

RAPS Grant Proposal
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Part I: Grant Proposal

Abstract

Relational aggression is a far-reaching problem for today's youth, affecting both boys and girls across many cultures. According to research, relational aggression makes students feel less safe in schools and has been identified as a significant contributing factor in physically aggressive episodes. In recent years, mentoring has proliferated as an intervention strategy for addressing the needs that young people have for adult support and guidance throughout their development and has been used to address numerous problem behaviors. RAPS (Relationships are Pathways to Success) is an afterschool program serving Erie County, PA that uses a mentorship framework to address relational aggression, an area that is often overlooked by anti-bullying programs, which mainly target more overt and physical forms of aggression. The goal of RAPS is to promote students' abilities to develop healthy relationships by dealing with conflict in a healthy way, thus decreasing relational aggression and promoting a safe school climate. But while RAPS has been well-established in the Erie community for over fourteen years, they have recently lost funding and the program is at risk of being discontinued.

Specific Aims

a. Problem Statement

Relational aggression consists of behaviors that are intended to hurt someone by harming his or her relationships with others, social roles, and/or social standing (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Such behaviors can include exclusion from activities or a desired friendship group, the silent treatment, and spreading false rumors (Pronk & Zimmer-Gembeck 2009).

Relational aggression is a far-reaching problem that can begin early in life. Research demonstrates that relatively simple forms of relational aggression can be detected among children as young as 3 years of age (Leff, Waasdorp, & Crick, 2010). Research has also indicated that children across cultures spontaneously report relationally aggressive acts as mean and harmful, making this a problem that affects children across cultures (Young, Boye, & Nelson 2006).

Prior studies have shown that relational aggression is salient among adolescent girls but it has recently become clear that relational aggression also affects boys. For example, research indicates that relational aggression occurs quite frequently among boys, and boys who display relational aggression (as opposed to physical aggression) experience greater psychosocial maladjustment than boys who display gender normative expressions of aggression (Leff, Waasdorp, & Crick, 2010). Research has also found that male and female students feel less safe in schools in which relational aggression is frequent (Leff, Waasdorp, & Crick, 2010).

b. Program Theory & Hypothesis

Protective factors that have been identified to reduce relational aggression include positive adult and family relationships (Moretti et al., 2005). Support and guidance from adults are a critical part of the process that allows youth to grow into responsible adults. Yet today there is a scarcity of such support, especially among poor youth. The institutions such as families, schools, and neighborhoods that youth have historically relied on to provide adult support and guidance have changed in ways that have dramatically reduced their capacity to deliver such support (Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 1995). During the past decade, mentoring has proliferated as an intervention strategy for addressing the needs that young people have for adult support and guidance throughout their development (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverton, & Valentine, 2011). Research studies demonstrate that mentoring holds the potential to benefit youth particularly in school related areas during a developmental period when youth may be in need of relational and academic school programs that offer mentoring supports (Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, & McMaken, 2011). Mentoring programs offer opportunities for children to acquire academic skills, values and behaviors, and form relationships with adults and peers that can have a profound effect on their development. An after- school program would appear to be an ideal context in which to provide youth with this type of relationship (Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, & McMaken, 2011). In the absence of supportive and caring adult, mentoring programs for children and adolescents seek to minimize risk factors for (e.g., low bonding to family, school, and community; early and persistence behavior problems; academic failure; alienation and rebelliousness; peer rejection; association with delinquent peers) and maximize protective factors (e.g., the involvement of supportive adults and peers; beliefs that promote school success and the rejection of crime and substance abuse; problem-solving skills; self-esteem; social and interpersonal skills; religious commitment; belonging to a supportive community; bonding to a social institution) (Bogenschneider, 1996; DuBois & Karcher, 2005; Rhodes, 2002).

Relational aggression has also been identified as a significant contributing factor in physically aggressive episodes (Young, Boye, & Nelson 2006). But while evidence is accumulating to suggest that relational aggression may create just as much, or possibly even more, damage than physical aggression, it is an area that is often overlooked by anti-bullying programs, which mainly target more overt and physical forms of aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996; Young, Boye, & Nelson 2006). Relational aggression is often overlooked in schools because overt physical violence is better understood, more readily observed, and more easily confronted. (Young, Nelson, Hottle, & Warburton 2011).

RAPS (Relationships are Pathways to Success) is an afterschool program that aims to foster social and emotional skills through positive adult relationships for sixth through eighth grade adolescents and college students using a two-tiered mentorship framework. While children in middle schools are the target population of this program, college students participating as mentors also benefit by being mentored themselves by a program facilitator. Through the program, students reflect on their behaviors and attitudes with respect to peer aggression and develop alternative strategies to social situations involving relational aggression. One of the main hypotheses behind RAPS is

that students who are relationally aggressive lack knowledge of ways in which they can form and maintain relationships and deal with conflict in a healthy and productive way. If the program can identify and recruit middle school students and provide them with mentor-mentee one-on-one time, along with group discussions and individual activities that teach about relational aggression, social problem-solving, and positive identity development, then it is expected that students who participate in the program will show increased knowledge of conflict resolution strategies, problem-solving skills, and strategies for coping with stress. In turn, these increases will lead to increases in empathy and self-esteem and decreases in relational aggression, allowing participants to create healthy relationships. Over time, this will promote a safe social climate within and outside of school and decrease the acceptance of relational aggression. Studies have demonstrated that longer-term mentoring relationships are associated with more benefits to youth than shorter-term relationships. For example, adolescents who participated in a relationship that lasted at least 12 months had more positive benefits as compared to youth in relationships that lasted fewer than 12 months (Grossman, & Tierney, 1998).

Mentoring holds the potential to benefit youth particularly in school related areas during a developmental period when youth may be in need of relational and academic school programs that offer mentoring supports (Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, & McMaken, 2011). As an afterschool mentoring program that works in collaboration with local schools, RAPS is an ideal program for addressing relational aggression because children spend almost a third of their waking hours in school (Timmer, Eccles, & O'Brien, 1985). Mentoring programs offer opportunities for children to acquire academic skills, values and behaviors, and form relationships with adults and peers that can have a profound effect on their development, schools would appear to be an ideal context in which to provide youth with this type of relationship (Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, & McMaken, 2011).

If the program can identify and recruit middle school students and provide them with mentor-mentee one-on-one time, along with group discussions and individual activities that teach about relational aggression, social problem-solving, and positive identity development, then it is expected that students who participate in the program will show increased knowledge of conflict resolution strategies, problem-solving skills, and strategies for coping with stress. In turn, these increases will lead to increases in empathy and self-esteem and decreases in relational aggression, allowing participants to create healthy relationships. Over time, this will promote a safe social climate within and outside of school and decrease the acceptance of relational aggression.

Program Components

RAPS is a 21-week curriculum that provides adolescents with opportunities to share fun experience while at the same time beginning to develop trust in the mentoring relationship. The program component revolves around three developmental domains:

- **Social/Emotional** (relationships, boundaries, empathy, motivation and peer pressure).

- **Cognitive** (goal-setting, social problem-solving and creative thinking).
- **Physical:** Healthy choices, body image, physical activity.
- One to one mentoring (i.e., pairing a mentor with a mentee)
- Dynamic lessons that include role playing, storytelling. These activities are intended for the mentees to reflect upon their actions and model positive behaviors

Intervening variables

- Increase in self-empowerment
- Development of personal identity
- Improvement in self-esteem
- Acquisition of skills to resist peer pressure related to drugs, alcohol use, and sex.
- Increase in problem-solving skills (i.e., conflict resolutions)
- Reduction of relational aggression among middle school students in 2 years.

Outcome

Increase in positive school culture in 2 years.

c. Summary of Approaches

Given the wealth of evidence that supports the use of similar mentoring programs for promoting positive outcomes in social and emotional domains, RAPS has the potential to be quite effective at addressing relational aggression. However, due to inadequate funding, the Ophelia Project's ability to provide this unique program has been compromised. Schools in the area have expressed interest in having this program, reporting that they feel it would benefit their students' lives. However, as many schools are already underfunded, they are unable to provide the funding to implement this program. If the Ophelia Project is able to secure funding for this program, they will be able to recruit and train more mentors, bringing the program to more schools and continuing to make the full, positive impact that it has the potential to make.

Target Population

The target populations of the RAPS program are Middle School, 6th-8th grade students, and participating college students (tier-1 mentors) in Erie County, Pennsylvania (see Appendix A for a complete list). Participating school districts select eligible children for programming. Numbers of available slots for children are based upon available numbers of tier-1 mentors.

Approaches & Methods

Introduction and Goals

In accordance with The Ophelia Project's mission statement, the goal of RAPS is to promote students' abilities to develop healthy relationships by dealing with conflict in a healthy way, thus decreasing relational aggression and promoting a safe school climate. The program's outcome objectives are as follows:

Short-term outcome objectives

- An increase in participants' knowledge of social problem-solving skills, peaceful conflict resolution strategies, refusal skills of high-risk behaviors, healthy strategies for coping with stress, and goal setting.
- A decrease in attitudes that view relational aggression as normal and acceptable by the end of the program

Medium-term outcome objectives (within 3 months following the program)

- An increase in healthy relationships with both peers and adults.
- An increase in self-esteem
- An increase in empathy
- A decrease in relational aggression
- Healthy lifestyle choices

Long-term outcome objectives (within 2 years following the program):

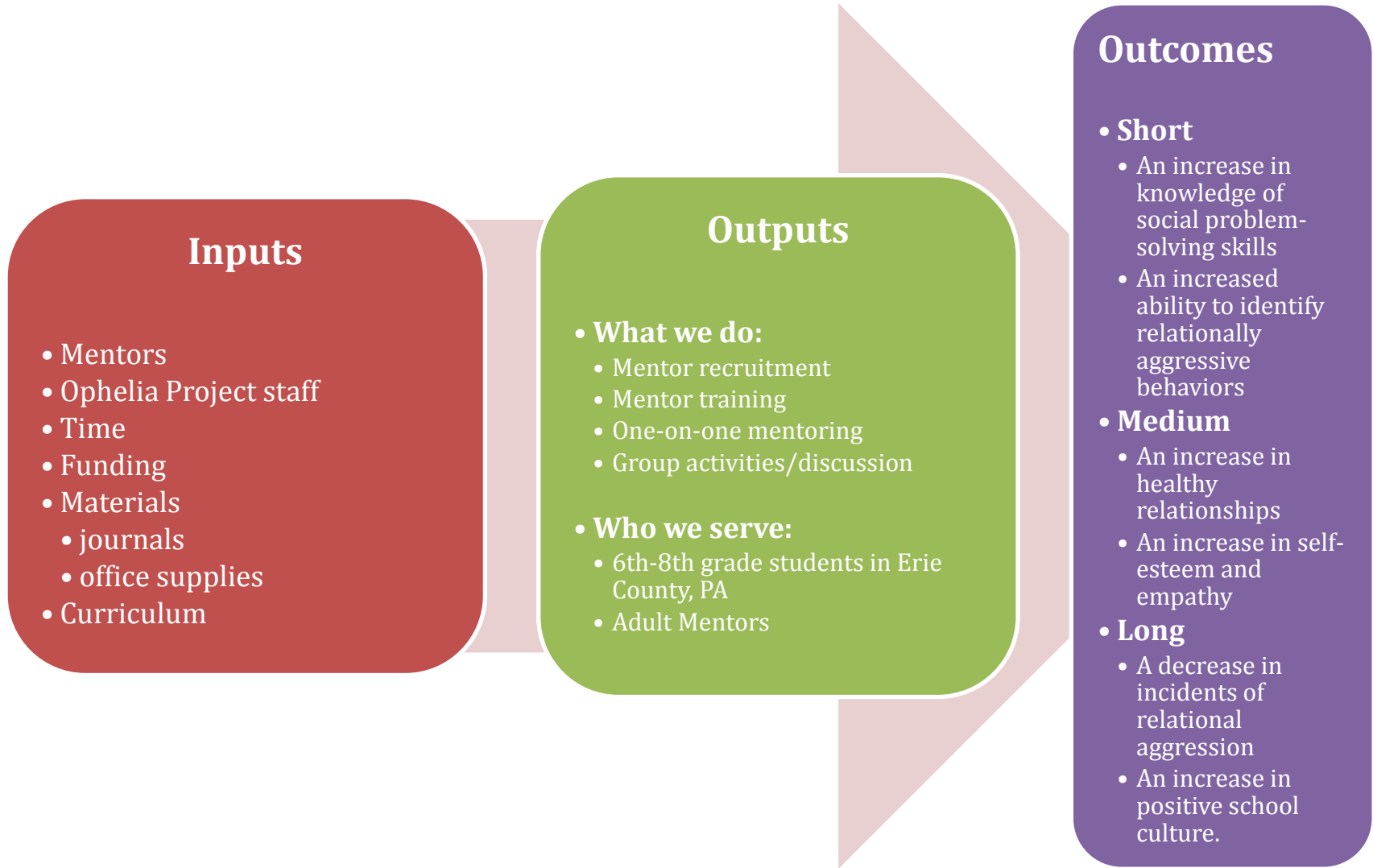
- An increase in positive school culture
- A decrease in physical aggression as a result of decreases in relational aggression

Recruitment, Retention, & Community Support

Recruitment and empowerment of local stakeholders and program supporters through education about program offerings is important to be able to carry out programming. This can be done with increased networking, participating in community events, and improving the functionality of the website by updating information provided. In addition, to find potential markets, reaching out and forming relationships with local school districts and facilities operating before and after school programs would be an appropriate place to begin to think about marketing, and gathering community support.

Once RAPS is a well-known program in the community and is proven to be effective; program recruitment should be on going, but will require less effort in a community highly educated about relational aggression and the benefits of RAPS. Program effectiveness has not yet been addressed beyond internal self-assessments of program participants. A more rigorous and detailed investigation regarding the relationship of program goals and outcomes is recommended to establish effectiveness.

A program like RAPS is rewarding in itself. The program is not only: fun, hands-on and engaging; but works on skills that teens are motivated to acquire that satisfy adolescent needs to belong.



Agency Capacity

Currently, RAPS serves 2 schools in the city of Erie. They are capable of serving considerably more schools and, therefore more children, but lack the funding to do so. RAPS has been successful at recruiting college students to carry out programming. Staff is readily available, willing, and able to serve increasing numbers of children. The curriculum is research-based and includes core components from the Common Core Standards of the Pennsylvania Board of Education. In an independently- conducted needs assessment conducted by graduate students at Washington State University, schools in Erie County, PA indicated that having a program like RAPS would be beneficial for their students and are interested in having the program in their school, but lack the ability to fund such a program.

Given the wealth of evidence that supports the use of similar mentoring programs for promoting positive outcomes in social and emotional domains, RAPS has the potential to be quite effective at addressing relational aggression. Over the twelve years since it began, RAPS is well-established in the Erie community, having served over 170 students and trained over 160 mentors. However, due to inadequate funding, the Ophelia Project's ability to provide this unique program has been compromised and RAPS may be in danger of losing their funding all together. With limited funding, a mentoring program such as RAPS may not be able to make the full, positive impact that it has the potential to make.

Part II: Funding Sources

In previous years, RAPS (Relationships are Pathways to Success) was funded in part by an afterschool program, CHAMPS designed for middle and high school students. CHAMPS works to improve: school performance, school attendance, retention in the program, and parent/sibling involvement (PPICS, 2011). Recently, like many educational programs across the country, CHAMPS has suffered from budget cuts and is no longer able provide funding to the Ophelia Project for RAPS. Last year, CHAMPS granted RAPS \$3 per student per session. Due to staffing costs, the Ophelia Project has not been able to operate within this budget and so the RAPS program has a running deficit.

The Ophelia Project currently seeks funding to support RAPS and continue to offer RAPS programming to area schools. The program budget request for the 2008-2009 school year was \$48,247 for RAPS, but we do not have more recent budgetary information. We searched for grants that would possibly fund *project-related expenses* to continue operating RAPS.

Public Funding Opportunities:

Funding Agency: Corporation for National and Community Service
(http://www.nationalservice.gov/for_organizations/funding/nofa_detail.asp?tbl_nofa_id=91)

Name of funding opportunity: AmeriCorps State and National Grants

Key Information: AmeriCorps awards grants to organizations to implement programs that utilize AmeriCorps members to engage in evidence-based interventions to strengthen communities. In the 2012 competition CNCS expects to invest a significant amount of available funding to programs working in the six Focus Areas of Disaster Services, Economic Opportunity, Education, Environmental Stewardship, Healthy Futures, and Veterans and Military Families. There is not a pre-determined limit for the amount awarded. Grants are typically for a three-year period, but funds are provided one year at a time, contingent upon satisfactory performance, compliance, the availability of funds and other criteria established in the award agreement.

Closing Date: January 18, 2012

Goodness of fit: This seems like an ideal grant for the Ophelia Project. It would require them to use AmeriCorps members as mentors, but we feel that this would be beneficial as it would provide the mentors with a living stipend, health insurance, and other benefits that seem to be a bulk of the program expenses. In the FAQ section of the grant materials it states that “a grant applicant identifies a community problem, designs a program to address the problem through the service of AmeriCorps members and volunteers and must demonstrate the capacity to administer and monitor a federal grant.” Although I am not sure what is needed to demonstrate the capacity to administer a federal grant, I feel like this fits perfectly with the RAPS program.

Barriers to Applying: The only potential problem we can see is that they would like to see evidence-based programs, however they state that, “evidence for the intervention could include results from research, performance data, or results from a similar program and would provide the basis for decisions about the design, frequency, and intensity of the proposed intervention.” Using evidence from other mentoring programs that are similar could help meet this requirement.

Private Funding Opportunities:

1. **Funding Agency:** Roy A. Hunt Foundation
(<http://www.rahuntdn.org/programs.shtml>)

Name of Funding Opportunity: Human Services Special Initiative Grants for community development or youth and violence prevention

Key Information: The Hunt Foundation funds a broad range of organizations reflecting the diverse interests of individual trustees. Most grants are general grants that are awarded for general operating support. When categorized according to the Foundation Center's Grants Classification System, the majority of grants are made in support of Arts and Culture, Environment, Health, and Human Services. General Human Services grants support multipurpose providers of general assistance, youth development services, recreation and sports, and employment services. The Hunt Foundation also funds special initiatives in Community Development, Environment, and Youth Violence

Prevention. The mission of the Youth Violence Prevention Program is to support organizations that strive to prevent violent behavior among youth.

General Grants are typically in the range of \$5,000-\$10,000. Special Initiative Grants are typically in the range of \$25,000-\$50,000. It is not explicitly stated on the website, but from looking at past grant recipients, they seem to be awarded annually.

Closing Date: For consideration in June, General Grant Proposals are due April 15th and Special Initiative Proposals are due March 1st.

Goodness of Fit: The general grant seems to be a good fit for RAPS since the funds are awarded for general operating expenses and can be awarded to existing programs. The Youth Violence Prevention Special Initiative could also be a potentially good fit for the program, especially since the program targets certain risk factors for physical aggression and relational aggression can be tied to physical aggression. One of the specific primary prevention program interests stated by the foundation is for “general skills training and competency-building programs that teach important social, life or problem-solving skills.”

Barriers to Applying: We will need to make a strong case for how elements of the RAPS program are related to preventing physical aggression and violence in order to fit with this special initiative.

2. **Funding Agency:** The Allstate Foundation

(<http://www.allstatefoundation.org/grant-focus-areas>)

Name of funding opportunity: Safe and Vital Communities Grant

Key Information: Safe and Vital Communities (Teen Safe Driving, Catastrophe Response, Neighborhood Revitalization). The Allstate foundation is dedicated to fostering safe and vital communities where people live, work and raise families. They strive to foster communities that are economically strong, crime-free, and give residents a sense of belonging and commitment. Most grants are between \$5,000.00-20,000.00. Grants are awarded annually and are renewable.

Closing Date: Grant applications are accepted year round.

Goodness of Fit: This grant seems to be a good fit to fund at least part of the RAPS programming. The mission of RAPS is to reduce relational aggression by creating emotionally and socially safe school climates. This fits with the Allstate Foundation goal of fostering safe and vital communities where people live, work and raise families.

Barriers to Applying: The Allstate Foundation is focused on providing for community programs. While RAPS programming takes place primarily in schools, we need to justify the ways that RAPS contributes to the community.

Part III: Foundation Grant Proposal

Our research team chose to apply for the Roy A. Hunt Foundation Grant. Below is the first step to the grant process, a letter of inquiry. The letter is due by March 1st as we are requesting funds from the Special Initiatives grant. We feel this grant would be a better fit over others because of the more specific focus on youth violence. Other grants were more broad community grants. Please see below for a sample letter of inquiry.

The Ophelia Project.
718 Nevada Drive
Erie, PA 16505

December 14, 2011

Tony Macklin, Executive Director
Roy A. Hunt Foundation
One Bigelow Square, Ste. 630
Pittsburg, PA 15219-3030

Dear Mr Tony Macklin,

I am writing to inquire whether the Roy A. Hunt Foundation would invite a proposal from the Ophelia Project, requesting an investment of \$50,000 from the Youth and Violence Prevention Special Initiative. This grant would provide part of the funds needed for us to both pay staff and supply materials for RAPS (Relationships are Pathways to Success). RAPS is a double-tiered mentoring program operating in Erie County, PA. The mission of RAPS is to build healthy relationships through mentorship that aims to reduce relational aggression in schools by creating emotionally and socially safe school climates. We think this project is very much aligned with your foundation's goals to address the risk factors that contribute to youth violence.

Relational aggression has been identified as a significant contributing factor in physically aggressive episodes. But while evidence is accumulating to suggest that relational aggression may create just as much, or possibly even more, damage than physical aggression, it is an area that is often overlooked by anti-bullying programs, which mainly target more overt and physical forms of aggression.

As an afterschool mentoring program that works in collaboration with local schools, RAPS is an ideal program for addressing relational aggression. Mentoring programs offer opportunities for children to acquire academic skills, values and behaviors, and form relationships with adults and peers that can have a profound effect on their development. Schools are an ideal context in which to provide youth with this type of relationship.

Support and guidance from adults are a critical part of the process that allows youth to grow into responsible adults. Yet today there is a scarcity of such support, especially among poor youth. The institutions such as families, schools, and neighborhoods that youth have historically relied on to provide adult support and guidance have changed in ways that have dramatically reduced their capacity to deliver such support. Through the RAPS program, students reflect on their behaviors and attitudes with respect to peer aggression and develop alternative strategies to social situations involving relational aggression. Students who participate in the program have reported increased knowledge of conflict resolution strategies, problem-solving skills, and strategies for coping with stress. In turn, these increases will lead to improvement in empathy and self-esteem and decreases in relational aggression, allowing participants to engage in healthy relationships. Over time, this will promote a safe social climate within and outside of school and decrease the acceptance of relational aggression.

Please feel free to call me with any questions. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Leigh Anne Kramer-Nasser
Education Specialist

Appendix A

Gender and Race/Ethnicity Demographic Information of 5 th -8 th grade students in Erie County by School
AAIN = American Indian/Alaska Native; AAPI = Asian American/Pacific Islander; HIS = Hispanic
School Name
Middle Schools and Junior Highs
Corry Middle School
534 East Pleasant Street
Corry, PA 16407
(814) 665-8297
Roosevelt Middle School
3325 Cherry Street
ERIE, PA 16508
Phone: (814)874-6800
Fax: (814)874-6807
Wilson Middle School
718 East 28th Street
ERIE, PA 16504
Phone: (814)874-6600
Fairview Middle School
4967 Avonia Rd
Fairview, PA 16415
Phone: (814)474-2600
Fort LeBoeuf Middle School
34 East Ninth Street
Waterford, PA 16441
Phone:(814)796-2638
James Parker Middle School
11781 Edinboro Rd.
Ediboro, PA 16412
Phone: (814)273-1033
Rice Avenue Middle School
1100 Rice Avenue
Girard, PA 16417
Phone:(814)774-5604
Iriquois Junior-Senior High School
4301 Main Street
Erie, PA 16511
Phone:(814)899-7643

Walnut Creek Middle School
5901 Sterrettania Rd.
Fairview, PA 16415
Phone:(814)835-5720
Westlake Middle School
4330 West Lake Road
Erie, PA 16505
Phone:(814)835-5750
James S. Wilson Middle School
901 W 54th Street
Erie, PA 16509
Phone:(814)835-5500
North East Middle School
1903 Freeport Road
North East, PA 16428
Phone:(814)725-8671
Northwestern Middle School
150 Harthan Way
Albion, PA 16401
Phone:(814)756-4116
Union City Middle School
105 Concord Street
Union City, PA 16438
Phone:(814)438-7673
Wattsburg Area Middle School
17704 Wattsburg Road
Erie, PA 16509
Phone:(814)824-3400
Harbor Creek Middle School
6375 Buffalo Road
Harbor Creek, PA. 16421
Phone:(814)897-2100

Private Schools
Villa Maria Academy
1140 King Road
Immaculata, PA 19345
610 644-4864
St. Luke School
2336 Fairhill Ave.
Glenside, PA 19038
(215) 884-0843
Our Lady of Mt. Caramel
215.348.5907
Our Lady of Peace Elementary
Our Lady's Christian School
606 Lowell Avenue
Erie, PA 16505
phone (814) 838-7676
St. James Elementary
St. John- Holy Rosary Eastside Catholic
504 East 27th Street
Eerie Penn 16504
814 452-6874
Erie Day School
1372 West Sixth Street
Erie, Pennsylvania 16505
Phone: (814) 452-4273
St Peter Cathedral Center School
160 West 11th Street
Erie, PA 16501
Phone: (814) 452-4276
Blessed Sacrament School
1526 Union Avenue, Natrona Heights, PA 15065
724-226-4900
St. George School
1612 Bryant Street Erie, PA 16509
Phone: 814-864-4821

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