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Dear Pam:

Attached is our final product detailing the findings of our evaluation of Respectful Ways. We have included an overview of the Respectful Ways program, the general themes we encountered while conducting focus groups with students and teachers, and a visual depicting the proportions of the general themes presented during the focus groups with the students. We hope that this report will be helpful in the continuing of your program. Thank you for allowing us to work with you and your team on this project. It was a great experience!

Sincerely,

Candace Evans

Nick Langley, M.S.



## Respectful Ways Evaluation

### **Introduction**

Respectful Ways is a new online social-emotional learning curriculum designed to engage students with topics surrounding four pillars of compassion, perseverance, respect, and responsibility through discussions, crafts, writing, singing, original poetry, and videos. Each pillar consists of 54 courses divided into 3 different age groups, Pre-K-2, 3-5, 6-12, with each age group containing 18 courses. This program was designed to be a flexible aid for teachers in trying to fulfill Common Core standards and PBIS mandates. The program is currently being implemented in a small, private school in Georgia. This report presents findings from a preliminary qualitative evaluation of Respectful Ways that used focus groups to assess the feasibility and acceptability of the program from the perspective of students, teachers, staff, and administration.

Respectful Ways is a school-wide online social-emotional learning curriculum originally designed to be implemented by teachers in their classrooms. For the debut of this program, it is being implemented by a school counselor in both large group and small classroom formats for grades K-5. The program includes interactive, animated slides to guide the teachers through discussion surrounding the lessons, signage that serves as visual cues to the school about the material being taught, and activities that invite the students to dig deeper into the material and find ways that the material impacts the students' everyday lives. Each course concludes with a promise pledge that sums up what was discussed in the course. For more information about Respectful Ways, visit <https://respectfulways.com/>.

### **Methods**

Because Respectful Ways is a new program being implemented for the first time, the primary goal of this evaluation was to use open-ended questions in a focus group setting to gather initial impressions of the program from students and their teachers, as well as the facilitator of the program and the principal of the school. Parental consent forms detailing the purpose and process of the evaluation were sent home with all fourth and fifth grade students, and a similar form was sent to the 4th and 5th grade teachers, the principal, the school counselor, and two other faculty members who helped with the program implementation. Verbal assent for participation was also obtained from the children who returned parental consent forms.

A total of four focus groups were conducted, including a group of eight fourth graders, a group of five fifth graders, a group of two upper elementary grade teachers, and one that included the school principal, school counselor (the program facilitator), and a faculty member who helps

with the program implementation in the large group who is also a teacher of students in a lower elementary grade. At the time that the focus groups were conducted, students had participated in three courses of the Respectful Ways Character Education program. The titles of the courses were “I Respect Others,” “Calling All Leaders, Stand Up and Lead,” and “Let Your Love Light Shine.” Participants were asked about their general thoughts of the program, specific questions regarding the courses they had completed, likes and dislikes, ways in which the students’ behavior has been impacted due to the program, and ways the program’s content or delivery could be enhanced. For more details about how the focus groups were conducted and the specific questions asked, see Appendix A and Appendix B. For a chart depicting the general themes found in the focus groups, see Figure 1.

Upon conclusion of the focus groups, the audio recordings were transcribed without any identifying data. The transcriptions were then analyzed to search for overarching themes and common responses within these themes. Each focus group discussion largely followed the questions asked in the script, and three general themes emerged: initial reactions to the program, effects of the program, and recommendations for improvement. In the remaining sections, we report the findings of our evaluation.

### **Initial Reactions to the Program**

Overall, the program seemed to be well liked by both the students and the adults. The overwhelming majority of students and four out of five adults reported liking the program or provided other positive feedback. In the focus groups, several students reported specific courses as their favorites. For example, one student stated, “I liked ‘I Respect Others’ because the videos were inspiring for you to like, [mind] your own business, and stuff like that. That’s why I liked it.”

Of the fourth graders, half of the students who participated in the focus group stated that the “Calling All Leaders” course was their favorite. One student stated that “the reason I liked ‘Calling All Leaders’, because she [program facilitator] got to talk to us and show us things that would make us want to teach others and lead different things.”

When asked about the parts of the program that they liked best (discussions, activities, promise pledges, etc) the fourth grade students preferred the activities, such as the crafts. They also stated that the signs that they saw in the hallway with visuals of the courses were very helpful in remembering what was discussed in the program.

One fifth grade student said, “I like it [the program] because it teaches you lessons for life and it teaches you more ways to be nice to people than what you can already think of.”

The fifth grade students also preferred the activities the best. Students stated that they enjoyed the activities for several reasons. First, they enjoyed that the activities helped them to interact with the material in a deeper way. They also preferred making something with their hands and having a piece of work to express themselves. Lastly, they enjoyed the activities, because it gave them an opportunity to interact with their peers. Several fifth grade students found the promise pledges to be ineffectual. One student said:

“I don’t think the promise pledge will have enough impact on kids. I don’t think just saying something and repeating it and going on about your day they really retain that in and use stuff in the promise pledge. I think we can retain stuff from other activities, but just not with the promise pledge.”

The teachers of the upper elementary students did not participate in Respectful Ways implementation nor were they introduced to the program. One teacher stated that the students seemed to be engaged in the material while learning it but lacked carryover into situations outside of the particular classroom. The other teacher stated that he/she had no interactions with the materials and has not been introduced to the material through her students or fellow educators. Further comments made by this teacher are discussed in following sections.

The school counselor, principal, and lower elementary grade teacher, however, had very positive things to say about the program. For example, when asked about the specific courses, the school counselor said, “I think that [I Respect Others] being one of the first lessons was definitely good right at the beginning of the year.” These participants also heavily endorsed the signage that was provided as part of the program. One teacher said:

“My kids are so excited to see those signs, and they are excited to remind others when they see them. It also gives me clues because I’m not really with them with [program facilitator] and it makes me use it in my classroom situation which I appreciate the visuals to use with the children. Or they will sometimes use what they learned with her to help further their discussion of what we’re discussing.”

### **Effects of the Program**

Fourth grade students discussed how topics they learned in the program were relevant in situations they faced in school. For example, one student described a situation in which she remembered the importance of being respectful and encouraged a classmate who “wasn’t that good” at football. A majority of fifth graders reported that the program had helped them learn how to be respectful, with one suggesting it was useful in conflict resolution:

“It’s helped me figure out things with my friends. Let’s say we’re not really getting along much, I can try to use some of the things to make it better.”

The program facilitator, a member of the administration, and a lower elementary grade teacher commented that students were relating content in the program to what they are doing in class or outside of school, using the language from the curriculum to describe how their friends were behaving (or should be behaving). As previously mentioned, upper elementary teachers not involved with the program were less certain that their students were making these types of connections.

Interestingly, the lower elementary teacher also reported a potentially unintended positive consequence of the program: Students were gaining practice in literacy through learning to read the words in the Respectful Ways signage placed around the school.

### **Recommendations for Improvement**

While the program was generally well-liked by those we spoke with, we also received a number of recommendations for improving the program’s content and its delivery. For example, multiple fourth and fifth grade students suggested incorporating more activities into the program. Specifically, students in both groups called for more arts and crafts and multiple fifth graders suggested the addition of “active, recess kind of stuff,” with one student recommending team building activities and another proposing stress-relieving activities:

“I think it would be sort of cool if we had a stress relieving type of thing. like maybe yoga/stretching. Not like every day, or all of them, but every now and then.”

It is important to note that elements of these suggestions are already a part of the Respectful Ways program in different modules that the students had not experienced yet. Another common suggestion among fourth graders was that they be allowed to take their projects home to be able to use them as reminders of what they learned and as tools to teach their parents, siblings, and friends. On a related note, one fifth grade student had an idea for extending the program beyond the classroom, an idea that was endorsed by fellow students:

“Is it like a website or something? Maybe it could be like you could get an account on it and play games and customize it. Maybe even make it like where you could play with other people.”

Fifth graders also offered recommendations for additional food-related topics in the curriculum. Specifically, two students supported lessons on proper manners and table etiquette and another

requested information on healthy foods and eating habits. Respectful Ways offers two health related modules: Let's Get Healthy for Pre-K-2 and Today I Choose Health for 3-5.

Our focus groups also revealed a few practical recommendations from the program facilitator - one related to program content and the other two to delivery. First, the facilitator noted that it would be great to have access to a list of additional, optional resources for each lesson. These could include books, activities, videos, articles, or any other resources that might be used to supplement a particular lesson. Second, the facilitator stated that a week is not enough time to thoroughly cover each lesson. Finally, she commented that it would be helpful to be able to store students' responses for the discussion sections, as the current system requires these responses to be deleted before doing the lesson again with a different grade level.

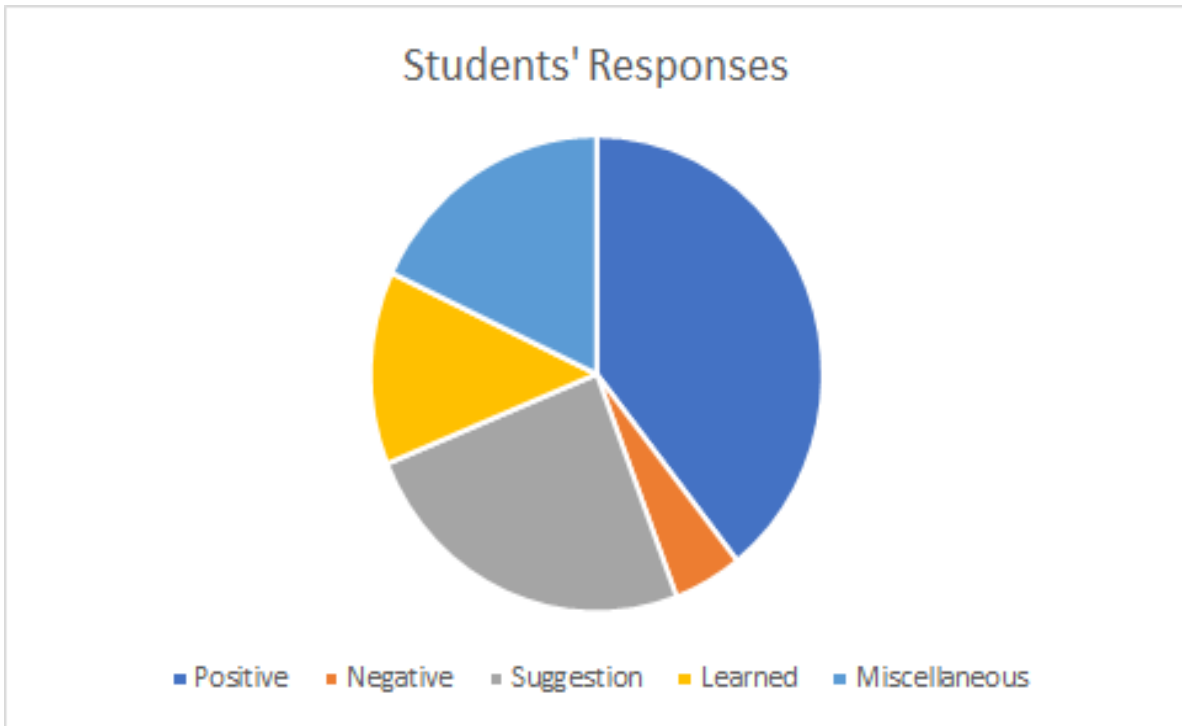
Lastly, the upper elementary teachers suggested that the program be immersed in the daily lives of the students outside of the specific classroom that they originally learn the material. When asked about ways to enhance the students' memories of what they're learning, one teacher said:

“Well and also the teachers which are in the classroom, to be made aware of it [the program]. Because if we're not using the same verbiage as they're using [the students and program facilitator], you know. And I'm the one they're [the students] around most of the time.”

## **Conclusion**

Our preliminary evaluation of the Respectful Ways program as it is being implemented in a small, private school in Georgia indicates that the curriculum is generally well-liked. Moreover, students, teachers, as well as staff and administration reported positive changes associated with program content. This evaluation also revealed a number of recommendations for improving the program, including the addition of more hands-on activities, new ideas for content, and potential practical changes as well.

We would like to emphasize that this evaluation is preliminary and small in scale. The findings reported here offer a valuable glimpse into a handful of students' and teachers' first reactions to Respectful Ways, but a more rigorous, large-scale study is necessary to truly assess the program's impact. Quantitative assessments of students' and teachers' perspectives of the program, as well as children's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to program content would be a useful next step in providing empirical support for Respectful Ways.



*Figure 1.* This chart shows the proportion of the types of responses **students** provided in the focus groups. The themes were positive comments about the program (what the students liked), negative comments (what the students did not like), suggestions (what could make the program better), things the students learned, and miscellaneous.



## Appendix A

### Student Focus Group Protocol

Student selection: Teacher and counselor recommendations first, volunteers second

Groups: Minimum of 2 groups of 4-6 students, one of 4th and 5th graders & one of 1st through 3rd graders

Procedure: Focus groups will be recorded and then transcribed, with all recordings being deleted immediately following transcription.

Script:

Hello, my name is [Nick or Candace]. Thank you for talking with us about the Respectful Ways program. We want to find out what you think and how you feel about the program you have been doing here at school. Before we start, I want to remind you that I'll be recording our talk so that we can share your ideas with the program designer, Pam. We will not share anything you say with your name attached. I also want to make it clear that you do not have to be in this focus group. You can agree to be in it now and change your mind later. And you can choose to not answer any of our questions that you do not want to.

Questions:

1. What did you think of the program?
2. Did you learn anything from the program? If so, what?
3. Which activities or lessons did you like the most?
4. Which activities or lessons did you like the least?
5. How could we make the program better?
6. Is there anything else you'd like to say about the program?

## Appendix B

### Teacher Focus Group Protocol

Teacher selection: Counselor recommendations first, volunteers second

Groups: One group of 4-6 teachers

Script:

Hello, my name is [facilitator name, Nick or Candace]. Thank you for taking the time to participate in a focus group about the Respectful Ways program. This focus group is designed to get your thoughts and feelings about the program your students have been doing here at school. Before we get started, I want to remind you that I'll be recording this session so that we can summarize your comments for the program designer, Pam. Though we are recording, we will not share any of your comments with anyone with your name attached. I also want to make it clear that you do not have to be in this research study. You can agree to be in the study now and change your mind later. And you can choose to not answer any of our questions that you do not want to.

Questions:

1. What did you think of the program?
2. Have you noticed any changes in your students' behavior since beginning the program? If so, please describe.
3. Do you have any recommendations for improving the program's content?
4. Do you have any recommendations for improving the program's delivery?
5. Is there anything else you'd like to say about the program?