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Project FOCUS (For Our Children's Ultimate Success), a TrueNorth community service, is an Out-of-School Time program that implements mentoring, civic engagement, career and college preparation, social and emotional learning, high adventure and academic enrichment activities.

TrueNorth operates Project FOCUS in Baldwin, Hart, Holton, Muskegon, Muskegon Heights, and Walkerville in west Michigan through the federally-funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program in partnership with the Michigan Department of Education.

<https://www.truenorthservices.org/out-of-school-programs/>

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Section One: Introduction

Goals

How well did Project FOCUS do in achieving their stated goals in the 2023-24 term?

Project FOCUS has 10 goals*, each of which has potential to drive programming to meet the needs of the students and the community they serve. These ten goals are abbreviated below:

1. Well established and maintained connection to the school
2. Academic enrichment and personalized instruction
3. Address the needs of the targeted population
4. Formal structures for school day teacher input
5. Diverse array of evidenced-based programs
6. Integration of STEAM activities
7. Involvement of students in planning and other decisions
8. Involvement of families in planning and other decisions
9. Opportunities for literacy and related development for families
10. Snacks and meals for students

* See Page 65 to see evaluation related to these 10 goals.

Evaluation Plan

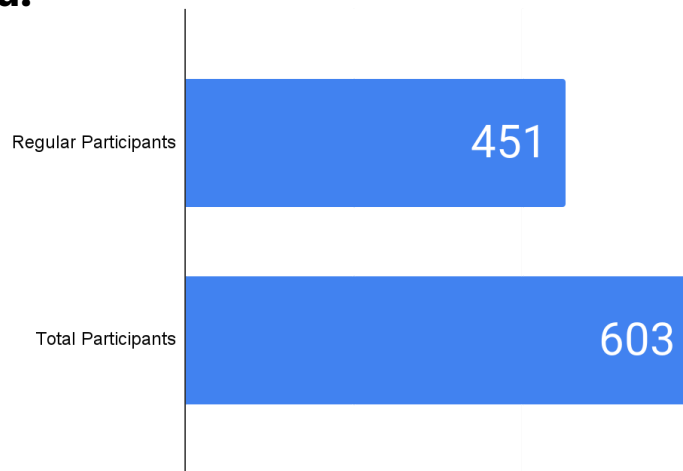
To determine the effectiveness of an Out of School Time (OST) program, we must also examine broader measures. The evaluation team looked at three pillars of success (in addition to the stated 10 program goals listed previously):

- 1) How does participation in Project FOCUS after-school programming influence academic and social outcomes?
- 2) What conditions are necessary for Project FOCUS to achieve positive results?
- 3) What does Project FOCUS do well to serve students, and what can it do to improve?

This report will serve to evaluate these goals, as well as provide as much specific data regarding attendance, grades, and demographics as is accessible. We will also provide an analysis of the perceptions of students, parents, and school staff. Based on this data and on targeted observations, recommendations will be offered.

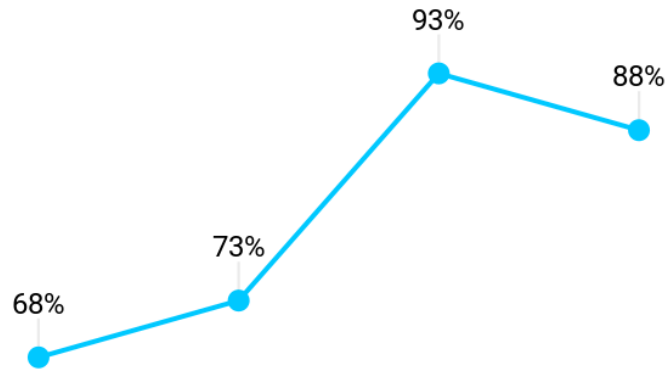
Section Two: Overall Impact

Youth Served:



Enjoyment, caring adults, and academic support were noted by participants, parents, and staff as highlights of the program.

Project FOCUS continues to be viewed positively over time.



Project FOCUS impacted student grades, feelings of safety, attendance, behavior, and career awareness

Evidence of:



**engagement,
academic support,
and social emotional
learning**

Section Three: Attendance

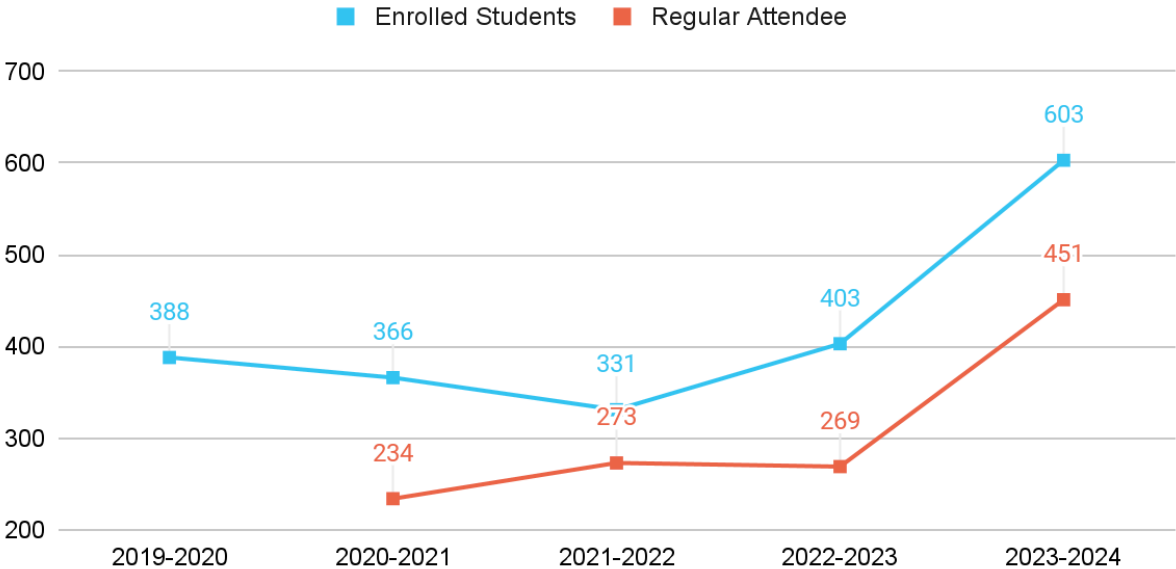
Attendance Over Time

Total Participants in 2023-2024 School Year: **603**

Regular Participants in 2022-23 School Year: **451**

Attendance

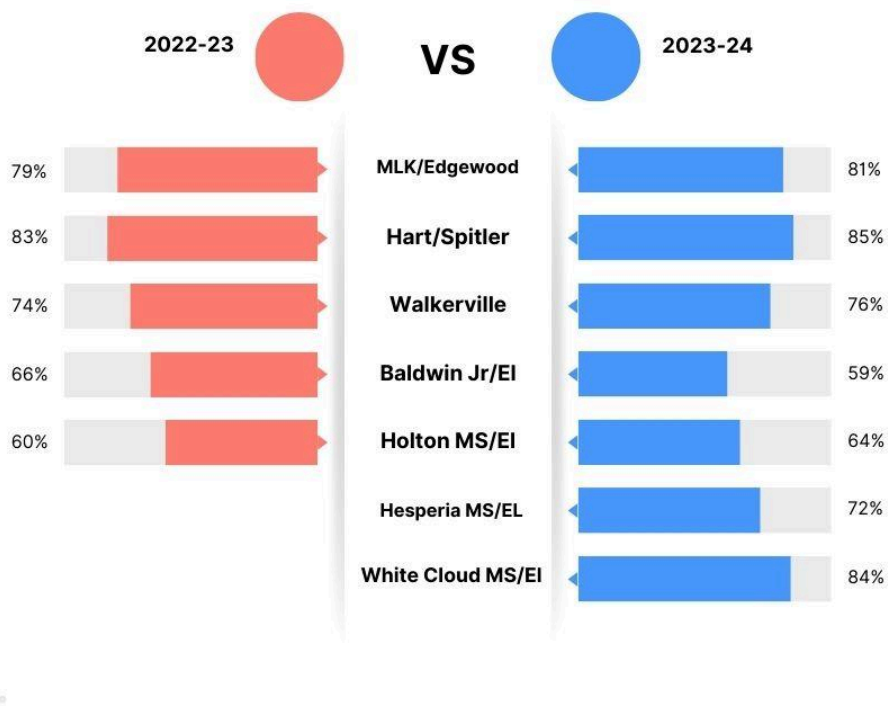
*4 sites added in 2023-24



Attendance Levels

Research in the field of Out-of-School Time programs indicates promising evidence for “regular” attendance. The Wallace Foundation (2017) suggests that thirty days is the threshold for the consideration of regular attendance. This criteria will be used in this section as a threshold for programmatic impact.

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS ATTENDING MORE THAN 30 PROGRAM DAYS

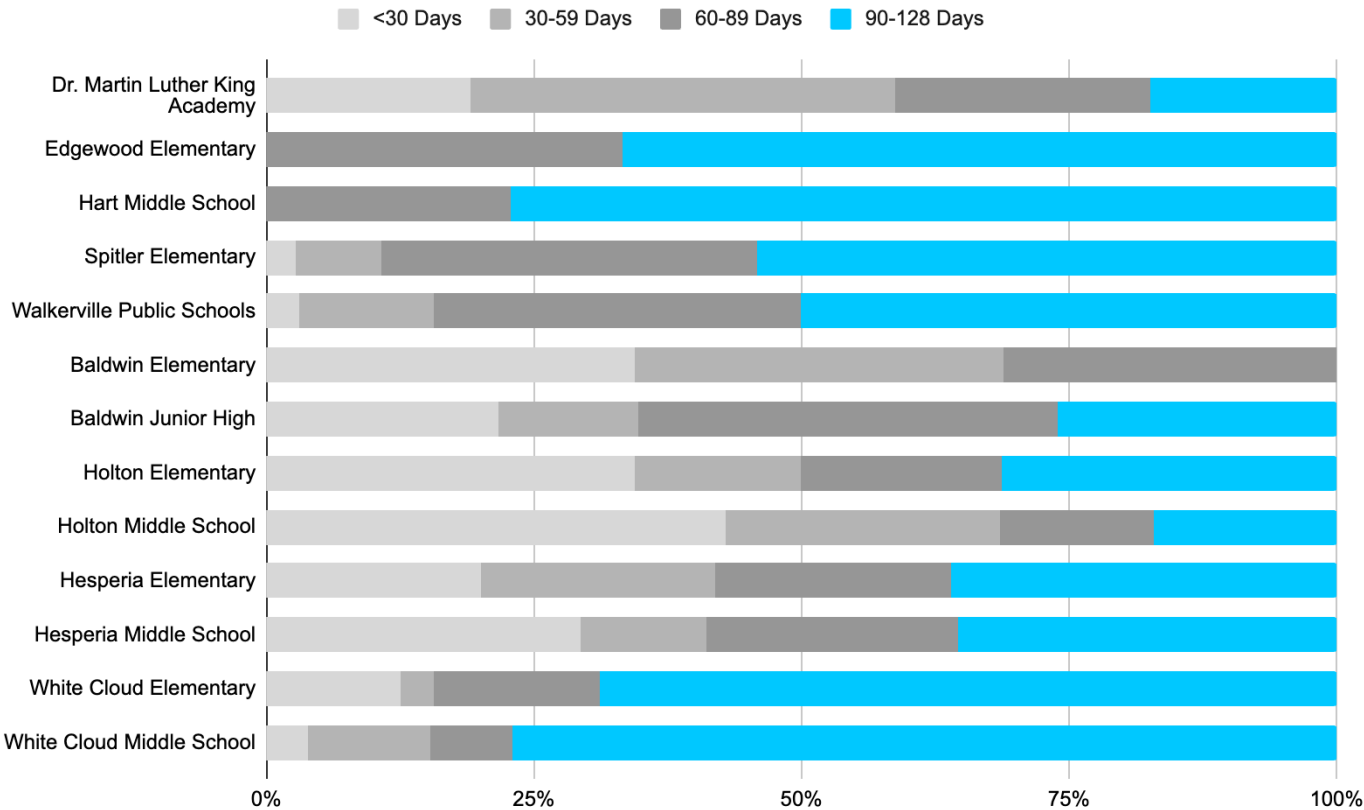


McCombs, J., Whitaker, A., & Yoo, P. (2017). The Value of Out-of-School Time Programs. *RAND Corporation*.

<https://wallacefoundation.org/sites/default/files/2023-08/The-Value-of-Out-of-School-Time-Programs.pdf>

Number of Program Days Attended

The chart below illustrates program attendance for participants. Recognizing that it is recommended that students attend 30 days or more to see effects of after-school programs, the chart illustrates the other categories of 30-59 days, 60-89 days, and 90-128 days. Using these categories in the future when more data can be collected (such as discipline records, test scores, and school attendance) could lead to a better understanding of the threshold of program attendance that makes a difference for a participant’s academic and social needs.



Impact of Attendance

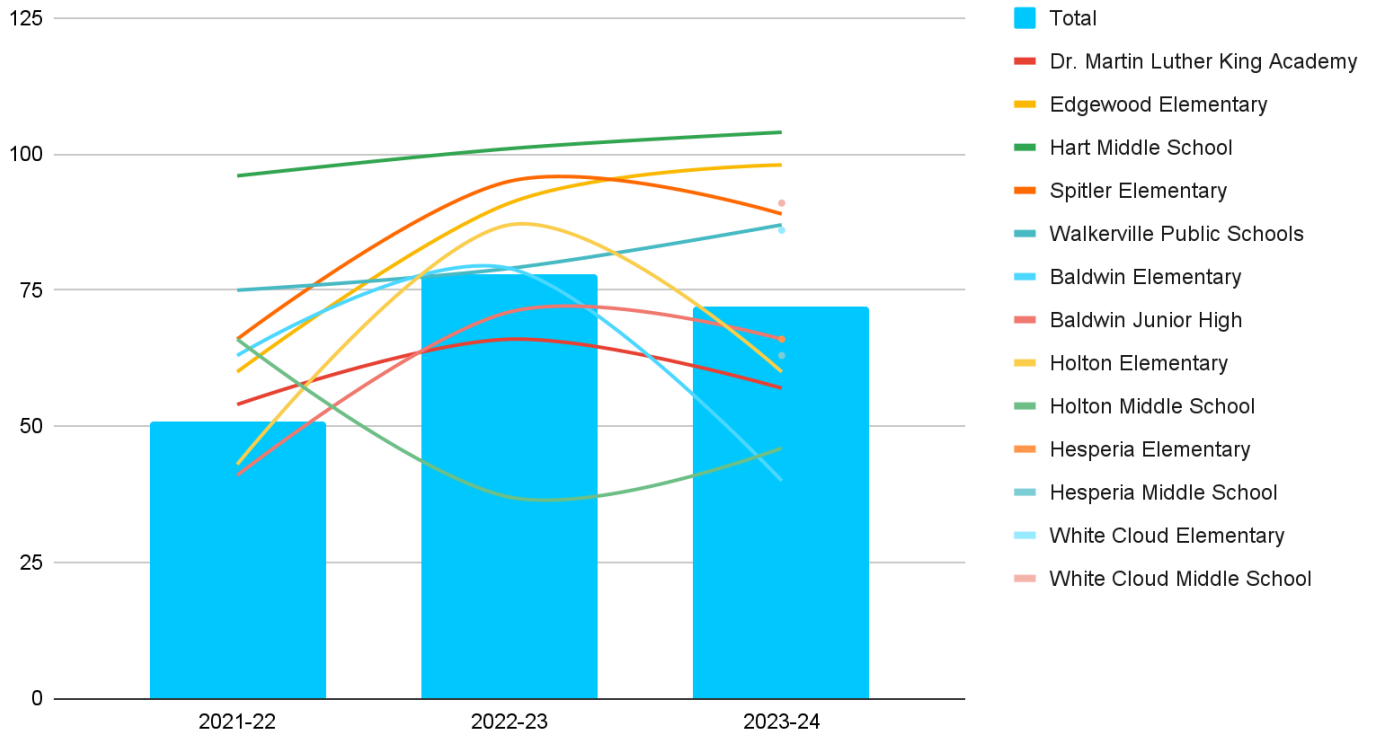
Is Project FOCUS attendance associated with better in-school attendance? This question is worth pursuing, as anecdotal reports from site coordinators and research in OST programs in general would indicate that improved attendance is a positive and likely outcome. However, given the available data for Project FOCUS, it appears that enrolled students do not, in fact, have better attendance than the general population of the school. Notes about potential reasons for this discrepancy and considerations for the future are noted in the recommendations section of this report.

On track attendance is indicated below by the percent of students missing less than 10% of available school days. This should not be viewed as a direct and equal comparison. This publicly available data was found using www.mischooldata.org, and is used to give a broad sense of how in-program attendance might look next to general public school attendance.

	Project Focus Attendees	2022-23(%)
Dr. Martin Luther King Academy	Not available	80%
Edgewood Elementary	Not available	77%
Hart Middle School	79%	92%
Walkerville Public Schools	63%	88%
Baldwin Elementary	86%	88%
Baldwin Junior High	87%	89%
Holton Elementary	74%	93%
Holton Middle School	Not available	92%
White Cloud Elementary	78%	92%
White Cloud Jr.	80%	91%

The table below illustrates the average number of program days attended by participants during the three consecutive school years. This data indicates an increase in the number of days attended between the 2021-22 school year and the 2022-23 school year, and a slight decrease this school year.

Average Program Attendance, in Days



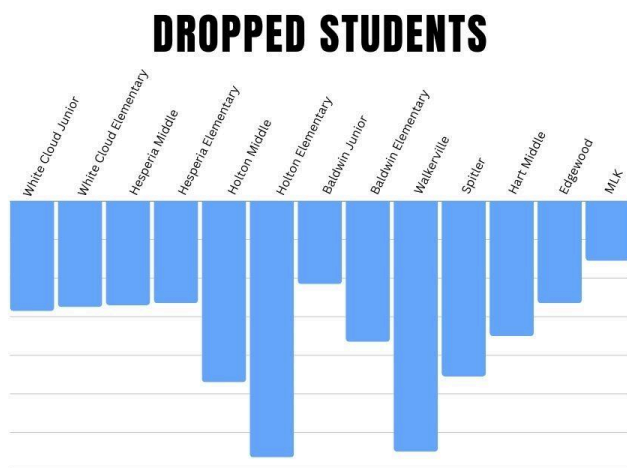
Section Four: Enrollment

Enrollment

The following table displays the number of students who were listed as enrolled in Project FOCUS programs, then dropped.

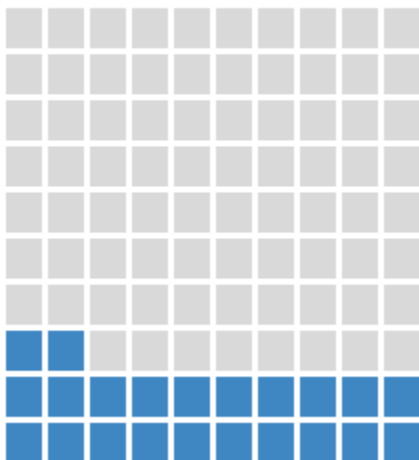
	Number of Dropped Students	Number of Students Who Remained Active	% drop
Dr. Martin Luther King Academy	21	67	31%
Edgewood Elementary	16	30	53%
Hart Middle School	31	44	70%
Spitler Elementary	49	54	91%
Walkerville Public Schools	56	43	130%
Baldwin Elementary	33	45	73%
Baldwin Junior High	15	35	43%
Holton Elementary	73	55	133%
Holton Middle School	29	31	94%
Hesperia Elementary	21	40	53%
Hesperia Middle School	15	28	54%
White Cloud Elementary	26	47	55%
White Cloud Jr.	17	30	57%

More students enrolled, then dropped, in Holton Elementary, Walkerville, Holton Middle School, and Spitler Elementary.

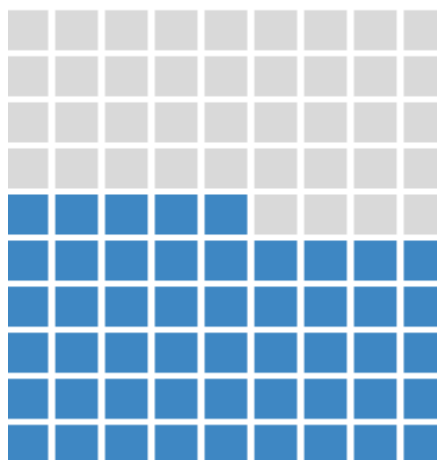


Reasons listed for student drop out varied, but the primary response indicated was “parent/student choice” (22%). Other rationale included “moved” (7%), “bus arrived home too late” (5%), “behavior” (5%), and “aged out” (5%).

Parent/Student Choice 22%



Left Blank 56%



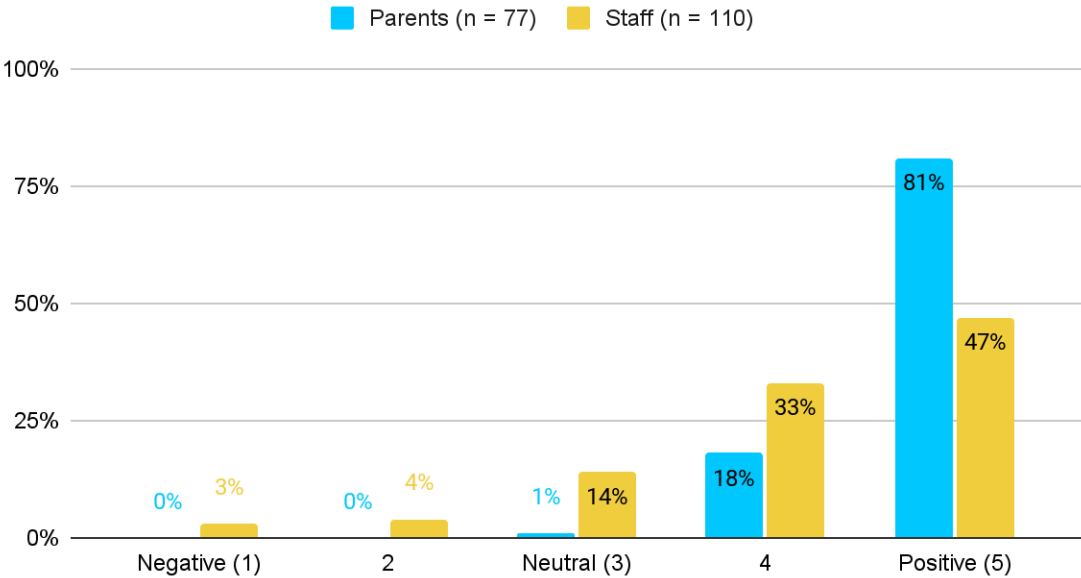
Section Five: Surveys

Survey Data

Overall Impressions

The following information displays the overall impressions by parents and staff of the Project FOCUS program. The results are overwhelmingly positive with parents, with **99%** of respondents rating their impressions with a 4 or 5 on a scale of 1-5. School staff rated their overall impressions as **80%** in the categories of 4 or 5.

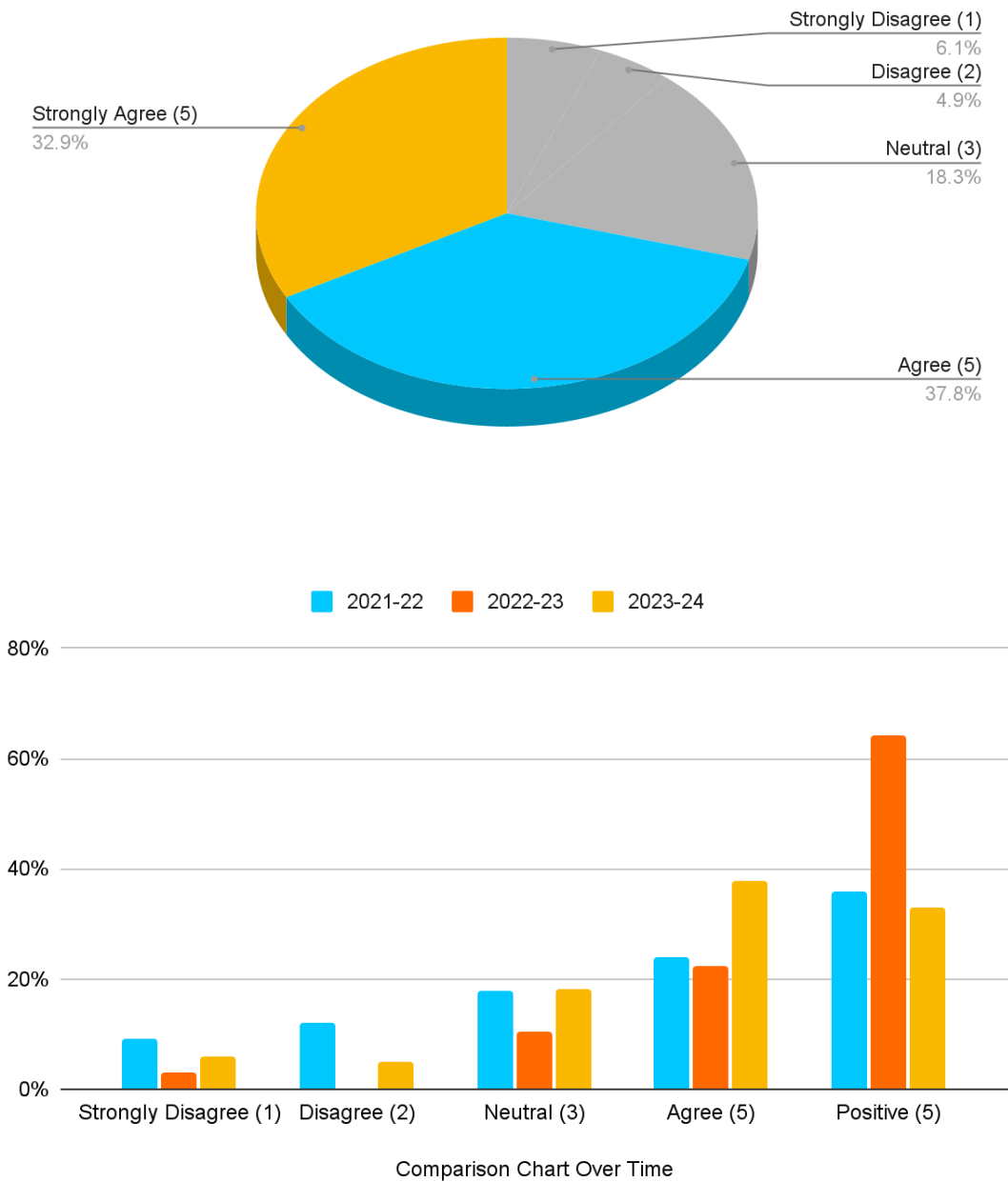
Overall Impressions of Project Focus by Respondent



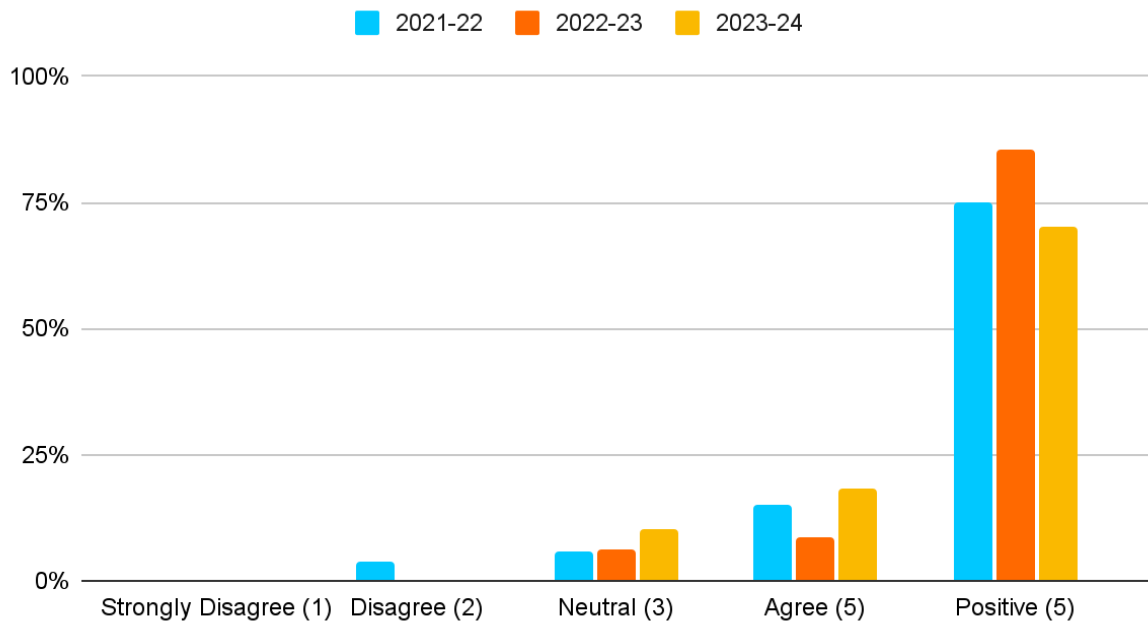
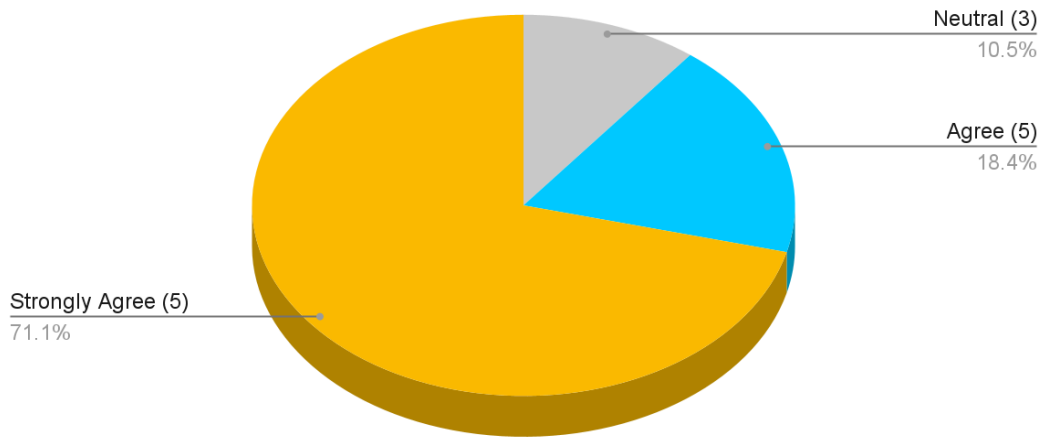
Ease of Communication

School staff and parents were also asked to rate their impression of the ease of communication with Site Coordinators. The question asked if the parent/school staff member felt there was open communication between parents/school staff and TrueNorth coordinators. A significant portion (70%) of school staff agreed or strongly agreed. Parents responded similarly, with the vast majority of respondents noting that there was open communication.

School Staff Rating of Communication Ease



Parent Rating of Communication Ease

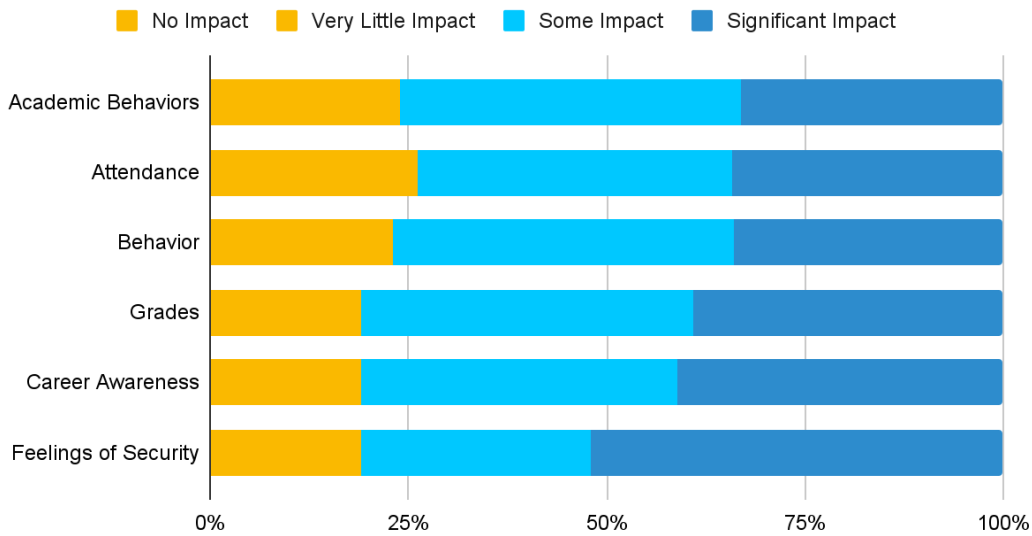


Comparison Chart Over Time

Perception of Key Areas of Impact

Survey respondents then answered questions related to their perception of the impact of several categories: feelings of security, career awareness, grades, behavior, attendance, and academic behaviors. The charts below display first the collective responses, then each category by respondent type and by site.

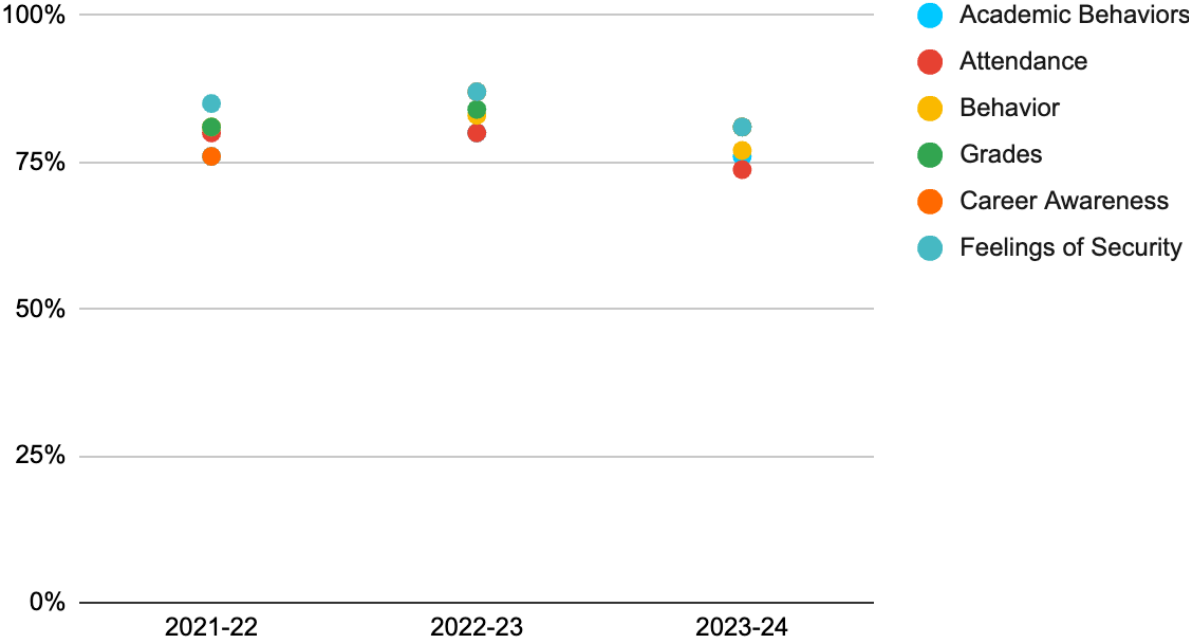
Collective Impact



	No Impact	Very Little Impact	Some Impact	Significant Impact
Academic Behaviors	9%	15%	43%	33%
Attendance	11%	15%	40%	34%
Behavior	8%	15%	43%	34%
Grades	10%	9%	42%	39%
Career Awareness	7%	12%	40%	41%
Feelings of Security	8%	11%	29%	52%

In all categories, Project FOCUS programming was rated impactful. The collective impact of Project FOCUS appears to remain relatively stable over time. This indicates that school staff, students, and parents are able to see positive impacts of the Project FOCUS programs.

Collective Impact Over Time



Perceptions by Respondent and Site

Parents, students, and staff perceived the overall impact of the program positively in all areas, with parents and staff perceiving the most impact on safety/security and students perceiving the most impact on their grades. Career Awareness was another area with the most favorability across all schools.

Despite this, the staff's views on impact on academic behaviors, behaviors, and grades lag behind those of parents and students. Edgewood and White Cloud Junior High reported the highest satisfaction with grades and could act as models for other schools looking to improve in this area.

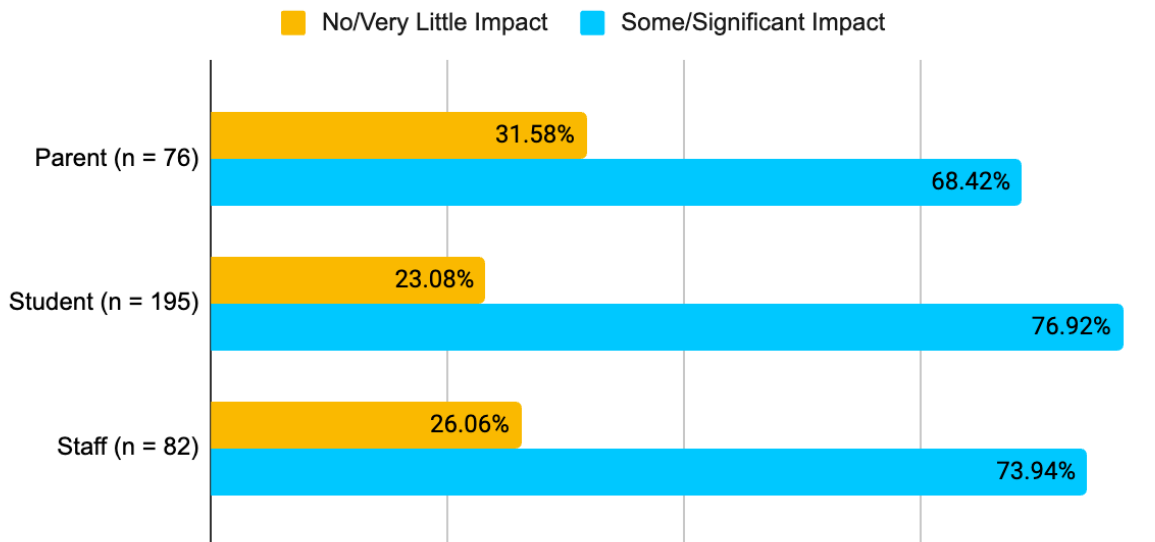
The impact on attendance was rated as the lowest across the board, with a few scores dipping quite low. Programs at Edgewood, Hesperia Elementary, and Walkerville Public Schools could be implemented elsewhere to positively impact attendance.

Respondents at Holton Elementary rated impact lowest on all measures and may benefit from implementing strategies from other schools.

Perception of Attendance

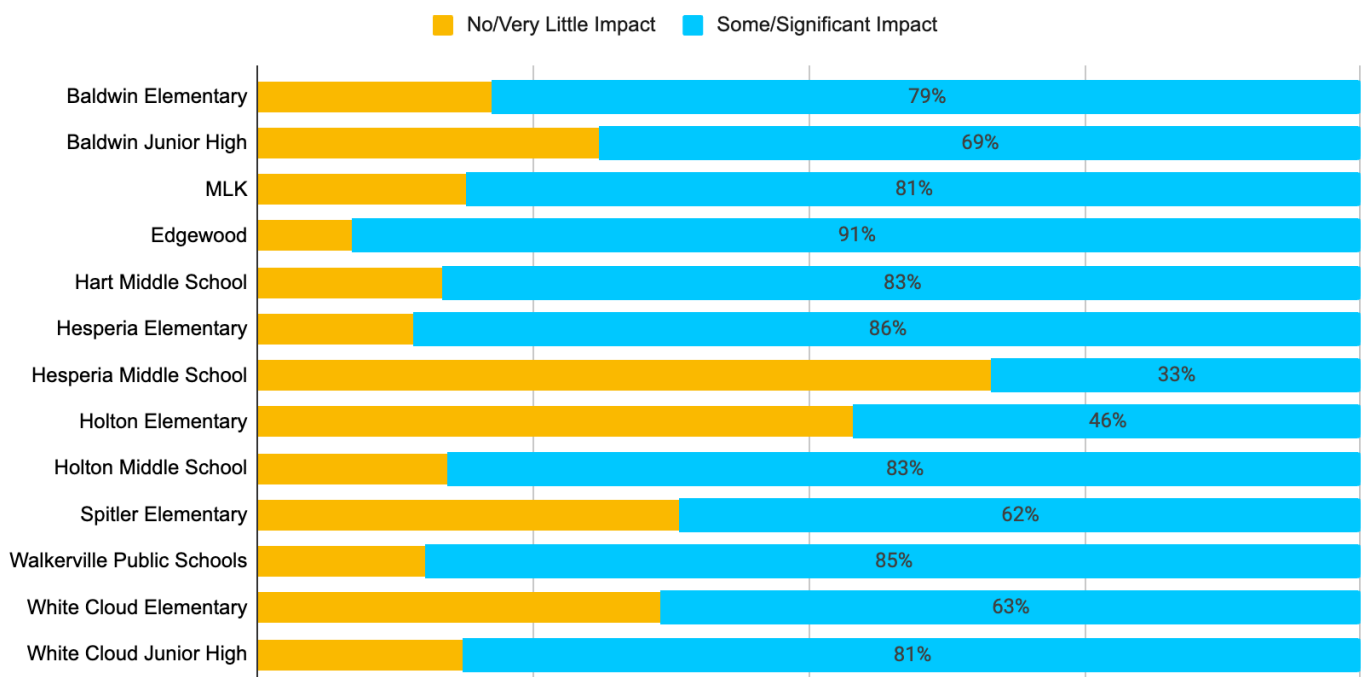
Perception of Impact by Respondent

Attendance (School Day)



Perception of Impact by Site

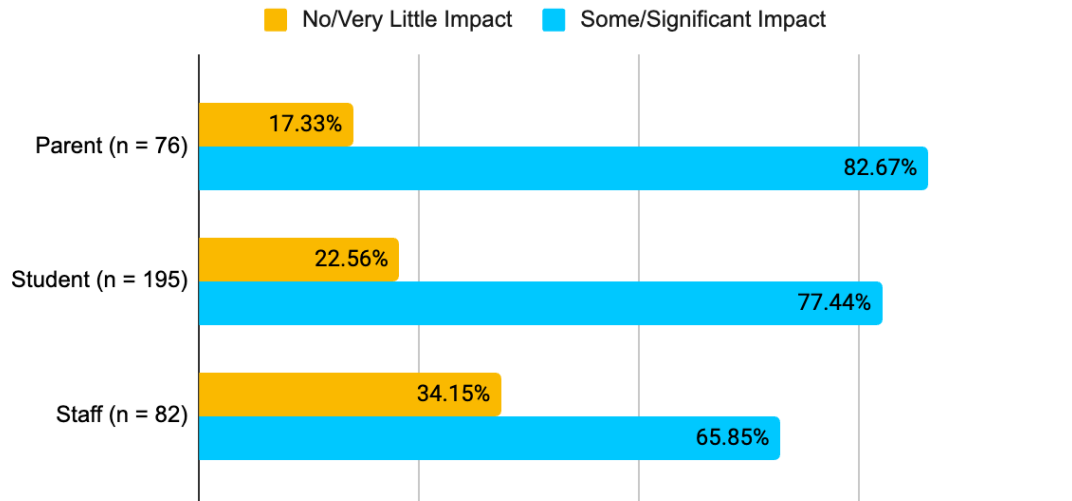
Attendance



Perception of Academic Behaviors

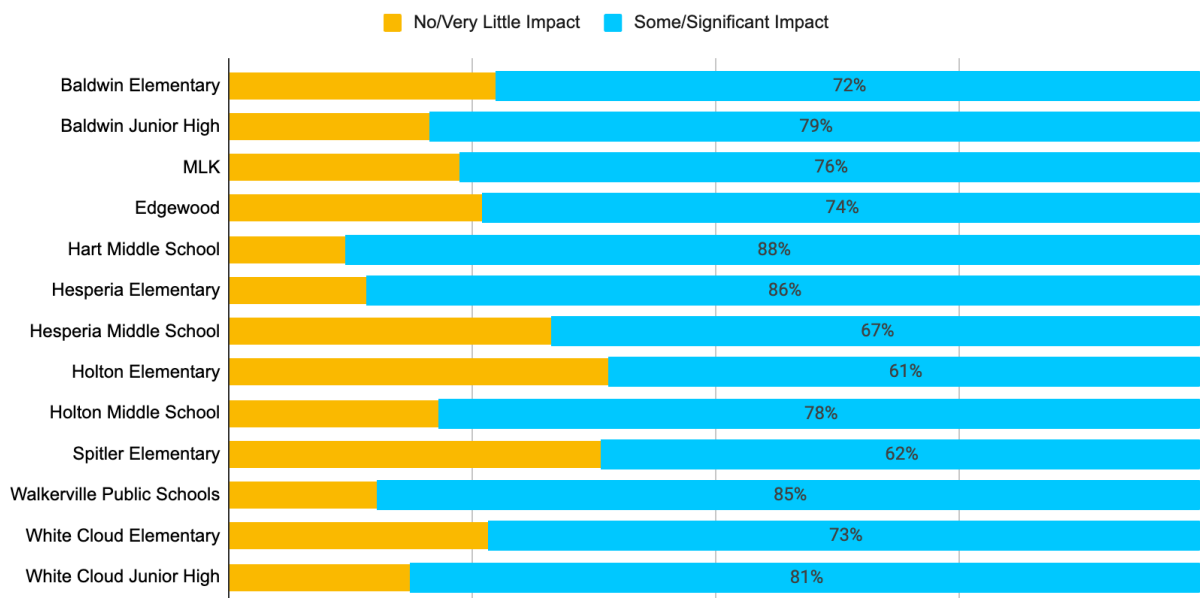
Perception of Impact by Respondent

Academic Behaviors



Perception of Impact by Site

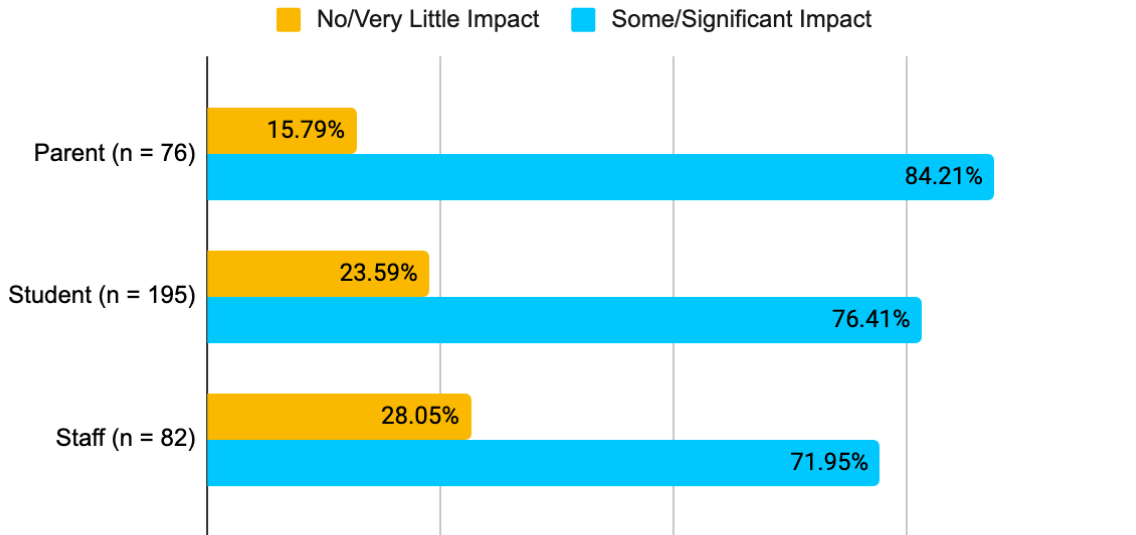
Academic Behaviors



Perception of Behaviors

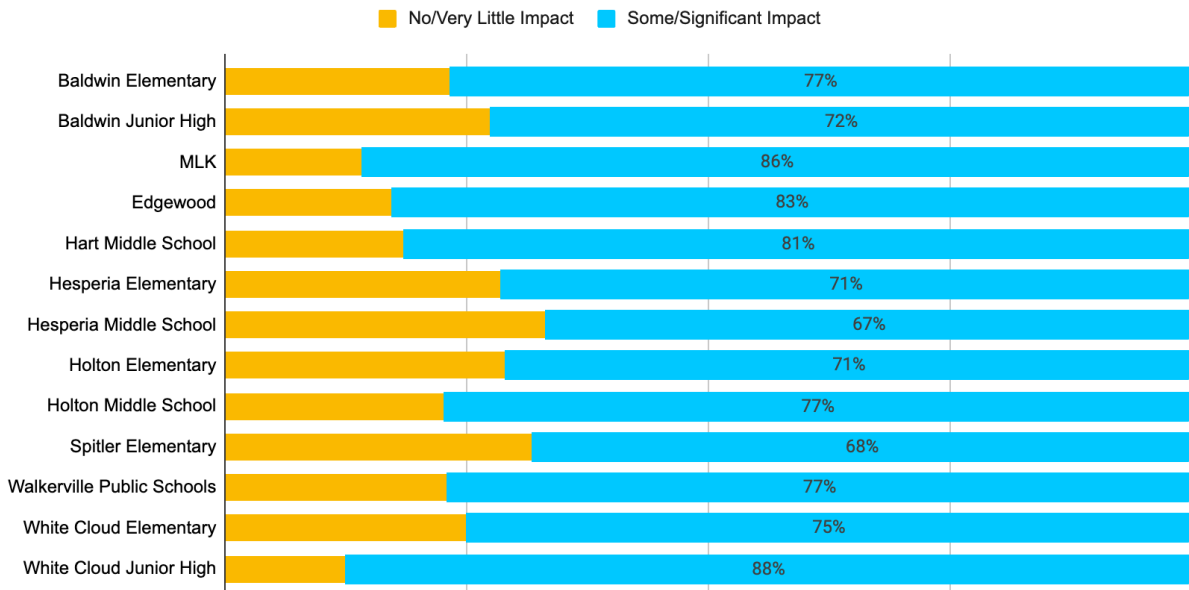
Perception of Impact by Respondent

Behaviors



Perception of Impact by Site

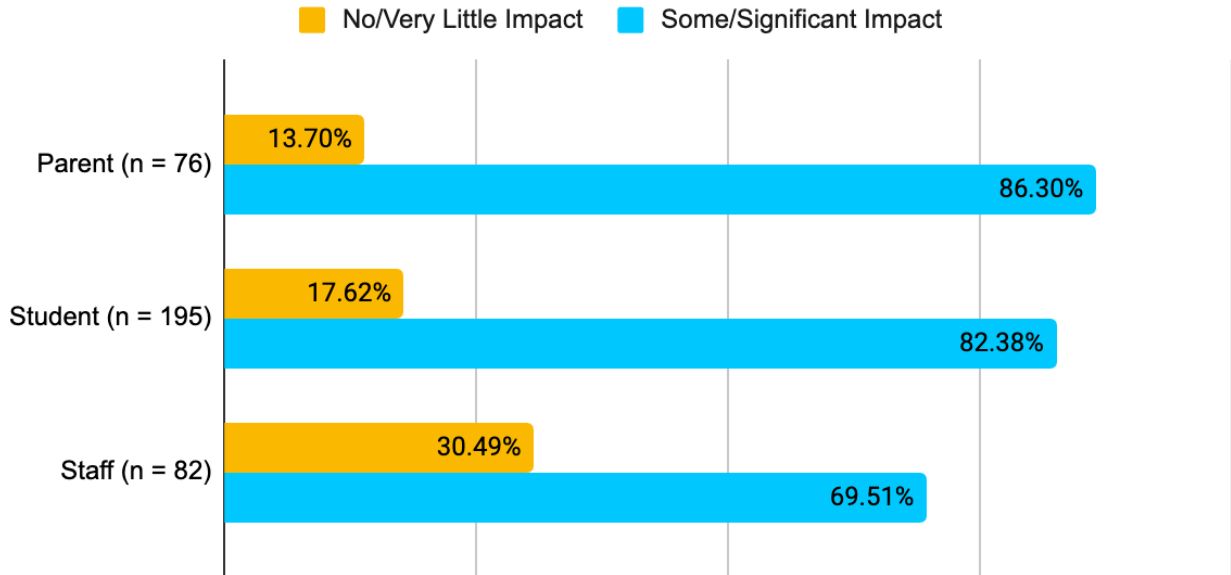
Behaviors



Perception of Grades

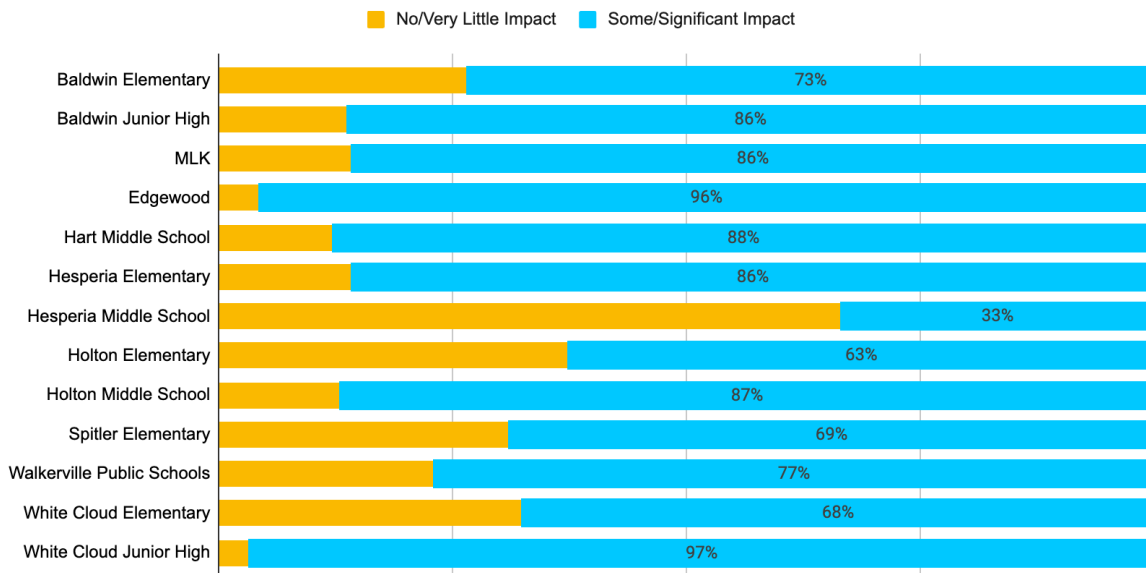
Perception of Impact by Respondent

Grades



Perception of Impact by Site

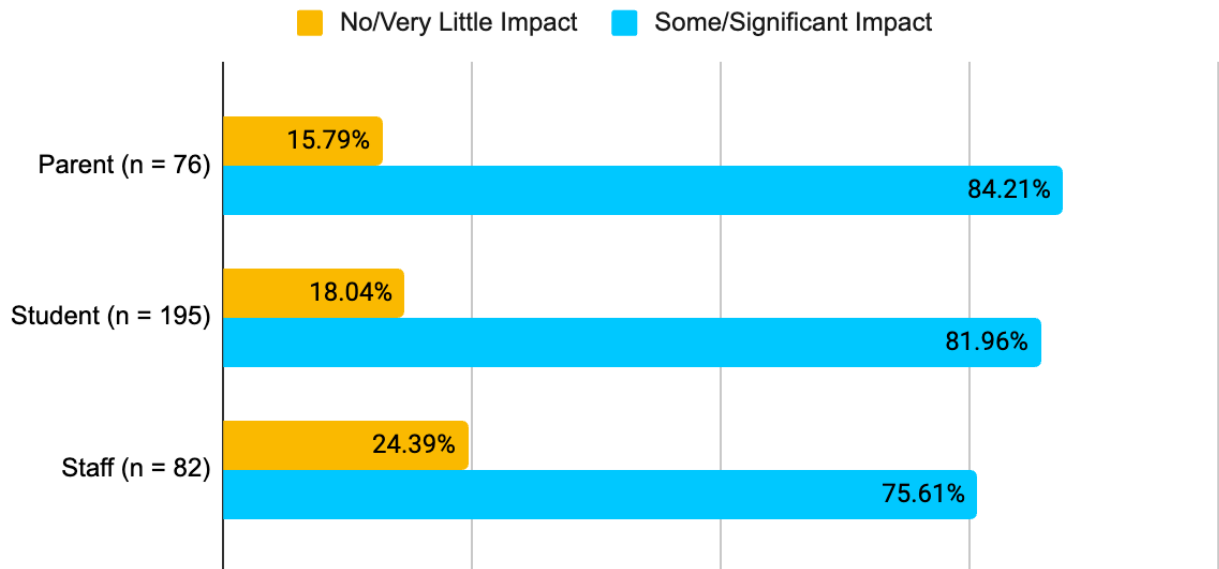
Grades



Perception of Career Awareness

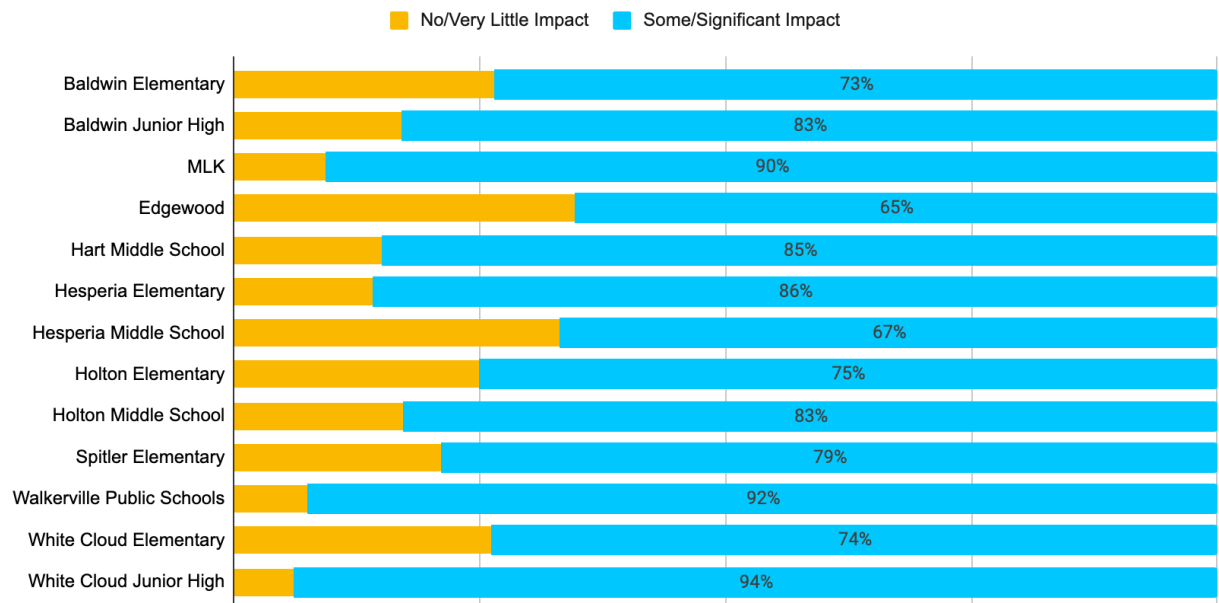
Perception of Impact by Respondent

Career Awareness



Perception of Impact by Site

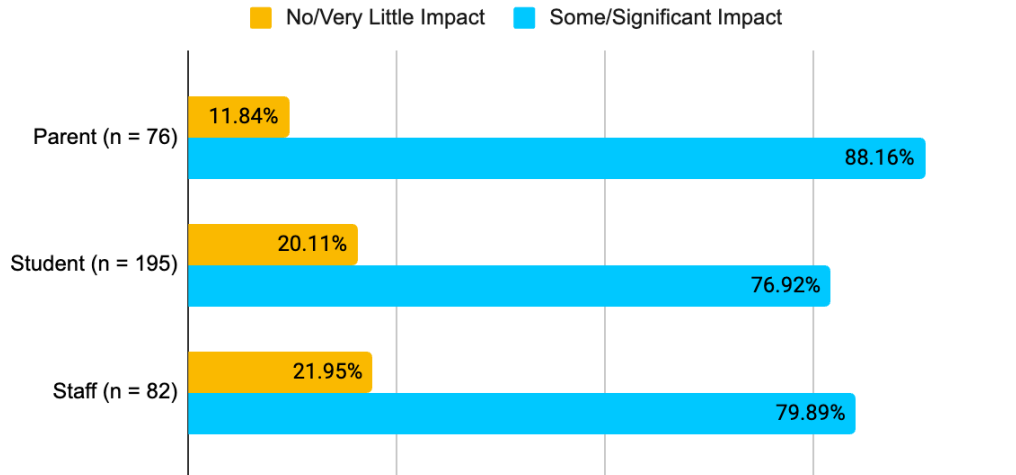
Career Awareness



Perception of Safety/Security

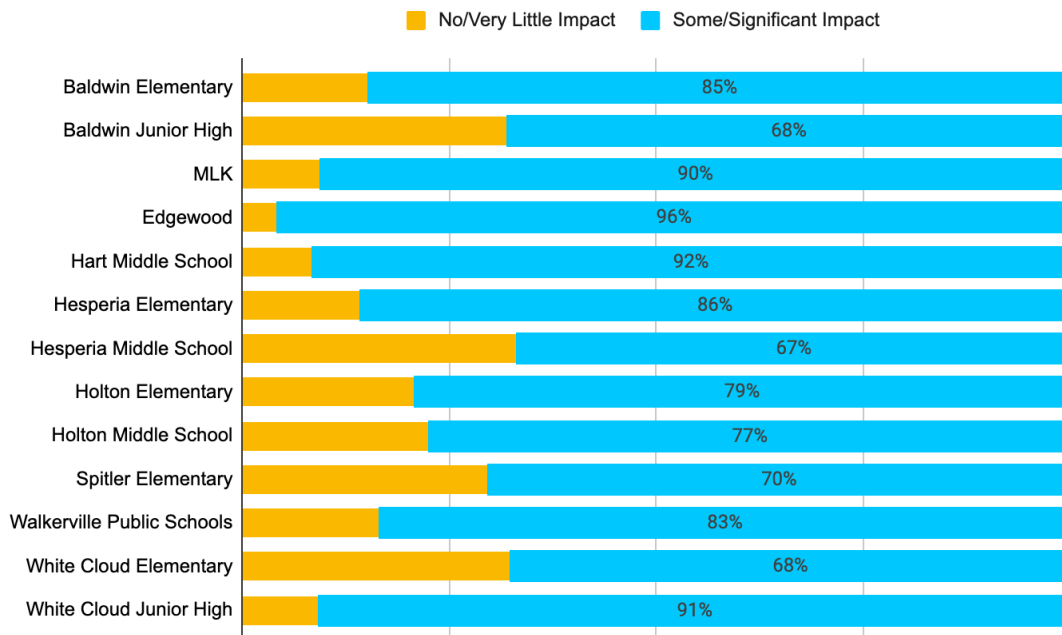
Perception of Impact by Respondent

Safety/Security



Perception of Impact by Site

Safety/Security



Section Six: Qualitative Analysis

Survey Analysis

Information gathered from surveys of parents, students, and school staff gives valuable insight into how Project FOCUS is perceived, and the impact it has on families. In this section, survey data was analyzed to understand a variety of topics.

Use caution when reviewing the sites individually, as each site had varying numbers of respondents. Having higher response rates for all respondents (school staff, parents, and students), would allow for different, more in-depth analysis of survey data.

Hesperia Elementary and Hesperia Middle School did not have a sufficient number of respondents to create a snapshot, therefore those sites are not included in this section of the report.

Student Reporting

WHAT STUDENTS ARE SAYING ABOUT PROJECT FOCUS:

Highlights of Positives

- ❖ You are supported no matter what, and people listen to you.
- ❖ That you can do homework on time and you can do a lot of crafts while talking to new people.
- ❖ You can be yourself and Project Focus helps you feel welcome and safe.
- ❖ You get to work on stuff and catch up and if you need help it's there. We have cool experiences and get to experience new things. The teachers are kind and helpful.
- ❖ We learn and have fun at the same time.

Highlights of Growth Opportunities

- ❖ Go on more field trips.
- ❖ Add more days in Project FOCUS like Monday through Friday.
- ❖ Tell people to be quiet and do their work and listen to our teachers.
- ❖ Give kids a longer recess.
- ❖ Listen to what the kids want to do a little more.

Parent Reporting

WHAT PARENTS ARE SAYING ABOUT PROJECT FOCUS:

Highlights of Positives

- ❖ Seeing the smile when I pick up my child and the excitement she has everyday to tell me what they did that day.
- ❖ My student enjoys the different activities. It helps to have time for him to catch up on classwork and a place to go with other students until I get out of work.
- ❖ Provides additional opportunities for students to learn/grow.
- ❖ How supportive and understanding the staff are towards the children and families.
- ❖ An opportunity for social connections that they were lacking during the school day.

Highlights of Growth Opportunities

- ❖ Make sure the people who help are understanding of all children's needs.
- ❖ I would have the program 5 days a week. A lot of parents depend on the program just to keep their job and most people work 5 days not 4.
- ❖ Like to see more emails on how things are going.
- ❖ Have more coordinators and pay staff higher wages.
- ❖ Have more parents involved one way or another.

Staff Reporting

WHAT SCHOOL STAFF ARE SAYING ABOUT PROJECT FOCUS:

Highlights of Positives

- ❖ It gives stability to those kids who need it.
- ❖ It provides our at-risk youth with more time to interact with peers and adults, provides mentorship and insight, and supplements what we do during the school day. It also can provide some alternative lessons and activities that we might not be able to offer them during the school day.
- ❖ Students have the chance to experience field trips that they have not gone on before. The staff is amazing, and they do their best to help students with homework.
- ❖ The students get experiences that their families don't provide for them and a safe place to be after school.
- ❖ Our students have a safe place to go after school where they are fed and cared for. They work on school work to help raise/maintain their grades.

Highlights of Growth Opportunities

- ❖ Continue to reach out to the students who sign up but do not attend more regularly.
- ❖ Work towards improving classroom management. Voice levels in kids are a bit loud at times.
- ❖ Have more structure for the kids with planned activities. Additionally having Project FOCUS coordinators be in the classrooms throughout the day to support Project FOCUS kids that struggle during the day.
- ❖ Continue funding it and growing. Maybe find a way to fund a program or group for our high school students, but in a different capacity.
- ❖ Closer relations between staff and Project FOCUS to better reach each student's needs.

Stakeholder Reporting Summary

WHAT ARE THE STAKEHOLDERS (*Parents, Staff, and Students*) SAYING ABOUT PROJECT FOCUS?

To begin coding and analyzing the survey data, first the words, phrases, and sentences were reviewed from the open-ended questions.

Initial codes were used to identify patterns in the data and then establish categories. For example, the response, “it helps my child with learning,” was coded as “academic support.” The response, “the relationship they have with their classmates,” was coded as “enjoyment/fun/friendships.” Any response indicating the establishment of a relationship with adults other than their parents was coded as “caring adults.”

Categories for each question are as follows:

The best thing about Project FOCUS is...

- Food
- Safe place
- Academic support
- Caring adults
- Enjoyment/fun/friendships
- Experience/field trips

To make Project FOCUS better I would...

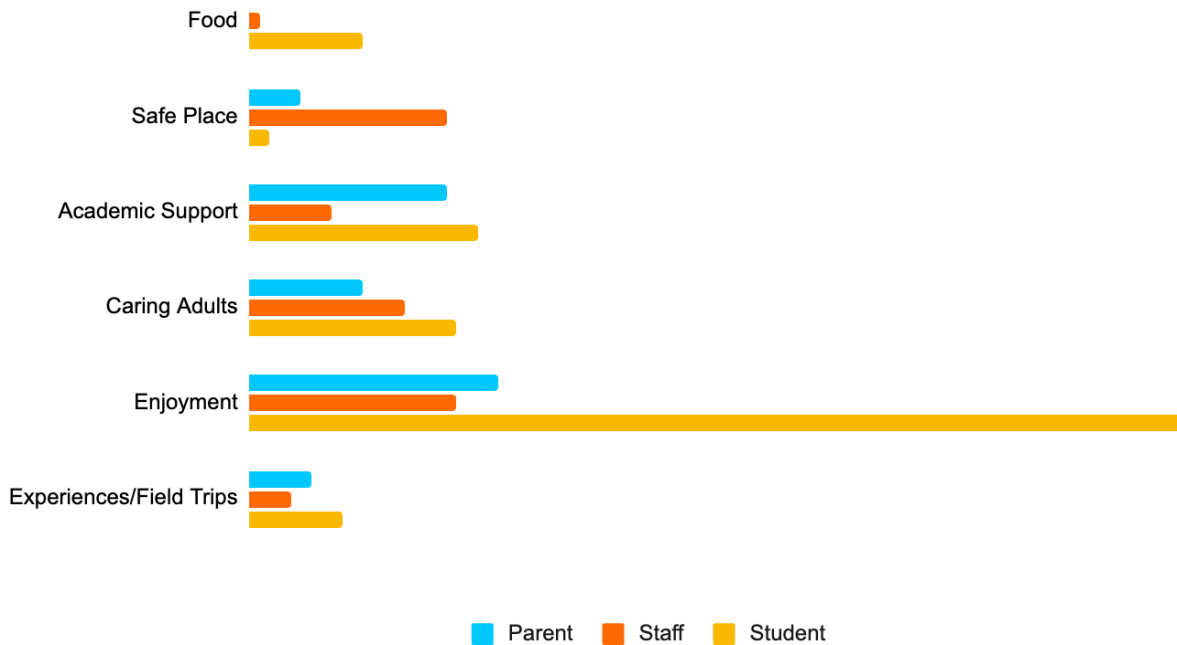
- Better food selection
- Raise (for staff)
- Less programming time
- More programming time
- Transportation
- Communication
- Structure/classroom management
- Increase the number of students served
- Increase/expand activities
- More academics

While trends were analyzed, it should also be noted that data was not dismissed that did not seem to fit in those codes. In fact, any outliers in the data emphasized the importance of identifying nuances of experiences. These will also be noted below.

Question: The best thing about Project FOCUS is...

Survey respondents collectively noted some areas more frequently than others. Respondents (47%) noted they appreciated the enjoyment, fun, and friendships that Project FOCUS programming provides. Academic support (17%) and caring adults (16%) were also frequently noted.

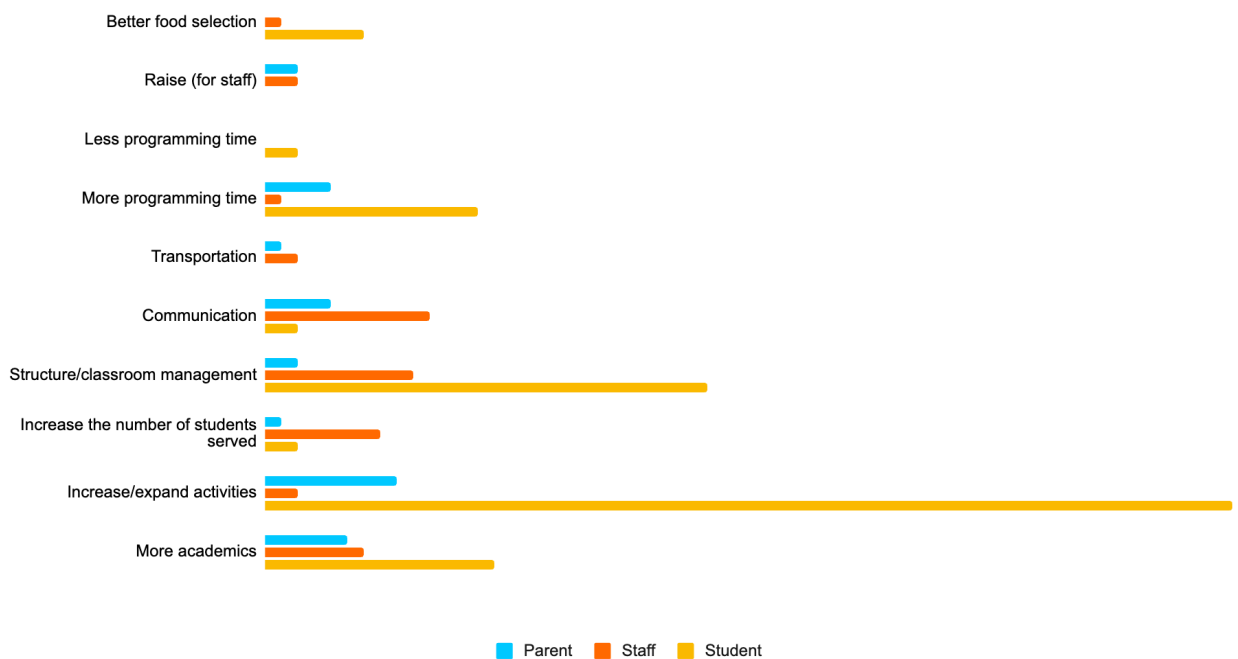
The best thing about Project FOCUS is...



Question: To make Project FOCUS better I would...

There was a wide variety of responses for the question regarding improvements to the programs. Survey respondents did indicate a desire for an increase and expansion of activities provided (36%). Many also noted that improvements in the structure, routine, and classroom management of programs could be improved (20%). Other improvements included more academic time (13%), more programming time offered (9%), and better communication with parents and staff (8%).

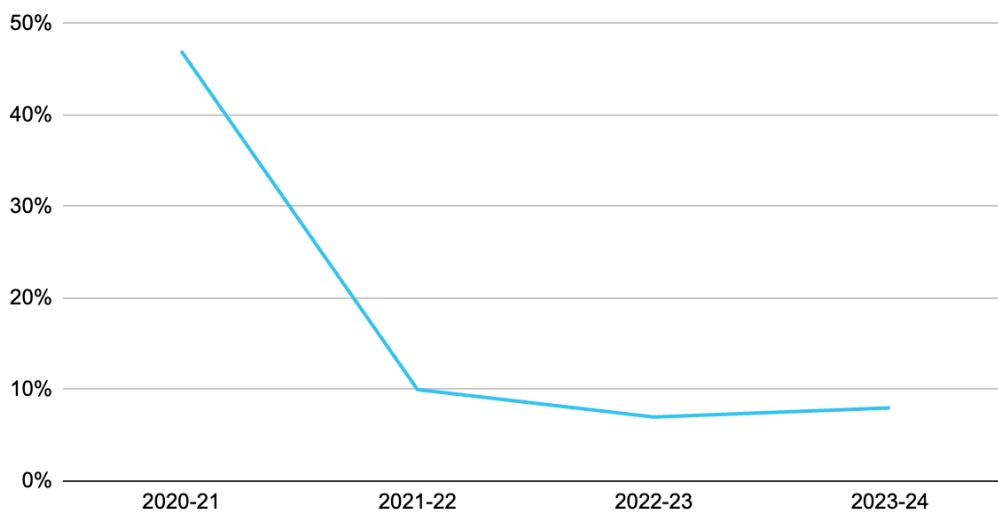
To make Project FOCUS better I would...



Communication

In the 2020-21 school year, a significant amount of respondents desired increased communication (47%). In 2021-22, that number decreased significantly (10%) when looking at the summary of respondents. This year and last year, that number reduced even more (8% and 7%, respectively). This is indicative of significant positive changes in the way site coordinators communicate with school personnel.

Respondents Asking for Better Communication From Site Coordinators



Site Snapshots

Baldwin Elementary

Most commonly indicated element of programming that is the “best thing”:

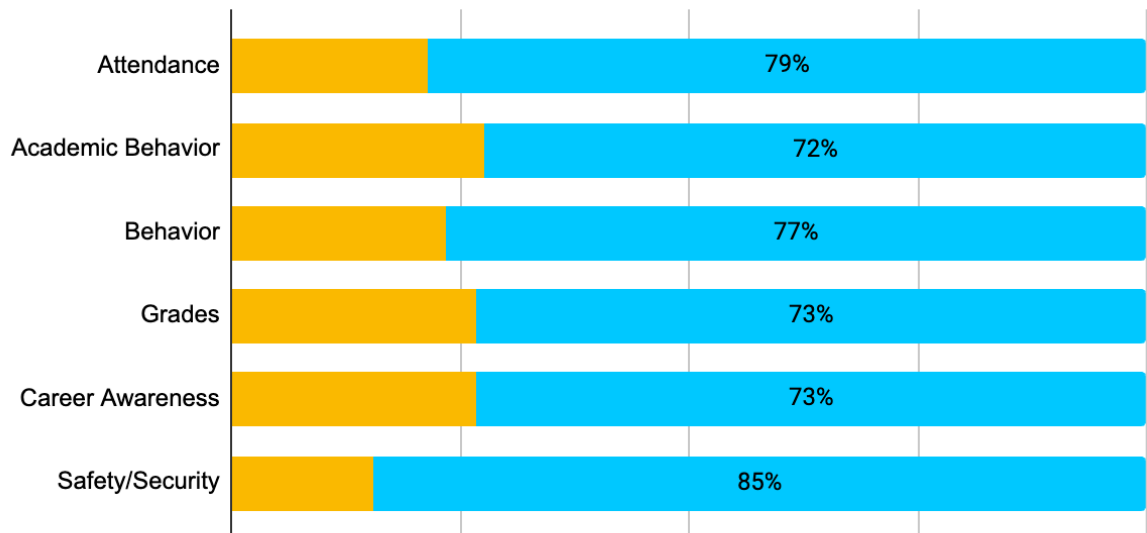
- Enjoyment and fun

Most commonly indicated element of programming to improve:

- Increase and expand activities
- Classroom management

Baldwin Elementary

Perceived Impact of Project FOCUS Programming



Baldwin Junior High

Most commonly indicated element of programming that is the “best thing”:

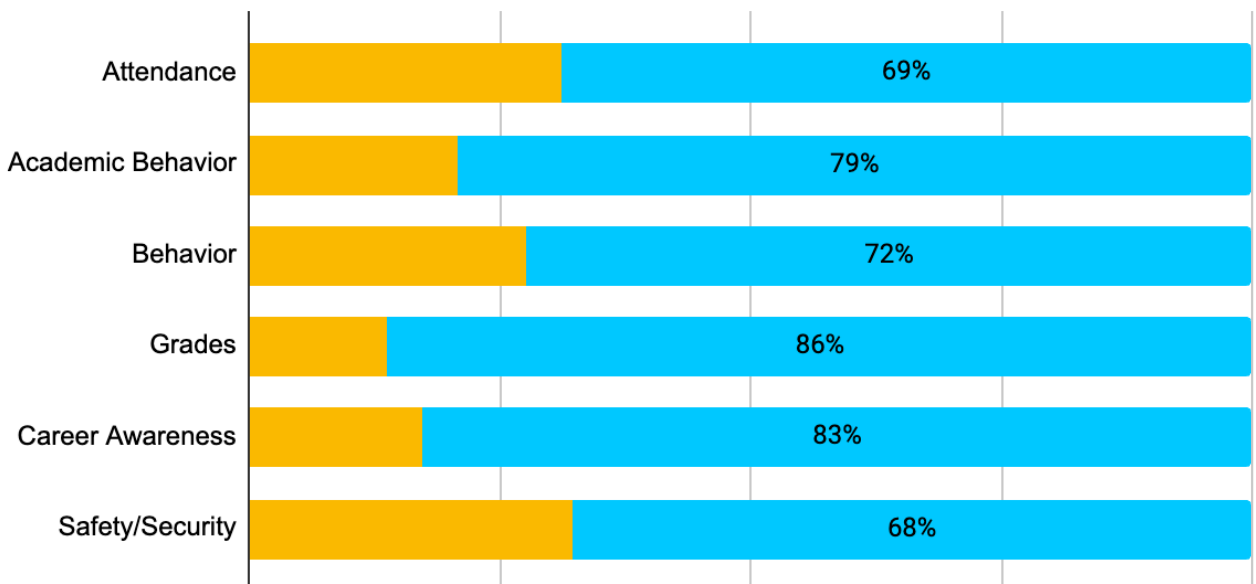
- Enjoyment and fun
- Caring adults

Most commonly indicated element of programming to improve:

- Increase and expand activities

Baldwin Junior

Perceived Impact of Project FOCUS Programming



MLK

Most commonly indicated element of programming that is the “best thing”:

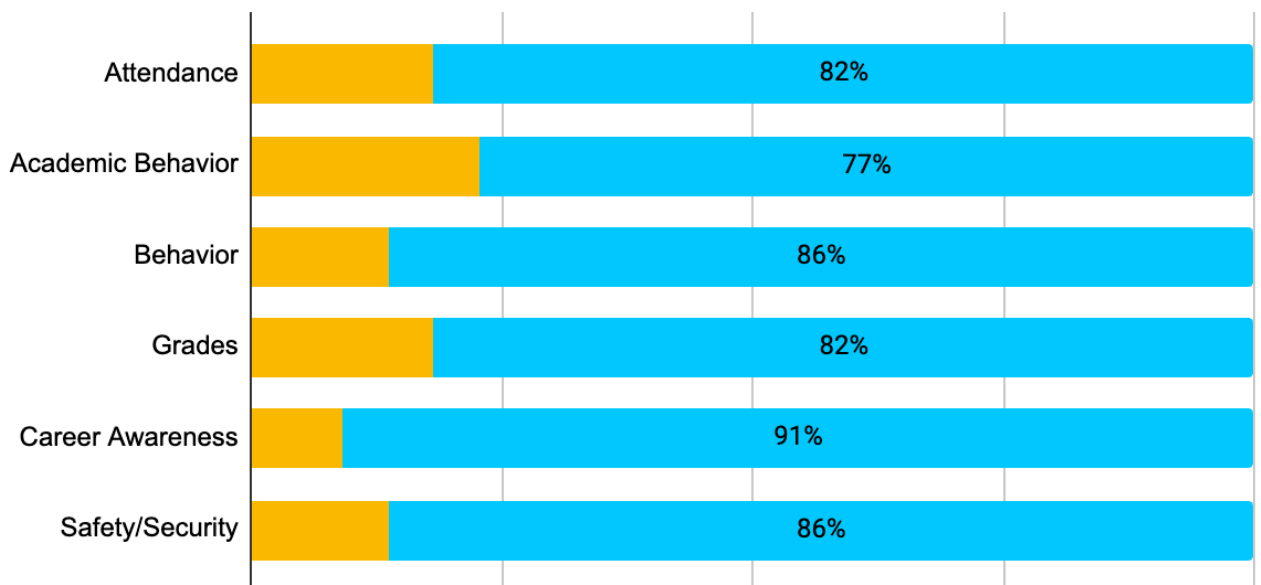
- Enjoyment and fun
- Caring adults

Most commonly indicated element of programming to improve:

- Offer more programming time
- Increase academic time

MLK

Perceived Impact of Project FOCUS Programming



Edgewood Elementary

Most commonly indicated element of programming that is the “best thing”:

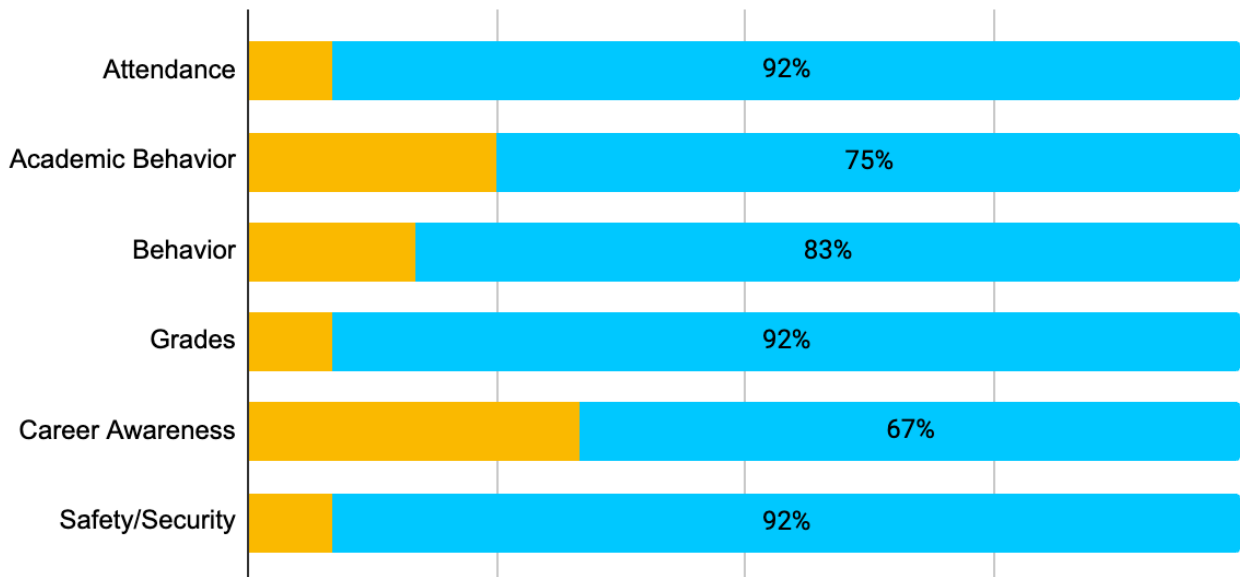
- Enjoyment and fun
- Caring adults

Most commonly indicated element of programming to improve:

- Increase and expand activities

Edgewood Elementary

Perceived Impact of Project FOCUS Programming



Hart Middle School

Most commonly indicated element of programming that is the “best thing”:

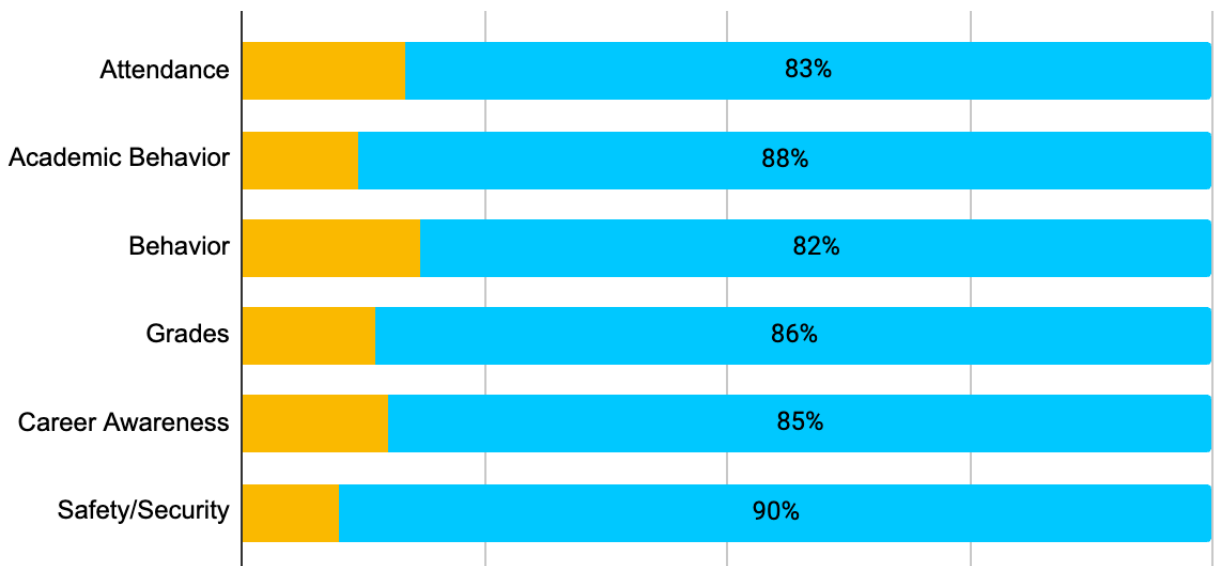
- Enjoyment and fun
- Academic support

Most commonly indicated element of programming to improve:

- Increase and expand activities
- Classroom management and structure

Hart Middle School

Perceived Impact of Project FOCUS Programming



Holton Elementary

Most commonly indicated element of programming that is the “best thing”:

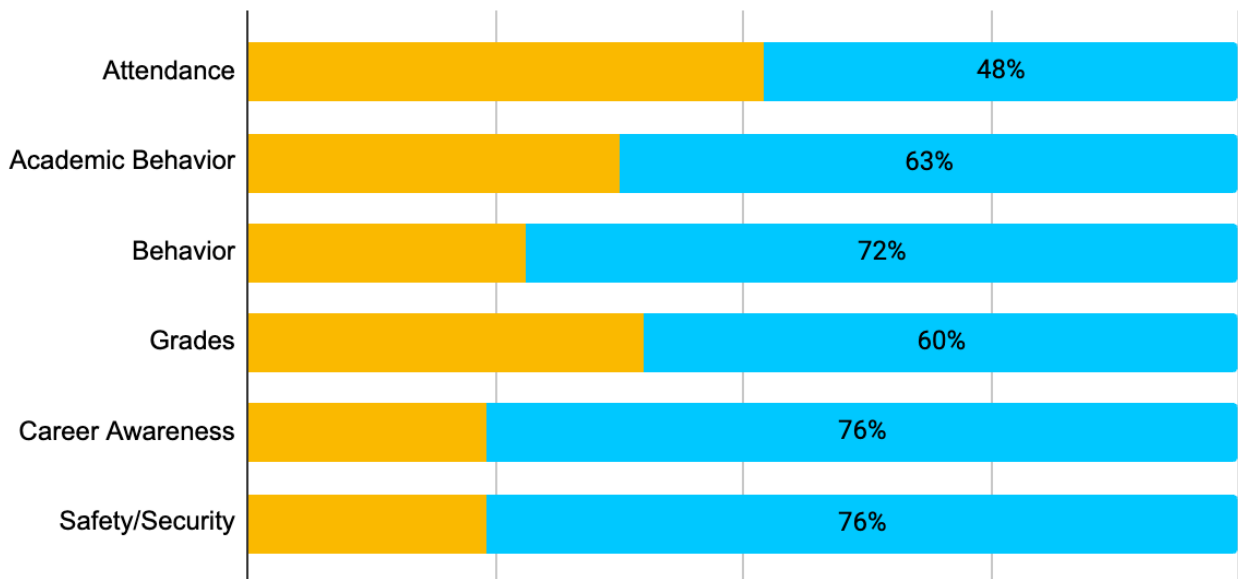
- Enjoyment and fun

Most commonly indicated element of programming to improve:

- Increase and expand activities
- Classroom management and structure

Holton Elementary

Perceived Impact of Project FOCUS Programming



Holton Middle School

Most commonly indicated element of programming that is the “best thing”:

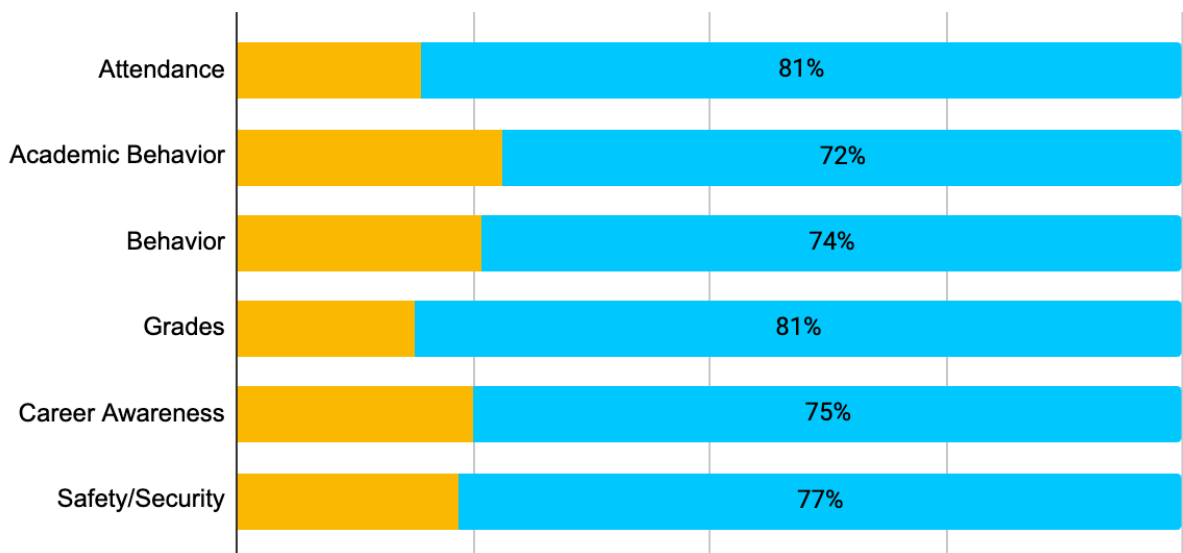
- Enjoyment and fun
- Safe place

Most commonly indicated element of programming to improve:

- Increase and expand activities
- Increase communication with parents and staff

Holton Middle School

Perceived Impact of Project FOCUS Programming



Spitler Elementary

Most commonly indicated element of programming that is the “best thing”:

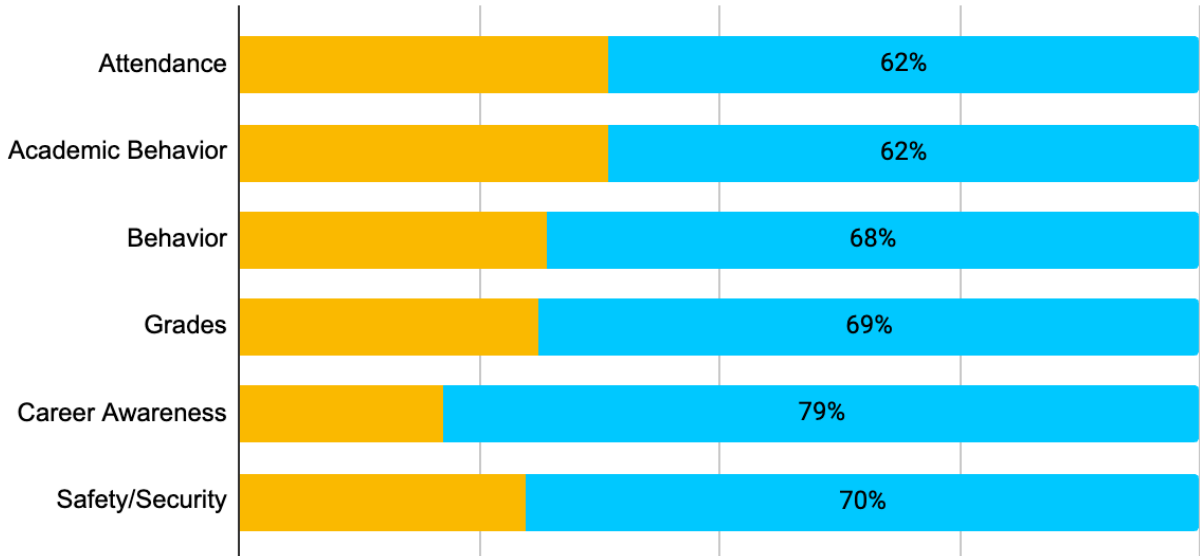
- Enjoyment and fun
- Caring adults

Most commonly indicated element of programming to improve:

- Increase and expand activities

Spitler Elementary

Perceived Impact of Project FOCUS Programming



Walkerville Public School

Most commonly indicated element of programming that is the “best thing”:

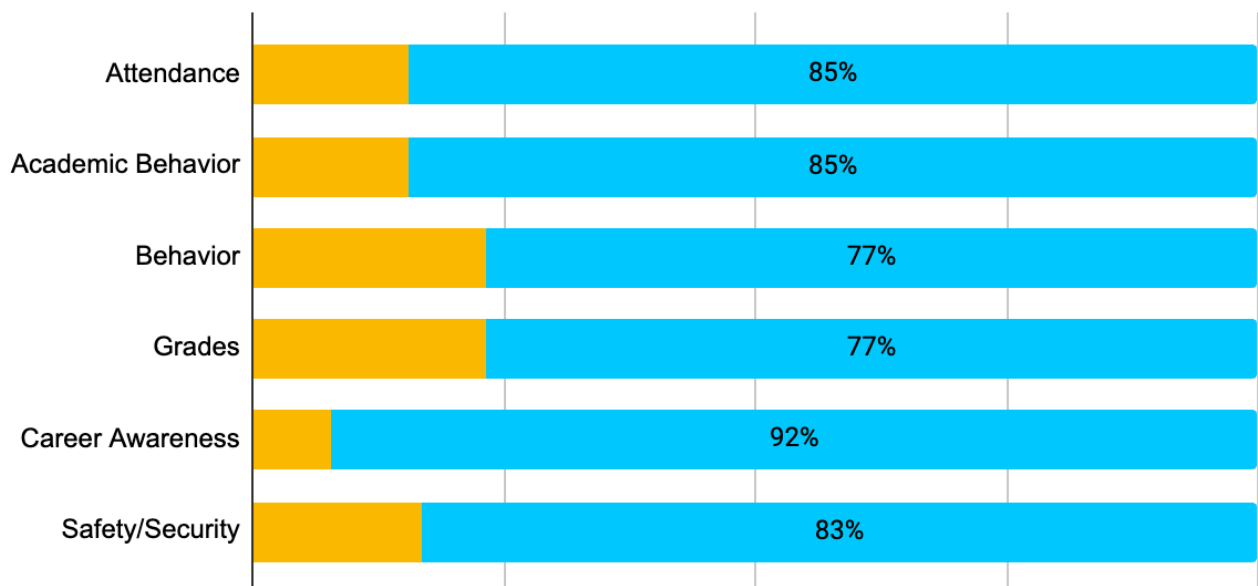
- Enjoyment and fun
- Caring adults

Most commonly indicated element of programming to improve:

- Increase and expand activities

Walkerville Public Schools

Perceived Impact of Project FOCUS Programming



White Cloud Elementary

Most commonly indicated element of programming that is the “best thing”:

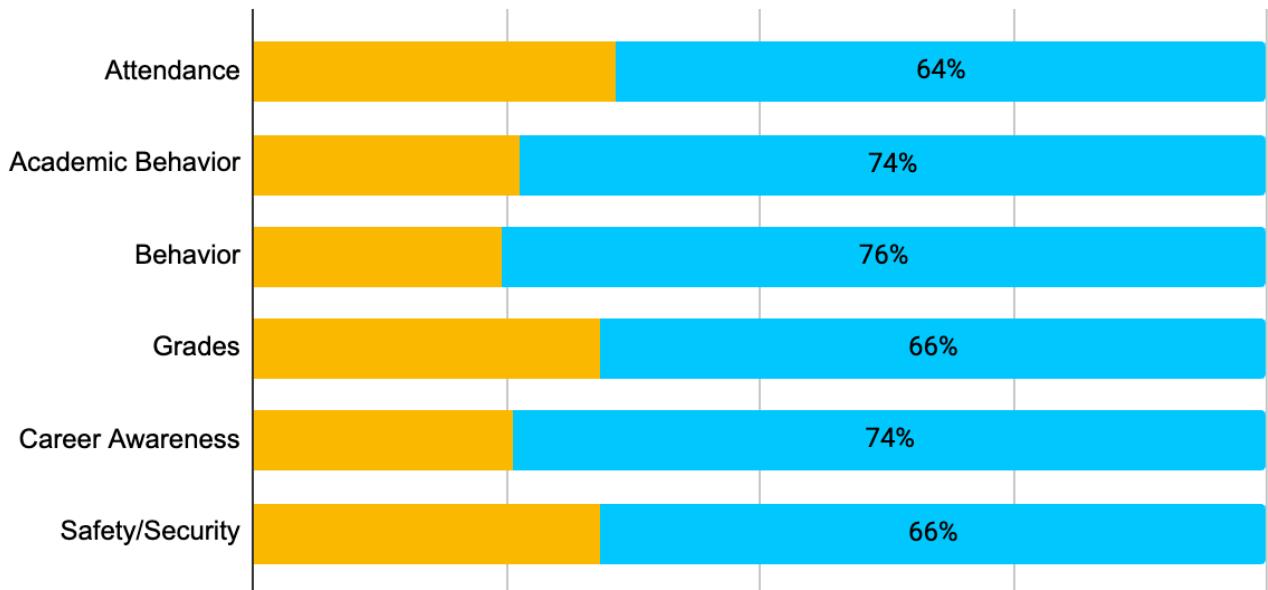
- Enjoyment and fun
- Field trips

Most commonly indicated element of programming to improve:

- Increase and expand activities
- Increase communication with parents and staff

White Cloud Elementary

Perceived Impact of Project FOCUS Programming



White Cloud Junior High

Most commonly indicated element of programming that is the “best thing”:

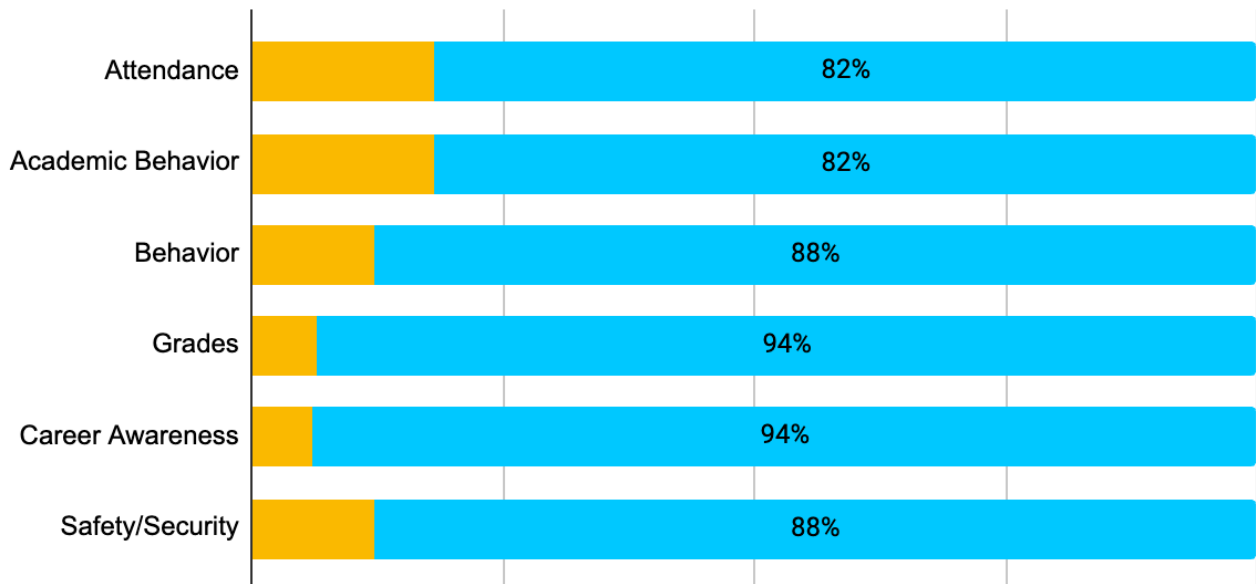
- Enjoyment and fun

Most commonly indicated element of programming to improve:

- Increase and expand activities

White Cloud Junior High

Perceived Impact of Project FOCUS Programming



Section Seven: Site Observations

The areas of observations intentionally remained the same to thoughtfully review changes in each category. These categories also align with Project FOCUS goals and with student, parent, and school staff recommendations for growth from previous survey data.

EVIDENCE OF ACADEMICS, SCHOOLWORK COMPLETION, AND SKILL-BUILDING

OBSERVATIONS

EVIDENCE OF ACADEMICS, SCHOOLWORK COMPLETION, AND SKILL-BUILDING

Academics, schoolwork completion, and skill-building are crucial components of a student's educational journey. Academic learning provides students with the knowledge and critical thinking skills necessary to succeed. Skill-building activities reinforce learning and teach students essential life skills such as time management, discipline, and responsibility. Focusing on academics, completing schoolwork, and building skills can contribute to a well-rounded and successful educational experience.

SITE-SPECIFIC OBSERVATIONS

Baldwin Elementary

Baldwin Elementary staff uses sophisticated vocabulary and asks students to engage in higher-order thinking activities. During a fun lesson on slime, students learned words like “activate” and “additive” and about the chemical reaction between the ingredients. They also compared and contrasted the different types of slime.

Baldwin Jr High

The Baldwin Jr. High staff is knowledgeable about the school curriculum. They stress the importance of academics and grades while providing the support needed for their students to be successful. Students participated in a slam poetry activity in which they used writing to share their feelings. Due to the safe space created for them, students overcame initial reluctance and participated. Adults also shared writing to show vulnerability. Afterward, students reflected on their poems and connected them to writing song lyrics. While academic, this type of writing can also help students reduce feelings of anxiety and loneliness.

Edgewood

Edgewood students develop fine motor skills by performing tasks such as writing and drawing and using tools with precision and control. Through these methods, they engaged in content, such as the Rosa Parks activity for Black History. They listened to a book about the bus boycott and recalled the main idea and supporting details.

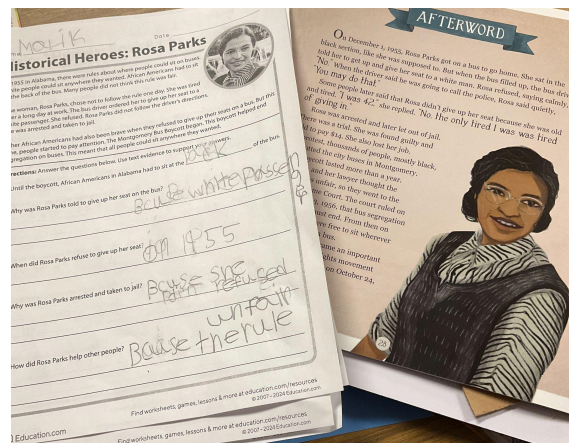
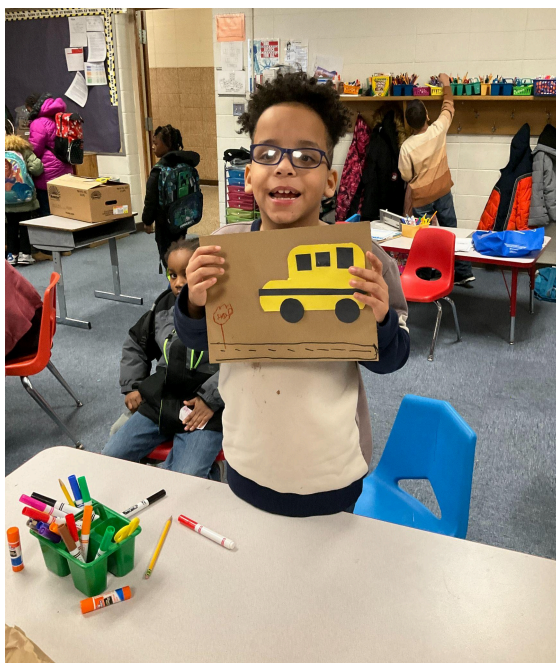
Walkerville

Walkerville has a strong focus on academics and works closely with the school staff to increase student learning. A theme or skill connects their activities. Additionally, there appears to be a balance

of academic learning and artistic expression. Walkerville frequently chooses engaging activities that include a literacy component. These activities, involving reading together or sharing writing pieces, can improve classroom community and lead to empowering discussions. Sharing reading and writing helps students connect while cultivating a sense of belonging.

NEXT STEPS

All sites provide individual and small-group assistance on assignments and homework. Adults engage in academic tutoring and skill-building. Consider pairing students of different ages to mentor and help each other during educational time.



EVIDENCE OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Social-emotional learning (SEL) significantly impacts students' overall well-being. SEL helps students develop essential skills such as self-awareness, self-regulation, and empathy. By acquiring these skills, students can better manage their emotions, set and achieve growth goals, show empathy for others, and make responsible decisions. SEL also contributes to creating an inclusive school climate while reducing behavioral issues. Overall, social-emotional learning equips students with the tools they need to succeed.

SITE-SPECIFIC OBSERVATIONS

White Cloud Elementary

Students use a mood board for emotional check-ins, to recognize the range of emotions, and to develop coping skills to navigate them. Brain breaks and using wigglers or relaxers help restore student focus.

White Cloud Jr High

The students are encouraged to be leaders, advocate for themselves, and act responsibly. Their main rule is “Respect everyone.” Students are encouraged to express their feelings through a daily prompt check-in. Students write the answer on the whiteboard or discuss it with the group. “Walk and talk” helps adults connect with the students one-on-one. The staff ensures students know the events and expectations for the day by allowing them to lead the agenda time.

Edgewood

The staff provides positive feedback to students using affirmations like “Good job” and “You’re right.” Their statements are phrased positively, such as “Walking feet, please. Thank you.” Students are taught they are all friends and need to help each other. The assistants are gentle and use humor to motivate students to give their best effort.

Holton MS

The staff establishes positive relationships with students. The hands-on science activities help students focus on the learning process and value both successes and failures. Students are encouraged to collaborate and problem-solve during lessons such as removing tarnish from pennies, designing towers to withstand earthquakes, and building Rube Goldberg machines. They develop life skills while engaged in STEAM. Students are given time to reflect on where processes break down and are supported when attempting activities again.

NEXT STEPS

All sites work to build and strengthen relationships with students. Peer mediation, buddy programs, and leadership groups could help students inspire each other. Calm corners equipped with soft lighting, furnishings, and sensory toys could give students a safe place to navigate and regulate their emotions.



EVIDENCE OF CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS

Effective classroom management and behavior support can improve academic performance, increase student engagement, and create a positive classroom environment. When students feel supported and valued, they are more likely to participate in classroom activities and have a positive attitude toward learning. Effective behavior support can reduce disruptions and improve student social interactions. A well-managed classroom with strong behavioral support can contribute to a more productive learning experience for students.

SITE-SPECIFIC OBSERVATIONS

Hesperia Elementary

Relationships and trust are the keys to classroom management. One staff member is working to build trusting relationships with a student by teaching Spanish lessons to his group. This connection helps improve the student's behavior while strengthening bonds within the group.

Hesperia MS

Students earn positivity points and redeem them for prizes from the treasure box. This encourages students to treat others with kindness and keep the room clean. The adults consistently interact with the students compassionately and redirect the groups respectfully.

MLK

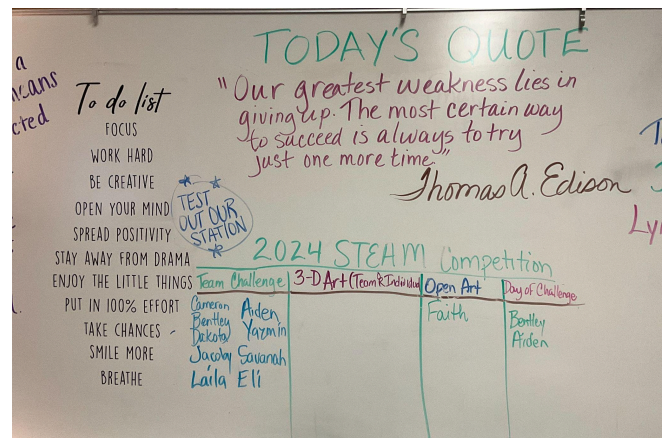
The adults use management techniques such as adequate wait time, repeating directions, and call-and-response. They explicitly teach procedures and enforce expectations to ensure a systematic and safe environment. Staff members lead whole-group and small-group discussions to help students process life events. The students appreciate and feel comfortable talking to the FOCUS staff.

Baldwin Elementary

The staff prioritizes the safety and health of the students. Adults address behavior issues in private. They are empathetic and understand the students' diverse needs. Positive language is used, and students' poor choices are not ignored with reminders such as "Be respectful" and "I need your attention." After lessons, students reflect on the process and answer open-ended questions such as, "What problems did you encounter?" "What was easy?" Students are taught ways to work through their challenges.

NEXT STEPS

All sites maintain high behavior expectations. A toolbox of self-regulation techniques could reduce disruptive behavior and give the students more ownership of the classroom environment. Coordinators may consider using incentives to keep at-risk students on track.



EVIDENCE OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND CHOICE

When students are allowed to make choices in their learning, it increases engagement and motivation. Allowing students to have a say in topics, projects, or assignments gives them a sense of ownership. This autonomy can lead to higher interest and investment in their work. When personally invested in their learning, students are more likely to actively engage in the material and take ownership of their educational journey. This can lead to a more positive and enriching learning experience for students.

SITE-SPECIFIC OBSERVATIONS

Hesperia MS

This site allows for student choice and creativity. Students are encouraged to be individuals, and differences are appreciated. Increased independence creates an environment in which both adults and students are happy to be there.

Spitler

Students have many choices and adequate resources, including Legos, games, art supplies, and books. They are actively engaged in activities and encouraged to rotate through various stations. The students are allowed unstructured time to be imaginative and interact with peers. The staff plans a variety of age-appropriate activities intended to engage all learners.

White Cloud Elementary

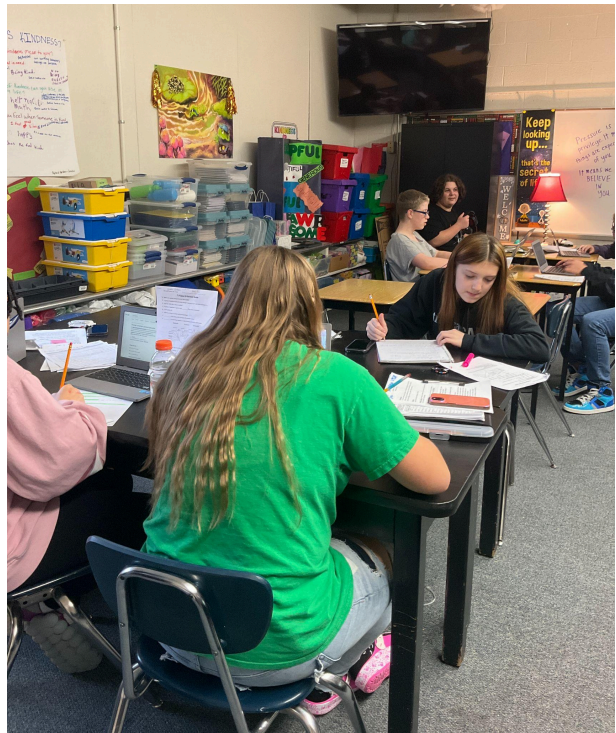
Activities and units vary in content and change often to maintain engagement. Students participate in lessons about nature, science, and art. The staff modifies the project requirements so all students can participate in a way that matches their developmental capacity. Flexibility is vital for staff and students, and adjustments are made to fit students' needs.

Hart MS

Students participate in student-led lessons, which give them the opportunity to have a voice in programming and develop leadership skills. Students work together to engage the group with concepts such as art, origami, and sports.

NEXT STEPS

Many sites adhere to a rotating schedule of events, such as Moving Mondays, Nature-Watch Tuesdays, Wacky Wednesdays/Kids Choice, and Tech Thursdays. Coordinators may want to increase student involvement in planning and facilitating lessons.



EVIDENCE OF RELATIONSHIP BUILDING WITH SCHOOL STAFF, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITY

When schools and families communicate effectively, it creates a supportive and cohesive learning environment for the students. When families are informed about their child's progress and involved in their education, they can provide more effective support at home. Open communication allows for early identification and intervention if a student struggles academically or emotionally.

SITE-SPECIFIC OBSERVATIONS

Baldwin Jr High

The staff focuses on the whole child, providing opportunities for students to practice taking risks, making decisions, and demonstrating ownership of their learning. Many motivational quotes and signs in the classroom emphasize the importance of hard work. The staff makes sure to connect with the students and families, showing they value diversity and appreciate students' beliefs.

Hart MS

Supporting the students and school community is a priority at this site. The students show school spirit by attending sporting events, making posters, and cheering on their classmates. They made bead bracelets for the volleyball team to nurture connections and foster a sense of belonging. The FOCUS staff communicates with the school staff to enhance student achievement. They connect with students and families, creating an inclusive environment. The YAC volunteered at the schoolwide "Walk with a Hero" event.

Holton Elementary

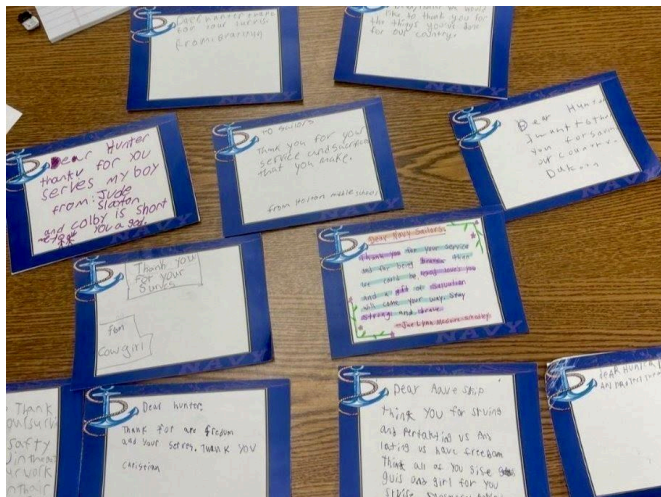
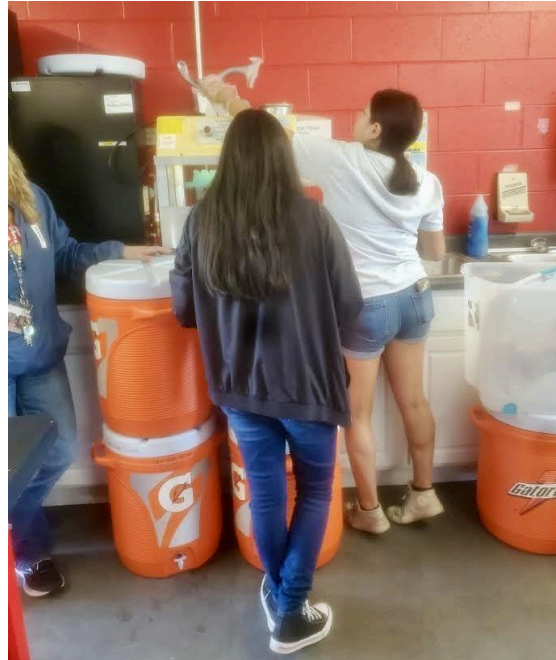
The staff builds relationships through communication. Newsletters highlight upcoming events and spotlight specific students. The staff develops a supportive environment by focusing on the students' favorite things about Project FOCUS, planning a Friendship party, and getting to know the staff on a personal level. Students are involved in the community and attend field trips like The Nutcracker performance by the West Michigan Youth Ballet.

Holton MS

Grade checks and incentives for improving academic achievement establish a cohesive learning environment. Students set their own educational and personal growth goals and evaluate their progress toward the goals. The staff discusses achievements with students so they gain greater personal responsibility for their development. YAC, student-led lessons, and family night strengthen relationships. The group uses chat cards as conversation starters to stimulate discussion and build community. Students wrote letters to Navy sailors as community involvement.

NEXT STEPS

Newsletters and notes keep families informed and involved. Sites could participate in more community outings and local field trips and invite family/school staff as guest speakers and experts.



OBSERVATIONS REGARDING THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT AND STUDENT HEALTH AND SAFETY

A positive and secure environment allows students to focus on their studies without the distraction of worrying about their well-being. Feeling safe encourages students to participate in class, ask questions, and take risks. Good health promotes better concentration and memory. When students feel safe and healthy, it significantly impacts their ability to learn and succeed in school.

SITE-SPECIFIC OBSERVATIONS

White Cloud Jr

Students take ownership of the space and are expected to consider what is good for the whole group. Posters about belonging and community are displayed, along with flexible seating spaces and rugs. Many mindfulness techniques are in place, including the use of a singing bowl. In Mindful Performance Therapy, students can use medicine balls, kettlebells, and resistance bands to help release negative emotions and pent-up energy. Students verbalize their feelings during and after the exercises.

MLK

Students' physical health is prioritized by encouraging them to play sports and ride bikes and providing ample opportunities to be active. Students learn through whole-body activities like building a hovercraft and participating in relay races. These activities centered around movement can help improve concentration and relieve stress for students.

Hesperia Elementary

The staff understands students' need to move for mental and physical health. They frequently incorporate physical activity into lessons. Students hike to find leaves, which they press into leaf coasters, and create nature scavenger hunts.

Walkerville

An organized environment helps students learn more effectively by reducing distractions and creating a sense of stability. Activities are well-planned, and the staff considers what students should do during transitions and when work is complete. The students know their options for unstructured time and have access to collaborative math games and cards from the Genius Box. Materials like Legos and K'nex are easily accessible to students waiting for teacher support. They incorporate health and hygiene lessons and understand that healthy kids make better students. Show and Explore lessons further students' ownership of the space and collaborative environment.

NEXT STEPS

The spaces are clean and inviting. Creating a student corner that allows students to change and personalize the environment periodically would display student projects and photos to further make the space student-centered.



Coded Evidence

At in-person and virtual site visits, the observers looked for evidence in particular categories. Although only a snapshot, “substantial” or “some” evidence was found in almost all observations of all categories. Our team observed Project FOCUS sites on 43 occasions.

	Physical environment, mealtime, and safety of the students	Reciprocal communication with school staff	Social-emotional learning and relationship building with students	Classroom management techniques	Student engagement and choice	Academic learning
No Evidence (observer did not have opportunity to see this)	2.30%	46.50%	7.00%	2.30%	20.90%	23.30%
Poor Implementation		2.30%		4.70%		2.30%
Some Evidence	25.60%	34.90%	46.50%	37.20%	41.90%	41.86%
Substantial Evidence	72.00%	16.30%	46.50%	55.80%	37.20%	32.56%

Section Eight

Recommendations

It is important to note that while the observations reported here give a glimpse into the day-to-day of Project FOCUS programs, it is not a full picture.

We were able to understand programming through two types of observations: 1) scheduled, “casual” observations, and 2) structured observations scheduled when coordinators can “show off” how their program is meeting particular criteria.

We also met regularly with staff, including administration, and were regular recipients of site newsletters.

Given the information gathered, the following recommendations are respectfully presented:

Daily Programming:

- Offer other academic support during “academic” time, so that all students remain on the same schedule (to prevent some students rushing through academic work to achieve “choice time”)
- Increased incorporation of community circles
- Include “I can” or “I will” statements into lesson planning
- Ensure each session has a complete lesson plan, including anticipatory set, closure, and materials list

Lesson Planning:

- Use consistent and specific language and activities regarding resilience and growth mindset
- Lean on other site coordinators for ideas, methods, and activity planning

- Ensure the lessons have extended activities for those students who finish early or need structure to maintain positive behaviors

Systemic Change:

- Provide professional development to staff directly related to practical, immediately applicable classroom management techniques
- Require regular collection of student data (test scores, survey of parent, teacher, and student, discipline records), including pre-entry data for newly-enrolled students
- Carefully track drop-out reasons; do not allow “blanks” in EZ Reports
- Meet and develop relationships with local school administration to foster increased willingness to share school-wide data of enrolled students

Section Nine: Final Notes

Ten Goals

Project FOCUS has 10 goals, each of which has potential to drive programming to meet the needs of the students and the community they serve. These ten goals are abbreviated below, and rated by the author of this report based on triangulation of a) self-reporting of Site Coordinators, b) quantitative data collected, and c) qualitative observations throughout the school year.

1. Well established and maintained connection to the school



2. Academic enrichment and personalized instruction



3. Address the needs of the targeted population



4. Formal structures for school day teacher input



5. Diverse array of evidenced-based programs



6. Integration of STEAM activities



7. Involvement of families in planning and other decisions



8. Opportunities for literacy and related development for families



9. Snacks and meals for students



FINAL NOTES FROM THE EVALUATOR:

In our tenure as evaluator for Project FOCUS, our key recommendations have been, and continue to be:

- Clear and regular communication with key stakeholders (e.g., school staff, Project FOCUS staff, parents, evaluators)
- Update student grade information weekly/bi-weekly in order to
 - Understand student growth patterns
 - Maintain connections with regular day school staff
- Provide professional development to Project staff directly related to practical, immediately applicable classroom management techniques.
- Require regularly collected student data (test scores, survey of parent, teacher, and student, discipline records), including pre-entry data for newly enrolled students.

Additionally, we would encourage Project FOCUS leadership to:

- Encourage and incentivize attendance in programming for enrolled students.
- Work toward understanding how attendance in programming relates to attendance rates in school.
- Create a system of data collection for site coordinators that is standardized and clear with limited editing privileges (to protect the standardization of the form).

We continue to be impressed by Project FOCUS coordinators, leadership, sites, and students. It is a pleasure to work alongside this organization putting forth tremendous effort to do what is best for students.