AT-RISK YOUTHS

BY: FRANCES ANN ANDRES
WHO ARE AT-RISK

- Some 1.2 million public high school students drop out every year.
- School dropouts are more likely to be depressed, feel isolated, and use drugs and alcohol.
- They are more likely to join gangs, commit acts of violence, and become imprisoned.
- Dropouts are more likely to be unemployed or earn lower salaries than those who graduated high school.
- They exhibit poor grades, truancy, behavior problems, or experienced special circumstances that impeded learning.

Every year about 750,000 adolescents become pregnant and more than 425,000 give birth in the United States.
Poor teacher relationships

- Teachers overworked and had little time for individual attention
- Teachers characteristics have uncaring attitudes, large class sizes, overcrowded schools, and too focus on standardized testing

and judged by teachers; expressed in the level of respect they received from adult

Lack of safety

- Often felt unsafe or uncomfortable at school environment
- Describes schools as *hostile*
- Told personal stories witnessing violence or of
Problem with peer relationships
• Feel judged and alienated by students cliques
• Make comments about separation among student groups
• Inability for students to see similarities between themselves and others
• Feel easily threatened
• Recognized how negative peer influences and poor culture or climate

Overly rigid authority
• Feel demeaned by school rules and regulations that they felt were overly strict
• Enforce schools rules in a rigid and inflexible manner
• Feel “pushed out” of school, which
PROJECT
HO’OMANA
PROGRAM
- Project Ho’omana program is under the City and County of Honolulu, Parks and Recreation.
- It is an intervention and prevention program that targets AT-RISK YOUTH from all types of students under the age of 18.
- The program has a partnership with Gear-Up Waipahu, Weed and Seed Waipahu, Waipahu Community Coalition, and Asian Pacific Leadership Program. The grant comes from the Office of Youth Services and 21st CCLC Grant with Waipahu Complex, DOE.
The *vision* of **Project Ho’omana** is to keep kids off the streets and out of trouble by reducing “at-risk” behaviors through involvement in alternative organized activities that teaches/reinforces values and develops meaningful relationships between students, families, schools and the community.

**Project Ho’omana** provides a safe, educational, a productive environment for youth to be a part of during non-school hours that helps to prevent their involvement in dangerous and delinquent behavior. Children left unsupervised, even for short periods of time, may be more vulnerable to the influence of delinquent peers or to academic problems.
Project Ho’omana provides many services for the students. The program does homework/tutoring assistance, life skills, (DPR) recreational activities, and community services projects. They have continued to be very active within the community and their teens involved in community projects including the Waipahu Cane Run, Community clean ups, and the Great Aloha Run. Any teens are eligible to sign up. Sometimes they get referred from their school counselor. Teens do a short self-assessment survey and fill-out a registration form with parents’ consent. The purpose of this survey is confidential.
The Truancy Prevention Program worked with the attendance coordinator at Waipahu Intermediate School to receive names of students who have been caught for truancy. These students, along with their parents, were required to attend a 4-hour session on a Saturday morning.

The Violence Education and Gang Awareness Program (VEGA) were designed to address the issues of Youth Gangs and various alternatives and opportunities that...
RESEARCH ARTICLES
The first article has drawn attention to students at risk school failure and dropout in the United States. The study took place at Austin Independent School District (SFAS). It was to examine the traditional and alternative school experiences of at-risk students currently attending a public alternative school that was designed using the practice methods and philosophy of solution-focused brief therapy.

Alternative schools are believed to be most effective at graduating youths at risk for dropout. These schools provide caring, flexible, and enriched academic programs. Recent study
During the *study*, interviewers ask students to answer the following research questions regarding solution-focused alternative high school (SFAS):

1. What are the experiences of SFHS students in their former traditional schools and in their new solution-focused alternative school?

2. Do at-risk students at SFHS perceive differences between their former traditional school and their new solution-focused alternative school? If so, what are these differences?

SFAS has eight major characteristics:

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<th>1. Emphasis on building upon students’ strengths</th>
<th>5. Emphasis on building upon students’ strengths</th>
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<td>2. Attention to individual relationships and student progress</td>
<td>6. Attention to individual relationships and student progress</td>
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<td>3. Emphasis on student responsibility and choice</td>
<td>7. Emphasis on student responsibility and choice</td>
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<td>4. Commitment to achievement and success</td>
<td>8. Commitment to achievement and success</td>
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They collected data by interviewing each individual that lasted between 45–60 min conducted by either a trained doctoral student or a trained school social worker using a semi-structured interview guide that consisted 36 questions. The interviews took place in a private room on the school campus.

**Summary of students’ reactions between Traditional Schools and Alternative Schools**

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<th>Experiences at Traditional Schools</th>
<th>Experiences at Solution-Focused Alternative High School</th>
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<td>• Poor teacher relationships</td>
<td>• Positive teacher relationship</td>
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<td>• Lack of safety</td>
<td>• Improving maturity and responsibility</td>
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<td>• Overly rigid authority</td>
<td>• Understanding about social issues</td>
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<td>• Problems with peer</td>
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The second article focused the middle school level. This grade level is of particular concern to educators because of poor standardized test performance. This study evaluated change in academic achievement in public middle school students practicing the Transcendental Meditation program.

The school participating in this study was a public middle school, located in a large, urban school district, with primarily low socioeconomic status (SES) racial and ethnic minority students. The school was in the lower half academically of all district middle schools.
**Meditating** students attended the 6\textsuperscript{th} and 7\textsuperscript{th} grades and practiced the Transcendental Meditation program at school for 12 minutes at the start and end of the school day for three months prior to the administration of the CST post test. They also participated on the “Quiet Time.”

**Non-meditating** control students attended the 8\textsuperscript{th} grade, which did not participate in the school's Quiet Time/meditation program. The students were taught the Transcendental Meditation technique that consisted of seven-step instructions. It included:

1) An introductory lecture (1 hour) that discussed the benefits of the program
2) A preparatory lecture (1 hour) that presented the mechanics of how to practice the technique
3) A brief personal interview with the teacher (10 minutes)
4) Personal instruction session (1 hour)
They used the California State Testing and Reporting (STAR) to measure the students’ skills. These tests are a standardized academic achievement measure that schools throughout the state administer annually to students to assess student progress.

At the end, the results show that both 6th and 7th grader (meditating) students exhibited a significant improvement in academic achievement. These improvements were statistically significant, without taking into account the declines in the 8th grade non-meditating students. Also, both the feasibility of incorporating twice-daily practice of this stress reduction program into the daily school schedule as well as the practical benefits of improving academic achievement in at-risk middle school students.
ACCOMMODATIONS & EXAMPLES
• Focus on supportive and non-judgemental teacher-student relationships
  • Give one-to-one AND personal attention to students on a regular basis
• Make home-school a connections a priority
  • Ask about students’ out-of-school lives (ex. hobbies, personal interest, their family)
• Plan and implement strategies to improve school climate
• Be flexible with school rules and offer choices when consequences are given
  • Set up reasonable rules, expectations, and consequences
• Provide education to staff members and support services for students
  • Provide-in-school support services or community referrals to students with mental health or social issues
2 ARTICLES:
NidichS., MjasiriS., NidichR., RainforthM., GrantJ., ValosekL., ChangW., RZigler. Academic Achievement and Trancendental Meditation: A Study with At-Risk Urban Middle School Students. 131 (3) 556 – 564.


INTERVIEW
Project Ho’omana Directors: Gayleen Balais, Jill Akutagawa, Desiree Lee Hang

WEBSITES

http://www.wsws.org/articles/2008/apr2008/scho-a03.shtml