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Pyramid Plus Approach | Full Report of Impact

The Project

Alliance for Kids, El Paso County's Early Childhood Council
Community Implementation of the Pyramid Plus Approach, A Social-Emotional Framework for Early Care and Education

The Problem/Need

In El Paso County, early care and education providers (including directors, teachers, and other staff in preschool centers and family child care homes) expressed having difficulty managing children's challenging behaviors, leading to classroom disruption and teacher burnout. This phenomenon was apparent across all demographics. Population-level data on early childcare and preschool expulsion in Colorado also reveals the need to help early care and education providers manage children's challenging behavior and nurture the social and emotional development of all children in their care, including those with special needs.

The Solution

At Alliance for Kids, our mission is to educate our community on the value of social-emotional health in our youngest children, and to promote high-quality early childhood experiences through the training and coaching of professionals. Through the community-wide implementation of the Pyramid Plus Approach (PPA), we support the professional development of teachers by helping to equip them with the knowledge and techniques embedded in the PPA.

Three years ago, AFK identified the PPA as an effective framework of evidence-based teacher and classroom practices that promote the social and emotional development of all children, including those with special needs. The PPA is a positive behavioral intervention and support framework that early educators can use to promote young children's social and emotional development and prevent and address challenging behavior. The Pyramid Model supports the social and emotional development of children at three levels: the foundation supports all children's development, the middle level supports children exhibiting challenging behavior, and the top represents supporting and including children with special needs. The Pyramid Model also includes a parenting class component, "Positive Solutions for Families," which gives parents and teachers a common approach and language. In classrooms where the Pyramid Model was implemented, there were significant improvements in children's social skills, and children with persistent behavioral challenges showed statistically significant decreases in challenging behavior (Hemmeter, Fox, & Snyder, 2013; Hemmeter, Snyder, Fox, & Algina, 2011).

In partnership with the Pyramid Plus Center at the Colorado Center for Social Emotional Competence and Inclusion (Pyramidplus.org) and generous support from the Colorado Health Foundation (Coloradohealth.org), Alliance for Kids (Allianceforkids.org) began a three-year project to implement the PPA in El Paso County in 2015. AFK created a Pyramid Plus Leadership Team comprised of leaders in the field of early childhood in El Paso County, including

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preschool directors, behavioral health specialists located in preschools, mental health specialists from community agencies, and a consultant from the Pyramid Plus Center, among others. Under the guidance of this team, AFK developed three options for early childhood education (ECE) centers and family childcare homes to participate in PPA training:

1) Teachers and staff may attend community trainings (18 sessions, 45-60 hours); 2) In addition to community trainings, they may participate in school-year-long, in-classroom bi-weekly coaching support; and 3) ECE centers may apply and make a commitment to become an official "implementation site" to receive generous supports to help them embed PPA training, PPA coaching, PPA data collection and analysis, and the ability to sustain the knowledge of the Pyramid Plus Approach in their center and across multiple classrooms (and/or family childcare homes, if relevant) into the future.

In the first three years of implementation (2015-2018), Alliance for Kids and our Pyramid Plus Leadership Team established and guided six implementation sites at early childhood and education centers in El Paso County. We facilitated the PPA course training of 568 early childhood professionals (of these, 88 were in-home family childcare providers), fifteen PPA-certified in-classroom PPA coaches, and seven PPA-certified PPA course trainers. In partnership with our implementation sites, AFK has facilitated the school-year-long, in-classroom coaching of 229 teachers. Seven community classrooms (separate from implementation sites) also received the same PPA coaching from an AFK Pyramid Plus Approach-certified coach (of these, 2 were family childcare homes). The six-week parenting class "Positive Solutions for Families," a component of the PPA, is also offered regularly through our implementation sites and AFK. This class has served over 300 families (as of fall 2018).

The Result

As of September 2018, AFK's Community Implementation of the Pyramid Plus Approach has impacted 14,807 children and their families in El Paso County, and has educated 6,444 families in the approach.

Beyond the number of children and families impacted, the number of implementation sites established, and course trainers, in-classroom coaches, and parents trained, we have three additional measures of the impact of PPA implementation: 1) Pre- and post-classroom assessment, using either the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT) or The Pyramid Infant Toddler Observation Scale (TPITOS); 2) Children's scores on the Teaching Strategies GOLD Social-Emotional assessment and their correlation with TPOT/TPITOS assessment scores; and 3) Pre- and post-training and coaching interviews with teachers in community classrooms. Results for each measure are described below:

1) So far, 62 classrooms and family child care homes in El Paso County have achieved "high fidelity" to the PPA model as measured by the TPOT or TPITOS, meaning teachers/educators in these sites implement the approach and its practices as the creators of the model intended. All but one of these sites have two teachers/educators, so 123 early care and education professionals now implement the approach to fidelity. Individually, 69 teachers have scored at AFK's Implementation project standard of fidelity (80%), and 87 have scored at the Pyramid Model's national standard of fidelity (75%). Because PPA implementation is an intensive long-term project and fidelity is often achieved after years of practice, we expect this number to increase as teachers continue to implement the approach

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in their classrooms, receive on-going support from their implementation sites, and as we continue yearly TPOT and TPITOS assessments to ensure fidelity to the PPA is achieved or sustained. Our data already shows some PPA Year One classrooms achieved high fidelity the year after they were coached, as they continued to practice the model.

2) At our largest implementation site, *CPCD...giving children a head start*, in Year 2 we found that 26 classrooms who achieved PPA-fidelity had more children who “exceeded expectations” and fewer who “fell below expectations” for their age on the social-emotional development measure of the Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment in comparison with 27 classrooms who were not coached and had similar initial fall scores and other demographics.*

3) During the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 school years, we also conducted pre- and post- PPA training and coaching interviews with teachers in our seven community classrooms (four teachers were based in preschool centers and three were licensed family childcare and education providers). Interviews were conducted by their AFK PPA-certified coach, and were semi-structured, open-ended, and audio-taped. Interviews were intended to be both a relationship-building tool (pre-interview) and an assessment of the teachers' experience implementing the PPA approach and its impact on classroom behavior, students and families, and their own professional development (post-interview).

In pre-interviews, all teachers initially reported difficulty in managing children's challenging behaviors, and their desire to support the social and emotional development of all the children in their care, including those with special needs. These providers received PPA training (18 sessions, 45-60 hours) and intensive on-site classroom coaching during the school year. In post-interviews, all teachers reported less difficulty in managing children's challenging behaviors, and an improved classroom environment. All teachers also reported positive impacts on their own professional development, the social-emotional development of children in their care, and their relationships with children and their families.

Below is the story of one preschool teacher's experience of implementing the Pyramid Plus Approach.

**Of 523 children in 26 PPA-fidelity classrooms, 19% exceeded expectations and 10% fell below expectations on the social-emotional measure in the spring. Of 545 children in 27 classrooms not coached by PPA-certified coaches (the control group), 15% exceeded expectations and 15% fell below expectations in the spring. This difference between PPA-fidelity classrooms and non-coached classrooms was statistically significant (p value=.00095). In the fall, there was no statistically significant difference between PPA-fidelity classrooms and non-coached classrooms on these measures. Additional analysis of children's ASQ Social-Emotional assessments shows no statistically significant difference in the number of children scoring “Above Threshold” in the fall, but by the spring, PPA-fidelity classrooms showed a statistically significant decrease in “Above Threshold” scores (from 19.6% to 14.4%, p -value= 0.0491) while the non-coached classrooms did not. The ASQ Social-Emotional data is based on 855 children with both fall and spring scores, and included 403 children in PPA fidelity classrooms and 452 children in non-coached classrooms.*

Danielle—One Teacher's Story of Impact Begins on the Next Page ▶



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Pyramid Plus Approach and Danielle

Danielle's Story

Danielle (pseudonym) took the Pyramid Plus Approach (PPA) training (18 sessions, 45-60 hours) then participated in bi-weekly Pyramid Plus Approach coaching over the entire school year in her preschool classroom at an Early Care and Education Center in Colorado Springs. Danielle's classroom TPOT assessment nearly doubled from 40% to 77% over the course of the year, just missing the 80% high fidelity-to-the-PPA-model mark per our project standard, but exceeding the 75% mark of the national standard of Pyramid Model fidelity. This improvement represents a great deal of change at both macro and micro levels of social and emotional classroom practices, behaviors, and interactions. Danielle's score will likely continue to rise as she continues to practice the model, as our data indicates. Danielle is one of 229 teachers trained and coached in the PPA so far. Pre- and post-coaching interviews help to describe the changes teachers saw in themselves, their classrooms, and their students at the end of the coaching year.

In her words...

In September, Danielle tells her coach that she has always loved working with kids. As a teenager, she was a baby-sitter and a full-time nanny. She discovered a passion for preschool when she had her own young children. She became a preschool paraprofessional in a public school, then a preschool teacher in a private center. She now has ten years of experience in the field of early childhood education. Danielle says, "It's a special age...because they're learning everything, everything is new and amazing to them...my motivation [is to] help these guys have a little bit of a head start before they go into a public school."

She also says one of her "biggest rewards" is the love she gets from her students. "If it wasn't for that relationship," she says, she "wouldn't do this every single day...you spend so much time with them, we're like a family. Some of these kids spend more time with me than they get to see their own parents during the week." Danielle marvels at "the bond that you create with these kids, the confidence and trust they have in you."

When asked what she needs now, Danielle's first request is "support for challenging behavior." She hopes the PPA coaching will give her "new self-confidence...with some of these things that can be challenging in the classroom, [and] a better understanding of how to make a change and do it the right way, so that you succeed. So that you have that follow through and that you can see results."

Danielle also adds, "My main role is to love these students and be there for them consistently. Be something consistent in their life and for their families."

Eight months later in May, Danielle and her coach have another interview. When asked, "What was the coaching experience like for you?" Danielle responds, "Life-changing, definitely."

Danielle explains that the PPA "took all this really good information and put it together [so that] it's easier to start spotting things in your classroom. There were things that I knew, but I didn't know how to approach it or handle it with my students, [but] I have a better idea about that now." Coaching helped her "put it all into a formula to use" that was "meaningful" and "beneficial."

Danielle shares...

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Danielle's Story...Continued

When asked if she felt more able to manage challenging behavior, Danielle says, "Most definitely. I've always been a calm person, but I'm even calmer now....that has a lot to do with learning about their [challenging] behaviors."

Danielle reflects, "I'm more focused on the social and emotional development of children now...on what is going on with each individual child that will help them do better next year in kindergarten - giving them those social and emotional skills that they need, that they might not always get." Previously, Danielle felt it was difficult to give each of her nineteen students what they needed, but says the PPA "has really given me the opportunity to do that, and take the time that I need with each of my students."

Danielle adds, "And of course, some of them needed a lot more support than others, and I've learned how to do that too, [to give] that individual support to children [with special needs] - keeping them involved with the classroom, and a part of the classroom. Instead of...you know, removing them, and making them not feel like they are a part of the other students or what's going on."

Danielle explains even further, emotion rising in her voice: "And not only that, it's helped the *other* students in the class become more engaged with those students. Michael (pseudonym) is a good example. None of the kids wanted anything to do with him at first. Now they're all looking out for him and wanting to include him. I notice them saying things like, 'Michael, you did such a good job.' So it's changed the way that I deal with the kids, but it's also - you can see it in *them* [the other children]. How *they* interact and deal with each other, and teachers, and our classroom."

"Feelings have been a huge thing this year. Recognizing that in each other. And the kids will come up to me and say, 'I think so-n-so is having a really hard day, what can we do for that kid,' or 'what can I do as a friend?' So it's been pretty neat."

~ Danielle

Danielle laughs, acknowledging her tears. "Feelings have been a huge thing this year. Recognizing that in each other. And the kids will come up to me and say, 'I think so-n-so is having a really hard day, what can we do for that kid,' or 'what can I do as a friend?' So it's been pretty neat."

Finally, Danielle's coach asks her if she has anything else to add. Danielle says she will follow the steps that her coach has taught her, and keep using the new skills she has learned. She wants to keep in touch with her coach and call her if she has questions down the road. Her earnest request clearly reveals the depth and value of the relationship they have built in this process. Danielle tells her, "I say this to a lot of people. If you are going to work in child care, or if you are a teacher, or anything that has to do with young children - you should take this class."

At Alliance for Kids, we consider this a win. This is what it's all about. Early childhood relationships are the seeds of children's social and emotional development. Social and emotional skills, if learned early in the context of nurturing relationships, impact the child for a lifetime, setting the stage for school success and later life success. An abundant amount of research indicates that skills such as conflict resolution and the management of their own behavioral triggers need to be learned at an early age. If not, the impact may be seen not only in the child and family, but in our communities and even statewide.

AFK and our community are in the fourth year of this project, and we are working to grow and sustain the Pyramid Plus Approach for educators, children, and their families for many more years to come.