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A Parent/Staff Training Program on Helping Young Children with Challenging Behaviors: Project SUCCEED in Head Start

Project SUCCEED in Head Start (Supporting and Understanding Challenging Children's Emotional and Educational Development), a research and demonstration project, was funded from 1998 through 2002 by the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. Based at Portland State University's Regional Research Institute for Human Services, project staff worked closely with two Oregon Head Start programs in developing and implementing the project. This presentation described the goals, interventions, and preliminary process and outcome evaluation results of the project.

Project goals included increasing family and teachers' skills and confidence in helping children with challenging behaviors; reducing family and teachers' stress; improving the home and classroom environment; reducing children's problem behaviors and increasing their social, cognitive, and emotional competence; decreasing the incidence of kindergarten failure; and increasing families' empowerment and advocacy skills. The cornerstone of the project's intervention is a *training curriculum* that addresses social and emotional development and strategies for addressing challenging behaviors at home and in the classroom. Other activities included *coaching* for participating staff and parents in the classroom and *provision of a post-training support group*. Family members and Head Start staff were involved with all phases of the project, and served central roles as curriculum developers, reviewers, and trainers/facilitators. The curriculum was developed through a joint parent and teacher workgroup, and is presented by and for groups of parents and teachers.

For the final program year (2001-2002), Project SUCCEED worked closely with a Head Start program that serves a largely suburban county in the Portland, Oregon metropolitan area. This particular Head Start program serves a culturally diverse population: almost 65% of the participants in the SUCCEED evaluation spoke Spanish in their home. Parents and teachers from *intervention* classrooms were invited to participate in trainings based on parent and teacher ratings of children's behavior on the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA; LeBuffe & Naglieri, 1998) and either parent or teacher expressions of concern. Ultimately, 12 teachers and 35 parents from 8 different classrooms took part in training classes that were offered at two sites; the 12 class sessions were spread over a four-month period, from late November 2001 through mid-March 2002. All handouts were translated into Spanish, and simultaneous English:Spanish translation was provided by an interpreter who was also trained as a facilitator. Food was provided, child care was provided on site, and parents were reimbursed for transportation, if needed. Coaching involved classroom visits about twice a month (over a 3-month period) from the SUCCEED program coordinator, an experienced early childhood educator and therapist, who stayed for 2-3 hours to observe, model, consult and debrief with participating teachers (and, to a far lesser extent, with participating parents who were in the classroom on a given day). The focus of coaching was on helping class members use the knowledge and strategies they were learning at the training sessions. After the conclusion of training classes, a three-session support group was offered to build on the camaraderie that had developed among participants and to extend the learning that had taken place.

Parents and teachers from *comparison* classrooms received 'services as usual' as offered by the Head Start program. These services included access to mental health consultation and the opportunity to attend parenting classes focused on typically developing children. In appreciation for their involvement in the outcome evaluation, each classroom received three books and a videotape related to child guidance.

Project evaluation included both process and outcome efforts. Process evaluation findings for the final program year included the following:

- ◆ Weekly evaluations showed consistently high satisfaction with training materials and quality of instruction.
- ◆ 100% percent of participants (N = 35) indicated that the training met their needs as a parent or teacher "well" or "very well."
- ◆ 91% responded "well" or "very well" when asked how well the program helped in dealing with children's challenging behaviors.

For the outcome evaluation, a total of 136 pre-intervention family interviews were completed (82 intervention and 54 comparison); 65 percent were conducted in Spanish. Pre- and post-intervention data were collected using the following measures: the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS; Harms & Clifford, 1980); the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA; LeBuffe & Naglieri, 1998; parents and teachers); the Preschool and Kindergarten Behavior Scales (Merrell, 1994; parents only); the Caregiver-Teacher Report Form (CTRF; Achenbach, 1991; teachers only); and a general measure of teaching stress. Other parent measures included the Family Support Scale (Dunst, et al., 1998), a component of the Family Empowerment Scale (Koren, et al., 1992), and the Parenting Stress Index (Abidin, 1995).

Analysis of baseline DECA data revealed that many parents rated their children's development and behavior in the clinically significant or "Concern" range (Self-Control = 21.6 %, Attachment = 32.8%, Initiative = 22.4%, Behavior Concerns = 61.2%). Teachers, however, generally reported lower frequency of "Concern" scores (Self-Control = 13.3%, Attachment = 20%, Initiative = 23.0%, Behavior Concerns = 20.0%).

Only teacher data was available for post-test analysis at the time of this presentation. DECA Behavior Concern ratings for children in the intervention classrooms improved (decreased) over the year (n.s.)

and increased ($p < .05$) in the comparison classrooms. Teacher stress related to challenging behaviors remained fairly stable from pre-test to post-test for the comparison group, while intervention teachers' scores decreased.

This review of Project SUCCEED suggests that the program model can be successfully implemented, and that families' and teachers' collaboration in curriculum review and training is both feasible and valuable. Preliminary findings suggest important positive changes associated with the intervention.

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