

**National Dropout Center for Students with Disabilities (NDPC-SD)
“Building Positive Relationships to Prevent Dropout and
Other Negative Outcomes”
Dr. Melissa Stormont
October 28, 2009**

Moderator: The National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities presents "Building Positive Relationships to Prevent Dropout and Other Negative Outcomes."

With us today is Dr. Melissa Stormont. She is an Associate Professor of Special Education at the University of Missouri. She has published extensive research related to the educational and social characteristics of, and strategies for, working with children and youth with emotional and behavior disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and risk for failure. Overall, Melissa had published over 40 articles and book chapters, and she has also written two books on these topics.

But before we hear from Melissa, Dr. Loujeania Williams Bost is the Director of the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities, and she has a word for us. And Loujeania?

Loujeania Bost: Good afternoon here on the East Coast, and good morning to our listeners in other time zones. Welcome to our teleseminar today, "Building Positive Relationships to Prevent Dropout and Other Negative Outcomes."

The importance of building positive relationships cannot be understated. I think Bill Milliken, the National Board Vice Chairman of Communities and Schools and the author of The Last Dropout, says it best. He says, "Programs do not change kids; people do." Every child needs at least one adult in their lives who is irrationally consumed with making sure that they succeed.

We also know that the research tells us that students who drop out often feel that teachers, administrators and others were not interested in them. However, students are more likely to make a personal commitment to engage in rigorous learning when they know teachers, parents and other students care about how well they do. They're willing to continue to make the investment when they're encouraged, supported and assisted.

We hear from teachers that take the time to develop positive relationships with their students, see improvement in their students both academically,

behaviorally and emotionally. Students who have positive relationships with teachers tend to put forth more effort in class and, as a result, improve their academic achievement.

Students who perceive their teachers as highly supportive have better attendance and avoid behavior problems. Positive student/teacher relationships involving students with high-incidence disabilities have a positive effect on conduct problems, delinquency, anxiety and depression.

Low-income African-American and Latino students in low-performance schools report even greater impact. These students report that positive relationships with their teachers increased their chances of completing schoolwork, motivated them to stay in school, do their best and go to college. Early adolescence is a key time for individuals to build skills to resist peer pressure and to manage conflict.

Building good relationships complements rigor and relevance and provides the three R's essential for school success. For students to engage fully in challenging learning, they must have increased levels of support from the people around them. Families and schools both play a pivotal role in supporting teens to explore their identities and make connections with peers and other adults. These relationships and connections enhance students' connections with school and facilitate successful school performance, including staying in school, progressing in school and graduating.

Thank you for joining us. Enjoy our speaker today, and don't forget to complete and return your evaluations so that we may continuously provide high-quality, usable and relevant information. Thank you.

Moderator: And thank you Loujeania.

And Dr. Stormont, the audience is all yours.

Melissa Stormont: Thank you. I am delighted to be here presenting to you.

I would like to give a little bit of a personal introduction in addition to my research introduction. I have five children. Their ages range from five to 28. I have some that found school completion extremely easy and some that found it rather challenging.

I've also had various kinds of interactions with teachers. I've had various interactions with different peer groups. And I feel like I really understand, both from a teacher perspective, a researcher perspective and a parent perspective, how important it is to make sure that, as Loujeania said, someone is invested and involved and constantly guiding individuals.

And so I'm very passionate about this topic. I would like to go over my purposes for this teleseminar. First, I'd like to create a context. The introduction created a wonderful context, but I would like to present a little bit more of a theoretical risk and resilience framework.

Secondly, I'd like to provide a framework that can be used for system-wide changes. I understand everyone who's listening is probably in a different position regarding where your state agencies are, where your local educational agencies are, in terms of their needs for building more positive relationships. And so I'd like to provide a framework so, regardless of where individual programs are or individual schools are, it would be applicable.

Then I'd like to present some examples of some research-based practices that can be used by individual teachers or by school counselors or by home-school coordinators that really make a difference and can be used by individuals or can be used system wide, so there's some flexibility there.

And then finally, I'd like to discuss the importance of outreach to specific groups of individuals who are the most vulnerable for very negative outcomes in life, not just dropout but also incarceration and early death, and that's individuals who are homeless and individuals who are in foster care.

So in terms of risk and protective factors, if we think about system theory and ecological theory and attachment theory, the importance of teachers and peers and families creating a bond with individuals where they can then support them in learning prosocial skills is critical. It's through interactions that children learn what they need to be successful in life. And especially when children and youth have within-child characteristics that make learning difficult, it's even more important that they're provided support for learning social behavior that's associated with success.

So if an individual has attention problems and they're impulsive, then social learning is going to be even more difficult than academic learning, because social learning is much more dynamic and changes across settings and individuals. And it's not always clear if you are reading somebody the right way or perhaps you're not even paying attention to the right thing.

I remember having to teach a middle school student with a learning disability when a conversation had ended, because this individual was following people around, and they were pretty clear in their nonverbal communication that they were done talking. But it wasn't clear to this individual.

Individuals who have attention difficulties and who are impulsive may also tend to be very literal learners, and again that makes it very challenging to teach social skills. So children have these within-child needs within their child system. And then, as families and peers and teachers, we can further compound their risk by having inappropriate expectations for them, or we can foster resilience through positive relationships by supporting all of the skills that they need and by being just very positive in our interactions with them.

According to the World Health Organization, positive interpersonal interactions are one of seven protective factors for mental health. Everyone needs to have interactions that are positive. And through this context, we can also provide other protective factors including social participation, social responsibility and social support. So four of the seven of these mental health protective factors are what we'll be talking about today.

So within the context of positive supportive relationships, children can learn what they need to be successful across settings. Whether it's the transition to kindergarten, the transition to middle school, the transition to adulthood, children need that level of support. Unfortunately, children most at risk tend to go from system to system without support for learning appropriate skills, and this occurs very early.

My 5-year-old came home from her summer kindergarten, which is sort of a pre-kindergarten. It includes similar staff, definitely the same teachers, but there is a little bit of variability in the lunchroom and different things like that. Anyway, she came home and said, the first day of kindergarten, "So-and-so got sent to the office." And that was very novel for her. We hadn't talked about office and those types of things.

So she was very wide-eyed. And I said, "Oh, tell me what happened." And she said, "Well he didn't know the—he doesn't know the rules." And I said, "Well it's the first day of kindergarten. Shouldn't this be about learning the rules?" And she said, "No, he should know the rules." And so we talked about that and talked about that, and I found a way to developmentally explain to her my theory without criticizing her teacher at the same time.

But according to research, that's absolutely true. A research study of 3,000 kindergarten teachers found that they cited social behaviors as the most important or essential for success for kindergarten. These behaviors include expressing feelings, following directions, sitting still and attending, taking turns and sharing, completing tasks, not being disruptive and being sensitive to others.

Interestingly, knowledge of English and academic readiness were selected as secondary to these skills. So there's this expectation for specific behavior without support. It occurs very early, and it occurs with children who perhaps had very negative preschool experiences. Maybe they were even excluded from preschool. And so then they come in and their backpack is half of their body, and they have this incredible weight of expectations, without instruction.

And so as a general rule, we always need to think—and I think this with my college students that I teach—my undergraduates not necessarily my graduate students—that, in the absence of instruction and specific rules, specific routines and behavior expectations, we can't assume that children, youth or even young adults are choosing specific behaviors. They may not actually know what the behavior expectation is.

So for example, for young adults, I find it disrespectful to do text messaging when I'm teaching. But other teachers do not think that that's a problem. And so, are my students being disrespectful if I haven't gone over how I perceive that particular behavior and what my behavioral expectations are? They're not making that choice if I haven't told them that, in my opinion, these specific behaviors mean respect.

And so it's very important that we teach, teach, teach and support. And again, through positive relationships, we can do that. And it's much easier to get on the front end of all of these different types of negative outcomes that were in the introduction by beginning as early as possible, by fostering relationships and by teaching, teaching, teaching the social behaviors that children need.

Unfortunately, the youth who are greatest risk are the youth who not only don't have positive relationships at home, but then they come into school and they're met with the same types of reactive disciplinary techniques and no support for learning appropriate social skills, no support within the context of positive relationships.

And so after a while, if your prosocial peers are rejecting you and your teachers aren't providing you support, and your family isn't providing you support, then around the fifth grade children tend to find each other. The rejected children tend to find each other. And I believe Patterson calls that limited shopping: There aren't very many people to choose from, and so they choose each other. And then once that starts, we're in big trouble in terms of what we have done to them and in terms of letting them down and then also in terms of society and where they're going after that.

School-related adjustment at about the fifth grade is, with at-risk youth in particular, very predictive of who will be arrested five years later. And so Hill Walker's research has clearly linked at-high-risk individuals or

individuals who are at high risk in fifth grade, their arrest status, by doing about a 50-minute assessment, in 80% of the cases, with these three measures.

And those measures are teacher-rated social skills, cue observations of negative interactions with peers, particular aggressive interactions and a count of office disciplinary referrals. So in that 50 minutes, they can predict pretty reliably, in the fifth grade, who's going to be arrested within five years.

So essentially—I'm still on the slide Theory and Risk for Dropout. Essentially, these individuals, with and without disabilities, go from system to system without any healthy attachment to someone who will support them in learning the life skills that they need, and then they're at increased risk for dropout.

And moving to that slide, Risk for Dropout, youth with disabilities who are at greatest risk are those who have an emotional disturbance. They are extremely at risk for dropout, and there are some national centers that are now trying to investigate that a little bit more clearly. Those individuals are also served so late that the ones who are finally identified as having an emotional disturbance are very, very needy in terms of the services. And their mental health needs and their academic needs are pretty significant.

But not very many youth who have mental health needs actually receive services. The World Health Organization indicates that as many as 20% of youth have some mental health needs for support, and 5% to 9%, according to Hill Walker, actually meet the criteria for emotional behavior disorder. And we know that a very small percentage, about 1%, actually receive services under special education and related services.

So our hope is really prevention through building positive relationships and then also through intervening once it's clear that there are negative relationships in individuals' lives, regardless of their age.

The lack of positive relationships for dropouts definitely occurs early through other correlates, and then youth end up leaving school, on the other end of their pathway, without relationships with others who can positively influence their life. They also leave without prosocial skills that would enable them to secure employment and housing and relationships with well-adjusted peers. And as we'll talk about more at the end, many are at risk for becoming homeless or incarcerated. And if they are homeless and pregnant, then that little baby is already at risk for dropout.

So what can we do in terms of designing supports across systems? Building resilience across as many systems as possible is critical. So as

many systems, including peer systems, teacher systems, family systems, community systems, we want to build positive time together with individuals who are interested, who are invested and who want to be involved in this individual child's life. As indicated in the introduction, children are much more engaged.

And Dr. Christenson's research has indicated that, if they perceive that their peers and their teachers are supportive of them, it's also important to use the positive time together to teach and support positive behavior and to use social errors as teaching opportunities instead of as opportunities to use reactive discipline.

It's also clear that we need to provide extra support for individuals during transitions or after life changes. So providing supporting in the transition to kindergarten for children with challenging behavior is very important. Also to prevent failure in college, it's important for students with learning disabilities to build positive relationships with people in the next system, so with their teachers in the next system, with college disability service professionals in that next system.

The person here at our disability services office, when I gave a class a tour, was talking about how they have about 500 students who are receiving services. Half are receiving services under the category of learning disabilities and that a lot of individuals aren't linked, in high school, with their college disability service offices and they're a little lost as freshmen. And I think a lot of freshmen are fairly lost and have to figure a lot of things out and wish that the grades their first semester didn't count, etcetera.

And so just linking those individuals with the disability service office, providing the support they're going to need through relationships and teaching all of this is an important adaptive skill that they'll need, whether it's when the dormitory doors close or how to appropriately ask for assistance here, or how to appropriately go over your accommodation needs with professors.

So moving on to Developing a School-Wide Vision, it's extremely important if a group of people want to implement a new program, a new intervention, a new practice, to have a vision about what they want to achieve and then, also, determine where they are. So part of the purpose for a vision is taking it from, "Sure, I care about this. Sure, I care about making sure that individuals have more positive relationships," but the vision part is as important as defining the problem part and problem-solving. So we have to first develop that vision and then we have to be systematic about making sure that our vision happens.

So making a relationship—establishing positive relationships a priority is part of creating that vision. Developing a needs assessment is part of that vision. And buy-in of the implementers is very important as well.

So for a needs assessment, what would that look like? Well that would be where you involve the people that you're interested in achieving this vision with and you create, perhaps, a survey. There are a lot of needs assessment surveys that have been used. And you ask the implementers if they have specific practices in place. So whether those are practices related to home-school communication or building relationships within the classroom or peer community building strategies, you ask if they have these things in place. And you could have different indicators like partially in place, fully in place, don't know if it's practiced or options like that.

You can start with survey and interview data. But then, when you move on to where you're really targeting your vision more specifically, you want to take direct observational data. And I'll get into why you want to do that.

And then the buy-in of implementers of change, you can't start with the next framework that I'm going to talk about if people that you want to implement the intervention haven't bought into it. So have they bought into it? Do they think it's an important part of their job? Do they think it is within the realm of what they can do? So that's part of the buy-in. But then the other part is do they perceive that they have the knowledge and the skills to be able to implement the specific practice?

So for example, we did a survey with 293 special educators and general educators representing different school districts in the State of Missouri, and they indicated that they overwhelmingly agreed with the statement, "I feel schools should be involved in addressing the mental health issues of students." So 89% indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed to this statement.

But when they were asked "I feel that I have the level of knowledge required to meet the mental health needs of children I work with," the vast majority disagreed or were neutral. And then similarly, when they were asked to respond to the question, "I feel that I have the skills required to meet the mental health needs of the children with whom I work," again, the vast majority indicated they were neutral or they disagreed with that statement.

So there is a feeling that something is important, and that's part of the buy-in for sure, but then there's also the part, which is, "Do I know how to actually implement this practice with integrity, or do I need some more support there?" And we'll get into that a little bit here in a minute.

So what could be a vision? Just to give you some more examples. Perhaps the desire to build more school-family connections to foster positive relationships between teachers and families and families and students, so this could include broader research-based programs. There are many available out there. The National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities has some evidence-based dropout prevention programs that are broader programs, and that would be a good place to start in terms of if you have something that broad, to go there and look at those specific practices. It could also be something more specific like the desire to build more positive relationships, specifically with foster families.

Moving to the next slide, What Could be a Vision, maybe it's the desire to improve positive relationships between teachers and students, or the desire to improve positive relationships among students. It could also be specific to another school-wide initiative that's occurring, so maybe within the context of School-Wide Positive Behavior Support. Students feel like they need to build more positive relationships, specifically for youth who need Tier 2 level of support.

So increasing positive interactions and relationships, the three D's for getting started: You need to first develop that vision. I wanted to spend some time talking about that. Determine baseline, so that next step, if you have all these different vision statements, you have to determine where you are.

So direct observation is what I strongly recommend using, and then parent-teacher surveys to supplement that would be fine. You can perhaps not do direct observation of whether a teacher has sent a positive note home, but you can do permanent products where teachers have to save those, and then you can count those. That's a type of a more direct observation than teachers, for example, just reporting on average they think that they have done it seven times this week.

And then also determining what data to use to monitor progress. That systematic monitoring is very important, and it is also a research-based practice. And it's also critical to decide which research-based strategies will be utilized and then to also support teachers or other professionals in actually implementing those research-based practices with integrity. And again, to monitor, monitor, monitor progress is very important.

So teachers may need assistance in selecting research-based strategies. According to Hill Walker in a commentary on the use of evidence-based interventions in schools, he states, "There is perhaps no field in which there is a greater discrepancy between the availability of empirically developed evidence-based practices and their adoption and effective use than in K-through-12 education."

We similarly, in the study that I was just talking about with teachers and their perceptions regarding mental health needs, we found that, in response to the question whether teachers had ever heard of the term evidence-based practices, 45% indicated that they had not or they weren't sure if they had heard of the term. So we have a lot of needs for support in terms of our in-service teachers.

So moving into my figure with the vision and the baseline and selecting strategies and monitoring progress, this is, in fact, a research-based strategy, being systematic, using data to make decisions. And the monitoring progress piece is very important because it may be that it's not the intervention that's not working, but the teacher is actually not utilizing the intervention, but maybe they think that they are, but they're really not. They're not clear about whether they're actually using something or not. And so when they estimate, they tend to overestimate. And I'll get into some of that research here in a little bit.

So research related to building a relationship that can help us decide which strategies we're want to implement include, at the system level, School-Wide Positive Behavior Support. The School-Wide Positive Behavior Support is a wonderful approach to supporting appropriate behavior through using everything that I've just talked about and more.

So the focus is always on teaching behavioral expectations, supporting the teaching of those behavioral expectations in classroom and non-classroom settings, and making sure that students are supported and teachers are supported and actually using these practices with integrity.

And again, some of the professional development that follows are that teachers will go in and learn about particular practices and then be expected, without support, to generalize those back into their natural settings. And research shows that that just does not occur. They need more support. They need more feedback. They need more coaching. Just like children need different levels of support, some teachers will need different levels of support to implement new practices, and we have to make sure that those are available.

They also use data for decision-making. And one of the key features that makes all of the components of School-Wide PBS that represent what we've known about effective teaching and what we've known about effective behavioral management through the principles of applied behavior analysis, is that teams that know the culture of the school, including the characteristics of teachers and students—teams drive the implementation of the key features of positive behavior support and make sure that there's buy-in and that there's support for teachers and there are people who take ownership of specific roles. And that really helps with

that research-to-practice gap because then it's the practice informing how the research is going to be implemented in the particular school setting.

So other system-level research-based practices are mentors. There's little systematic research available that has really looked at—looked extensively into the mentoring research that's school-based and has determined critical elements of a mentor program that are more effective or are linked with specific student outcomes.

So Cindy Smith—and this is in my reference list—and I have done a review of just ten mentor programs that were published in peer-reviewed journals. And there are some specific elements that you can compare different mentor programs on and link with different student outcomes and try to glean the characteristics that are more associated with positive outcomes.

And mentor programs varied in terms of the frequency of contact. Some mentor programs had daily contact. Other mentor programs only had two hours a month. And so that's a pretty big range. Some—in terms of the duration, some lasted a school semester and other mentor programs lasted more than ten years. In terms of paid, some program mentors are paid or they volunteered, and that's very different. So in some, teachers were actually paid a little extra to serve as mentors for a few students. And in other programs, volunteers met for just a couple of hours a month.

The structure is also varied in mentor programs with some providing very structured activities and training and support for mentors and other programs not providing training or structure, and it's not very clear what the mentors and the mentees did during their time together. And so the two programs that had the least impact were unstructured, and they had volunteers, and they also had less contact. So we tentatively concluded that the structure is important, that actually compensating the mentors is important, the contact is important and that the duration is important.

The Behavior Education Program as another system level research-based practice is also known as Check-In and Checkout. And this is particularly appropriate for students who are at risk who need more support so that their behavior won't get worse and worse and worse. And what it involves is a daily check-in and checkout with an adult.

The adult meets with the individual at the beginning of the school day. We're assuming that there is a positive interaction at the beginning. And it's one big overview of behavioral expectations, again some positive interactions, a reminder specifically of what students are working on, and then students receive a daily progress report card. The person makes sure they have their materials. I would think they probably make sure that they have a good attitude for the day through some positive interactions.

And then they carry this daily progress report card to their classroom. And depending on their age, they might just have their elementary teacher give them their feedback per class period or, in middle school, they might take it from class to class. And they get feedback on their behavior and if they're meeting their goals. If they receive typically 80% of the points that they're working on, then they'll receive a reward when they checkout, and their parents are informed of this, and they sign off.

Research has shown significant decreases in problem behavior when using check-in and checkout. They've shown decreases in office disciplinary referrals, increases in academic engagement. And one study that was using this within the context of School-Wide PBS found that for 10 of 12 students who needed support at the secondary level, who weren't responding to the universal support—for 10 of the 12, that was all they needed was this check-in and checkout.

Combining school and home interventions at the system level is another very good way to build relationships. There are a lot of examples, again on the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities website. A very good one—and I read Dr. Christenson's PowerPoint from when she did her presentation via a teleseminar on engagement. The Check and Connect is a really good example with both school and home connections. The Incredible Years, Carol Webster-Stratton, is another very good broader system-level research-based program that combines school and home components.

In terms of building relationships within the classroom and things that individual teachers can actually do if they're not within a system that is really adopting these broader programs that will have a much more significant impact on a greater number of students, but individual teachers and individual professionals still have a lot of choices regarding what they can do to help build social skills and build positive relationships with individual students.

Building community is very important. Building community among peers is very important. And building community with teachers and students is very important.

And I wanted to share a research article by Alday [ph] and Peckerar [ph], 2007. They implemented something very easy, very simple with three middle school students with teachers. Teachers were the intervention—the intervention providers. And for three middle school students who had difficulty with their on-task behavior in an urban school with three different ethnic backgrounds, two boys and one girl, they found a very significant impact with this very simple teacher intervention.

This was the teacher intervention. The teacher met the students at the door, used the student's name and said something positive. So, "David, I'm glad you're here today." "Steven, I really like that sweater." "John, I really like your shoes." So—a couple of those are examples from the article.

They didn't tell the teacher what to say because they wanted to make sure that they delivered it authentically, of course, and teachers know how to give compliments. It's just you're being systematic about when you do it and how often you do it that could be the problem. But just greeting these students at the door and saying something positive had a large impact on their measured on-task behavior during the first part of—first hour or the first part of second hour.

For one student, the female student, her on-task behavior went from 52% to 87% just based on that one change, which was the teacher building that community by saying something nice at the beginning of the hour.

The Good Behavior Game is another example of a within-a-classroom way that we can build positive relationships. And the Good Behavior Game has a lot of research to support it, and I won't be able to get into all of the details here, but I can give you an overview. I would strongly recommend Rathvon's 2008 book on Effective School Interventions. It's the second edition, and it's 2008. She has the Good Behavior Game, and she has positive peer reporting in this book. And she provides all of the information that you would need to then help support teachers in implementing this. It's very, very practical and very, very laid out for you.

So essentially what the Good Behavior Game—it can be implemented with elementary age students and with middle school students, and there are group contingencies. The classes were divided into teams, and there's positive peer pressure to support following specific behavior expectations. So the behavior expectations are clear, they're typically posted, and the grouping includes two groups with similar demographics. So you divide your males and your females appropriately, and you also divide students with challenging behavior appropriately.

The class then has a baseline, and goals then goals are determined based on their baseline. So perhaps a reduction of this specific behavior by a half of an increase in this particular positive behavior, if they're using that version, and then the class receives various types of reinforcers. The teams might receive various types of reinforcers, if Team 1 wins versus Team 2. And then if they all win, if both teams meet their goals, then they might have a different level of reinforcer.

But this particular intervention has been documented to be extremely successful. In the Institute of Medicine's recent book, Preventing Mental,

Emotional and Behavior Disorders Among Young People: Progress and Possibilities, they talk about the significance of the Good Behavior Game on Page 152. I just want to summarize what they say, because it's—or I want to quote what they say because it's very powerful research.

Under conduct problems, they say that, “the Good Behavior Game reduced disruptive and aggressive behavior and reduced the likelihood that initially aggressive students would recognize a diagnosis of conduct disorder by the sixth grade, or that highly aggressive boys would receive a diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder as a young adult.” So these were initially aggressive first grade students, I believe, and so there is this impact. Five years later and then into adulthood, there's this impact related to substance abuse as well.

Some of the critical components of the Good Behavior Game include that it's that positive peer-supported pressure to engage in appropriate behavior, and the expected social behavior is very clear within the context of the Good Behavior Game.

Another intervention is just examining and then changing positive-to-negative feedback logs. When I used to do behavior consultation, whether it was in preschool settings or secondary settings, I would always go in when a teacher was complaining about a difficulty she was having with a student with a learning disability or a student with behavior challenges. I would sit during my observation and for 20 minutes of that observation, I would collect positive/negative data. So I would just draw two columns, and I would just tally the number of times the teacher said something positive to the student and the number of times the teacher said something negative to the student. And then I would graph that for the teacher, and we would talk about it.

And on the next slide, Ratio of Negative to Positive, we would talk about the teacher and the nature of the interactions that the teacher was having. And typically, teachers or, in after-school programs, the psych consultants would say, "I just feel like I'm always on Jeremy or on Susan," and I would show them that, "Well you are. You are typically saying, 'Don't do this and don't do that,' and saying their name and saying something redirective, but in a negative connotation, not in a teaching connotation."

And then we would set goals related to when I come back and how we were going to change that. And we didn't really spend a lot of time talking about the fact that I wasn't talking to them about the intervention that I wanted them to use with the students that they called me about. And then we—I would come back, and we would talk about the classroom strategy on the next page, which is precorrection, behavior-specific praise and feedback.

So the positive/negative log is your one way to give feedback. But then if you want teachers to change their behavior, you need to help support them in getting ahead of problem behavior and driving the nature of the interactions they're going to have with students by setting them up to be positive.

So the precorrective statement, teachers will plan. And Wendy Reinke and I wrote a whole article that's recently been published in Beyond Behavior to help support anyone who wants to implement this with teachers, to implement this with teachers. Teachers need to plan on what they want students to do in different settings. So, this could work in preschool. As I've said, I always give precorrective statements on the first day of class to my college-age students, and we review them if we need to later in the semester.

So you have precorrection statements, planned statements and the behavior expectations. And then you plan and set goals for the number of times you're going to catch students. And of course, with students with challenging behavior, you want to make sure you catch them more often, engaging in the desired expectation. And then you want to make sure that there's feedback for teachers in terms of whether they're actually using this.

So, in Head Start research that we did, we collected data on teachers' implementation of program-wide positive behavior support. And we found that most teachers were increasing their praise a little bit. Although it wasn't significant, they were moving in the right direction. Most had decreased their use of reprimands. I think the use of reprimands per 15-minute observational period went from 15 minutes—three per 15 minutes to less than one per 15 minutes.

But there were still some teachers who weren't implementing precorrectional praise. So then we went in with those teachers and provided more support in terms of this specific intervention, how to give precorrection, how to give behavior-specific praise, and then we added a feedback component.

So we gave them feedback on whether they did provide that precorrection statement, which again is just, "What are their behavior expectations for a small groups? What are your behavior expectations for this very setting in history class? If a student needs to—asks for assistance, how do they do that appropriately? Every student needs to get your attention. How do they do that appropriately? If they want to leave their chair or their seat, how do they do that appropriately? So, the rules and routines that are appropriate for these different settings, that needs to be taught. And then that feedback component appears to be very, very, very important.

Praise is a very simple, simple, simple strategy that's very underused. It's extremely underused, and it's a very powerful, powerful tool that we can use to increase on-task behavior and decrease disruptive behavior. And within the context of learning social skills, if we make behavior praise-specific, which is the correct way to implement it as an intervention, then it can be used as a teaching tool.

So we set up children with precorrection statements, and then you praise them and say, "Look, you're doing exactly what I just asked you to do. You used your kind words, and then Sally gave you the glue," or, "I noticed that you came in, sat in your seat, and you have all of your materials, and you're ready to go," so providing those types of things throughout the school day, very important.

Moving on to positive peer reporting, again this has a lot of research to support it, and it's summarized in detail in the literature. Positive peer reporting is just another really good, effective intervention for increasing positive interactions with peers by encouraging peers to pay attention to other students' good behavior, and then report on that good behavior. A version of this for younger children is called peer tootling. So instead of tattling, you tootle. And then the older version is positive peer reporting.

So it targets negative behavior from students—or it targets changing the negative behavior in peer interactions by working with peers to improve their social interactions and peer acceptance. It's been effective for students in general education settings and special education settings.

Students who are rejected or students who are neglected have an incentive to engage in prosocial behavior to try and get recognition for engaging in that prosocial behavior. And then similarly, students who are engaging in rejecting kids have an eye towards more positive behavior of their peers, again, to report and earn points.

So the amount of positive-to-negative social interactions has been documented to change as a result of using positive peer reporting. Essentially, students get selected at random, and then—there are typically two groups of students: the students who are rejected, neglected, who are sort of the target students, the students that are the reason why you're doing this intervention, and then the rest of the class.

And so you would make sure that some of those students, the ones that you're really using intervention for, are targeted every time. So, they are the star student or the student that people are reporting on more often than the other students, but not every day because everybody would figure that out, including the student that we're targeting.

And then you randomly select other students from general education, and those are the star students that are the students that are to be watched that day. And then the students report on those particular stars and give positive compliments. And this is taught. Again, this is taught to the students how to do this, and they positively report on their peer's behavior.

Moving on to building relationships with families, of course it's best if there are the resources to utilize the broader programs. We really have documented success like I was talking about before, The Incredible Years and Check and Connect. If we can't do those particular programs because of resources or buy-in or what have you, then there are still pretty simple things that we can do to target families and to get families more involved.

As children get older, families tend to be less involved in their education. There are characteristics that influence involvement in children's education, and that's important to know for outreach efforts, our parent educational level and family form, such as two-parent versus single-parent—those are associated with the amount and type of family involvement that families have.

Families with children from low-income backgrounds may have more barriers to becoming involved in school when compared to families of children from middle to high-income backgrounds. And educators need to make an extra effort, and sometimes a different effort, to increase the involvement with specific families.

Barriers to involvement include parent stress, work responsibilities, daily household management tasks and stress related to meeting basic needs. Focused interventions targeting increasing family involvement in school has been shown to be effective. And family involvement in school is important at predicting achievement, and it predicts a lot of very positive longer-term outcomes.

So, some simple strategies that we can use to try and increase positive relationships with families include demonstrating respect, demonstrating trustworthiness, communicating positively. One way to do this is through keeping positive-to-negative communication logs, keeping track of what we say and how we say it, and being creative and persistent in our outreach efforts. So not just accepting that particular families are not involved, but actually making an extra effort and an extra attempt to figure out what the barriers might be, whether it's that they don't have a phone and their child's not bringing home the particular—their homework or their Friday folder or what have you. What are some of the barriers to increasing that communication back and forth?

And research has actually shown that just simply sending home school notes are effective for increasing families' involvement with student learning, but also, if families are involved in signing off on their child's behavior at school, then their child's behavior in school is more impacted by that, if there's a home-school connection and a home reinforcement. Sending home positive communication is so important to building these relationships with families. Positive feedback is very, very important.

And one of the barriers to building relationships with families is that we tend to interact with families within the school system when something has gone wrong, in a negative situation. And that's just not the right time to—or it's not as good of a time. Every time that two people are together and can interact, it can be a positive interaction. But it's really not a very supportive context for building relationships.

You can also assign homework that involves having fun conversations and talking about specific things. You can help prepare students for what they're going to talk to their families about by providing some structure, especially for younger children who maybe their family members do ask, "How was your day? What did you do at school," and they say, "Nothing. Fine." You, on this end, as teachers and teacher supporters, can help provide some structure.

Teachers can debrief with students at the end of the day and sort of check out with them and say, "What did you really enjoy about the day? What was your favorite part of the day? What are you looking forward to tomorrow?" And then they can assign homework to the child to report this or to the youth to report this back to their family, and being creative and making sure that we create different opportunities for support and different opportunities for families to be involved.

Moving into the last thing that I would like to talk about, which is reaching out to very vulnerable youth, there are two groups of individuals that have very concerning outcomes, and we can reach out to these groups better because we know where some of the individuals are. So, youth in foster care and then youth who are homeless. And that's the first group that I want to talk about.

For youth who are homeless, I want to provide a definition, and this is from a book chapter that I wrote with Rebecca McCathren who wrote a chapter on this. This is in the reference list, and it was published by the American Counseling Association. Homelessness, according to this definition, means having a primary residence that is a public or private shelter, emergency housing, hotel or motel or any other public space, including public parks, cars, abandoned buildings or aqueducts. It also includes living with friends and, in certain conditions, so overcrowding

conditions. Being homeless means have no fixed place to sleep, the things that are cherished, little stability, little security.

About 850,000 youth are homeless, which reflects 6% of adolescents. Younger youth who are homeless are more likely to be in school. So if they're 12, 13, 14, they're more likely to be in school than if they're 16 or 17. Once youth become homeless, the challenges become compounded every year that passes.

Of course, what we want to do is prevent homelessness from occurring. And we need to do that by understanding how vulnerable certain families are for having a child who leaves and becomes homeless, because of that family adversity. In a lot of cases, family adversity is cited as the precipitating factor.

Some youth who become homeless say that they were kicked out of their house, or they left because of the abuse that occurred in their home, and living on the streets or living in a shelter was easier than that. So, just understanding our students and understanding our families so that we can provide the temporary housing support that they might need so that they don't experience living on the street or living in unpredictable types of conditions, such as from friend to friend to friend.

Just to give you some examples, once youth become homeless, they are at increased risk—even though they were already typically using substances, they're at increased risk for really having full-blown substance abuse disorders. One study found that 60% to 71% met the criteria for substance abuse disorder.

They're at increased risk for deviant sexual practices. Over 20% of homeless youth reported survival sex. Street youth are the individuals who are most at risk for using these practices. And 84% of homeless youth, in one study, reported that they did at least one of the deviant sexual practices for survival.

The risk for suicide is also increased in the homeless youth, particularly if their family had a history of substance abuse—that even exacerbates that risk even more. And very sadly, one study found about half of youth of who are homeless thought about suicide and one-quarter had attempted suicide. Given their unsafe sexual practices, they are at increased risk for HIV.

More time on the streets—again, more time on the streets is linked with worse outcomes, including using more drugs, their risk for HIV goes up, their involvement in crime goes up and interacting with deviant peers goes up. So homeless youth are very, very vulnerable.

Another group of vulnerable youth who are homeless are young women who are pregnant and become pregnant while homeless. There are two different lines or two different groups of research when you look at the homeless literature—one is homeless families, and then one is homeless youth. And within the context of the research on homeless families, it's reported that quite a few of the families, in fact, the vast majority are represented by single females who are heading up the family.

And so I think there's probably this transition with a lot of the homeless youth from being a young teenage mother who's living on the street or living in homeless conditions transitioning into then becoming the head of a family that includes homeless families—or homeless children. So I think that's really important to remember as well.

And then as we'll talk about when we talk about children and youth in foster care, homeless children are at increased risk for foster care, and individuals who are in foster care are at risk for becoming homeless. So, these two groups are both very vulnerable and interrelated.

So moving into children and youth in foster care, I want to go over some of the research in this area. Again, children and youth in foster care are very vulnerable for homelessness.

Craven and Lee wrote—and this is in my reference list—a very good systematic review of the literature of interventions. And in their overview of the literature in this area, they cite that 500,000 children are in foster care, that 30% have severe emotional and behavioral problems, which is 2.5 times more than in the general population. That placement is increasing due to increases in homelessness, due to increase in drug use and other risk factors, and negative life experiences often precipitate foster care placements—most often precipitate foster care placements.

And not only does foster care not really prevent further negative outcomes for children in foster care, but it really exacerbates some of the problems that children have. And this is especially true when children go from one placement to another placement to another placement. And the average stay in the foster care system is between 30 months to 36 months, and 21% may have more than three placements. Forty-four percent of the children in foster care are younger than three.

They also talk quite a bit about this children and youth in foster care and being more vulnerable, because they have this risk associated with moving and they're already very reluctant to form attachment to their current foster family. So many individuals who are in foster care have post traumatic stress related to what was going on in their family prior to this, and those needs aren't met. And then those needs for resolving that aren't met. They can't form an attachment with their new foster family or

their new family, and then they move, and then they move again, and they move again. So this becomes harder and harder and harder. And it's harder for them to form relationships with people. And that just goes on until many children stay in the foster care system until they age out.

And although they're supposed to have specific plans that help them with the transition when they're emancipated, they don't. And a very concerning numbers of students or children, youth who are in the foster care system move into adulthood as homeless adults. So they do not have the skills needed for that successful transition and, again, having those positive interactions with individuals who can support them is what we need to do to be able to prevent that.

They're also twice as likely, when they move into homelessness, to have children that then enter the foster care system, as I think I stated before.

These gaps in the research, according to Craven and Lee, include that there really wasn't any research that focused on attachment. Even though these individuals have attachment issues, they don't receive the mental health services that they need around these attachment issues. And they didn't find any research that focused within the context of intervention on the unique dynamics of foster families.

So all of the inputs—if you're using family system theory, all of the inputs that are different and dynamic in a family that has children entering the family and changing the interactions within a family, and then how that influences the family as a whole. And meeting the needs of the different family members, or the outputs of a family as a whole, and how to be more supportive of that and build relationships with foster families to help support their involvement in school, but also fostering some positive interactions with those individual children who typically have some unmet mental health needs and some attachment issues.

So, if we understand the importance of building positive relationships and building positive interactions, being more positively involved with our children and youth, and we know that this is important for their long-term outcomes, and we also use these relationships and use that time to foster the development of social and adaptive skills, then we're heading in the right direction. And research clearly shows that those are resiliency factors. Those are associated with children who, even in adverse circumstances and situations, do better, the ones who stay in school even though they have all of these risk factors, who do not get pregnant even though they have all of these risk factors, who transition successfully into a workplace, who transition successfully into positive relationships within a community with prosocial peers.

So we have a lot to continue to do, especially within the school system and a lot of barriers to implementing research-based practices within the school system. Even simple research-based practices like precorrection and praise and feedback, and simple research-based practices like greeting individuals at the door and saying something nice to them, we still have a long way to go in making sure that those rather simple practices are used within the classroom setting.

So in conclusion, and then I'll take some questions, I had a quote from the World Health Organization, "Despite variation in the amount of time children spend in school, they are the primary institution for socialization in many societies. For this reason and because of the convenience of conducting interventions in a setting where young people spend much of their time, schools have been one of the most important settings for health promotion and preventative interventions among children and youth." And again, according to the World Health Organization, those resilience factors, those protective factors, include positive interactions.

Are there any questions?

Moderator: All right. Well let's open it up for questions right now.

And you can comment or ask a question by simply pressing star and then number one on your telephone keypad, and that will place you in our live question queue, and then I'll call on you by the name of your city. If you're on a speakerphone, please get as close to the phone as possible. This way everyone will be able to hear you more clearly.

So if you have a question or a comment, go ahead and press star one now. You can also continue to send to email questions to me but only during the program at M, as in Mike, O-D, as in delta, F, as in foxtrot, at krm.com.

And at the moment, I have an email question, and it is, "Do you have specific programs or examples for high school level with supportive data?"

Melissa Stormont: High school level with supportive data? Well I would say that School-Wide PBS would have high school level data. And also the Check and Connect, I believe, is another effective intervention, again, for the positive interactions that would have some high school data. I know that high school students, the ones who are hanging on and hanging in there, are the ones that are most challenging. And teachers' goals are typically to keep their students in school, and they celebrate when they come to school and knowing that their motivation often times is less and their engagement often times is less.

But Check and Connect is one of the evidence-based dropout prevention programs that I believe was conducted with high school. I know they have data. It's in the What Works Clearinghouse. I also know that the initial research with School-Wide Positive Behavior Support was done with more elementary groups, but now it's done more with secondary settings.

And I can also look into that a little bit more, if you want to email me that question or go to the discussion board that I think we're going to have afterwards. Tim Lewis at the University of Missouri is part of the Dropout Prevention IES grant. And so I would assume that I can find out some more of that information through him.

And also, there is a resource on the National Dropout Prevention Center—I don't know if it's the main website or the website for students with disabilities, but they have a wonderful resource, and I didn't print it out, but it's a wonderful resource that talks about different risk areas and different interventions and it goes across different age groups.

Also, the Institute of Medicine's report that I cited earlier has effective interventions and may have clearly delineated which ones are supported and for different ages. And I know that dropout prevention would be in there. I'm just not sure if their interventions are focused on building positive relationships within schools. I know they have some family ones in there that are very data-based.

So I would go to the website for the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities, or the Check and Connect. Go to pbis.org, which is on my reference list under websites, and look into their research database for high school. And then also the Institute of Medicine's recent publication analyzed all prevention intervention programs around mental health issues. And I think if there is a data-supported practice that's not in there I would be very surprised.

Moderator: All right. Thank you for that. And once again, star one on your telephone keypad will get you on the phone with Melissa. And in the meantime, we'll wait for anybody who'd like to queue in.

And here we have Little Rock. Welcome to the program. Go ahead with your question, please.

Little Rock: Yes. Good morning. I was needing a little bit more information about the classroom intervention when you talked about the positive-to-negative feedback logs. And once that review is with the teacher, does the student have any interaction or responsibility to assist in that process?

Melissa Stormont: Oh, that's a good question. And you could include that, if you wanted to. But then that would be more of a student self-monitoring intervention. And I was talking about it more in terms of a teacher intervention, so an intervention with the teacher's behavior and changing that first.

And if we change that, then they are increasing—researchers show that it's important to flip the ratio that you typically see as negative to positive, which is three or four to one, and flip it around, so there are three to four positives per negative. And when you do that, typically, the children's behavior changes. And so that would be the place to start. And then if the child's behavior or the youth's behavior doesn't change, then I would add the self-monitoring component and include the demonstration of positive behavior.

It's best to state things with students in a positive way, so, if you're worried about their off-task behavior, to work on their on-task behavior because they can't be off-task if they're on-task, so then clearly defining that and then collecting data with the student, maybe cueing the student, or collecting data on that. Also if they're out of their seat a lot, setting the goal and providing feedback with the student, recording perhaps for themselves, when they're in their seat. So that's what I mean by stating it positively. You can't be out of your seat if you're in your seat.

Little Rock: Yes. Okay.

Melissa Stormont: Is that clear enough?

Little Rock: It is. And one last question, in reference to the peer-to-peer positive peer reporting on the secondary level, you had mentioned providing instruction for the peers so that they are capable of helping in that process.

Melissa Stormont: Right.

Little Rock: Is there something that you recommend to use in providing the peers with that instruction?

Melissa Stormont: Sure. And again, this book on Effective School Interventions that in my reference list by Rathvon is really wonderful. I mean, it summarizes all their research, so—that supports different practices. So you could really sell administrators and sell teachers on it and get some buy-in, because they do a great job or she does a great job summarizing the research.

And then they go in, or she goes in and just step-by-step provides what it would look like, the materials that you need. So under positive peer reporting, she has, for example, on Page 345, the very specific things that you would do and how you would provide support for giving specific compliments.

Little Rock: Thank you. Those are my questions.

Melissa Stormont: Okay, great. Thank you.

Moderator: And thank you for that. And we've got, oh, about five minutes or so remaining, and let's go next to High Ridge, Missouri. Welcome to the program. Are you there High Ridge?

High Ridge: Yes, we are. I had it on mute.

Moderator: Oh. Go ahead with your question, please?

High Ridge: Could you repeat the resources for positive peer reporting for secondary? She said it so fast, we couldn't get it in our group.

Melissa Stormont: Sure, sure. There are—it's one of those interventions that has a lot of research that's been conducted on it, so you could probably just Google it or go through the university library system and find the actual research that supports it. But I recommend Rathvon, Effective School Interventions, and it's Natalie Rathvon, Evidence-Based Strategies For Improving Student Outcomes, 2008, and it's in my reference list.

And she summarizes the research that supports positive peer reporting. She has—I don't know how many, I would have to flip through the book—but so many different interventions for so many different age groups. And then for each one, she actually goes in—she talks about how you can collect information on where you are.

So you had a vision for changing this and you want to determine your baseline and how you're going to monitor progress, she has ideas in here already, and gives you different options that would fit better with high school students or with your particular high school students. So, you can get your before information and then you also get that same information after you've implemented.

And again, she just goes through and talks about the materials that you would need and examples of compliments. So here in her book, the steps in giving a compliment, you would teach them, "Look at the person, smile, report something positive the person did or said during the day, then make a positive statement after that," and then provide some examples. Introduction and training, intervention steps—I mean, it's just very, very practitioner friendly and also includes variations that have been supported for different practices in the research.

So if you think of challenges—if you think, "Well I don't think that this particular strategy would work for this particular student," you could go in and look and see if that is under the note section for each one or special

challenges she'll talk about. So, it's just a really good resource. I highly recommend it.

Moderator: All right, thank you for that. Just a couple minutes remaining. Let's go quickly to Dayton, Ohio. Welcome to the program.

Dayton: Hello. Thank you. We were wondering if there were specific strategies or resources for introducing positive behavior supports to families.

Melissa Stormont: Absolutely. And have you been on the Positive Behavior Support national website?

Dayton: No, not in regards to that topic.

Melissa Stormont: Oh, okay. So I would recommend going there to pbis.org. That is a website. And then I know in Missouri, in the State of Missouri, we have the key implementers of School-Wide Positive Behavior Support housed within—or at least some of them are housed within the College of Education, and I see them every day.

And I know that in the State of Missouri, they have a lot of really great resources. I don't know if they have them on their website, but I also have that website on the references and resources that I have listed. And it's the Missouri School-Wide Positive Behavior Support, in Missouri. And I know we have 472 schools currently implementing School-Wide PBS. Maybe with various levels of integrity, but I know in some of the schools, they're communicating quite a bit with parents and quite positively with parents, and I know that personally because my kindergartener brings home, in here backpack, within her Friday folder, updates, and they have little PBS in the newsletter, and it's really neat.

So you might even look at individual school districts who have high success rates in implementing PBS. And if you need help locating that, I can certainly help you find that. But then those individual school districts would have on their school's web page PBS and communications with parents and things like that.

Dayton: Thank you very much.

Melissa Stormont: Oh, sure. Thank you for the question.

Moderator: All right. And with that, I'm afraid our time is about up. I want to thank you, Melissa, for your presentation today. There was one telephone question and an email question we were unable to get to. But for anyone else as well, if you have questions or comments about the material today, and we invite those that were not able to get to, to visit our online discussion forum at ndpc-sd-network.org, again that address is N-P—I'm

sorry—ndpc-sd-network.org. And you can ask questions or offer comments until November 6, 2009.

And I would again like to remind our listeners to carefully fill out the evaluation form. The URL address for that evaluation form is at the back of your printed materials. And your feedback and comments are very important to us. I'd like to thank you all in advance for taking the time to tell us your thoughts.

Today's presentation is copyrighted in 2009 by the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities, all rights reserved.

And I would like to thank you very much for joining us today. This concludes our program. You may now disconnect, hang up and enjoy the rest of your day.