed. Twenty-three percent of the IMPACT students reported that there were no supportive adults at school they could go to with problems.

Table 41

Support from adults at school

| Group  | N  | Pre-program |          | Post-program |          | Change in Perceived Support |
|--------|----|-------------|----------|--------------|----------|-----------------------------|
|        |    | Yes         | No       | Yes          | No       |                             |
| Crisis | 20 | 14 (70%)    | 6 (30%)  | 14 (70%)     | 6 (30%)  | 0%                          |
| ATOD   | 12 | 8 (67%)     | 4 (33%)  | 10 (83%)     | 2 (17%)  | 16%                         |
| Grief  | 7  | 6 (86%)     | 1 (14%)  | 5 (71%)      | 2 (29%)  | -15%                        |
| CPG    | 6  | 6 (100%)    | ---      | 5 (83%)      | 1 (17%)  | -17%                        |
| IDIG   | 2  | 2 (100%)    | ---      | 1 (50%)      | 1 (50%)  | -50%                        |
| Total  | 47 | 36 (77%)    | 11 (23%) | 35 (74%)     | 12 (26%) | -3%                         |

Table 41 shows an overall decrease in the perceived support from adults at school from pre- to post-program. However, this summary table does not adequately reveal all of the changes that occurred during the program. There were both positive and negative changes that “canceled” each other and therefore are not evident in the summary table. For instance, 8 of 36 students changed their initial positive responses to those indicating no adult support at school by end of program. Seven students (4 ATOD, 3 Crisis) who initially responded “No support” reportedly gained the support of adults at school by end of program. Five of them listed their Group Facilitator as the adult they could turn to for support. In fact, post-program findings showed that among all students, the Group Facilitator was listed as a provider of support 32% of the time, second only to teachers (listed 34% of the time). In many cases, the Group Facilitator replaced the teachers in the students’ responses. This was a positive indication that the Group Facilitator played a supportive role that extended beyond the group setting; particularly for students who previously believed they had no support from adults at school.

The most common type of support that students received from the adults at school was best described as “encouragement.” Specifically, students described encouragement as “she helps me to do better,” or “he makes me feel positive about things.” Having these adults “listen” to their problems and conflicts without accusation was the second most

common type of support. Helping with school-related problems such as grades, homework, or problems with other adults or kids from school was the third most common type. Similar to findings of support from adults at home, the sharing of past experiences was also described as a positive type of support.

Students described the various qualities of these supportive adults from their schools. Trust was the underlying theme in the majority of responses. Students trusted adults that were “cool,” “easy to talk to,” made them feel “comfortable,” and didn’t “judge” them.

Questions regarding peer support were of the same structure as those for adult support. However, we were only able to obtain data from 60% of the matched interviews. Table 42 shows no overall change in perceived support from peers from pre- to post-program. One ATOD student did report a gain in peer support and one Crisis student reported a loss of support as a result of a breakup with her boyfriend. Thirty-six percent of the students reported no peer support. By post-program, students reported less peer support (64%) than adult support from home (85%) and adult support from school (74%).

Interestingly, the data revealed that students made a distinction between *peer* as referred to in this question and the friends they made in their group. Over one-third of the students specifically reported that they made new friends while in the group, even those that responded that they had no peer support.

Table 42

Support from peers

| Group  | N  | Pre-program |          | Post-program |          | Change in Perceived Support |
|--------|----|-------------|----------|--------------|----------|-----------------------------|
|        |    | Yes         | No       | Yes          | No       |                             |
| Crisis | 8  | 7 (88%)     | 1 (12%)  | 6 (75%)      | 2 (25%)  | -13%                        |
| ATOD   | 11 | 7 (64%)     | 4 (36%)  | 8 (73%)      | 3 (27%)  | 9%                          |
| Grief  | 4  | 1 (25%)     | 3 (75%)  | 1 (25%)      | 3 (75%)  | 0%                          |
| CPG    | 5  | 3 (60%)     | 2 (40%)  | 3 (60%)      | 2 (40%)  | 0%                          |
| Total  | 28 | 18 (64%)    | 10 (36%) | 18 (64%)     | 10 (36%) | 0%                          |

The types of support and the supportive qualities of the peers often blended together within the student responses. In general, students felt supported by peers that they have “known for a long time.” This prevalent description, although ambiguous, was a very important quality for these students. Additional qualities such as confidentiality, shared experiences and sibling-like closeness were also common among the responses. “Because she is my friend” was also reported as a supportive quality.

*Group climate and facilitator support.* The IMPACT groups were designed as curriculum-based, teacher-facilitated support groups. As well as presenting students with relevant and useful information, the group setting was to be a safe environment for expression of feelings, concerns, experiences and grief. IMPACT students’ perception of their group’s climate would be likely to influence their program experience and the potential outcomes of their participation. The perceived support of the Group Facilitator would also contribute to the group’s climate. Climate was determined by how “safe” students felt in their expression of thoughts, feelings, and opinions.

Interviewers asked IMPACT students to rate how safe they felt expressing their feelings, thoughts, and opinions within their groups. The students were given four options to choose from: *very safe, safe, somewhat safe, and not at all safe*. Table 43 displays the

response breakdown of this question when asked during the pre-program interviews.

Table 43

IMPACT student perceptions of group climate

| Group  | N  | Pre-Program Group Climate Rating |          |                |                 | Post-Program Change |          |      |
|--------|----|----------------------------------|----------|----------------|-----------------|---------------------|----------|------|
|        |    | Very safe                        | Safe     | Some what safe | Not at all safe | Positive            | Negative | Same |
| Crisis | 20 | 4                                | 7        | 7              | 2               | 30%                 | 20%      | 50%  |
| ATOD   | 12 | 1                                | 5        | 5              | 1               | 50%                 | 8%       | 42%  |
| CPG    | 6  | 3                                | 3        | ---            | ---             | 17%                 | ---      | 83%  |
| Grief  | 7  | 2                                | 4        | 1              | ---             | ---                 | 29%      | 71%  |
| IDIG   | 2  | ---                              | 1        | 1              | ---             | ---                 | 50%      | 50%  |
| Total  | 47 | 10 (21%)                         | 20 (43%) | 14 (30%)       | 3 (6%)          | 28%                 | 17%      | 55%  |

Across the program, the responses of ATOD, Crisis, and IDIG students fell mostly in the *Safe* to *Somewhat safe* range. CPG and Grief student responses were distributed on the higher end of the range (*Very safe* to *Safe*). Overall, 21% of the students felt *very safe* expressing themselves at the start of their programs. These students believed in the confidentiality of the group and that fellow group members would be non-judgmental. Six percent of the students that felt *not at all safe* at the start of program reported a lack of trust in their fellow group members.

Examination of the post-program change revealed that more than half of the students maintained the same rating across the program. Positive changes resulted from any rating that went up one or more levels. The most common positive change was from *somewhat safe* to *safe*. The most significant positive change was reported by an ATOD student who started at *not at all safe* and explained at post-program that the size of the group and the encouragement for self-expression created a *safe* climate. Similarly, negative changes were indicated by a drop in rating levels. The most common change was *safe* to *somewhat safe*. Interestingly, there were no discernable differences in reasons given for these ratings. In other words, students' reasons for feeling *safe* were not

different from those that reported *somewhat safe*. In fact, all of these reasons were positive, for example “confidentiality,” “trust in the group and “being around others with same problems.” It is possible that students were simply more focused on the positive aspects of the support they received, even if the support level was not ideal. Only one student went from *safe* to *not at all safe*. This student reportedly did not trust nor like the Group Facilitator.

The characteristics of the group climate that encouraged expressions of feelings, thoughts, and opinions of the IMPACT students were confidentiality among peers, presence of peers with similar problems, trust in facilitator to uphold rules of confidentiality, and the ability to “relate” to others and their problems. Conversely, lack of trust or suspicion of their peers’ inability to stay true to confidentiality rules discouraged some students from feeling safe in their self-expressions.

The data revealed that the groups, regardless of type, all offered a positive climate for student expression. This was evidenced by the majority of students that either increased or maintained their positive safety rating of the group. As described previously, even students with negative changes provided positive reasons for their ratings. In general, students who maintained low ratings did not attribute them to the group climate as much as their own inability to trust others or more often because they “didn’t know them” well enough.

Interviewers asked students the same series of questions regarding safety but in the context of their regular classroom outside of the group. Only 31 students had pre/post matched responses to these questions. The pattern of ratings clearly showed that IMPACT students felt less safe about expressing themselves outside of their group (see Table 44) than within the group. This was also evidenced by the numbers of students who rated not at all safe at the start of the program: 6% *within the group* vs. 45% *outside the group*. In addition, over half of the students who felt not at all safe outside of the group at the start did not change their ratings at the end of the program.

By comparison, the distribution of pre/post program rating changes for *within the group* and *outside the group* was very similar. However, the disparity in starting points between the ratings revealed that students were more positive about expressing themselves openly within the group setting, even at the beginning of the program.

Perhaps students had positive expectations of being in an environment that would encourage open expression, confidentiality, and foster trust among their peers. There were no discernable differences between students that had participated in IMPACT prior to this session and those who had not.

Table 44

IMPACT student perceptions of climate outside of the group

| Group  | N  | Pre-Program Rating |         |                |                 | Post-Program Change |          |      |
|--------|----|--------------------|---------|----------------|-----------------|---------------------|----------|------|
|        |    | Very safe          | Safe    | Some-what safe | Not at all safe | Positive            | Negative | Same |
| Crisis | 10 | ---                | 1       | 4              | 5               | 30%                 | 10%      | 60%  |
| ATOD   | 11 | 1                  | 2       | 3              | 5               | 36%                 | 9%       | 55%  |
| CPG    | 5  | ---                | 1       | 1              | 3               | 20%                 | 20%      | 60%  |
| Grief  | 5  | ---                | 2       | 2              | 1               | 20%                 | ---      | 80%  |
| Total  | 31 | 1 (3%)             | 6 (19%) | 10 (32%)       | 14 (45%)        | 29%                 | 10%      | 61%  |

Overall, there were three central themes upon which students based their ratings of safety and comfort: trust, confidentiality, and “knowing” others. These three themes emerged though all of their reasons regardless of whether they were positive or negative. For example, students who felt *safe* would explain:

“It’s confidential, no one will say anything outside of the group.”

“I know a lot of the people.”

“They are all honest with me about their lives and problems so I can be honest with them.”

“I could say something and nobody would blurt.”

These themes were prevalent in those who did not feel as safe:

“I don’t trust them.”

“You can’t trust people and they backstab you.”

“They tattle tale on everyone and start spreading rumors.”

“I don’t know anybody there.”

“There are other people there that I don’t know and don’t trust with my personal stuff.”

The described changes that occurred over the course of the program were also linked to these themes as students emphasized the confidentiality of their groups and the ability to express themselves more openly. Their responses revealed that trust in others was based on the commonalities among the group members, the non-judgmental discourse, and getting “to know” these other people.

At the start of the program, 68% of IMPACT students said they would go to their Group Facilitator with personal problems. Many of these students were positive that even though they did not really “know” the facilitator at that point, they could go to them because of the confidentiality implicit in their role. Twenty-three percent of the students said they would not turn to them and 9% were unsure. Several of these students were not as trusting as the larger group and replied that they “didn’t know” the Group Facilitator.

By the end of the program, the percentage of students who would go to their Group Facilitator with personal problems increased to 81%. The most cited problem types were problems at home with parents and family. When asked why they would go to their Group Facilitator, students described positive qualities and attributes that were very similar to those described about the supportive adults in their homes and schools. Such qualities included being non-judgmental, listening well, encouraging, and maintaining confidentiality.

Nineteen percent of the students maintained that they would not go to their Group Facilitator with a personal problem. Lack of trust was the central theme, either because the facilitators were adults or because the students still “didn’t know them.”

*School performance.* Interviewers asked IMPACT students a series of questions relating to school performance. Specifically, students were asked to self-report on their progress, barriers impeding academic progress, what positive actions could be taken to overcome barriers, and if they were engaged in such actions.

Many students (72%) believed that they were not doing as well as they would like in school; however, only 45% described barriers impeding their academic progress. Based on the data patterns, we classified these barriers into two categories: internal and external. Internal barriers were those that were more characteristic of the student, such as

“being lazy” or “depressed.” Negative activities the students’ participated in (e.g., drinking or taking drugs, not going to class) were also attributed to the student. These activities, as described, were interpreted as an internal choices student made. External barriers were those that were described as happening around the student, in their environment or to other people around them. “Divorce,” “death in the family,” and “my dad always going into the hospital” are examples of external barriers.

Overall, students were just as likely to describe external as internal barriers. In addition, there was no apparent relationship between group membership and whether barriers were internal or external. Moreover, qualitative analysis of response patterns revealed that there was no apparent relationship between type of barrier and articulation or engagement in positive actions to overcome these barriers as explained next.

We defined positive actions as any action that a student may engage in to help overcome their barriers to improved school performance. Positive actions were classified as either school-related or non-school-related. School-related actions included “getting a tutor,” “completing my assignments and turning them in,” “attending class everyday,” and “stop talking and pay attention.” Examples of non-school-related actions included “break up with my boyfriend,” “hang out with my friends,” and “work out.”

Thirty-two students (68%) described positive actions they had engaged in over the course of the program (see Table 45). The “No” column represents students who articulated potential positive actions but admitted no actual engagement in these actions. Eighteen of the 32 “positive action” students (56%) were able to maintain some type of engagement in positive actions from the start of program to the end, while the remaining 14 students became engaged at some point during the program.

Table 45

Positive actions reported by IMPACT students

| Group  | N  | Positive Action? (%) |          | Positive Actions |
|--------|----|----------------------|----------|------------------|
|        |    | Yes                  | No       | % School-Related |
| Crisis | 20 | 12 (60%)             | 8 (40%)  | 83%              |
| ATOD   | 12 | 7 (58%)              | 5 (42%)  | 71%              |
| Grief  | 7  | 6 (86%)              | 1 (14%)  | 83%              |
| CPG    | 6  | 5 (83%)              | 1 (17%)  | 100%             |
| IDIG   | 2  | 2 (100%)             | 0        | 50%              |
| Total  | 47 | 32 (68%)             | 15 (32%) | 66%              |

Sixty-six percent of all positive actions were school-related. Six of the 15 students who did not engage in positive actions were still able to articulate school-related ideas. This articulation may serve as a positive indicator of future engagement.

Overall, two-thirds of the students reportedly maintained or initiated positive actions toward improving their school performance while in the program. Almost half of these students, who reportedly did not engage, were still able to articulate specific positive actions that they believed would improve their performance. The presence or absence of school barriers did not appear to influence the students' engagement in positive actions.

*Alcohol and drug use.* Interviewers asked IMPACT students to candidly speak about their alcohol consumption and drug use before and after the program. Although this data was self-reported and not confirmed through any other sources, students were made aware of the confidentiality of their responses in order to encourage honesty.

Students were asked how often they consumed alcohol, their thoughts about alcohol, and their reasons for drinking. As Table 46 shows, 62% of the students reported no alcohol consumption at all. It is possible that this percentage is inflated and that more students actually did use alcohol. It is possible that students gave the socially acceptable response to the question of alcohol use. In addition, all IMPACT students had to sign a no-use contract. Therefore, although they were assured that their responses would not be

held against them, they may have falsely denied using alcohol. Four of these students who reported using no alcohol at all “considered” drinking but offered no positive reasons for doing so. Three students who reported no alcohol use at all during this round explained that they had used alcohol but stopped prior to beginning IMPACT. Thirty-nine percent of the students reported alcohol consumption at the start of the program. Frequency of alcohol consumption ranged from “rarely” or “only on special occasions” to “once a week” or “on weekends at parties.” These students were from the Crisis and ATOD groups.

Table 46

Alcohol usage among IMPACT students

| Group  | N  | Pre-Program |          | Post-Program |          | Individual Change              |      |
|--------|----|-------------|----------|--------------|----------|--------------------------------|------|
|        |    | Yes         | No       | Yes          | No       | Reduced usage (%) <sup>a</sup> | Same |
| Crisis | 20 | 9 (45%)     | 11 (55%) | 7 (35%)      | 13 (65%) | 6 <sup>b</sup> (67%)           | 13   |
| ATOD   | 12 | 9 (75%)     | 3 (25%)  | 5 (42%)      | 7 (58%)  | 5 <sup>b</sup> (56%)           | 5    |
| Grief  | 7  | ---         | 7        | ---          | 7        | ---                            | 7    |
| CPG    | 6  | ---         | 6        | ---          | 6        | ---                            | 6    |
| IDIG   | 2  | ---         | 2        | ---          | 2        | ---                            | 2    |
| Total  | 47 | 18 (38%)    | 29 (62%) | 12 (26%)     | 35 (74%) | 11 (61%)                       | 33   |

<sup>a</sup>Percentage is calculated as: # students reporting less usage/# students reporting usage at pre-program.

<sup>b</sup>Responses from 3 students not included here (2 in ATOD and 1 in Crisis) indicated an increase in alcohol consumption.

For those students who did not drink, health-related concerns and issues were their primary reasons for not drinking. These concerns ranged from less specific (i.e., overall health) to more specific damage to particular organs (i.e., liver, kidney). Rapid death was also a health-related concern. Effects on behavior were the next often cited reasons, such as “getting into fights,” “doing stupid things,” and descriptions of how alcohol “will affect my future.” Three students specifically described the behavioral effects of one or both parents who drink excessively as their reasons for not drinking.

Less specific responses such as “I don’t want to,” “because it’s stupid,” and “it’s bad for you” were also very common, particularly among the middle school students.

The reasons given for drinking fell into three main categories. The first category was related to the “fun” of drinking which included social aspects such as drinking “at parties” and “because everyone else is doing it.” The second category related to how alcohol made them “feel” (e.g., “makes you happy,” “relaxes you”). The final category described the use of alcohol as a means to “forget problems” and “deal with anger.” The reasons for drinking provided by the students who maintained or increased their alcohol usage fell into the “fun” category.

As Table 46 shows, students in both the Crisis and ATOD groups reduced their alcohol consumption considerably. Six of 9 Crisis students (67%) and 5 of 9 ATOD students (56%) reduced their consumption. From these 11 students, 6 students reported a complete cessation of their alcohol consumption by end of program. In general, these students were able to acknowledge the effects drinking had on their behavior and how that impacted others around them.

Students were asked how often they used drugs, their thoughts about drugs, and their reasons for use. As Table 47 shows, 74% of the students reported no drug use at all. As with the students who claimed not to use alcohol, it is possible that this percentage is inflated. Eight students “considered” using drugs due to curiosity, peer pressure, or stress. Three students indicated that they had used drugs but stopped prior to participation in IMPACT. Twenty-six percent of the students (Crisis and ATOD) reported drug use at the start of the program. Marijuana was the drug most often cited by these students. Frequency of drug use ranged from “once every 4 months” to “almost everyday.”

Table 47

Drug usage among IMPACT students

| Group  | N  | Pre-Program |          | Post-Program |          | Individual Change    |      |
|--------|----|-------------|----------|--------------|----------|----------------------|------|
|        |    | Yes         | No       | Yes          | No       | Reduced usage (%)    | Same |
| Crisis | 20 | 3 (15%)     | 17 (85%) | 1 (5%)       | 19 (95%) | 2 <sup>a</sup> (67%) | 16   |
| ATOD   | 12 | 9 (75%)     | 3 (25%)  | 6 (50%)      | 6 (50%)  | 6 (67%)              | 6    |
| Grief  | 7  | ---         | 7        | ---          | 7        | ---                  | 7    |
| CPG    | 6  | ---         | 6        | ---          | 6        | ---                  | 6    |
| IDIG   | 2  | ---         | 2        | ---          | 2        | ---                  | 2    |
| Total  | 47 | 12 (26%)    | 35 (74%) | 7 (15%)      | 40 (85%) | 8 (67%)              | 37   |

<sup>a</sup> Response from 1 student not included here indicated an increase in drug use.

The 74% of students who reportedly did not use drugs at all listed health concerns and potential addiction as their primary reason. Some students also expressed the shame drug use would bring upon their parents and families. It is possible that this percentage is inflated and that more students actually did use drugs. It is possible that students gave the socially acceptable response to the question of drug use.

The most common theme among reasons for drug usage was escape. Students described how they used drugs to “avoid problems at home,” take pressure off my shoulders,” and “to forget” about negative aspects of their lives. As with alcohol consumption, the theme of “fun” emerged as well. Students described how they used drugs “to have fun,” “when hanging out with friends,” and “to socialize.” Other reasons included “keeps me awake in class” and “it makes me feel more alive.”

As Table 47 shows, students in both the Crisis and ATOD groups reduced their drug usage considerably. Of the students that reported drug use at the start of the program, 2 of the 3 Crisis students (67%) and 3 out of 9 ATOD students (33%) reportedly ceased their drug usage completely by the end of the program. Three additional ATOD students reduced their usage.

Students who ceased or reduced their drug usage described the negative effects of drug use through events that occurred because of their use. For instance, one student explained that he was expelled because of use. Another student shared that he quit because his parents kept finding out and getting upset. Both of these students acknowledged that the drug use was not worth the consequences. For the small number of students who maintained (or increased) their drug use, although they were able to list negative aspects of drug use, these students chose not to stop at this time.

*Summary of student interview findings.* The IMPACT groups were designed to provide a climate and context for encouraging student expression of thoughts, feelings, and concerns without judgment. The groups were successful in this effort as evidenced by the positive student reports of safety, trust, and support within the groups. Increased trust in the Group Facilitators also reinforced this finding. Goal awareness, goal setting, and goal accomplishment were also associated with program participation. The majority of students who had set personal goals for themselves at the start of the program had either accomplished them or were in the process of accomplishment.

Students' perceptions of adult and peer support did not dramatically change over their time in the program. There were students who gained support from adults at home and at school but the majority maintained the support they had at pre-program. The qualities of these adults that made them "supportive" to students were very similar regardless of whether they were adults from home, school, or even the Group Facilitators. Students regarded "being known" by someone, or knowing someone for a long time as a very important quality. Trust and confidentiality were also important qualities. Students related to adults who candidly shared past experiences with them, particularly about how they overcame their own barriers. Group Facilitators who exhibited these or similar qualities were likely to gain and maintain positive relationships with the students and be seen as supportive.

In reflecting on their own school performance, many students admitted that they were not doing as well as they would like, yet fewer than half were able to describe any barriers impeding their progress. Students either attributed these barriers internally ("being depressed" or "laziness") or externally ("my parents' divorce"). Regardless of whether their barriers were internal, external, or non-existent, two-thirds of the IMPACT

students maintained or initiated positive actions to help them improve in school. This engagement in positive actions, whether school-related or not, is a positive indicator of improved performance.

The greatest positive finding that emerged through this interview data was the reduction and cessation of alcohol consumption and drug use among Crisis and ATOD students. These students described new knowledge and awareness of the effects of alcohol and drugs, specifically the effects their behavior had on others.

Although not all students were successful in all aspects of the program, small changes suggest the potential for greater change. Unfortunately, the students who did not appear to benefit at all were those whose participation was mandatory. Their responses both pre- and post-program suggested a lack of commitment and effort. For future program sessions, closer attention by staff and Group facilitators to those students whose participation is not voluntary may lead to more positive experiences for these students.

### *Coping Skills Vignettes*

During IMPACT, students are provided with social-emotional skills instruction. The development of positive skills for coping with stressors and aversive situations and/or feelings is critical to adolescents in adapting to diverse situations and stressful events in their lives (Hamill, 2003). The coping skills vignettes were used in our study of the IMPACT program to discover the coping skills that these students possessed in response to aversive and emotion-provoking situations and to determine if IMPACT participation influenced the development of these skills and self-awareness. We wanted to determine if during the time spent in the IMPACT program, students increased their choices of positive coping skills and decreased their negative choices in various scenarios. We also wanted to see if students who chose negative coping skills demonstrated the ability to articulate supportive reasons for these choices.

Our analysis of these vignettes revealed that the two positive coping skills of Problem-Solving and Support-Seeking were prominent in 3 of the 5 vignettes. In addition, over the course of the program, students' positive skill choices increased significantly in two vignettes. In addition, we saw that among IMPACT students, specific emotion-based scenarios yielded specific reaction patterns. Students were more likely to internalize in sadness-evoking scenarios and externalize their reactions when in anger or

fear-evoking scenarios. The Distancing-Avoidance coping skill was highest in the shame-evoking situations, mostly because students wanted to “forget” the event or avoid future occurrences. Overall, these findings suggest that the IMPACT program influenced the movement of students’ choices toward more positive coping skills.

Saarni’s (1997) work on adolescent coping skills with aversive feelings and situations involved the use of hypothetical, emotion-based stories and resulting coping skill options. These stories and options were the primary source of our coping skills vignettes. Using the same five emotion-based scenarios (*SHAME*, *ANGER*, *FEAR*, *HURT*, and *SADNESS*) and a modified format, we developed a series of pre- and post-vignettes that would be appropriate for middle and high school students in an urban district. Each vignette consisted of a hypothetical scenario and the students were prompted to select the response (from a list of five possible responses) that would best reflect their reaction to the scenario. Each response reflected a different type of coping skill, some more positive than others (e.g., Problem-Solving, Distancing-Avoidance). The five coping skills and their definitions are presented in Table 48.

Table 48

Coping skill choices and definitions

| Coping Skill         | Type          | Definition   |
|----------------------|---------------|--|
| Problem-Solving      | Positive      | Coping responses that attempt to reassess situations that cause aversive feelings or reactions. Includes problem identification and imagining alternative solutions. |
| Support-Seeking      | Positive      | Coping responses that attempt to alleviate the situation or aversive feeling by seeking help from others, comfort, or social approval.                               |
| Distancing-Avoidance | Less positive | Coping responses that attempt to avoid or disengage from the situation that causes aversive feelings or reactions.   |
| Internalization      | Less positive | Coping responses that attempt to turn situations that cause aversive feelings inward, without reassessment or seeking others for help.                               |
| Externalization      | Less positive | Coping responses that attempt to turn situations that cause aversive feelings outward without reappraisals of situations, feelings, and/or reactions.                |

For each vignette, students were asked to explain why they chose the particular reaction. We posed the same open-ended question following each multiple-choice portion: “Why would you make this choice?” Students were expected to provide reasons or explanations to support the coping skill they chose for the particular vignette.

We administered the coping skills vignettes to a total of 246 IMPACT students. There were 211 students who completed the pre-vignettes at the start of the program and 172 students who completed the post-vignettes. The resulting matched group consisted of 137 students, 56% of the larger group. Preliminary analyses of the response distributions for the entire group and the smaller matched group did not yield any discernible differences. Therefore, the matched group was determined to be a valid representative sample of the larger group. Unless otherwise specified, all analyses and findings were based on the matched sample.

We were looking to see if students’ choices on the multiple-choice portions of the vignettes significantly differed at the beginning and the end of the program. We looked for changes in the pattern of responses using non-parametric tests. Non-parametric techniques specifically designed for nominal data were used to analyze the pre/post response changes. The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test computes the differences between the pre- and post-response pairs and classifies the differences as positive, negative, or tied. The number of positive and negative differences will not differ significantly if the pre- and post-responses were similarly distributed. This test also takes into account the magnitude of the differences as well as the sign. The McNemar test is based on related dichotomous variables and employs a chi-square statistic to test for changes in response. This method is appropriate for analyzing changes in pre/post designs (SPSS, 2006).

The open-ended portion of the vignettes was analyzed using qualitative methods of emerging themes and classification into common categories. The question (“Why would you make this choice?”) generated a multitude of different reasons and explanations. The analysis focused on the content and whether students were able to articulate reasons that aligned with their coping skill choices. To do this we classified the responses into one of eight inductive categories which we then examined for alignment and changes over time.

*Coping skill choices.* Table 49 presents the coping skill choices selected across all pre- and post-vignettes. Each set of frequencies is presented by specific emotion-based vignette. The response patterns of the coping skill choices for the five vignettes illustrated those particular emotion-based scenarios elicited particular patterns of coping skills.

Table 49

Summary of pre/post skill choice changes by vignette scenario (N=137)

| Coping Skills        | <i>SHAME</i> | <i>ANGER</i> | <i>FEAR</i> | <i>HURT</i> | <i>SADNESS</i> |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|----------------|
| Problem-solving      | +1.4%        | +4.4%        | +6.6%       | +5.8%       | -2.9%          |
| Support-seeking      | +0.8%        | +6.6%        | 0.0%        | -3.7%       | +4.4%          |
| Distancing/Avoidance | -3.6%        | +2.9%        | -3.6%       | -10.2%      | +4.2%          |
| Internalization      | -3.7%        | -3.0%        | +1.4%       | -2.9%       | -7.3%          |
| Externalization      | -0.7%        | -13.9%       | -2.2%       | +11.7%      | +3.7%          |

A statistically significant difference between pre- and post-vignette coping skill choices emerged in the *ANGER* scenario, ( $\chi^2(128) = 5.92, p=.02$ ). Over the course of the program students developed more positive coping skills in response to anger-producing scenarios, as evidenced by the increase in positive coping skill choices (Problem-Solving, +4.4% and Support-Seeking, +6.6%) and the large decrease in Externalization (-13.9%), a negative coping skill. A similar pattern was observed for the *FEAR* scenarios. The responses yielded an increase in Problem-Solving skills (+ 6.6%) and a combined decrease in Distancing-Avoidance and Externalization (-5.8%), resulting in a  $p=.10$  on the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test.

The distributions of coping skill choices over time for the other vignettes were not statistically significant but were, nonetheless, interesting in their patterns. For example, many of the students who initially chose to distance themselves from the hurtful situations (*HURT* vignettes) later chose to externalize the situations and react negatively. Similarly, although there was an increase in students who chose to seek support in the *SADNESS* vignettes, there were also increases in students who chose to either externalize the situation or distance themselves from it.

*Reasons for coping skills choices.* Once students selected a coping skill in response to each vignette, they were asked to support their choice by responding to the question “Why would you make this choice?” The response classification scheme that was generated through analysis is presented in Table 50. We examined both the overall distribution of these response categories and the alignment of the categories to the coping skill choices. The alignment of the students’ coping skill choices to their reasons for selection was one way to provide supporting evidence for the presence of social-emotional awareness and development. In other words, being able to articulate a supportive reason for making a particular coping skill choice suggested awareness of their reactions and choices, even if the coping skill choice was negative.

Table 50

Classification scheme for responses to open-ended “why” questions

| Category      | Description   | Examples  |
|---------------|---|---|
| UNCLEAR       | Poorly articulated reason; doesn't answer question; unclear.  | “I don't know.” OR “Because.”   |
| BLAME1        | Reason is expressed as internally-placed blame; accepts negative consequences because of own action.  | “I feel bad for not saving money to buy them a present.”  |
| BLAME2        | Reason is expressed as externally-placed blame; may include negative feelings and/or action against a person/thing who is blamed.   | “... dog is a stupid animal that should of not ran away in the first place. Plus because of him I was late to school.”                        |
| PERSONAL      | Reason includes personal details that may/may not be related to vignette; uses personal experiences to explain reason; may change scenario to fit with personal experience.                 | “Because my mom would just get mad buy me a new one but it would be hard because we are not doing well money wise ...”                        |
| AVOID         | Reason is expressed solely as avoidance of negative consequences and/or situation (does not describe potential positive or alternative solution); includes “forgetting”                     | “I don't want to get kick or jacked.” OR “Because I'd rather not think about it.”   |
| SOLUTION      | Reason is expressed with a positive benefit and/or positive outcome of making choice; may also be recognition of problem and articulation of solution or possible alternative.              | “I would talk to my friends and family that it should have been handled in a different way. I would talk to [teacher] after class.”           |
| JUSTIFICATION | Reason is expressed solely as a justification for choice; does not include avoidance or positive outcome; may include reasons of “fairness.”  | “I will take it away because (she) hurt my feelings.” OR “It is not fair because I work for that bike.”                                       |
| STAND*        | Reason reflects actions of standing one's ground, being brave, allowing oneself to be seen as the “stronger” one, even fighting as self-defense, as a problem-solving skill, not avoidance. | “Because the more scared you act the more people will boss you around and if you show that you're not afraid sometimes they leave you alone.” |

\*This category only emerged in the *Fear* vignette

The response classifications that demonstrated little relationship to specific coping skill choices were UNCLEAR, PERSONAL, and JUSTIFICATION. Moreover, these classifications were not influenced by the various emotion-based scenarios of the vignettes. Across pre- and post-vignettes, an average of 6% of the reasons were UNCLEAR. In some cases, these responses reflected difficulty articulating meaningful reasons for their skill choice. In other cases, students responded inappropriately. A small shift in the amount of Problem-Solving skill choices aligned to UNCLEAR reasons suggested that some students may have identified with this positive skill but were not

able to articulate reasons to support it. Students who gave PERSONAL-type reasons (4%) ostensibly needed to convert or translate the hypothetical context into a personal experience in order to explain. JUSTIFICATION was the most common response classification accounting for an average of 29% of the reasons provided. These reasons were neither positive nor negative; rather, they were simple declarations that students believed to be true (e.g., “because that’s the way I feel” or “because it’s the best thing to do”).

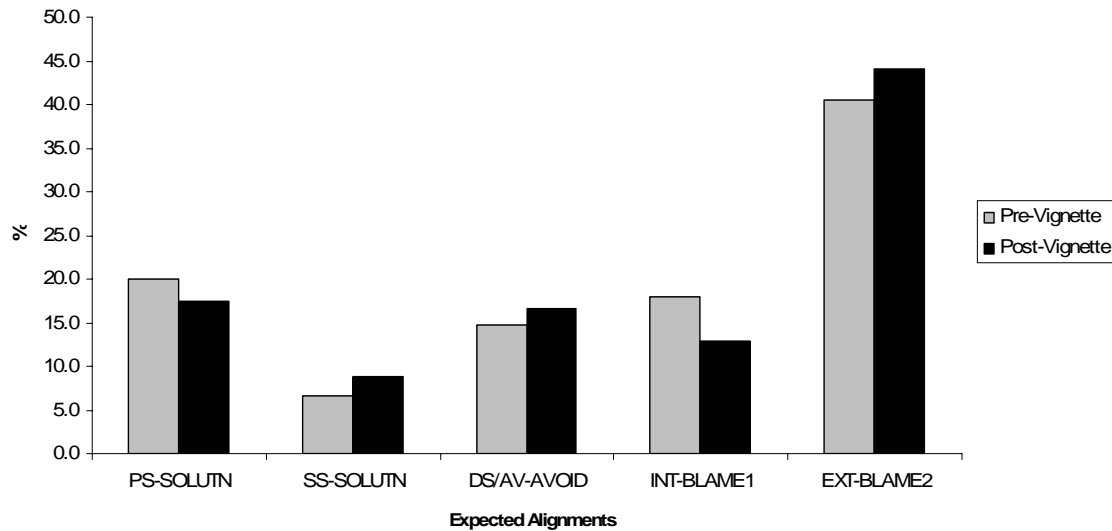
The alignment of coping skills to the students’ reasons was one way to provide supporting evidence for the presence of social-emotional awareness and development that was a component of the IMPACT program. This would be particularly evident in the alignment of positive skill choices (i.e., Problem-Solving and Support-Seeking) to reasons that described positive resolutions that included reassessments of situations that cause aversive feelings or reactions. These SOLUTION-type reasons also included problem identification and visualization of alternative solutions.

The alignment of reasons to negative skill choices (i.e., Distancing-Avoidance, Internalization, and Externalization) was also meaningful. This alignment demonstrated that students were indeed aware of their emotions and the rationale for them; however, these students may need further guidance in understanding how to manage their emotions and coping skills that would lead to more positive outcomes. The skill choice of Distancing-Avoidance was expected to align to reasons describing avoidance (AVOID). As described in Table 50, the AVOID-type reasons only described physical and emotional avoidance with no description of positive outcomes, benefits, or alternative solutions. The alignments of the Internalization and Externalization skill choices with the corresponding reason classifications of BLAME1 and BLAME2 were also expected.

Overall, the percentage of expected alignments accounted for 38% of all possible alignments. Figure 1 below displays the distribution of all expected alignments across the pre-and post-vignette responses.

Figure 1.

Percentages of expected coping skill/reason alignments



As Figure 1 shows, the greatest skill/reason alignment and most positive change was seen between the negative coping skill Externalization and its corresponding reason type. A similar pattern emerged for the Distancing/Avoidance alignment. These findings suggest that although the chosen coping skills were negative, the students demonstrated an awareness of their emotional responses and reasons by articulating reasons to support their choices. Moreover, increases in negative skill/reason alignments from pre- to post-vignettes indicate that students have increased their awareness during their time in the IMPACT program.

Among the positive skills, there was an overall increase in the Support-Seeking skill to SOLUTION-type reasons. This increase was most prominent in vignettes where seeking an authoritative adult (e.g., policemen, parents) was the appropriate solution, particularly for minors.

Two unanticipated alignments emerged in our analysis. The alignment between the Problem-Solving coping skills to AVOID-type reason suggested that students identified the Problem-Solving coping skill as a means for removal from an aversive situation or feeling. The second unanticipated alignment was the Distancing-Avoidance skill with the STAND- type reasons. This category of reasons was specific to the *FEAR* vignette. Many students articulated the reasons describing bravery, fighting for one's pride, and "standing your ground" as positive strategies. Given the urban environments

and of these high school students and the rules of social conduct in which they may engage, it was likely that their reasons for “appearing tough” (the Distancing-Avoidance skill choice portion) were based on the only context in which they were familiar. For this group of students, the Distancing-Avoidance skill choice described on the vignettes (“You act tough, as if you’re not scared”) was the preferred choice and their STAND-type reasons effectively supported this. This alignment saw little change from pre- to post-vignette.

In our analyses of students’ awareness and articulations of their reactions and choices, we found that students were, in general, able to provide supportive reasons for their choices. This finding includes all expected alignments, whether the coping skills were positive or negative. This also includes unanticipated alignments. Although they were not “expected,” they still demonstrated the students’ ability to articulate supportive reasons. Approximately one-third of the students justified their responses without articulating “reasons” for their behavior. Positive pre/post changes over the course of the program were evident for three of the coping skills; however, many changes were specific to the individual vignettes and thus masked by the larger group analyses.

Through the use of these coping skills vignettes, we have seen that during the time spent in the IMPACT program, students increased their choices of positive coping skills and decreased their negative choices in various scenarios. We have also seen that students who chose negative coping skills demonstrated the ability to articulate supportive reasons for these choices. This finding clearly suggests the presence of emotional awareness and development. Given that the students have this capability, the IMPACT program has the potential for teaching students to think through their reactions, use positive coping skills, and support them with well-articulated reasons. Nevertheless, the small, yet encouraging, increase in alignments over the course of the program suggested that the program did influence students’ awareness of their reactions and the development of their coping skills.

### *Individual Protective Factors Index*

We were interested in determining whether students who attended IMPACT became more resilient over time. The Individual Protective Factors Index (IPFI) is a

measure of adolescent resiliency developed in 1992<sup>6</sup>. It has been tested for reliability and validity, and is commonly used for research purposes. The 71-item IPFI measures protective factors covering three domains: 1) social bonding, which includes attitudes about school, family and pro-social norms; 2) personal competence, which measures self-concept, self-control, self-efficacy and positive outlook; and 3) social competence, which includes the domains of assertiveness, confidence, and cooperation. Students given the IPFI are also given a questionnaire that measures risk factors. This part of the instrument gathers information about how often students engage in various behaviors such as using drugs and alcohol, getting in fights or trouble at school, being around kids who use drugs, damaging property, or going to class under the influence of drugs or alcohol. The questionnaire also asks about pro-social behaviors like participating in school clubs or organizations.

We slightly modified the IPFI to suit the purposes and goals of the IMPACT evaluation. A few items were deleted to give the first section of our instrument 57 items. We then took items from the risk factor questionnaire and added them to our survey. In the last part of our instrument we asked students about their friends' behaviors because negative peer influences are also risk factors. Finally, the last few items indicated how students feel about IMPACT. Our instrument had a total of two sections and 95 items. The end result was a revised survey that measured protective and risk factors similar to the original IPFI. We administered the instrument to a sample of IMPACT students immediately prior to and following the IMPACT program in order to determine if there was a change over time.

*Protective factors.* The IPFI data was analyzed by section. The first part of the survey measured protective factors and included 57 items. Because of the large number of items on the survey, we conducted a factor analysis to reduce the data to clusters of related items (factors) that would explain the most variance in the results. This initial analysis yielded five meaningful factors:

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<sup>6</sup> Springer, J.F. and Phillips, J.L. Evaluation of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) National Youth Sports Program; Evaluation, Management and Training (EMT) Associates, Inc. 1992. The IPFI was supported with funding by the NCAA through a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

- *Drugs and Alcohol*: Students were asked about their attitudes toward drugs and alcohol with items such as “I might smoke cigarettes when I get older” and “People seem to have fun when they drink alcohol.”
- *Pro-social Attitudes*: This factor included items such as “I get along well with other people” and “Being part of a team is fun.”
- *Aggression*: This factor included items asking students about their attitudes toward violence and anti-social behavior. Such items included “I get mad easily,” “I don’t like most people,” and “Sometimes you have to physically fight to get what you want.”
- *School*: Students were asked about educational aspirations. This factor included statements like “I really want to graduate from college” and “School is a waste of time.”
- *Family*: This factor included items asking about students’ attitudes toward their families, such as “I can tell my parents the way I feel about things” and “My family expects too much of me.”

Each item that comprised the factors had a value. These values were averaged to create a resiliency score for each factor. Pre- and post-IMPACT scores were examined to see if there was a change in the students’ resiliency scores. Throughout the IPFI, a higher score indicates more resiliency (or a higher degree of protective factors), whereas a lower score means less resiliency or higher risk. Therefore, an increase in scores from the pre- to the post-administration of the IPFI on all items and factors indicates a positive change in program success.

Of the five protective factors examined, the only factor for which we saw a statistically significant increase from pre- to post-IMPACT was the factor related to drug and alcohol use. On average, the resiliency score increased only slightly. On a scale of 1 to 4, the mean score increased from 2.68 before IMPACT to 2.78 after IMPACT (Table 51). This finding indicates that students were slightly less likely to support or engage in alcohol or drug use after IMPACT than they were at the start of the program. However, since the change in the mean is so small, while the finding has statistical significance, it has little educational or practical meaning and should be interpreted with caution.

Table 51

Protective Factors Related to Drugs and Alcohol: Overall

|               | Mean IPFI Score <sup>a</sup> | Number of Students | t      | Significance |
|---------------|------------------------------|--------------------|--------|--------------|
| Pre - IMPACT  | 2.68                         | 115                | -2.306 | .023         |
| Post - IMPACT | 2.78                         | 115                |        |              |

<sup>a</sup>Resiliency score is on a scale of 1 – 4, with 1 being the lowest score and 4 being the highest.

In Table 52, we present more specific findings for each of the 8 items that comprise the drugs and alcohol factor.

Table 52

Protective Factors Related to Drugs and Alcohol: Individual items

|  | N (Pre) | Students who Disagree:<br>Pre-IMPACT | N (Post) | Students who Disagree:<br>Post-IMPACT |
|--|---------|--------------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------------|
| I might smoke cigarettes when I get older          | 235     | 158 (67%)                            | 172      | 131 (76%)                             |
| People seem to have fun when they drink alcohol    | 235     | 120 (51%)                            | 172      | 91 (53%)                              |
| I will probably drink alcohol when I am old enough | 237     | 107(45%)                             | 171      | 81 (47%)                              |
| Marijuana makes you happy                          | 234     | 154 (57%)                            | 170      | 114 (67%)                             |
| People usually drink alcohol at good parties       | 233     | 62 (27%)                             | 167      | 69 (41%)                              |
| I can't wait to be old enough to drink             | 237     | 144 (61%)                            | 170      | 123 (72%)                             |
| I am curious about alcohol and drugs               | 233     | 147 (63%)                            | 169      | 117 (69%)                             |
| If I have a chance, I might try drugs              | 233     | 148 (64%)                            | 169      | 119 (71%)                             |

The percentage of students who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the individual statements increased after participation in the IMPACT program, indicating an increase in student resiliency.

Risk factors. The next set of items on the survey measured various risk factors. First, we asked students how their parents would feel if they used alcohol or drugs and their parents found out. No significant change was detected from pre- to post-IMPACT. In general in both pre and post administration, students overwhelmingly reported that their parents would disapprove of both alcohol and drugs. Ninety-five percent said their parents would disapprove or disapprove strongly if they found out their students used alcohol, and 97 percent reported that their parents would disapprove or disapprove strongly if their parents found out about drug use.

In the next section, we asked students how many times in the previous two weeks they had engaged in certain behaviors, such as using drugs, getting into fights, arguing with parents, getting stopped by the police, and getting sent to the principal or detention. In this section, we also asked students about a few pro-social behaviors such as going to church and participating in school clubs or organizations. Once again, we conducted a factor analysis to group the 23 items into meaningful clusters. We extracted 2 main factors: drug and alcohol use and violence and crime. Significant pre-/post-IMPACT differences were detected only for the drugs and alcohol factor (Table 53). Students reported engaging in drug and alcohol activities slightly less frequently after IMPACT than at the start of the program. This finding is consistent with the slight increase in the protective factors associated with alcohol and drug use mentioned above.

Table 53

Risk Factors Related to Drugs and Alcohol: Overall

|               | Mean IPFI Score <sup>a</sup> | Number of Students | t      | Significance |
|---------------|------------------------------|--------------------|--------|--------------|
| Pre - IMPACT  | 4.26                         | 121                | -2.275 | .025         |
| Post - IMPACT | 4.43                         | 121                |        |              |

<sup>a</sup>Risk score is on a scale of 1 – 5, with 1 being the lowest score and 5 being the highest.

In examining the pre-/post-IMPACT change for individual items, we discovered a small but significant increase in resiliency for four of these risk-related items (Table 54). During the post-assessment, students reported that they used methamphetamines less frequently than before IMPACT (although the frequency was very low to begin with; 89% of students reported no methamphetamine use in the pre-assessment). Students also reported that they damaged other people’s property (only 33% reported this behavior in the pre-assessment), spent time with other kids who were using drugs, and argued with their parents less frequently after IMPACT than at the start of the program.

Table 54

Risk Factors: Individual Items

|   | Mean<br>Pre-IMPACT | Mean<br>Post-IMPACT | Number of<br>Students |
|---|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Used methamphetamines                             | 4.68               | 4.87                | 126                   |
| Purposely damaged other people’s property         | 4.22               | 4.56                | 133                   |
| Been around other kids who were using drugs       | 3.31               | 3.75                | 133                   |
| Argued with parents or other adults in your house | 2.53               | 2.88                | 130                   |

*Note.* The higher the mean score, the *less* frequently students engaged in these risk-related activities.

In addition to examining overall resiliency scores, we looked at increases and decreases in risk behaviors by IMPACT group type. A Chi-square test was performed which indicates whether two variables are related. We were interested in finding out whether a change in risk behavior was related to group type. The most pronounced results were found with the ATOD group. Table 55 shows changes in specific behaviors among ATOD students, along with the Chi-square test results. The p-values were all less than .10 which indicates that we can be confident the results are not due to random error.

Students in the ATOD groups showed a decrease in risk behaviors from the pre- to post-IMPACT administration. For example, 31% of ATOD students reported decreasing their use of marijuana after the IMPACT program, while 24% reported increasing use, and 45% reported no change (Table 55). The actual number of students in

these groups is small (e.g., only 10 students reported increasing marijuana use) but statistically significant. The largest change detected was that almost half of the ATOD students associated with other kids who used drugs less frequently after IMPACT than at the start of the program. These results are not surprising given that the ATOD group specifically addresses drug and alcohol abuse.

Table 55

Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs (ATOD) Group Results

|  | Increase | Decrease | No Change | Chi-square | df | N   | p    |
|--|----------|----------|-----------|------------|----|-----|------|
| Used marijuana                                       | 10 (24%) | 13 (31%) | 19 (45%)  | 20.81      | 8  | 132 | .008 |
| Got stopped by the police                            | 10 (24%) | 11 (27%) | 20 (49%)  | 22.74      | 8  | 131 | .004 |
| Smoked cigarettes                                    | 4 (10%)  | 10 (24%) | 28 (67%)  | 13.45      | 8  | 134 | .097 |
| Had a lot of alcohol (3 drinks or more)              | 9 (21%)  | 10 (24%) | 23 (55%)  | 13.64      | 8  | 134 | .092 |
| Gone to class high on alcohol or drugs               | 8 (19%)  | 15 (36%) | 19 (45%)  | 32.43      | 8  | 134 | .000 |
| Been in a car with a friend who was high or drinking | 8 (19%)  | 13 (31%) | 21 (23%)  | 13.64      | 8  | 131 | .092 |
| Been around other kids who were using drugs          | 13 (31%) | 20 (48%) | 9 (21%)   | 23.62      | 8  | 133 | .003 |

For all of the risk factors except two (arguing with parents and being around other kids who use drugs) the majority of students reported that they did not engage in any of the risk behaviors in the pre-assessment. This could be due to the social desirability bias, meaning that students did not want to reveal anti-social or dangerous and illegal behaviors to the researchers or whoever might see the surveys, although they were assured that their responses were confidential and anonymous. Because the pre-IMPACT resiliency scores were high, it is difficult to detect significant increases in the post-assessment. For the most part, we found little or no meaningful changes from pre- to post- IMPACT.

Another important factor we studied in relation to adolescent resiliency was peer influence. IMPACT students were more likely to report that their friends engaged in risky or illegal behaviors than to self-report that they engaged in these behaviors. We asked students if most, some, or none of their friends engaged in various behaviors. We found significant (but small) changes for several items (Table 56). In the table, an increase in the mean resiliency score indicates that a student has become more resilient at the end of IMPACT, which indicates that fewer of that student’s friends engage in the risk behavior.

Table 56

Peer Influences

|                          | Mean<br>Pre-IMPACT | Mean<br>Post-IMPACT | Number of<br>Students |
|--------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Smoke cigarettes         | 2.46               | 2.57                | 132                   |
| Drink alcohol            | 2.15               | 2.33                | 131                   |
| Use drugs like marijuana | 2.22               | 2.35                | 131                   |

*Note.* The higher the mean score, the *less* frequently students engaged in these risk-related activities.

*Attitudes about IMPACT.* The last section of the survey asked students how they found out about IMPACT and their perceptions of its effectiveness. Most students heard about the IMPACT program through a counselor, administrator, teacher, or another student (Table 57). Many students reported that they heard about the program through an “other” source, but did not specify further. When asked to elaborate on the “other” source, some students put down a person’s name but did not identify their role (teacher, dean, etc).

Table 57

How did you first hear about IMPACT?

|   | N=216 |
|---|-------|
| Counselor or administrator                | 57    |
| Teacher                                   | 56    |
| Another student or friend                 | 32    |
| School announcement, bulletin, or handout | 25    |
| Assembly                                  | 10    |
| Parent                                    | 3     |
| <i>Other</i>                              | 33    |

Lastly, students were asked how much they would recommend IMPACT to friends and how much they believed the IMPACT program helped students stay off drugs and alcohol. The responses are reflected in Table 58. Students generally had a more positive view of IMPACT at the end of the program and there was a statistically significant finding that students reported that they would recommend IMPACT to their friends more after IMPACT than at the beginning of the program. This suggests that students found the program beneficial.

Table 58

Students' Attitudes about IMPACT

|             | How much would you recommend IMPACT to friends? |                      | How much do you believe IMPACT helps student stay off alcohol/drugs? |                      |
|-------------|---|----------------------|--|----------------------|
|             | Pre-IMPACT<br>N=221                             | Post-IMPACT<br>N=169 | Pre-IMPACT<br>N=221  | Post-IMPACT<br>N=169 |
| Not at all  | 16 (7%)   | 8 (5%)               | 17 (8%)  | 14 (8%)              |
| Barely      | 16 (7%)   | 11 (7%)              | 21 (10%)   | 10 (6%)              |
| A little    | 59 (27%)  | 32 (19%)             | 55 (25%)   | 38 (23%)             |
| A lot       | 68 (31%)  | 58 (34%)             | 74 (34%)   | 58 (34%)             |
| A whole lot | 62 (28%)  | 60 (36%)             | 54 (24%)   | 49 (29%)             |

Overall, the revised IPFI survey did not detect major changes in students' resiliency from before to after the program. It is not uncommon for researchers to find statistically insignificant or small effects in studies of educational intervention programs. The significant changes we found were related to the use of, and attitudes toward, drugs and alcohol, which is promising. Although these results are statistically significant, they are very small. Some possible explanations exist as to why we did not find major improvements using the IPFI. First, students may have reported socially desirable responses in the pre-assessment, making it difficult to detect a true change in the post-assessment. For example, students may have been inclined to report that they used drugs less frequently than they really did before the IMPACT program began. In addition, all students who participated in IMPACT signed a no-use contract which may have inhibited them from disclosing drug use. Therefore, if they reported a true decline in drug use in the post-assessment, it may not have been detected due to the inflated pre-assessment frequencies.

In addition, we experienced major attrition in the sample. By the time we administered the post-assessment, we had lost about one-third of our sample. If we had sustained larger numbers of students in the sample, we might have been able to detect more robust effects. The students who disappeared from the sample may not have been

lost randomly, but could have represented a meaningful group (e.g., students most at-risk) whose presence could have altered our findings.

Despite these limitations, some encouraging results were found. We saw a general and consistent trend toward less drug and alcohol use from the pre- to the post-assessment. Furthermore, an overwhelming majority of students reported that their parents would be greatly concerned if they found out their children were involved with drug or alcohol use. This is promising since parental concern is considered a protective factor because fear of parental disapproval could deter students from using drugs and alcohol. Finally, a large majority (over 80%) of students found IMPACT helpful and would recommend it to their friends.

### *Grades and Attendance*

One of the primary goals of IMPACT is to increase student achievement. Therefore, we wanted to see if IMPACT students' grade point averages (GPAs) were significantly higher than they were prior to completing the program. T-test analyses revealed that the mean GPA of IMPACT students was lower after participating in IMPACT ( $M = 1.64$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ) than before participation ( $M = 1.73$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ),  $t(293) = .09$ ,  $p = .027$  (two-tailed). These results must be interpreted with caution due to the fact that although there was a statistically significant difference between the means, there was essentially no change in the means in a practical sense. In other words, on average, IMPACT students' GPAs did not change meaningfully after participating in IMPACT. In addition to looking at change in GPA, we wanted to see if IMPACT students who did not pass English and/or math prior to the program (i.e., received a D or F in the fall) received a passing grade after the program (i.e., received an A, B, or C in the spring). We found that 30% of students who did not pass English before participating in the program passed after participation. Twenty-one percent of students who did not pass math prior to the program passed after the program. These findings must be viewed in the light of several caveats. First, IMPACT may not directly affect change academically. Rather, IMPACT may increase students' social-emotional skills, thereby indirectly facilitating their academic learning. Second, it is not clear that increasing students' social-emotional skills immediately results in an increase in academic achievement.

We also sought to determine whether students' attendance rates were significantly higher after participating in IMPACT. We calculated attendance rate by dividing the total number of hours attended by the total possible hours of attendance. With respect to attendance, we found that students did attend school at a higher rate after the program ( $M = .91$ ,  $SD = .07$ ) than before the program ( $M = .87$ ,  $SD = .15$ ),  $t(293) = -.04$ ,  $p = .000$  (two-tailed). As with the mean GPA, although there was a statistically significant difference, there was no educationally significant change. Rather, on average, IMPACT students' attendance rates did not change meaningfully after participating in IMPACT.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### *Attendance and Tardiness*

Nearly half of the facilitators who were interviewed (11 of 25) stated that student attendance and/or tardiness was a problem in their groups. When students do not attend their groups regularly, they are not able to reap the full benefits of the program. Poor attendance and tardiness may also make it more difficult for groups to “bond” and become safe spaces for sharing. The attendance logs indicated that, on average, students attended approximately two-thirds of the sessions for their group(s). While this number in itself does not seem particularly low, coordinator and facilitator interviews revealed that often the same core group of students consistently attended, while others consistently exhibited poor attendance. Since attendance is voluntary for most students, staff should explore ways to make students more aware of the importance and value of the program in order to encourage students to attend consistently. Additionally, more coordinators may need to meet individually with those students who consistently do not attend IMPACT sessions in order to discuss their attendance problems.

Tardiness was frequently reported by facilitators and was also noted in our classroom observations. Facilitators often mentioned that students were late because their regular classroom teachers did not allow them to leave on time. Some coordinators and facilitators felt that teachers did not see the value of the IMPACT program and thus resisted releasing their students in a timely manner. Making attempts to increase teacher awareness and knowledge of the IMPACT program may help to lessen this problem. Tardiness also resulted when summonses were distributed late. Coordinators should attempt to create a systematic and efficient way of summoning students so that they can arrive at their group sessions on time.

### *Communication Among IMPACT Staff Members*

Facilitator, coordinator, and administrator surveys revealed that poor and/or infrequent communication was a common problem. When asked how often they met with their coordinators during the 2004-05 school year, the largest proportion of facilitators (5 of 16) stated that they never met, and only half of the facilitators met with their coordinators more than once or twice a semester. Frequent communication among staff is

necessary in order to prevent confusion and to assure that the program is implemented in the way it was intended. This could take the form of brief but frequent informal meetings if it is difficult to reserve large blocks of time to meet. Additionally, providing facilitators with feedback, encouragement, and advice not only improves the quality of facilitation in group sessions, but can also increase the self-efficacy, program buy-in, and morale of the facilitators. This also provides coordinators with the opportunity to obtain valuable information about how the program is doing and what adjustments can be made to improve it.

The core team provides a valuable means for communication among all IMPACT staff at a particular school. However, fewer than half of coordinators reported that there was a core team at their school. In fact, some coordinators did not even know what a core team was. If the core team is an essential part of IMPACT, coordinators should be encouraged to form a core team at their schools. The purpose of the team and the responsibilities of the members should be clearly defined. Additionally, the team should meet regularly in order to be most effective.

### *Support*

Overall, facilitators were very satisfied with the level of support they received for the IMPACT program. The vast majority (21 of 24) indicated that the support met their needs *well* or *very well*. Nearly all coordinators (29 of 30) also reported receiving some type of support. However, only about a third of the coordinators (10 of 27) reported receiving any type of support from administrators. When support was provided, it was generally constrained to logistical assistance (e.g., providing locations for group sessions, assisting with paperwork). Since increased administrative support for a program can lead to more positive outcomes, administrators should be encouraged to increase their knowledge of the program and consult with the coordinator to promote the program within the school and provide support in whatever way it would be helpful. This may also help to increase teacher support for the program, which was mentioned earlier as a problem at many schools in our sample.

### *IMPACT Training*

Interviews revealed that overall, training was perceived as very effective. Twenty-three of 26 facilitators felt that it prepared them *well* or *very well* for implementing the program. When asked to provide suggestions to improve the training, nearly half of the facilitators felt that the training was fine as it was. However, one aspect of the training that Central Office staff may want to consider is its frequency. At the time of their interviews, about a third of facilitators (9 of 25) had been trained at least four years earlier, and 3 facilitators had been trained more than 10 years earlier. As suggested by one facilitator, Central Office staff may want to consider offering refresher trainings on an annual or biannual basis so that facilitators can stay current in terms of their knowledge about social-emotional issues affecting adolescents, group facilitation issues, and the rules and regulations of the IMPACT program.

Students who attend IMPACT typically need assistance with using social-emotional skills to deal with their issues in an adaptive manner. These students need direct instruction in the use of these skills. Therefore, it is particularly important that the topic of modeling the use of social-emotional skills be addressed during professional development. Additionally, students need to be able to transfer the use of their newfound social-emotional skills from IMPACT into their regular classrooms and their personal lives. Processing of group activities is one means to facilitate the transfer of learning across contexts. Hence, facilitator use of group processing techniques must also be addressed during professional development.

### *Integration of IMPACT*

As stated earlier in this report, implementing interventions in an integrated manner is associated with more positive outcomes and long-term sustainability. The majority of IMPACT staff felt that the program was *well-integrated* or *very well-integrated* into their school's structure. However, several integration problems were either mentioned or observed, including lack of schoolwide support, awareness, and resources. Coordinators should be encouraged to continue their efforts to increase awareness and support for the program at their schools, and to investigate physical as well as social resources to enhance the program.

### *Instructional Quality and Curriculum Fidelity*

For the most part, the quality of instruction in IMPACT groups was high. The most notable exception was the level of interaction during sessions. Discussion during sessions was primarily recitative, with the facilitator leading most of the conversations. Students need to be active participants if learning is expected to occur. Therefore, as suggested previously, group processing and discussion facilitation techniques should be addressed more heavily during professional development. Facilitators implemented the IMPACT curriculum with a moderate degree of fidelity. We found that when facilitators supplemented the lessons, the activities only aligned with the lesson goals as intended about half of the time. It is possible that facilitators modified the lessons to such an extent due to the fact that many facilitators felt that the curriculum need to be revised. Central Office staff should look into revising the curriculum. In addition, on-site coordinators or administrators should provide facilitators with sufficient support to ensure that the curriculum is being implemented with a high degree of fidelity.

### *Summary of the Effectiveness of IMPACT*

The IMPACT program is targeted at students who are experiencing non-academic issues, and possibly academic issues, that are interfering their achievement. The goal of the program is to increase student achievement. We found that participation in IMPACT did not result in a change in students' GPAs or attendance rates. However, some students who were not passing their English and/or math class prior to IMPACT passed these classes after participating in IMPACT. These results must be interpreted with caution for several reasons. The first reason is that since we did not have a comparison group, we cannot attribute these results, or lack thereof, to the program. Second, students did not attend more than 65% of IMPACT sessions, on average. Therefore, it is possible that they did not attend enough IMPACT sessions to make a difference in their achievement. Third, it is possible that the modifications that facilitators made during sessions changed the core components of the curriculum to such an extent that the effectiveness of the program was diminished. Finally, IMPACT may not directly affect academic outcomes. Rather, IMPACT may increase students' social-emotional skills, thereby indirectly facilitating their academic learning. Furthermore, it is not clear that increasing students' social-emotional skills immediately results in an increase in academic achievement. Our

findings indicate that the IMPACT program did result in an increase of social-emotional skills in students. In addition, results suggest that student use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs also decreased. As mentioned previously, studies show that building children's social-emotional competence and reducing risky behaviors are significantly linked to academic performance. Hence, we theorize that the aforementioned changes may result in future positive changes in academic achievement for these students.

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