

THE IMPACT OF THE 'CHECK OUT' PROGRAM AT BSA  
A PILOT PROGRAM FOR IMPROVING BEHAVIOR (McKeon, 2014)

Background

Students at BSA present with social-emotional and academic needs at a rate significantly higher than average. Many of our students come from unstable environments, have faced severe levels of trauma and do not have an adult supporting them in their education or preparing them for adulthood. Our students, 50% of whom are homeless or involved in the child welfare system are at greater risk for dropping out as a result of these needs.

At Broome Street Academy we strive to provide students with the social emotional supports needed to build relational trust with adults while engaging them academically. Much research has been conducted on the impact of relational trust in the school environment (Byrk & Schneider, 2003; Kruse, Louis & Byrk, 1994) that guided our initial work in this area. Specifically, respect, personal regard and personal responsibility were focused on in this pilot project. These three elements were informed by two research projects conducted at BSA by Harvard University during the 2013-14 school year: Making Caring Common and Social Perspective Taking. In addition, the escalation of difficult behaviors reported by faculty, staff and community members helped us identify our neediest students for participation in the targeted intervention in these three areas.

Relational trust, also referred to as social trust is characterized by interactions that take into consideration the goals of those involved in developing trust, mutually agreed upon social rules and inter-dependent support.

As individuals interact with one another around the work of schooling, they are constantly discerning the intentions embedded in the actions of others. They consider how others' efforts advance their own interests or impinge on their own self-esteem. They ask whether others' behavior reflects appropriately on their moral obligations to educate children well (Bryk and Schneider, 2003).

Respect is guided by the social interactions that develop in this relational trust paradigm. Respectful social discourse is at the root of developing relational trust in our community with the goal of avoiding conflict.

Personal regard helps cultivate a culture of trust and is critical to sustaining relational trust. The staff involved in this pilot project were willing to extend themselves beyond the formal requirements of their jobs to create the climate of social trust.

Personal responsibility and a commitment to the social –emotional and academic needs of our community helped to shape the attitude of relational trust. We needed to maintain our integrity, honesty, confidentiality from a moral-ethical perspective in order to accomplish the task of building relationships with our neediest students.

Method

Four staff members, the Dean of Culture, Director of Behavior Management, Social Worker and Head of School divided the fourteen most vulnerable students into small, daily check-out groups. The groups ranged from 3 -5 and were required to meet with their 'champion' each day after school. Prior to meeting in small groups the staff involved met to discuss how to

build relationships, different methods and areas of expertise each brought to the task and different strategies that could be used depending on the needs of the group.

One common element was the use of Kickboard to collect behavioral data. Kickboard provides all staff the tools to post comments about student behavior, positive and negative. Each day, each of the 4 staff members reviewed the daily staff posts of their students and discussed specific incidents (both positive and negative) that were reported. Conversations around making better choices, how to demonstrate respect, how to understand that different teachers enforce the rules differently, taking others perspective, conflict resolution and mediation grew out of these Kickboard reviews.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected at the end of a one month trial using a pre-post intervention design. Quantitative data was collected and analyzed based on teacher reporting (Kickboard). Specifically, we analyzed the increases and decreases in positive comments, discipline referrals, suspension, profanity, disruption, refusal and play-fighting/fighting. Data was collected over a 4 week period.

Qualitative data was obtained from interviews with the staff member ‘champions’ and survey responses from participating students. The four staff members participating in the project meet weekly to discuss positive and negative responses. In addition, anecdotal comments made as part of the Kickboard posts were used to triangulate the data. The student survey consisted of 6 open-ended questions regarding student perceptions of the ‘check out’ process. Survey responses were anonymous and 89% of the student surveys were returned.

## Results

Data collected from Kickboard responses showed improvement in all positive areas assessed with an average percentage of positive comments increasing from 29.5% to 44% (Table 1). Negative behaviors that were reported either decreased or remained the same (Table 2). Table 3 shows the number of students participating in this pilot project whose behaviors either decreased or increased.

Table 1

Average percentage of positive kickboard comments before and after intervention

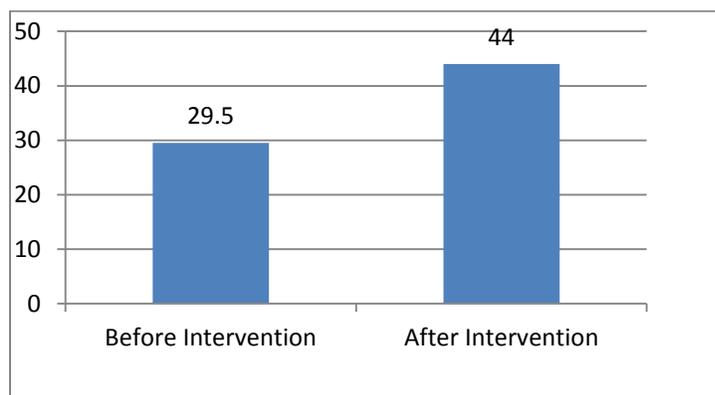


Table 2

Negative behaviors that were reported either decreased or remained the same after implementation of this program.

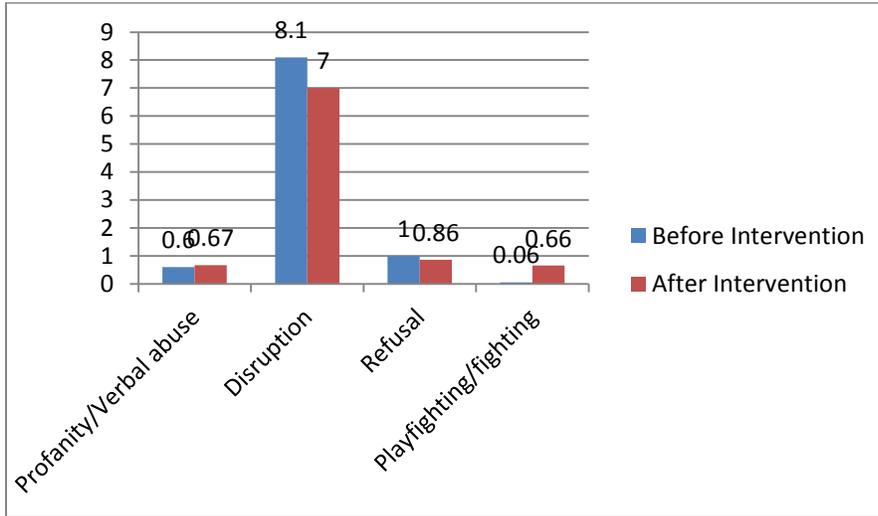
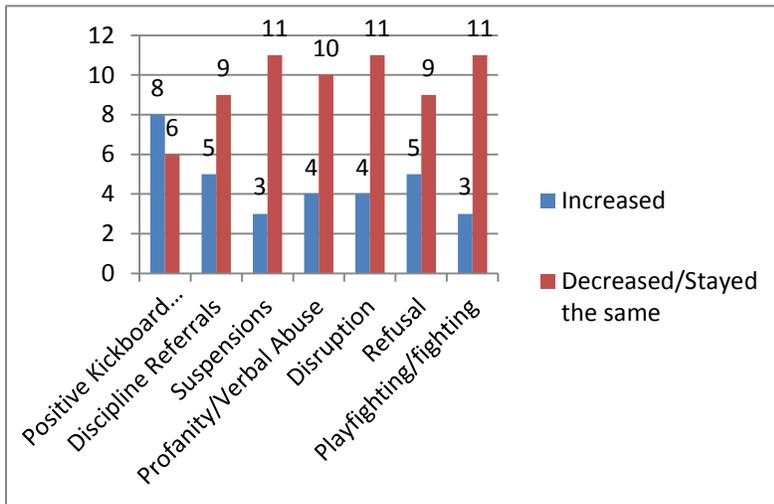


Table 3

Number of students in the pilot program who increased or decreased behaviors after implementation



The major themes that emerged from coding responses to the surveys and anecdotal comments for both students and staff are:

- Making Decisions: students and staff perceived changes in decision making as a result of this intervention;
- Avoiding Trouble: students perceived their ability to stay out of trouble as a positive consequence of ‘check out’;
- Improving Grades: students and staff reported increases in academic awareness resulting in improved grades
- Building Relationships: students and staff perceive more positive relationships with those students previously perceived as the most difficult to manage;
- Improving Behavior: students and staff perceive students in the ‘check-out’ project as more capable of controlling their actions thereby improving overall behavior in the classroom.

### Making Decisions

Many students reflected on changes in how they make decisions. On the question “How has it (check in process) affected you outside of school there were multiple responses that reflected an increase in the awareness of the decision making process.

Comments from students included “I think about my decisions now”, “I make smart decisions”, “It has affected my by staying out of trouble and away from the crowd”. The overwhelming response by staff was that students behavior was improving because they were making better decisions.

Staff: “Afterschool you stayed for help and to make up a lab he was missing. This is what investment looks like”, “I’m so proud to see that you are thinking about the consequences before you commit to the action”.

### Avoiding Trouble

Students perceived their ability to stay out of trouble as a positive outcome of this process. Comments from students included “being in this process, you really have to know how to control yourself”, “the positive is I haven’t been getting into trouble and I am making an effort to change”, “I get into less fight, and study, and do my homework more”.

Staff: “At first you didn’t want to consider going to a different train station but now it seems to agree with you. It’s good to see you make the right choice”.

### Improving Grades

Being able to see changes in grading patterns has been very powerful to this process. Students reported that they are more able to stay on top of school work as a result of the check- out procedure. They stated “I’m doing better in my class”, “I am doing better in ALL my classes now”, “a lot of my classes I’m just inconsistent. I’ll do my work one day and the next day I won’t feel like doing my work. My ‘champion’ helps me with that by making sure I stay on all my work and get everything I need to get done, done”.

Staff: “I saw a level of investment from you today that I’m not sure I’ve ever seen. You answered complex questions during today’s lab and you did so eloquently. You proved you are indeed an honors student and I hope it is a sign of great things to come, “Getting 100% on your Geometry test is amazing! You are improving academically across the board”.

### Building Relationships

The students in this pilot program all reported the importance of the relationship that was established with the “champion”. “I got to know Dr. McKeon better...it has helped me work on myself as a person”, “I never knew a teacher/staff member could help me get back on track”, “when the champion yells at you it shows they care”, “It helps me know that I have somebody to go to if I needed help or just to talk to in school”, “she believes in me making me feel good, making me do good”, “it has helped me by letting me know she cares about my future and wants me in BSA” “your champion will help you succeed”, “the relationship with Ms. Shervington has made me a better person and makes me excited to come to school and do good”.

### Improving Behavior

All students perceived their behavior as better as a result of this program. One student whose overall grades and behavior improved in school had an incident outside of school that was in contrast to this change. Student responses in this area included “it helps me with my negative problems”, “it’s changing my actions, it’s good for me”, “all my good reports I get now show me just how good I can actually do in school”, “it help me with my negative problems”, “I would like other students to know that this process helps you focus on school and the goals you have set for yourself”.

### Recommendations

When reviewing the results of this pilot project in combination with the Harvard study results it is recommended that the ‘check-out’ project be implemented with all staff and students. This will be an extension of our current No Nonsense Nurturer© model for improving student behavior. We will train staff in relationship mapping during the 2014-2015 professional development year. This can be done using an adapted form of the relationship mapping protocol provided by the Making Caring Common Project at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. The relationship mapping process is designed to shift school norms by building relationships. The adaption for BSA is the expansion of the model to all students, not just those at risk and all staff, not just those involved in behavior management. Developmentally, students at this age are at risk for making poor choices that could impact their future. We will commit to this process as a school sending a clear message that fostering positive relationships with caring adults is essential to the social-emotional and academic growth of all students.