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Developing Resiliency Skills of Preschoolers Through Social-Emotional Behavioral Teaching Practices to Buffer Against Trauma and Increase Child Outcomes

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**Developing Resiliency Skills of Preschoolers Through Social-Emotional Behavioral
Teaching Practices to Buffer Against Trauma and Increase Child Outcomes**

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Capstone Project: A School Improvement Plan

Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa

Abstract

This school improvement plan responds to challenges that preschool teachers face with the growing number of young children in their classrooms who have experienced trauma and exhibit serious, highly disruptive, and dangerous behaviors. All children benefit from early learning experiences that are rich in social-emotional learning. Research has shown that students with well developed emotional literacy, problem solving skills, and self-regulation skills have better outcomes into adulthood compared to peers who struggle with these skills. This school improvement plan aims to provide insight and guidance for Early Childhood Educational Programs by providing intentional professional development to build staff capacity for teaching children appropriate social-emotional skills.

Keywords: early childhood, preschool, trauma, resiliency, social-emotional, Head Start, professional development, challenging behavior, teaching strategies

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Developing Resiliency Skills of Preschoolers Through Social-Emotional Behavioral Teaching Practices to Buffer Against Trauma and Increase Child Outcomes

“Young children who are exposed to trauma often exhibit a range of behaviors that are reactions to the trauma itself” (Neitzel, 2020, p. 159). Understanding this statement is crucial for educators, caregivers, and parents to address the behaviors of children with trauma. There is growing research on the importance of Trauma- Informed Care (TIC), and the teaching of social-emotional skills, especially in Early Childhood Educational environments. The impact of trauma on young children is frequent, widespread, and only growing more prevalent (Chudzik, et al., 2022). Brunzell et al. (2019) state that nearly half of all children in the United States have previously or are currently experiencing ongoing trauma. The problem is that preschool teachers need effective strategies to address behavioral challenges with children who have experienced trauma.

Early childhood educators are faced with many questions of how to help preschool-age students in their classroom best. There is a need for effective strategies and interventions for children in preschool classrooms that will not re-traumatize, trigger, or negatively impact children. Children who are living in or have experienced trauma need their teachers to have specific skills and strategies tailored to children with trauma backgrounds. The purpose of this school improvement plan is to identify research-based and evidence-based practices that preschool teachers can utilize to benefit not only children with trauma backgrounds but all children in their classrooms.

Preschool-aged children who have experienced trauma often show agitation, impulsiveness, aggression, noncompliance, and other challenging behaviors in the classroom (Yoon et al. 2022; Vanderzee et al., 2018; Loomis, 2018). While teachers often have skills,

experience, and training on responding to challenging behaviors, many new Head Start teachers are working on obtaining teaching degrees and certificates, and do not come in knowing how to handle children with challenging behaviors. This leaves teachers feeling confused, defeated, and helpless when trying to find solutions to help these children be successful in their classrooms. This school improvement plan explains why training and professional development practices are crucially important and will lay out a plan of how to train teachers on how to use PBIS, Conscious Discipline, and Second Step in their classrooms. This plan will also lay out a professional development training plan specifically for Head Start programs to guide them in implementing these practices.

Peer-reviewed research articles and action-research articles were reviewed for the literature review for this project. These articles were obtained through DeWitt Library at Northwestern College and through Google Scholar. These articles were published within the past 10 years, with research focused on preschool-age children.

The belief is that a formal professional development plan to include training of new and seasoned staff on PBIS, Conscious Discipline, and Second Step, teachers will be able to implement these evidence-based practices in their classroom to increase children's resiliency skills. By intentionally developing children's emotional literacy, child outcomes will be more positive in both the short and long term. By-products of this school improvement plan will include fewer behavior referrals, increased educator wellness, and higher staff retention.

Review of the Literature

Challenging Behaviors in Early Education

Researchers Kwon et al. (2022) conducted a study that looked at the impact of preschoolers' behavioral challenges on teacher burnout, job stress, and the extent these negative

feelings would have on teachers' intent to leave their jobs or fields. The study participants looked at 614 Head Start teachers from across the United States. Their study had these teachers rank their views of the severity of behavioral challenges within their classroom and their own depressive symptoms to the extent that their feelings were a result of the children's behaviors. The participants also responded to questions of how committed they were to their jobs, and whether they intended to leave within the next year. Kwon et al. (2022) found that while there was not a direct link between behavioral challenges in the classroom to teachers' intent to leave their positions, there was a direct link between the extent of behavioral challenges to teachers' job satisfaction and feelings of well-being, and a direct link between teacher's low morale and depressive feelings and their intent to leave. The study suggests that preschool classrooms with children with high behavioral concerns have teachers who are under higher stress, are more depressed, and experience higher levels of burnout. Teachers with these feelings correlated to teachers wanting to leave their jobs. While correlations cannot imply causation, the study seems to suggest that preschool classrooms with fewer behavioral challenges have teachers with higher morale, less stress, and higher job commitment.

Researchers Chen et al. (2020) explored children with trauma backgrounds, how trauma impacts young children's behavior, and how their behavior impacts both children and their caregiver's executive function. The study looked at 109 children and caregivers who sought treatment at a community-based trauma clinic. Just as researchers hypothesized, children with higher frequency and duration of trauma correlated to more challenging behaviors exhibited by the children. Children with trauma backgrounds exhibit challenging behaviors for their caregivers which impacts the children's and caregivers' relationship and negatively impacts both the children's and caregivers executive functioning. Both Kwan et al. (2022) and Chen et al.

(2020) found that young children's challenging behaviors had a negative impact on their caregivers.

Nabors et al. (2022) conducted research related to enhancing social-emotional skills and engagement to improve behavioral outcomes of preschoolers. This was a pilot study that looked at five case study examples of preschoolers with disruptive behaviors in the classroom and added direct teaching of regulation strategies to decrease challenging behaviors of children. Their study used a curriculum that included teaching calming strategies to help children learn self-regulation (Nabors et al., 2022). Eight specific social-emotional skills were taught to children over 15 weeks. After the intervention phase, assessment rating scales were given to the teachers to rate how effective teachers felt the interventions were. The study found that in each case study, the intervention of directly teaching social-emotional skills and emotional regulation improved children's engagement and decreased disruptive behaviors. Kwon et al. (2022), Chen et al. (2020), and Nabors et al. (2022) all explored children's behavioral challenges in preschool classrooms and researched ways to improve positive outcomes for the children and their teachers.

Social-Emotional Development

In 2019, Dorr & Perels conducted a study of 137 preschoolers in Germany. Their study sought to correlate benefits for children's self-regulation and metacognitive skills when adding at-home instruction in addition to indirect and direct teaching in the classroom. The study looked at several combinations of instruction including instruction to the children only in the classroom, instruction for teachers and students, instruction for caregivers and students, and instruction for students, caregivers, and teachers. The results showed the highest benefit when all groups received the intervention.

Justicia- Arráez et al. (2021) conducted a study to analyze the effectiveness of a program aimed at improving social and emotional competence of preschoolers to reduce challenging behaviors. Their study focused on testing whether direct teaching of social-emotional skills to 102 preschool-age children would have a positive impact on their behavior within a preschool setting. The intervention included direct instruction twice per week with 45-minute- sessions to teach more socially acceptable and positive behaviors to preschool children. The sessions focused on 4 content areas: compliance with rules and expectations, emotional literacy, communication skills, and cooperation skills. Results showed a decrease in challenging behaviors such as impulsiveness, aggression, and noncompliance, and an increase in children's ability to identify and express emotions, communication skills, sharing, helping, problem-solving, and social interaction skills. This study offers a preventative solution to challenging behaviors in early childhood classrooms, which could also benefit caregivers and teachers by decreasing stress and burnout.

A Finland study conducted by Veijalainen et al. (2019) implemented an intervention with 383 preschool children. Their study looked at coping strategies during times of frustration and upset. The study interviewed both teachers and students to gauge self-regulation and coping strategies. Findings showed that children with better self-regulation skills could overcome frustration more effectively. Teachers could assist children in handling moments of upset through co-regulation as part of the intervention in helping children learn self-regulation. Like Door & Perels (2019), Justicia- Arráez et al. (2021) and Veijalainen et al. (2019) all suggest the importance for children to learn acceptable behaviors, especially in moments of dysregulation and upset, as an important part of children developing strong social and emotional skills.

Teaching Strategies & Interventions

Researchers Albrecht and Brunner (2019) looked at how implementing Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Second Step social-emotional curriculum in early education would impact student learning. Their study took place over three years and wanted to measure the effectiveness of the intervention on student behavior and school climate. The program implemented PBIS program-wide and direct instruction of expectations, rules, solving social problems, building friendship skills, and other social skills. To measure effectiveness, the researchers looked at suspension data and staff questionnaires. Results showed a decrease in suspensions, with an increase in positive school climate and staff satisfaction. The results showed even greater benefits for the second and third years of implementation.

Another study conducted by Cooper (2019) looked at the implementation of Conscious Discipline on teacher burnout. Dr. Becky Bailey developed the Conscious Discipline classroom management program that invites teachers to first examine their own emotions and reactions when problem behaviors occur in their classrooms (2001). By recognizing, identifying, and then making a conscious choice as adults, teachers can model effective self-regulation, effective problem-solving, and demonstrate empathy within their classrooms. The research looked at survey data from teachers who had been utilizing Conscious Discipline techniques with fidelity in their early childhood classrooms. After five months of implementation, the researcher found that teachers reported higher rates of self-efficacy and lower rates of burnout. One implication of this study was that through the use of Conscious Discipline practices, teachers were able to see behavioral challenges exhibited by their students as opportunities to teach and build skills rather than instances of hindrance.

Another study that looked at Conscious Discipline strategies through the application of parental engagement and learning was conducted by Darling et al. (2019). This study involved four Head Start programs and utilized parent classes of children enrolled in the program over 7 weeks. After the 7-week intervention, parents reported that they felt more equipped to handle their children's challenging behaviors, that their parent-child relationship had improved, and their children's behavioral problems had also decreased. The findings seem to suggest the efficacy of parental engagement with effective behavioral teaching strategies in the classroom.

Another research study that was conducted on children's self-regulation, attention, and behavior and the implementation of mindful yoga instruction was done by Razza et al. (2020). This study implemented yoga with preschoolers over 8 weeks. This study looked at a total of 89 children in 5 Head Start classrooms. The methodology of the study included direct assessments of the children's sustained attention and behavior regulation. Results showed significant increases in children's attention and regulation following the course of the intervention. Results indicate that this type of intervention is beneficial for all preschool-age children but suggests that children with trauma or other risk factors may especially benefit from mindfulness strategies.

Researchers Wood et al. (2018) looked at another type of mindfulness-based intervention in their study of 27 preschoolers. This study implemented an intervention in the classroom that included direct instruction twice a week for 25-minute intervals over a 6-week timespan. The methodology relied on teacher-reported progress of the effectiveness of the instruction. Teachers in the study reported that the intervention had a positive impact on children's executive functioning skills. Executive functioning in early childhood includes skills such as sustaining and focusing attention, impulse control, decision-making, and the ability to process information in the face of distractions. Findings from Wood et al. (2018) support the research of Albrecht

and Brunner (2019), Cooper (2019), Darling et al, (2019), and Razza et al. (2020) that suggest the importance of teaching executive functioning skills in the early years and the impact that mindfulness and social-emotional interventions can have on young learners, as well as the positive impact on teachers' wellbeing and job satisfaction.

Building Resiliency

Researchers Carotta et al. (2022) examined key protective factors for at-risk children within Head Start programs serving low-income and rural families. The research used assessment data to analyze the developmental outcomes of vulnerable youth and the protective factors that could be put in place to build resiliency and increase child outcomes. Their research found several key protective factors that may mitigate risk factors. Some of these protective factors included self-assertion, the ability to take initiative, self-regulation, motivation, engagement, and secure attachments to caregivers. Their findings suggest that implementation of programs that seek to build these skills of children in their program will enhance protective factors and thus increase developmental outcomes.

The importance of creating safe and supportive learning environments, especially for children who have experienced trauma, was analyzed by researchers Cummings et al. (2017). This research study sought an answer to the question of what early childhood teachers should know about the trauma experiences of young children, the unique emotional and behavioral patterns of these children, and how to best support the social and emotional well-being of these and all children within their classrooms. This study conducted research via questionnaire and interview with 14 community-based service providers. Their research identified the need for the implementation of research and evidence-based prevention, promotion, and intervention strategies, specifically for children with trauma backgrounds. Researchers suggest that the needs

of children who have experienced trauma may have unintentionally not been met. By identifying challenges and gaining knowledge surrounding best practices on providing trauma-informed teaching practices, teachers can begin to meet the needs of their students (Cummings et al. 2017). Findings from both Carotta et al. (2022) and Cummings et al. (2017) seem to indicate that early childhood teachers could better support children through trauma-informed teaching practices that include the ability to realize the impact of trauma on young children, recognize signs of trauma, and respond appropriately without re-traumatizing or exacerbating children's trauma.

School Profile

National Characteristics

Head Start is a federally funded preschool program that was founded in 1965 as part of the War on Poverty. In 1995, Head Start expanded to include Early Head Start as a program that serves pregnant women and children from birth to age three. Head Start and Early Head Start programs support comprehensive services to children and families within the program that includes services to address cognitive, social, and emotional development. Head Start is a unique early education program that aims to promote school readiness for young children. Head Start has a strong focus on research and evidence-based practices, ongoing monitoring, data-driven decision-making, and innovation to ensure effective, high-quality services. Head Start is multi-faceted, providing children experiences that foster development, ensuring children have access to health care services, promoting family engagement, and creating safe, supportive, and culturally responsive environments for children and families. Head Start has provided services to over a million children and families nationwide. All Head Start programs are required to follow the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) and the Head Start Act that outline program governance, program operations, administration requirements, and procedures.

HSPPS outlines eligibility requirements for children of the program that include income equal to or below the poverty line, families eligible for public assistance, children experiencing homelessness, and children in foster care.

Agency Characteristics

While federally funded, Head Start programs are locally designed based on unique community needs. Each Head Start center is designed to meet the needs of children, families, and the communities they serve. West Central Community Action (WCCA) Head Start and Early Head Start was founded in 1965 and began as an 8-week preschool program serving 80 children in Crawford, Harrison, Monona, and Shelby Counties in Iowa. Today, WCCA Head Start serves 249, 3-5-year-olds within the Head Start program, and 92, 0-3-year-olds in the Early Head Start program. All Head Start programs must provide 1020 program hours per year for their 3-5-year-old programs. Early Head Start (0-3-year-old programs) are required to have 1380 program hours. WCCA Head Start has two program options for Early Head Start: a home-based program option, and a classroom-based option. The program's options are determined from regular county and community needs assessments. The WCCA Head Start program runs from September- May, similar to local public schools with programs, offering 5 days per week from 8:30 am- 3 pm. Early Head Start classrooms also offer 5 days per week but run throughout the summer months. The home-based program option offers weekly, 1.5-2-hour in-home visits. There are 10 Head Start classrooms, 7 Early Head Start classrooms, and 3 home-based teachers. WCCA Head Start partners with local AEAs, public health departments, mental health providers, other parent-education and family support programs, and other community assistance programs.

Mission, Vision, & Goals

Our mission is to be caring, dedicated, and compassionate while nurturing and guiding families and children to be successful leaders within our communities. Our vision states that Head Start is a program of professional Early Childhood leaders who are determined to build, nurture, and encourage children and families to reach their full potential. Our current program goals are to empower families and maintain strong community connections that will enable children to be successful in transitioning to future learning environments, to be recognized as a leader in the community for Early Childhood programs, and to strengthen parent engagement in all aspects of the program.

Student Learning Goals

Head Start aims to prime children so that they are ready for their next educational setting, oftentimes, Kindergarten. WCCA Head Start has established school readiness goals that follow the Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF). The domains within the ELOF that Head Start teachers provide instruction to children on are Approaches to Learning, Social and Emotional Development, Language and Literacy, Cognition, and Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development. Teachers utilize Teaching Strategies GOLD to document and track the progress of children's development in areas of social-emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy, mathematics, science, technology, social studies, and the arts. Children's skills, abilities, and development are entered into the GOLD system to identify and deliver individualized and targeted instruction for students to ensure their school readiness.

Parent Involvement & Engagement

One of the cornerstones of Head Start is family engagement. Head Start recognizes families as children's first and most important teachers. Family advocates work with families to

encourage engagement within their child's education and assist families to become self-advocates by supporting families through goal setting and providing resources to help families meet goals. WCCA Head Start has policies and procedures that boost family engagement by ensuring that parents feel welcome at the center, receive regular communication with their children's teachers, are offered conferences at least twice per year, are included in the curriculum, participate in screenings and assessments for their children, are invited to participate in parent meetings and family nights, and are offered home visits.

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

WCCA Head Start utilizes a developmentally appropriate and researched-based Creative Curriculum that promotes and measures progress toward successful outcomes. All children are also screened upon entry into the program to identify concerns in children's developmental, behavioral, motor, language, social, cognitive, and emotional skills. The Ages and Stages developmental and social-emotional screenings are used by the program to identify children's developmental levels in these areas. WCCA utilizes the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), to ensure the delivery of high-quality and comprehensive teaching practices to children in our program. CLASS observations are conducted by an internal, certified observer twice per year. In addition to these regular internal CLASS observations, The Office of Head (OHS) conducts one observation per 5-year grant cycle in a randomly selected classroom for every Head Start program. OHS analyzes the national averages of scores of summative domains, then sets a quality threshold for programs to aim for, and a re-competition threshold for minimum standards. Any program falling below one of the three identified domains must undergo additional monitoring and scrutiny to secure funding for their subsequent funding grant.

WCCA Head Start also utilizes Program-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PW-PBIS). PW-PBIS is an evidence-based approach that addresses challenging behaviors in young children by promoting social-emotional skill development through the prevention of challenging behavior by teaching appropriate skills and uses a tiered approach for universal, secondary, and tertiary interventions as needed. WCCA Head Start utilizes the Teaching Pyramid Observational Assessment (TPOT) and The Pyramid Infant-Toddler Observation Scale (TPITOS) to determine the fidelity of implementation of Pyramid Model practices within the classrooms. An internal certified observer conducts TPOT and TPITOS observations twice per year, once in the Fall, and again in the Spring. Teachers and classrooms receive a scored percentage indicating their level of fidelity. TPOT and TPITOS scores overall during the 2023-2024 school year show a decline in fidelity program-wide from the fall to the spring and reveal a pattern of decline when compared to the prior 2022-2023 school year.

Behavior Incident Reports (BIRs) are also utilized within PW-PBIS. When children exhibit severe and/or persistent challenging behaviors, internal procedures describe how a program will document and analyze these behaviors to determine child and classroom intervention strategies, as well as to identify program-wide needs to tailor coaching and professional development support. BIR data is collected and entered into an Excel file by the Support Services team and analyzed regularly by the Leadership team.

WCCA Head Start also utilizes the Second Step Social-Emotional curriculum within Head Start classrooms as a supplemental curriculum. Social and emotional learning is crucial for helping young children understand and manage their emotions, feel and show empathy, establish healthy and secure relationships, and make safe, respectful, and responsible decisions. Second

Step curriculum provides a framework for teaching these vitally important skills in the preschool setting.

Beginning in the 2022-2023 school year, WCCA Head Start introduced the Conscious Discipline approach program wide. Conscious Discipline is built on three core ideas (Bailey, 2019). The first is that caregivers and teachers have control over themselves and their ability to control and change their reactions impacts the children in their care. The second principle states that connections and relationships are the basis for behavior change. The third recognizes that conflicts and challenging behaviors are opportunities to teach missing or underdeveloped skills. The utilization of Conscious Discipline principles aligns with and strengthens the Pyramid Model practices of PBIS.

Professional Development

The HSPPS outlines minimum training and professional development requirements for all Head Start programs. All staff are required to complete a minimum of 15 professional development hours each year. This professional development includes some mandatory pieces of training such as CPR, Mandatory Reporter, Active Supervision, and Positive Guidance. Additional professional development is determined by the WCCA Head Start Leadership and Administration team and includes a coordinated coaching program, another requirement of the HSPPS. The WCCA Head Start Leadership team analyzes data from CLASS, TPOT, and TPITOS scores to apply individualized professional development plans for teaching staff.

Needs Assessment

Professional Development and Staff Capacity

The HSPPS outlines the minimum educational requirements for all staff, including teachers, assistant teachers, support staff, and administration and leadership teams. Lead

teachers are required to have at least an associate degree in an Early Childhood related field, and assistant teachers are required to have or be actively working toward at least a Child Development Associate's certification. Given the many barriers of hiring and retaining qualified staff, the Office of Head Start does allow programs to hire teachers and assistant teachers without these minimum qualifications, with the provision that those not meeting requirements have individualized professional development plans to lead to certification and degree completion within a reasonable timeframe. One employee benefit of WCCA is the assistance that employees receive with these individualized professional development plans for staff working toward compliance with this requirement. With many staff working on individual education plans, there is a wide range of education, experience, and staff capacity within the WCCA Head Start program. In addition to these individualized professional development plans, there is a need for universal professional development to include current research-based practices that will build the resiliency skills of teachers and students. Research suggests that programs that develop and implement program-wide professional development and training around positive guidance strategies, social-emotional development, and resiliency building through a trauma-sensitive lens have better outcomes for children and staff in their programs (Hemmeter, et. Al. 2016). WCCA Head Start strives to establish, improve, and sustain the delivery of high-quality services to children and families in their community. There is a need for this program-wide professional development plan to include initial training of new staff and consistent ongoing training, coaching, and support for veteran staff. This training plan should be data-informed, based on current research of best practices, and sustainable throughout each grant cycle.

Data Analysis

CLASS data from the current school year and the prior two school years are represented in Figures 2, 3, and 4. The solid and dotted lines indicate the differing threshold levels as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

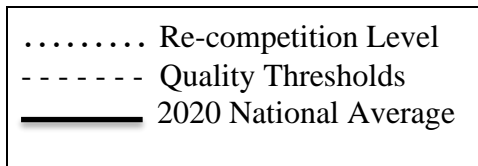


Figure 2

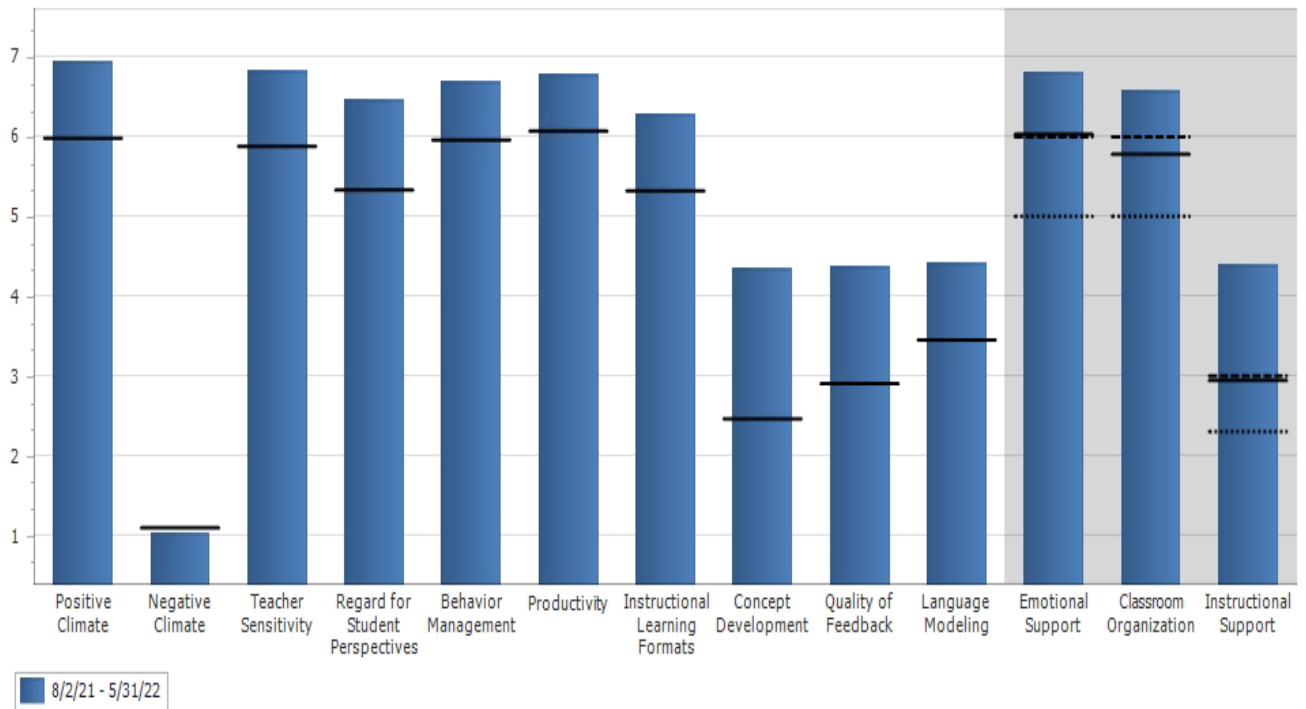


Figure 3

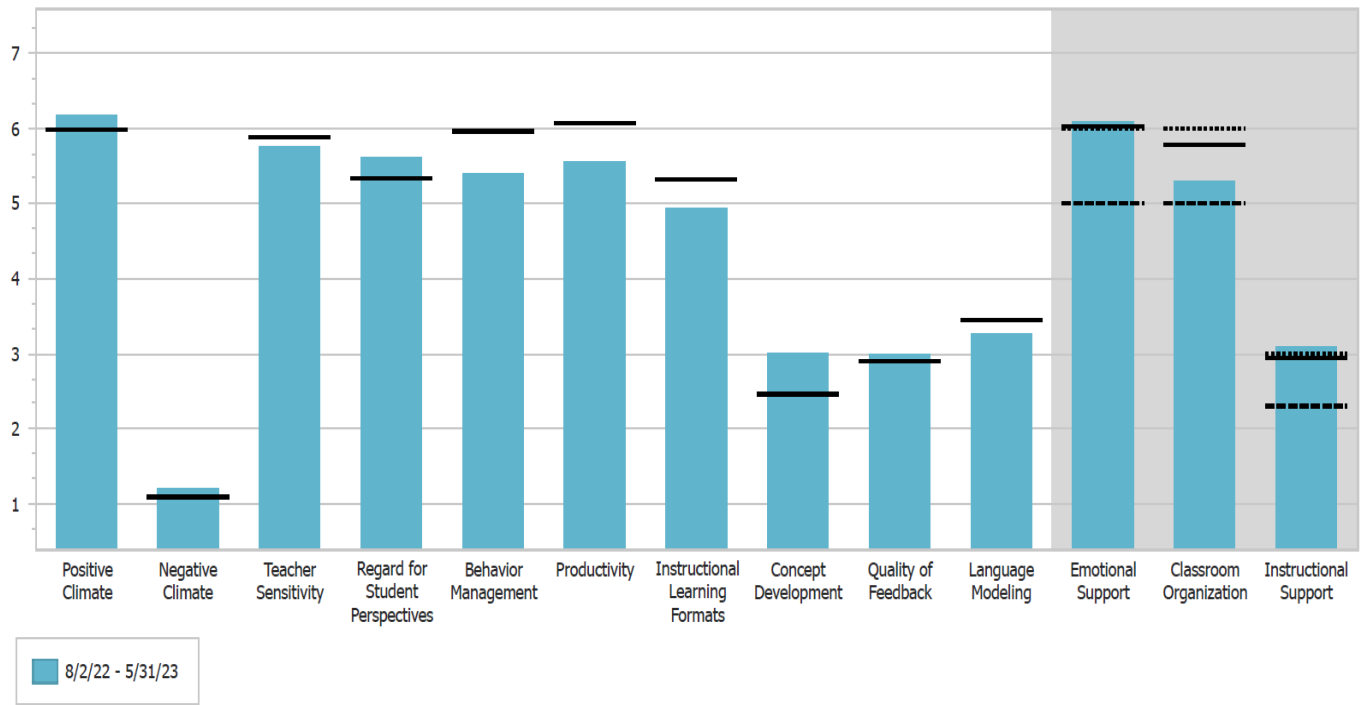
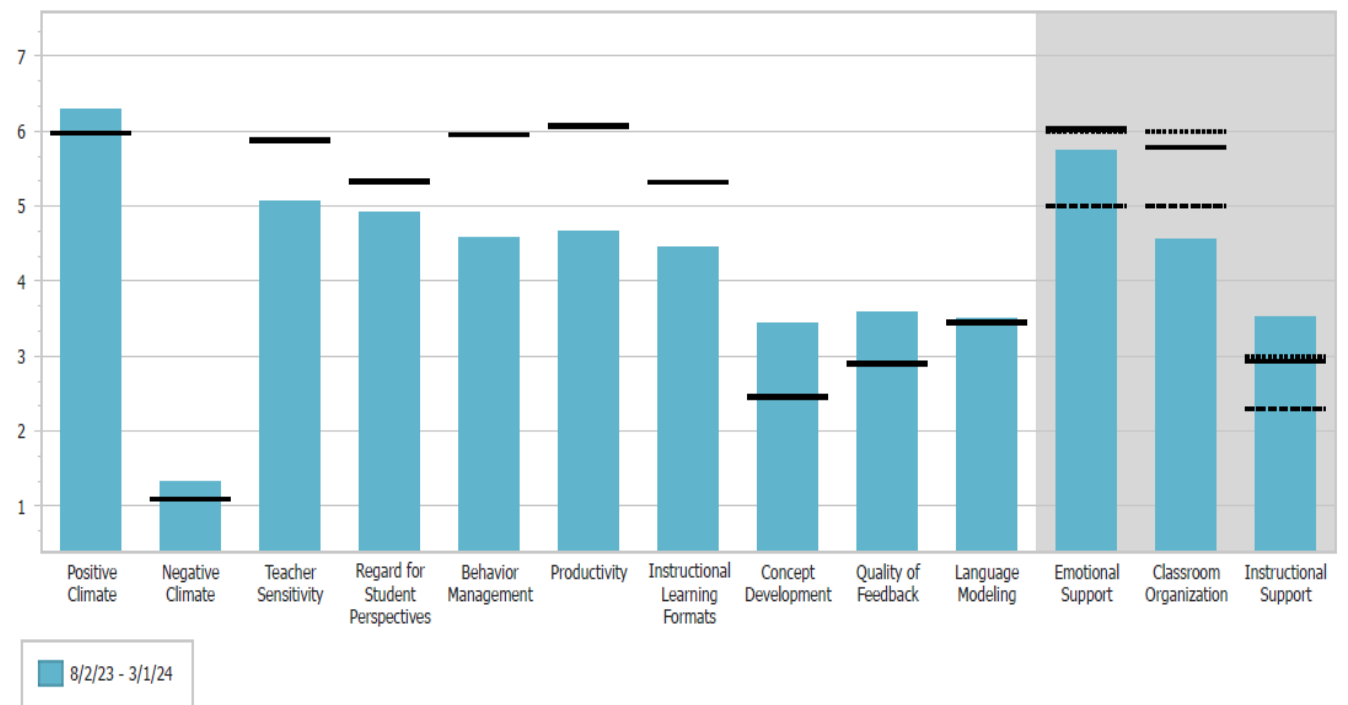


Figure 4



Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support are highlighted with the gray background. These are the three summative domains that are made up of the dimensions to the left that could lead to a program being placed into re-competition. Program-wide, there has been a decline in the domains of Emotional Support and in Classroom Organization over the past three years, resulting in both of these domains falling below the national average and re-competition thresholds. Instructional Support has remained at or above the national average, quality threshold, and re-competition level.

Results from the program's TPOT observations over the past three years are displayed in Figures 5, 6, and 7. Similar to the CLASS scores, this data indicates a need for action. The blue columns represent scores from the Fall observations; the red represents Spring observations for the associated school year.

Figure 5

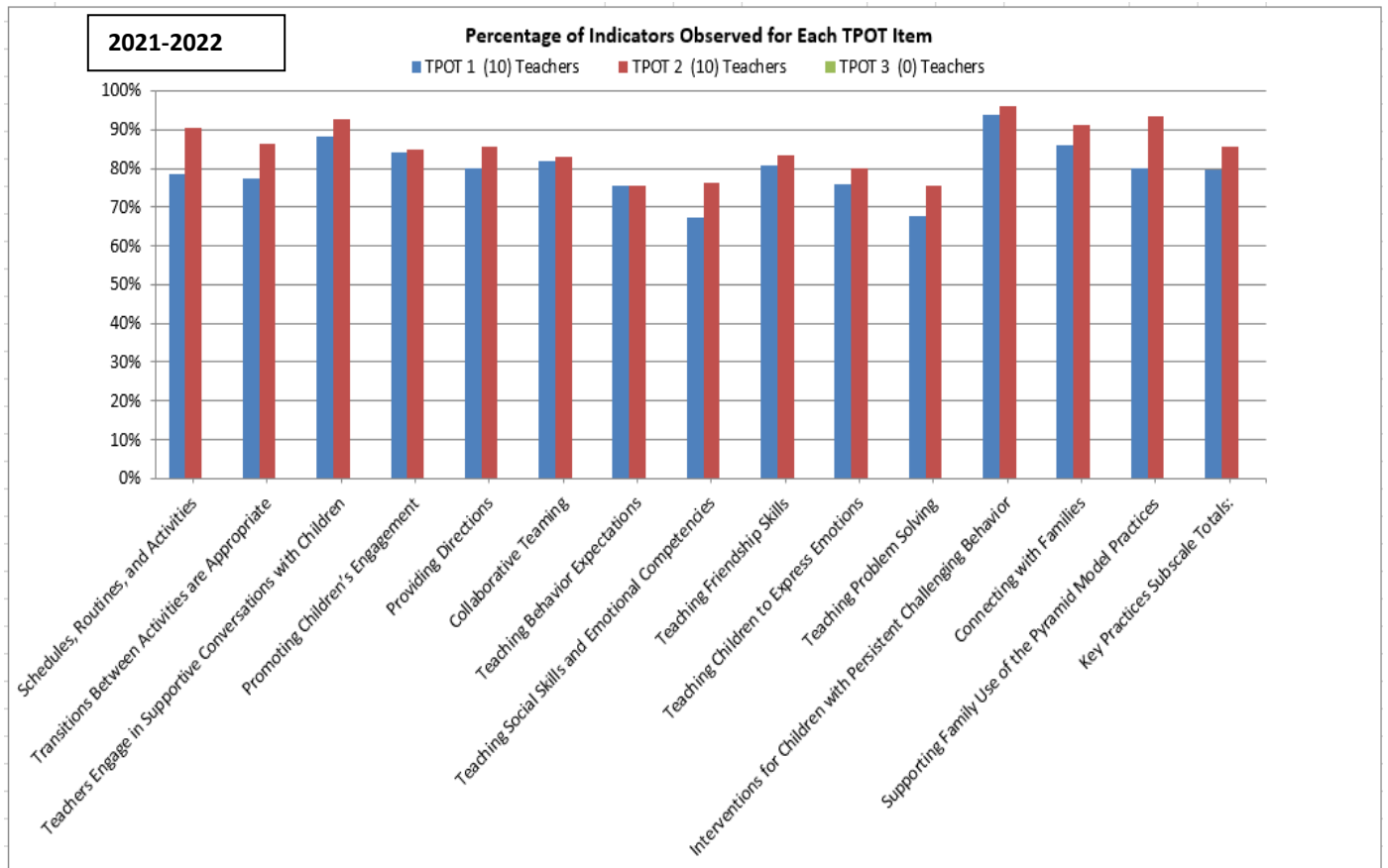


Figure 6

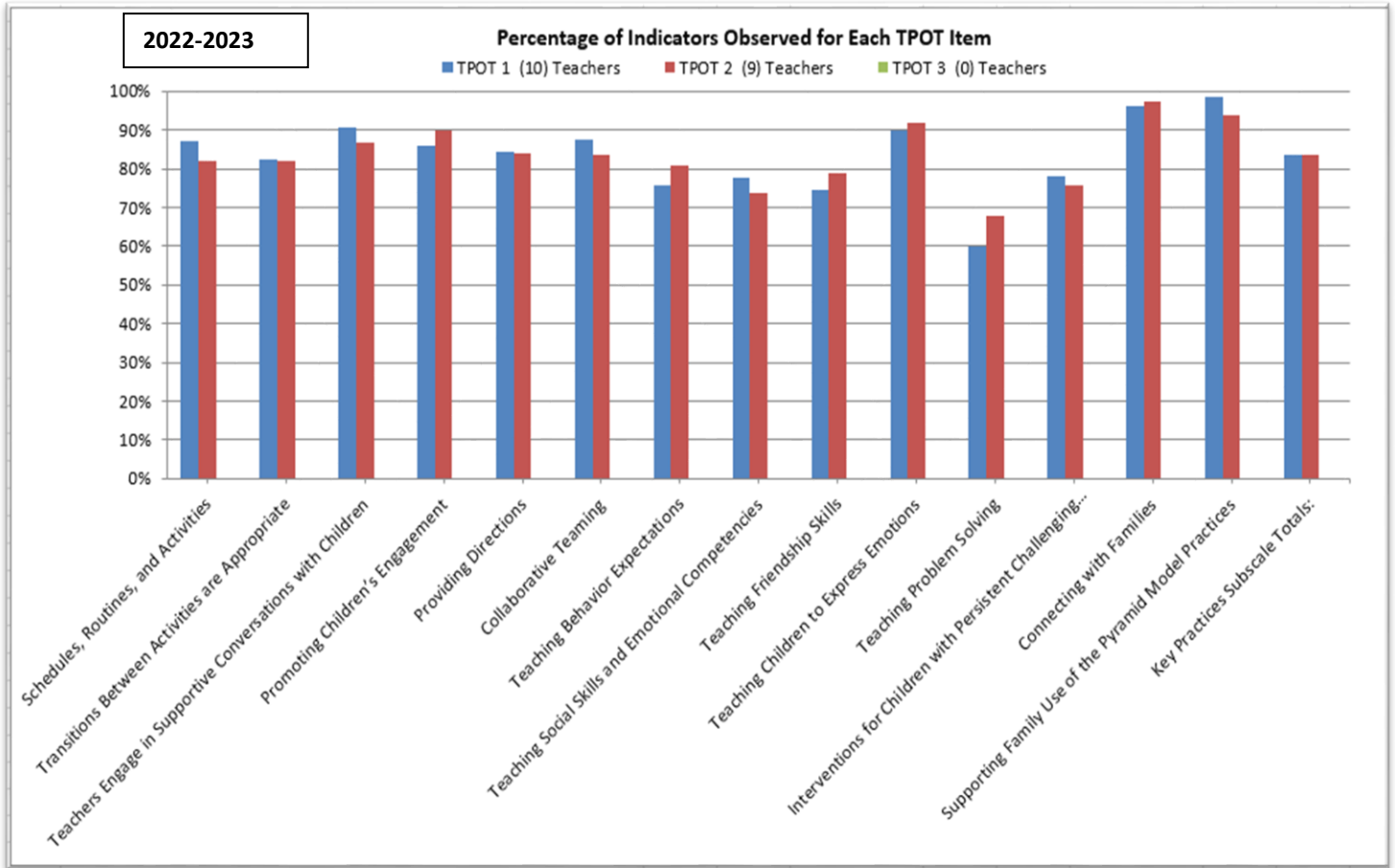
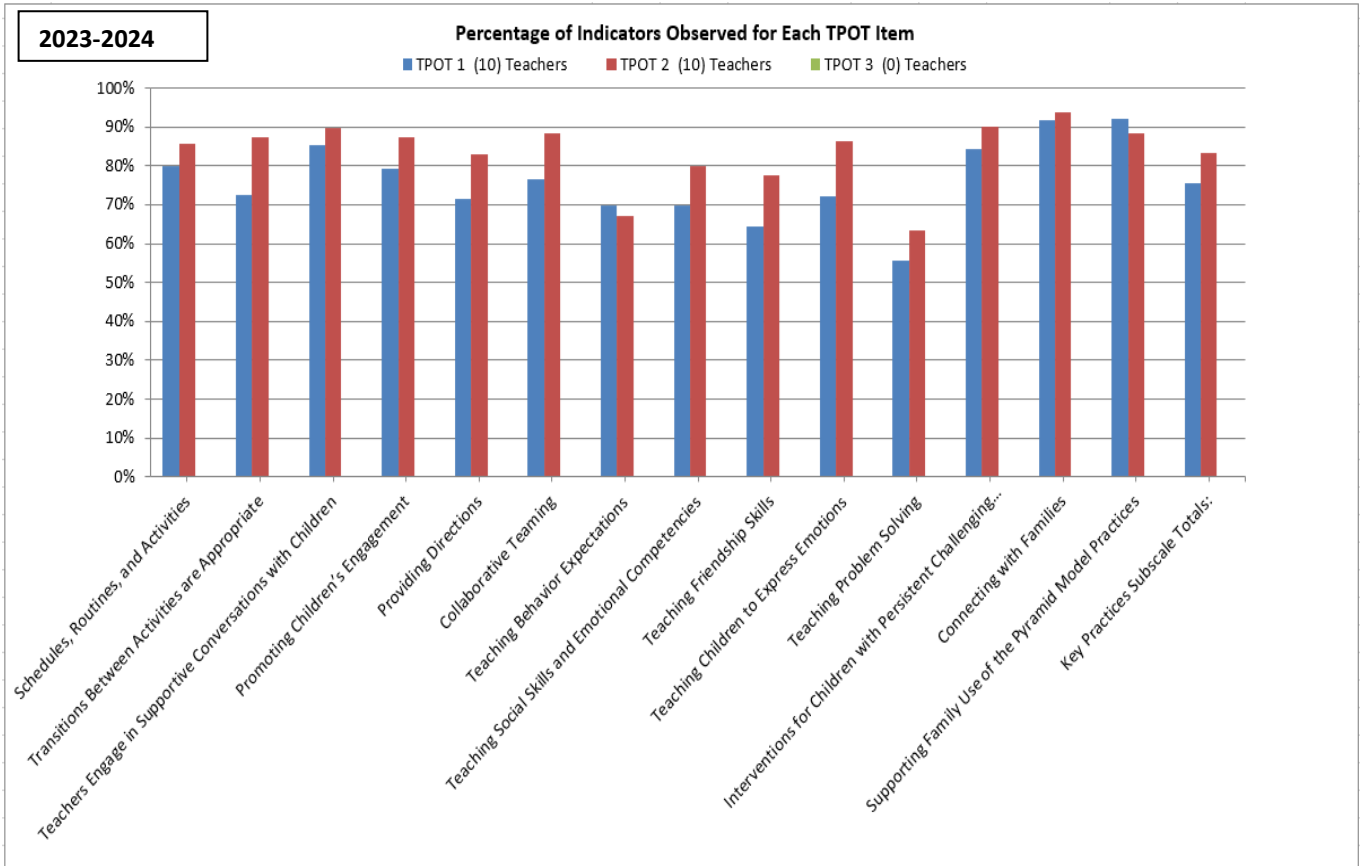


Figure 7



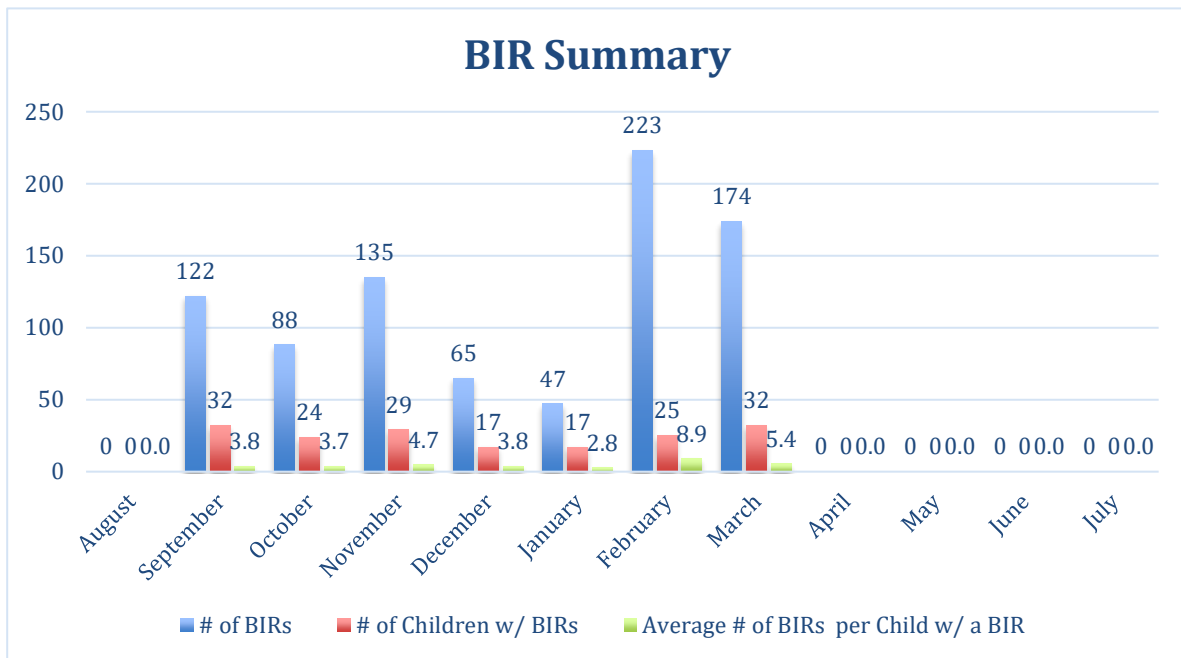
The range of scores is between 76-86%, with some variability across years and from the fall to the spring within school years. While some variation is expected as staff come and go from the program, higher percentage scores indicate higher quality teaching practices. A strength this data shows is the increase from fall to spring in both the 21-22 year, and the 23-24 year, with scores remaining steady for the 22-23 year. Some weaknesses identified are that these gains are not sustained yearly and may indicate an overall decline when scores are averaged from one year to the next. The improvement within a school year could suggest a correlation between staff support through coaching. This is a strength of the program, having coaches trained and procedures in place that outline coaching plans. Current procedures allow staff with individual classroom scores below 85% to be eligible to participate in coaching, mentoring, and additional and individualized support. However, there is currently no plan in place for when total combined scores of the program as a whole fall below 85%. This data indicates the need for this program-wide approach to improve upon these scores since they have fallen below 85% for the last four consecutive observations. Other assessments that could be beneficial in determining the effectiveness of professional development plans, once outlined, could look at and compare individual teachers' scores, and compare this to the amount of professional development and coaching support they received.

All Head Start children are screened for possible developmental, behavioral, and social-emotional delays, disabilities, or concerns within 45 days of enrolling in the program. The Ages and Stages Developmental Screening Third Edition (ASQ-3) screens children in the developmental areas of communication, fine motor, gross motor, problem solving, and personal social skills. The Ages and Stages Social Emotional Screening Second Edition (ASQ- SE 2) identifies behavioral and social emotional development needs. During the 2023-2024 school

year, 47% of the children screened were initially identified as having a possible concern, delay, or disability requiring additional follow up, individualization, and/or external referral. While many of these children do show significant improvement within a few months with quality universal support, there appears to be a correlation with the children that show challenging behaviors in the classroom.

Children with behavioral challenges are identified as needing possible secondary and tertiary intervention and support through an internal referral initiated by teachers and/or through BIR data. Figure 7 provides the program-wide BIR data for the current school year. As of April 1, 2024, there were 854 BIRs for Head Start children. 65 children in the program had at least one BIR at this point in the school year.

Figure 7



Additionally, these BIRs can be further broken down into type of behavior, environmental context (activity), and whether others were involved in the child’s challenging behavior (e.g., Figures 8-10).

Figure 8

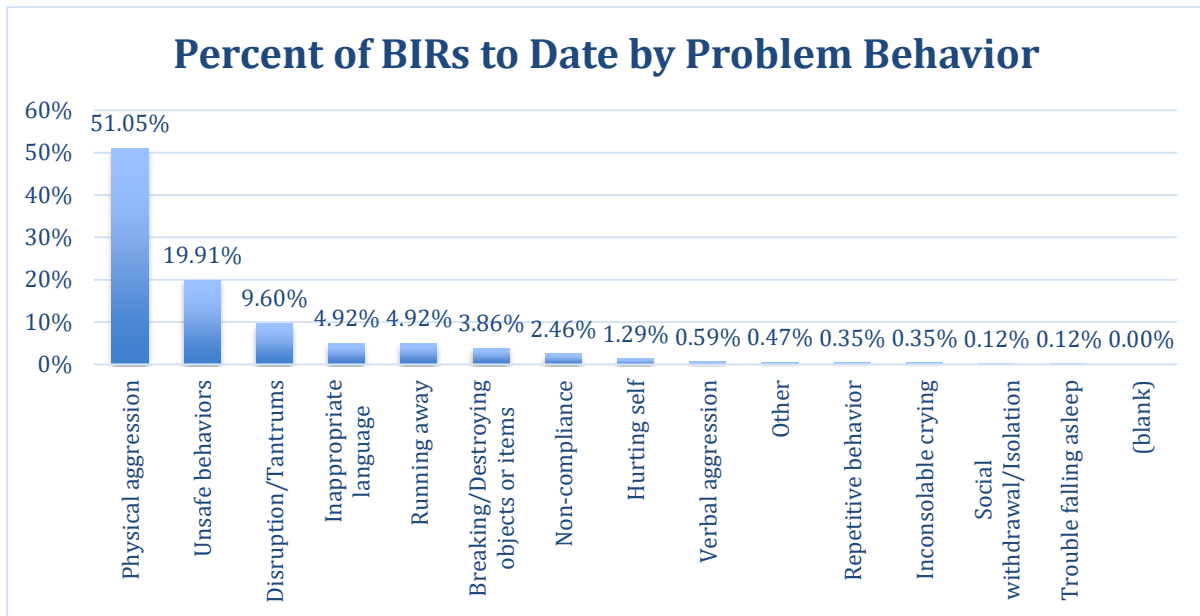


Figure 9

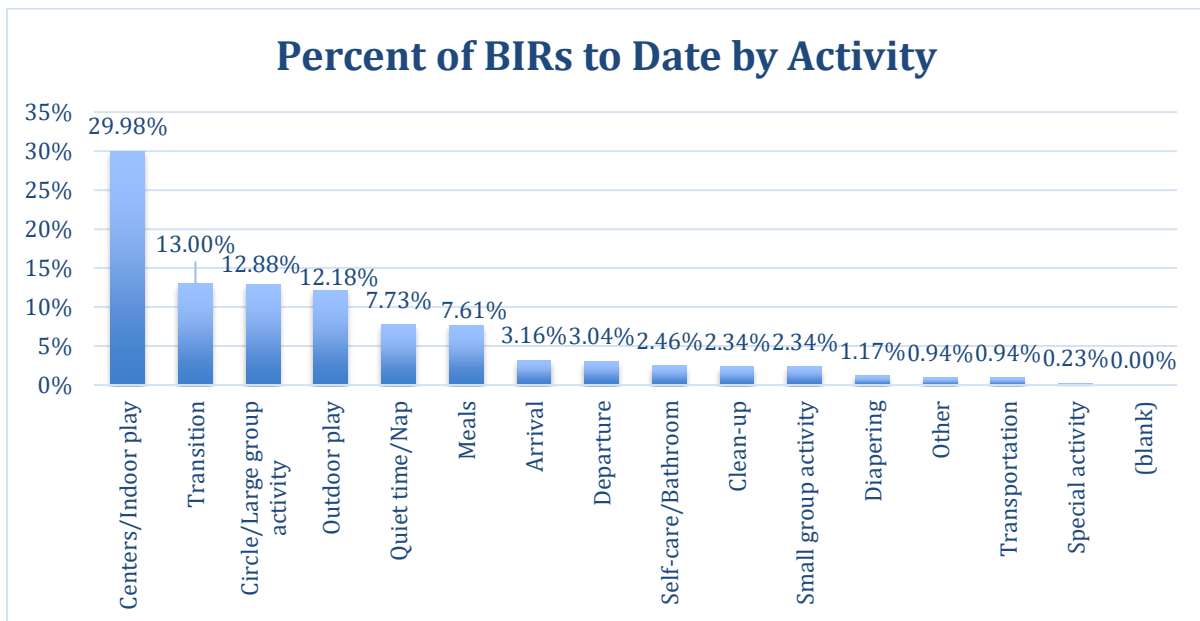
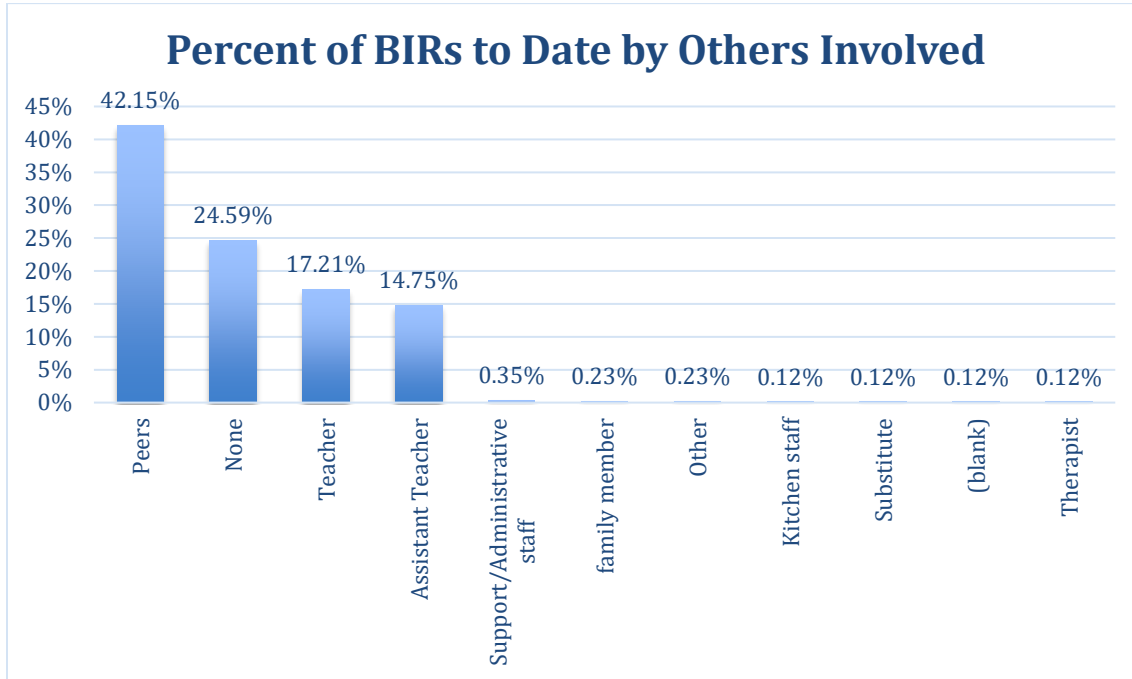


Figure 10

Action Plan

The problem of the declining CLASS and TPOT scores, along with the prevalence challenging behaviors in Head Start classrooms will be addressed with intentional professional development and implementation of PW-PBIS, Second-Step Social-Emotional Curriculum, and Conscious Discipline. The need for the development of an ongoing universal professional development plan to include training and coaching support for all program staff is evident from the data. This action plan will include online training, in-person instruction for staff, zoom training, and consistent and ongoing coaching support from the program's leadership team. Coaching support will include in-person observations and collaboration with staff, video submission from teachers and review by coaches of targeted area goals, and regular follow-up of

progress and feedback being provided to staff. Staff will be assigned to one of three cohort training groups based on their experience, education, training, and preference. These training cohorts will meet for professional development one, half-day per month for training and networking, set specific goals, and receive coaching support during the three weeks of the month in between these trainings. The monthly training sessions will focus on PW-PBIS for the first-year cohort group, Second Step for the second year, and Conscious Discipline for the third. All WCCA Head Start teaching staff will attend one of these three cohorts each program year based on their personalized professional development plans.

Implementation of School Improvement Plan

To maintain the required minimum number of program hours that students must be enrolled in each school year, the Head Start director would need to approve the logistics of this proposed set calendar and professional development plan. The leadership team must be intentional with planning well in advance of each upcoming school year to ensure that training content and materials are prepared and available for each training session. There must be individualized professional development plans for all leadership staff that will be leading training sessions and coaching, to ensure the continuity of this plan will be sustained.

The Leadership Team will add professional development planning to their already existing monthly meetings. Each year in May, the Leadership team will analyze the data for the current school year and begin planning adjustments and actions for the next year's professional development plan overall. The Leadership team will assign three cohort team leads that will begin planning each of their cohort groups. The Support Services Coordinator will lead the PBIS Cohort, a Behavior Specialist will lead the Second Step group, and another Behavior Specialist will lead the third Conscious Discipline group. In June, following the conclusion of the current

school year, the leadership team will analyze individual staff's scores and divide staff into cohort groups. By July, the three identified cohort leads will bring their training plans back to the team for final approval. The Cohort group assignments and training plans will be introduced to all staff during Pre-service training in August when teaching staff return from summer break. The first monthly cohort trainings will begin each year in September and conclude in May.

The cohort team leads, as well as the Instructional Coach will all be certified trainers of all subject areas within the cohort groups. Resources that will support the Leadership Team will include collaboration with training opportunities from the Office of Head Start, the local Area Education Agencies, school districts, and other outside professionals. Site supervisors will assist with ongoing coaching and support for their classroom staff in addition to other members of the Leadership Team. The Leadership Team will review staff's progress and engagement with the training through regular and ongoing communication with site supervisors and have quarterly progress meetings. Progress will be monitored through brief staff surveys that will be distributed each month to staff after each training session. Progress monitoring of professional development goals will be individualized for each teacher, based on teacher's CLASS, TPOT, and BIR data. To achieve this professional development plan successfully, the program calendars must build in half-days once per week.

Challenges may arise with this plan in the initial start-up year. Additional planning meetings prior to initial implementation may be necessary for first-year implementation. Strong buy-in from all members of the Leadership Team must be established, effective team-work strategies, and ongoing collaboration are necessary for the success of this plan. It will be critical that cohort leads are confident and comfortable in their roles to lead these teams and successfully deliver training and support within this plan. Other barriers that teams will need to consider will

be staff buy-in, staff's attendance and engagement with training and coaching support sessions, vacation and sick time that may interfere with training dates, and classroom support and coverage for training dates.

Conclusion

Challenging behaviors in Early Childhood classrooms hinder engagement, disrupt peer and caregiver relationships, and negatively impact children's development (Nabors et al. 2022). The prevalence of childhood trauma is growing increasingly common and contributes significantly to behavioral issues in the early years (Neitzel, 2020). Young children are even more at risk of experiencing trauma. As awareness of trauma and its impact on development grows, the need for programs to prioritize creation and sustainability of trauma-sensitive classrooms is crucial to maximize learning opportunities and empower the early childhood workforce. Positive behavior supports and intentional social-emotional teaching builds resilience of young children by increasing positive outcomes for all young children—especially those with trauma backgrounds. Children who have high emotional literacy have stronger social-emotional skills, healthy self-regulation skills, are engaged learners, and display fewer challenging behaviors. Early Childhood teachers need effective strategies to address behavioral challenges with children who have experienced trauma. With intentional and well-planned professional development plans, preschool programs can increase child outcomes and build the resiliency skills of both children and staff.

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