

# Introduction and Overview of Intervention Design

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## **Introduction**

The Missouri IV-D Family Support Division received a three-year, \$1 million grant from the Office of Child Support Enforcement in the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services to fund the Future Leaders program as part of the Charting a Course for Responsible Parenting and Economic Mobility Demonstration. The Future Leaders program focuses on teen parenthood and emphasizes a collaborative relationship between the Missouri IV-D Family Support Division and Missouri urban and rural school districts, with a core focus on improving the lives of the youth they serve.

The primary goal of the program is to leverage experience and knowledge regarding the legal, emotional, and financial responsibilities of parenting to educate and motivate teens and young adults. Future Leaders teaches middle school students to think about the choices they make about relationships, finances, and parenting. The program offers proven educational strategies, presentations, classes, pictures, case studies, experiential learning, assessments, videos, peer discussions, and other activities.

The program's intent is to develop male and female future leaders in grades 7-12, through educating and motivating teens. The curriculum consists of at least 13 units. Each unit consists of about one hour of instruction time, with time allowed for open discussion and input from students about the topics at hand. The overall curriculum is derived from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and introduces students to such topics as friendships, bullying, human needs, goals, social media, confidence, self-esteem, conflict and anger management, time management, financial responsibilities of parenting, and child support. The program's curriculum and activities help young adults gain the knowledge, skills, and access to resources likely to lead to success in pursuit of life goals, economic mobility, and responsible parenting. The core curriculum covers six units of personal development material, six units of financial literacy, and one unit of child support information. The program incorporates evidence from successful programs focused on youth development, peer education, health promotion, parenting education, cognitive and behavioral education, and workforce development models.

## **Background and Overview**

Teen parenthood presents costs to taxpayers and difficulties for teen parents and their children to varying degrees of magnitude. An increased understanding of the financial costs of parenthood can be persuasive in helping young teens make responsible decisions around parenthood. Partners of the Family Support Division served as

facilitators for the curriculum (addressing financial, legal, and emotional responsibilities of parenthood).

The approach builds on the success sequence, which is the idea that teens increase their chances for success by graduating from high school, working full-time, and having kids only after reaching age 21 and getting married.

The curriculum presented is divided into two sections. The first section covers personal development curriculum, and the second section covers financial literacy provided by Junior Achievement USA (JA).

The personal development curriculum educates youth to be more mindful of their actions entering adulthood responsibly. The curriculum includes topics such as:

- Goals
- Bullying
- Self-esteem
- Human Needs and Safety
- Social Belonging
- Healthy Relationships
- Leadership
- Conflict Resolution
- Sense of Purpose and Achievement

This educational strategy fits well with the overall mission and vision of the program.

## **Mission**

Empower youth and young adults to become self-sufficient, resilient, and responsible citizens.

## **Vision**

To give youth parenthood curricula and financial literacy to delay parenthood until they have completed their education, gained financial independence, and entered a committed relationship.

## Target Population

The Future Leaders program provides activities and curriculum designed for 6-12 grade young adults. About 2,500 students from school districts around

Missouri will participate in the program during the grant period. The program offers knowledge via several educational strategies such as presentations, classes, videos, peer discussions, and other activities designed to enable them to become self-sufficient and maintain healthy relationships through adulthood.

Nine school districts participated in the Future Leaders program during the first year of educational activity. These school districts were geographically spread over Missouri (Figure 1 and Table 1) and ranged from large metropolitan schools to small rural ones.



**Figure 1-Participating Schools**

- Sikeston Junior High  
Sikeston, MO
- Kirksville School  
District Kirksville, MO
- Slater Junior High  
Slater, MO
- Genesis School  
Kansas City, MO
- Wentzville School District  
Wentzville, Mo
- West Middle School  
Columbia, MO
- Center Middle School  
Kansas City, MO
- Charleston High School  
Charleston, MO
- Fairview School District  
West Plains, MO

**Table 1-Participating Schools**

## **Learning Strategies**

Several evidence-based learning strategies were incorporated into the activities of students and facilitators to meet the goals of the Future Leaders program. The prominent student engagement strategies and evaluation strategies used by facilitators and students are discussed below:

### **Student Engagement Strategies (from the facilitator perspective)**

#### **Student Engagement Strategy 1: Focusing on Learning Goals**

- Inform students of learning goals. As you begin your classroom work and each time you start a new lesson, state the learning outcomes for students. In student-friendly language, discuss what the goals mean and why a person would want to know about this content.
- Invite self-assessment. Before launching a lesson, find out what students already know about a topic and what they might like to know. This could be done in written form, or in small or larger group discussions. Document and discuss their background knowledge, as well as their questions.
- Frame activities in the context of learning goals. As you invite students to engage in a learning activity, clearly describe or invite student discussion about how the task relates to the stated learning goal of the lesson. Students will gain most benefit from the activities when they understand the purpose in terms of their own learning.
- Create opportunities for self-assessment and reflection. Invite students to assess themselves after they finish each learning activity. Remind students of the learning goal and invite a discussion about what learners do or perhaps do not yet understand based on their own experiences.
- Above all, support students by giving them a sense of purpose – why they should know this, why they should do this, how it relates to their own lives – by talking about how the content relates to your life.

#### **Student Engagement Strategy 2: Managing Learners**

- Make connections.
- Set a positive tone. Let students know that you are sacrificing time from your own schedule to work with them and that you are doing so because you care about their future.
- Expect respect.

- Give immediate, clear feedback. When students are on-task, engaged and cooperating, clearly state what you appreciate about those learners' behavior. At the same time, do not hesitate to gently but directly address students making unfortunate choices.

### **Student Engagement Strategy 3: Facilitating Discussions**

- Empathetic tone. When students feel safe to share their ideas and confident that divergent opinions will be respected, they will comfortably share their thinking with the larger group. You can create a safe space for discussion by emphasizing the value of respecting peers' thinking.
- Open-ended questions. Open-ended questions could be answered with a variety of multi-word responses; rather than a quick yes or no, these leave most room for students' original ideas and personal insights.
- Unbiased facilitation. After a student shares, resist the temptation to affirm or disagree with their comment – instead, turn that job over to the group. This keeps the discussion rolling and delegates the thinking and evaluating to the students.
- Patience. Research shows that if we offer students time to think after asking a question, we will be rewarded with more thoughtful, more complex responses. Even if a few hands are promptly in the air, pause before calling on anyone.

### **Student Engagement Strategy 4: Positive Reinforcement**

- Prompt. Students have the greatest opportunity to respond to and integrate feedback if they receive it promptly. Catch them being effective learners and share that information publicly. This will motivate students to keep up the good work and remind others of the task at hand and the expected behavior.
- Specific. When offering positive reinforcement, we are most effective when we describe what we see and appreciate about students' behavior, rather than using vague descriptors like, "Well done," or "Good job."
- Authentic. Be truthful with students about what you observe; false flattery will not help your credibility.

### **Measuring Success and Enabling Improvement-Evaluation Strategy**

The overall scope of evaluation for this program is underpinned by several evidence-based practices and theories. This ongoing evaluation uses the change theory identified

in the grant's logic models and accurately reflects the state of development of the program including evaluation of short, intermediate, and long-term outcomes.

This goal-based evaluation focuses on capturing data about specific changes in the target population, including data regarding what knowledge and skills have been gained and to what degree and what behavior, or beliefs participants have changed related to their education, work, or health status. The assessment covers both knowledge gain and changes to beliefs and behavior that can reliably assess the changes that are a function of participation in the learning and knowledge-based training provided by the Future Leaders program.

Second, the evaluation includes a strong assessment of the utility of various content delivery methods and modes of instruction with the target student population and with schools to help in further adaptation of the curriculum to meet divergent needs.

The evaluation is also structured to provide data and knowledge needed to address feasibility issues, including the best ways to replicate the program and ways to help ensure long term sustainability.

The evaluative approach incorporates mixed methods with qualitative methods predominately used to assess the value program participants gain from the program. Qualitative methods to be used to collect data include, but are not limited to, case study; interviews, naturalistic inquiry, focus groups, and surveys or polls. Qualitative data is primarily used to provide value-based understanding and as an important complement of the quantitative data collection and analysis. Qualitative and quantitative data are consistently collected through structured data collection tools, such as pre and post evaluation and are enabled by a Learning Management System (LMS). Qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis is conducted at the individual participant level which can then be aggregated to provide successively higher-level views of the data (individual course level, individual facility level, facility district level, etc.)

Specific goals for the evaluation include:

- Comprehensive assessment of program and its outcomes, including fidelity to the curriculum
- Multi-level evaluation, including evaluation at the program level, individual facility level, at the individual content module level, at the individual facilitator



level, and at individual student level (which can be aggregated by demographic characteristics, for example)

- Development of a sustainable, reusable evaluation strategy leveraging LMS capacity
- Cost and effort analysis (focus on strategy requiring minimal resources and as little manual entry of data by program staff as possible)
- Extensibility evaluation (evaluation can be easily used as program is offered in other facilities and other types of sites without substantive adaptation)
- Scalability evaluation (can be extended to larger than expected numbers of program participants)
- Usefulness to underpin evaluation of cost effectiveness of the program
- Service potential as aid to replicability of similar efforts
- Sharing of lessons learned, including perhaps publication or presentation
- Help determining or refining logistical considerations, for example, optimal timing for participant success
- Reduction of dependence on alternative sources of data which can reduce both costs and errors related to data matching

Multiple cohorts of middle school students were used as part of the evaluation strategy. Gathering the baseline cohort of students who had received none of the learning modules was impossible given COVID restrictions, but similar cohort data capture is planned for next year's student cohort. Serving as a control group, next year's students will complete a pre-survey that covers both content areas of the planned education modules and the attitude and values assessment. Their aggregate demographic information will be compared to later cohorts to evaluate for any sample bias. The same survey will be carried out as a pre-training survey with the incoming students before they receive the training and we compare and analyze results in relation to the first group.

Data collected for this program is primarily kept in the secured LMS. Any additional data used for evaluation is collected and maintained on a level-four secure server with all required physical security access mechanisms in place.

Evaluation is planned to allow for expansion based on the number of facilities hosting the program and on changing eligible student populations.