

Summary of Year 1 CASS Evaluation

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Overview of the Evaluation & Discussion of Limitations

Four schools were involved in Year 1 of the CASS evaluation. Three schools implemented the program (Jefferson, OLC, and Wiley), however one school did so at a minimal level. Thus, we examined student outcomes separately for the “low” implementation school (N = 1; 232 students) and the “regular” implementation schools (N = 2; 274 students). One school served as a control school (N = 1; 179 students). Students were in grades K through 8, and they were approximately evenly distributed across the grades. Students were surveyed at two times during the academic year. The “baseline” assessment took place in the fall semester for each school, however assessment dates ranged from XXX to XXX. The follow-up assessment took place in the spring semester between XXX and XXX. At baseline, a total of 1,502 students completed the survey, and at follow-up, 1,333 students completed the survey. This represents 89% of the baseline.

Several key issues should be considered before drawing conclusions based on the evaluation results that follow in this report.

1. **Lack of random assignment.** Schools self-selected into intervention and control conditions. This introduces the next problem.
2. **Pre-existing differences across schools at baseline.** The four schools differed significantly on baseline measures of many behaviors and attitudes. In addition, both the control and low implementation schools implemented the Olweus program prior to working with the Ophelia Project on CASS. Because random assignment was not used, we cannot determine whether differences across the schools at subsequent assessments are due to the presence or absence of the intervention, or to pre-existing characteristics of the schools.
3. **Single school in two conditions.** Because there is only one school in the control condition and in the low implementation condition, we cannot determine whether any differences in follow-up assessments are due to unique characteristics of those individual schools, or to the condition they are in.
4. **Failure to track individual students.** Because only 2 schools tracked individual students across the assessments, we cannot examine change over time in student behavior and attitudes. We can determine whether differences are present across schools in mean levels of behavior/attitudes at a single point in time (baseline, follow-up); but that is not the same as saying that students changed their behavior over time.

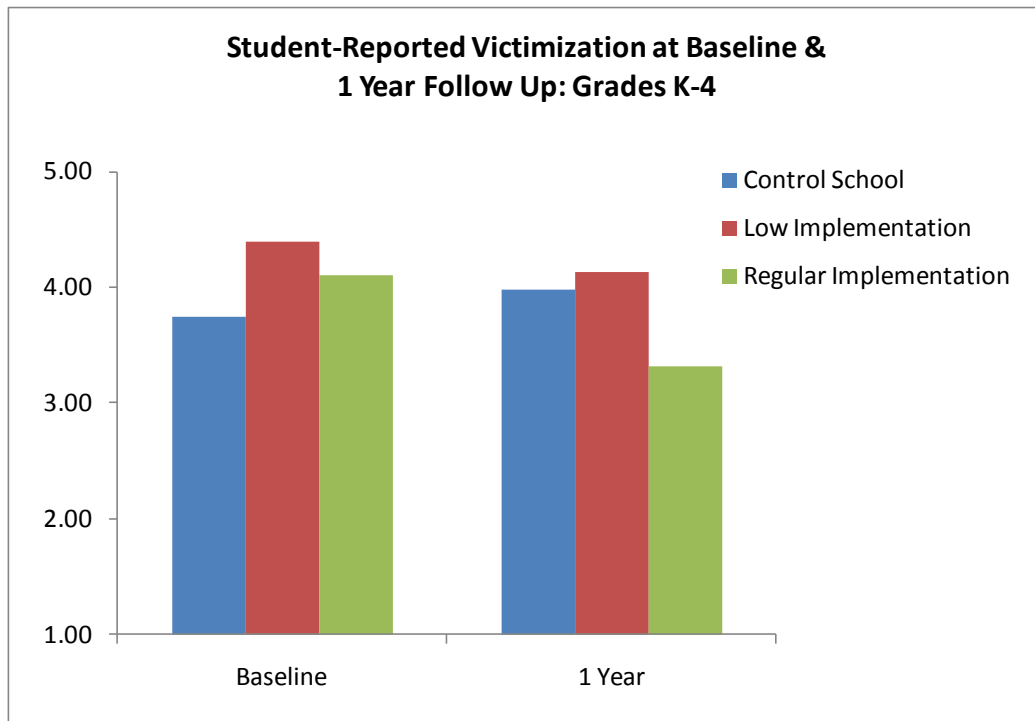
The evaluation results that follow do not represent a comprehensive analysis of all items on the student surveys. Instead, I created summary variables for some important constructs (e.g., social aggression; normative beliefs about aggression), and I examined single items determined to be of particular interest for the evaluation (e.g., attitudes).

Student-Reported Victimization and Aggression

Results for Victimization

K-4th Graders

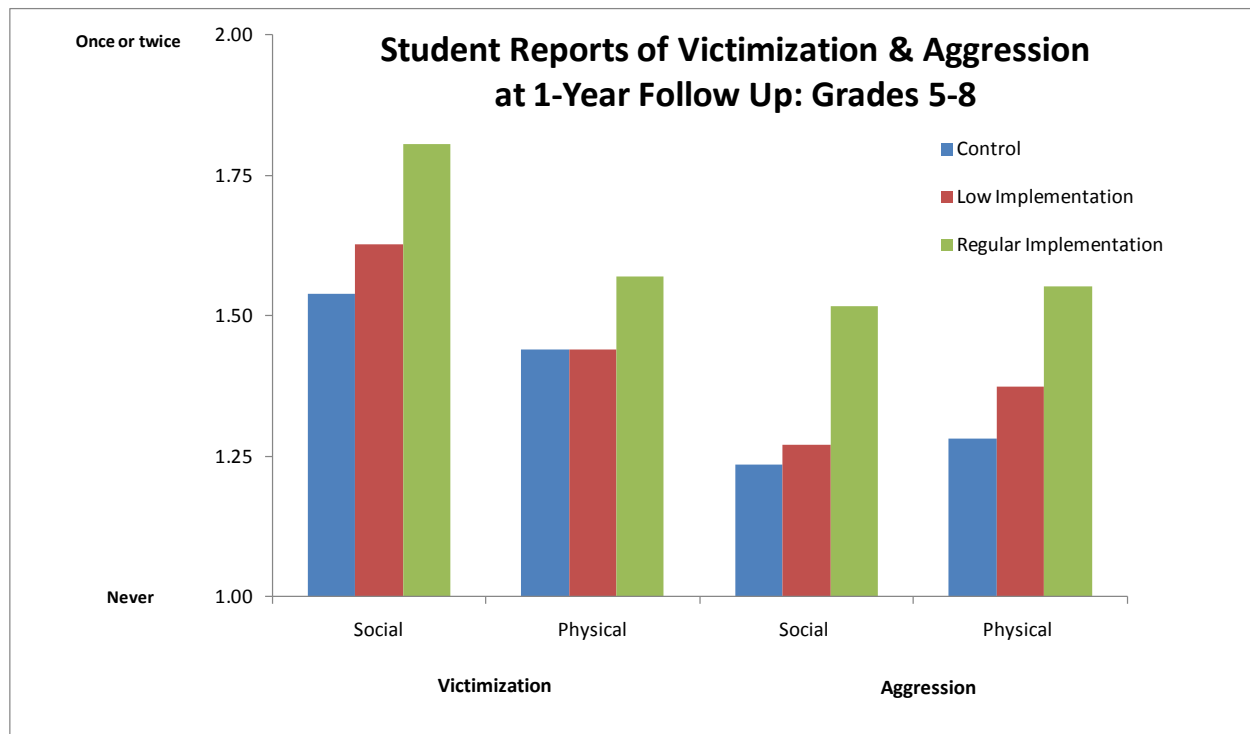
Students in grades K-4 responded to 8 items measuring different forms of victimization (relational, verbal, indirect, and physical). Response options included: “no” and “yes”. I did not examine different forms of victimization separately for the young children. Instead, I created a victimization score by summing the number of victimization items to which children responded “yes”.



- K-4th grade students reported, on average, being the target of 4 acts of aggression.
- There were no differences between school types at the baseline assessment with one exception: Kindergarten students in the implementation schools (regular and low) reported more victimization than did students in the control school.
- ***A the 1 year follow-up, students in the regular implementation schools reported significantly less victimization compared to students in both the control school and the low implementation school.***
 - It is important to note that only students in schools that implemented CASS at the suggested intensity (“regular” implementation) reported low levels of victimization. Students in the low implementation school were virtually identical to those in the control school at baseline.

5th-8th Graders

Students in grades 5-8 responded to the same 8 items measuring victimization, and they provided information about their own aggressive behavior and about witnessing aggression. There were two differences between the K-4 survey and the 5-8 survey. First, older students were asked to consider a specific time frame of 12 months when answering questions. Second, the response scale was the following: 1= not at all; 2 = once or twice; 3 = 2-3 times per month; 4 = about once a week; 5 = several times a week. The results for victimization, aggression, and witnessing aggression are presented below.



- **Students reported very low levels of victimization and aggression: between “never” in the last year to “once or twice” in the last year. This is highly consistent, however, with previous self-report assessments of aggression and victimization and is widely considered to be an under-estimation of the actual levels of aggression in the school context.**
- The following effects were found at the baseline assessment (not shown in the above graph):
 - Students reported more social victimization than physical victimization
 - 6th graders reported significantly more victimization compared to all other grades.
 - Students in the low implementation school reported the lowest levels of victimization – significantly lower than both the control school and the regular implementation school. This effect varied by grade, however.
- At the follow-up assessment, two noteworthy findings were the following:
 - Again, **students reported more social victimization than physical victimization.** This is consistent with prior research showing that non-physical forms of aggression are more prevalent in schools.
 - **Control schools reported the lowest levels of victimization, followed by the low implementation school and the regular implementation school. They were all**

significantly different from each other. This was true only for social victimization, however, not for physical victimization.

- Although these results seem to imply that the intervention schools are faring worse than the control school after one year of CASS implementation, two issues should be considered before drawing such a conclusion.
- First, because of pre-existing differences across the schools and the lack of random assignment, we cannot determine whether students in the implementation schools are reporting higher levels of victimization compared to the control school *as a result of the CASS program*.
- Second, because we did not track individual students over time, we cannot determine whether levels of victimization are increasing, decreasing or remaining stable in any of the schools.

Results for Aggression

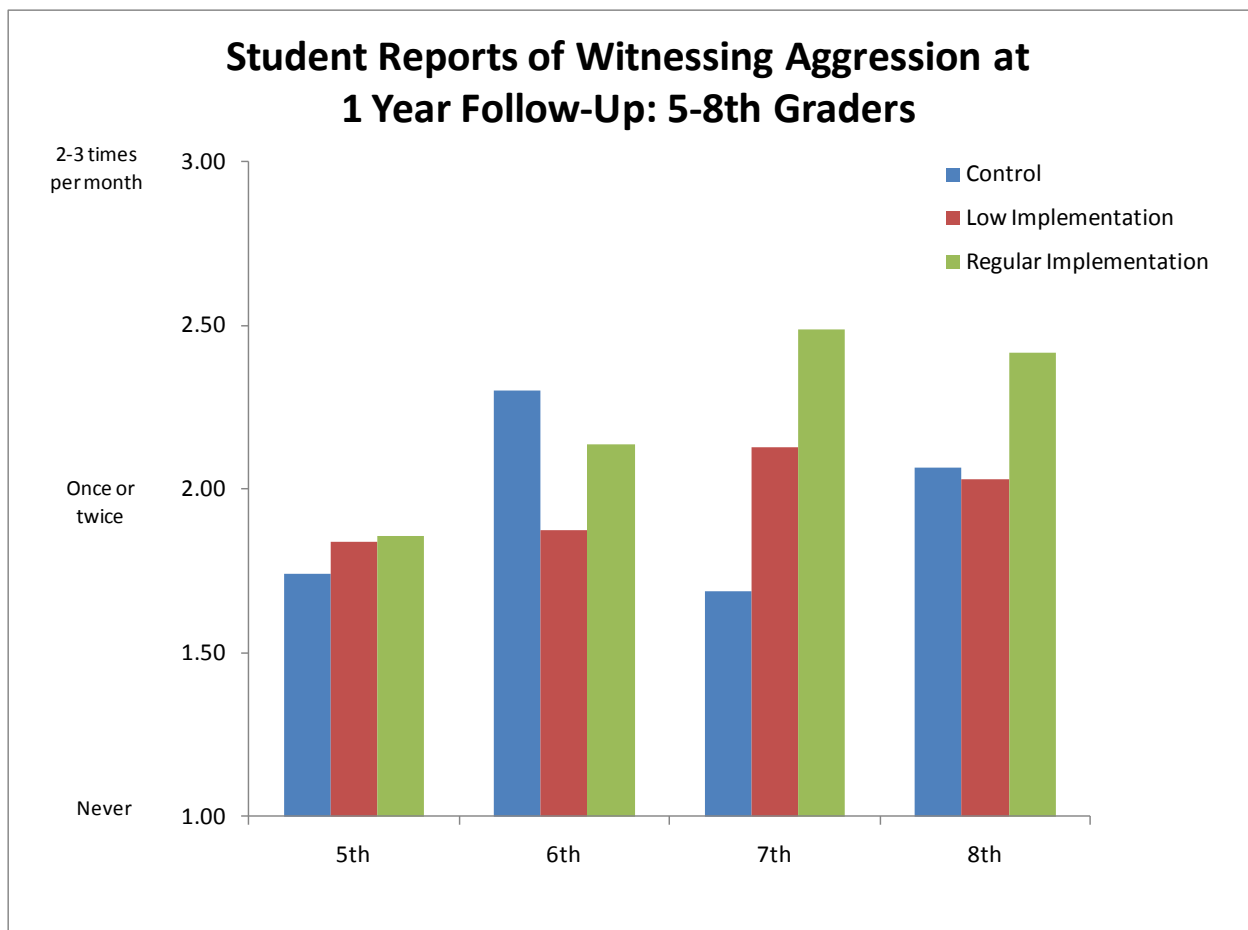
5-8th Graders Only

- ***Schools differed in levels of aggression at the baseline assessment. Students in the regular implementation schools reported the highest levels of aggression, followed by the low implementation school and the control school. This is an important pre-existing difference across the intervention and control conditions and might be due to the fact that the control and low implementation schools had previously implemented the Olweus program.***
 - This pattern varied somewhat by grade level, however in all cases, students in the regular implementation schools were the most aggressive.
- At the follow-up assessment, several effects were found:
 - Students reported significantly more physical aggression than social aggression. This is a bit perplexing given that students reported being the targets of more social victimization compare to physical. It is possible that students are less likely to self-report social aggression due to social desirability effects.
 - ***Students in the regular implementation schools reported more aggressive behavior compared to students in the low implementation and control schools, who didn't differ from one another. This pattern was true for both social and physical forms of aggression.***
 - Recall that this was also true at the baseline assessment. Thus, we cannot assume that students in the implementation schools are becoming increasingly aggressive. They might, in fact, be remaining stable in their aggressive behavior, or even decreasing in aggression. Our evaluation design simply cannot answer these questions.
 - Another possible interpretation of these findings (and this is true for victimization as well) is that students in the implementation schools are becoming more accurate informants of aggression due to their increased knowledge and awareness.

Results for Witnessing Aggression

5-8th Graders Only

- Several significant effects were found at the baseline assessment.
 - 6th grade students reported witnessing more aggression than did students in all other grades. This result is consistent with studies showing that early adolescence coupled with a school transition creates multiple risks for students.
 - Students in the control school witnessed more physical than social aggression.
 - Students in the low implementation school reported witnessing the least aggression – significantly less than both the control school and the regular implementation schools, who did not differ from one another.
- At the follow-up assessment, the following effects were found:
 - Students reported witnessing more physical aggression than social aggression. This finding is consistent with student reports of their own aggressive behavior.
 - ***There was an effect of school type, but only among 7th graders. 7th graders in the control school witnessed less aggression compared to those students in both the low and regular implementation school, who didn't differ from one another.***



Summary of Results for Victimization and Aggression & Recommendations

Despite the evaluation study's design limitations, the following tentative conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of student reports of aggression and victimization one year after implementing the CASS program.

1. Students say that aggressive interactions are infrequent in their schools. To illustrate this point, while only 16% of 5-8th graders say they have never been victimized in the previous year, the vast majority (70%) say they have been the target of students' aggressive acts only once or twice per year. Less than 1% of students report being victimized, on average, on a weekly basis. That said, we know from other studies that self-reports typically underestimate students' aggressive interactions. Some evidence to support this interpretation is the finding that younger students (K-4) reported more frequent victimization (e.g., almost 10% reporting being the victim of all 8 aggressive behaviors). Younger students may be more willing than older students to report negative experiences and behavior in the school context. Regardless of interpretation, it will be helpful to obtain teacher-ratings of student aggression in future years of the evaluation.
2. Students report experiencing more social forms of victimization, although they say that they witness and engage themselves more physical aggression than social aggression. Without additional information, it is difficult to interpret these results. Nonetheless, the results suggest that both forms of aggression are similarly salient to students in grades K-8.
3. Results with younger students provide tentative evidence that the CASS program is having a positive impact on school levels of victimization. Keeping in mind the limitations of the evaluation design, we see that mean levels of victimization were significantly lower in the regular implementation schools at the follow-up assessment compared to those in both the control and low implementation schools. This is promising information that suggests that the CASS program is having the intended effects in the younger grades.
4. In contrast to the findings for grades K-4, middle school students in the implementation school reported significantly more aggressive interactions at the follow up assessment compared to the control school. The fact that the high implementation school also differed from the low implementation school suggests that the more intensive CASS implementation might be increasing students' awareness of aggression. An alternative explanation, though, is that pre-existing differences in levels of aggression and victimization across the schools are contributing to the pattern of findings at post-test. We will continue to chart levels of aggressive interactions in the control and high implementation schools in subsequent years.

What Might Account for Intervention Effects? Examination of Mechanisms or Processes

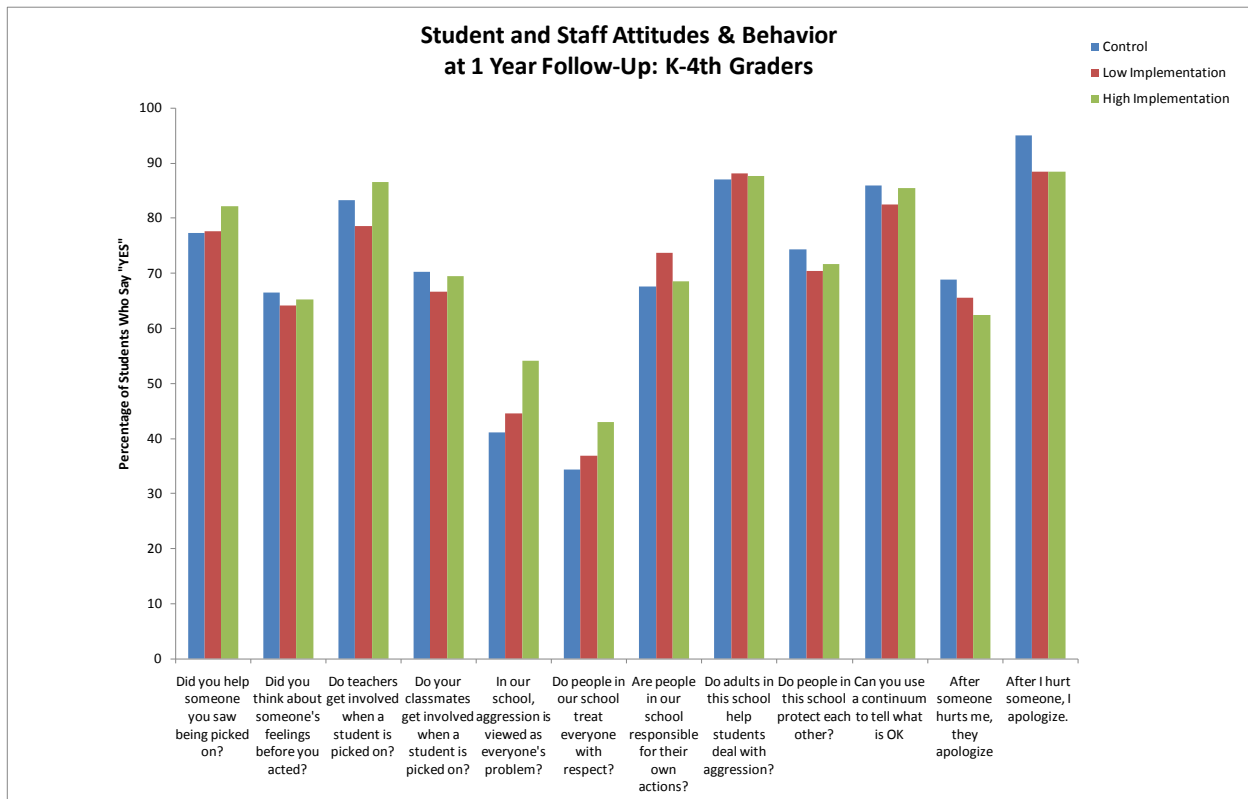
The CASS program is designed to change the climate in a school (i.e., student behavior) by altering student and staff understanding of and attitudes about aggression (e.g., normative beliefs; intention to intervene) and encouraging positive bystander and "making it right" behaviors. In an ongoing attempt to determine whether CASS is having the intended effects on changing these intermediate outcomes

(mechanisms), students were asked to indicate their agreement with a series of statements reflecting attitudes and behavior.

Positive Bystander Attitudes & “Making it Right” Behavior

K-4th Graders

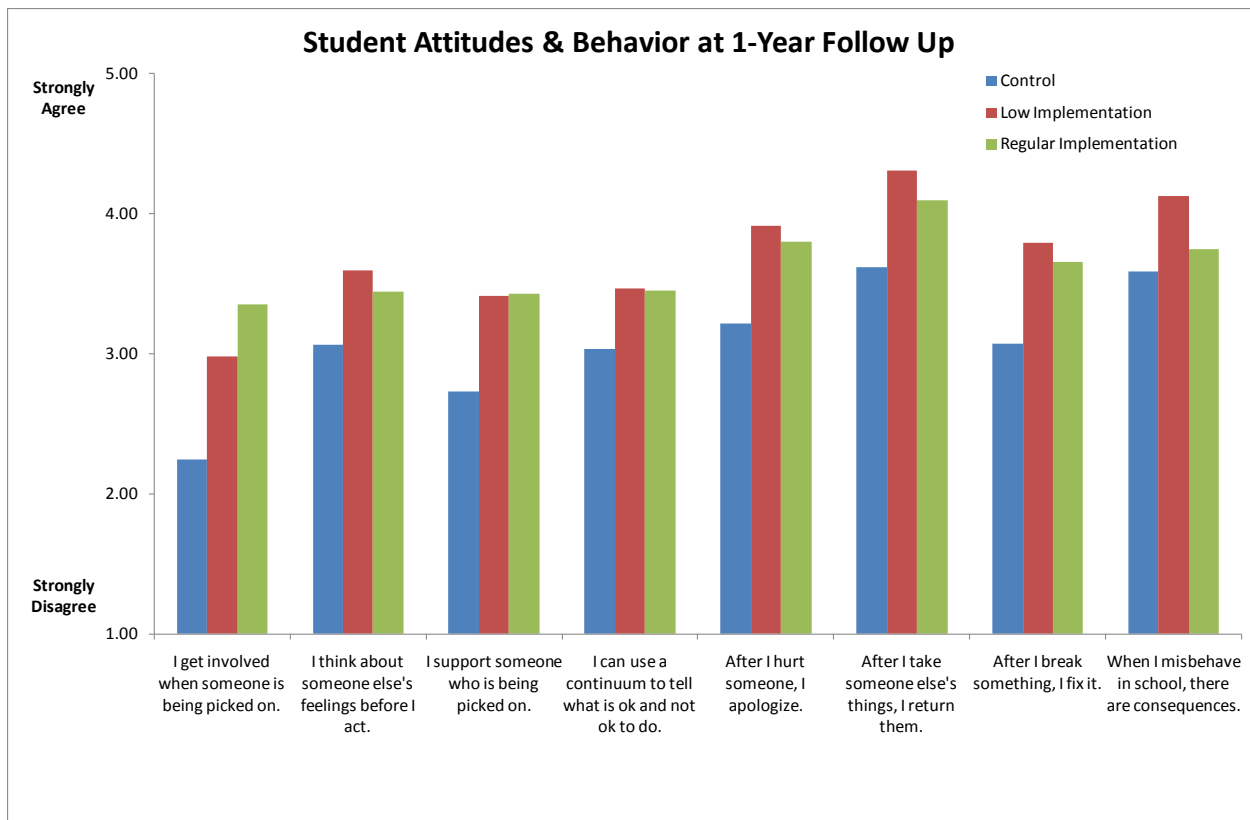
Younger students responded to a limited set of items, and they responded to each item with a simple “yes” or “no”. The graph below shows the percentage of students at follow-up who indicated “yes” to the following statements at follow-up only.

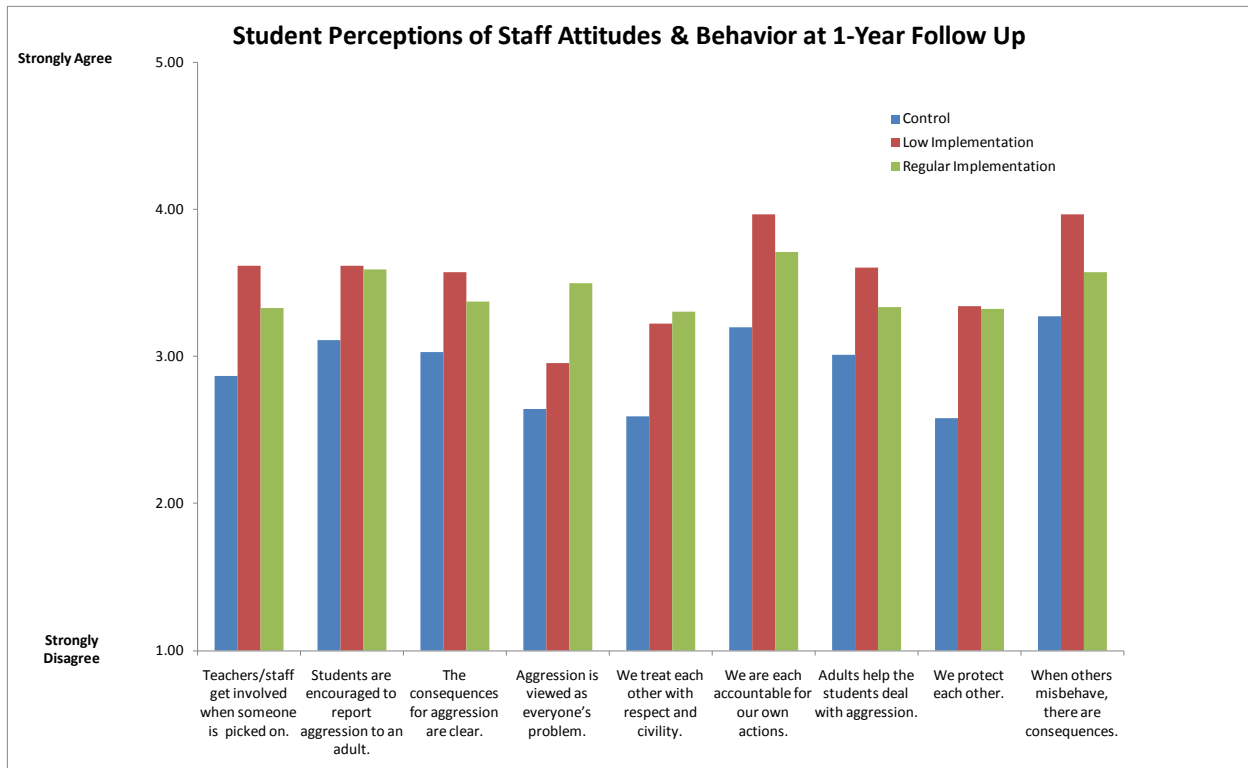


- There were essentially no differences in student-reported attitudes and behaviors across the intervention and control schools at follow-up (nor were differences present at the baseline assessment). The majority of students gave positive responses to the items. Two exceptions are the following:
 - Less than half of students indicated that “People in our school treat everyone with respect” and “In our school, aggression is viewed as everyone’s problem”. Interestingly, although the effect of school was not significant, group means show that students in the high implementation school reported more agreement with these two statements compared to the control and low implementation schools.

5-8th Graders

- At the follow-up assessment, there were significant differences between the intervention schools and the control school on most attitude and behavior items. The pattern of results showed that *students in the intervention schools showed more positive attitudes and behavior than did those in the control school. Interestingly, the low and regular implementation schools did not differ from one another.*
 - It is important to note, though, that because the schools differed at baseline, the differences observed at the follow-up assessment might not be due to the CASS program but to pre-existing differences across the schools.





- A similar pattern of results was found for student perceptions of staff attitudes and behavior. ***Students in the intervention schools reported more positive views of staff compared to students in the control school. In most cases, this was true for both the regular and low implementation schools.***

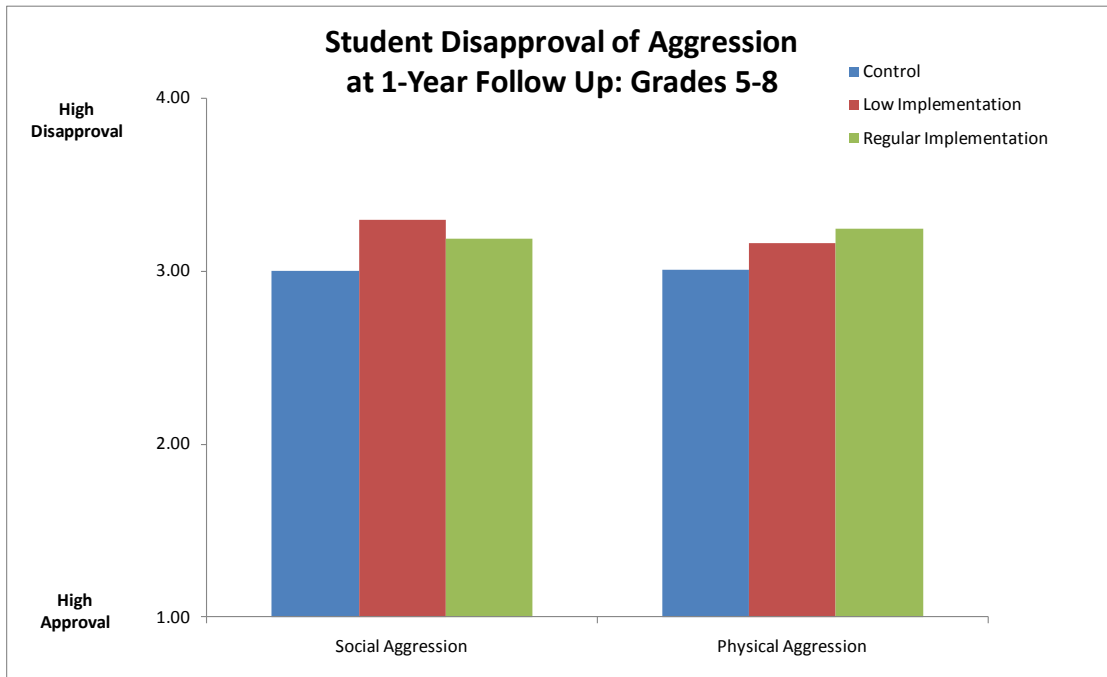
Normative Beliefs about Aggression

5-8th Graders only

Only older students gave information about beliefs about the appropriateness of aggressive behavior. Students responded to a series of statements expressing disapproval of aggression. The response scale was the following: 1 = strong approval of aggression; 2 = some approval; 3 = some disapproval; 4 = strong disapproval. Some items measured beliefs about social aggression (relational, verbal, and indirect) and others measured beliefs about physical aggression.

- At the baseline assessment, there were differences across schools only in beliefs about social aggression: Students in the low implementation school were more disapproving than were students in the control school and the regular implementation schools.
- ***At follow-up, students in all implementation schools were more disapproving of aggression than were students in the control school. This was true for both social and physical forms of aggression.***
- Note, though, that the school effect varied by grade level. Significant differences were found only among 5th and 6th graders. Among 5th graders, students in the intervention schools were more disapproving of aggression than were those in the control school. Among 6th graders,

students in the low implementation school were more disapproving compared to students in the control school and the regular implementation schools, who did not differ from each other.



Summary of Results for Intervening Mechanisms & Recommendations

Results for K-4th graders show few differences across schools in students' attitudes and behaviors related to bystander behavior and "making it right" and their perceptions of staff and peer attitudes. We need to keep in mind, though, that these students responded to a limited number of items and they did so in a yes/no format, thus reducing the variability of these items.

Analyses with the older students, on the other hand, provide some promising initial evidence to suggest that the CASS program is having the intended impact on student, staff and peer norms about aggression. If this is true, then we should expect to see changes in student behavior in subsequent years of the evaluation.