

# Modifying for Success: Designing a Bullying Prevention Program Evaluation within the context of Extension

Jessica Norton and Adrienne M. Duke

Human Development and Family Studies and Alabama Cooperative Extension Systems  
Auburn University



## Abstract

Understanding the specific obstacles of a program can strengthen program design and evaluation. Program outcomes and effectiveness should only be considered components of evaluation research; additionally, evaluators should consider program design and implementation as key contributions to quality programming. School-based programs present specific challenges; this is especially the case when school-based programs are implemented from outside organizations that are not affiliated with the school or the district. This poster will discuss the complications faced while implementing and evaluating this school-based bullying prevention program, changes made to the program based on evaluation of program feasibility, feedback, and outcomes.

## Introduction

The American education system is designed for school-aged children and adolescents spend most of their days in educational settings. In addition to regular school hours, many schools offer morning and after-school programming that allows for students to stay in school for longer periods of time. Thus, schools are often an ideal setting to implement programs targeted towards school-aged children and adolescents. Though an ideal setting, school-based programming can prove to be difficult, especially when the program is being implemented by an outside organization (Mishna, Muskat, & Cook, 2012; Jensen, Dietch, Brisson, Bender, & Powell, 2010).

When designing a school-based intervention, one must consider the capacities of the school, in regards to timing, staffing, receptivity of school personnel (Mishna, Muskat, & Cook, 2012). Evaluators must also look at the organizational structure, personnel, and capacity of their institution in order to have an effective program (Jensen, Dietch, Brisson, Bender, & Powell, 2010).

## Extension

Extension is a nationally funded education system comprised of colleges and universities, called land-grant institutions, that were initiated to serve states by making relevant research and programming available to states' residents (McDowell, 2001). The goal of Extension is to improve the well-being of the people by providing them with information that will allow them make the best decisions for themselves.

The Alabama Cooperative Extension System's (ACES) division of Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS), in collaboration with 4-H, implemented a school-based bullying prevention program, Be SAFE. Our programming and evaluation efforts are implemented through a network comprised of many individuals who execute different roles. In our project, program evaluation is done through a collaborative process. The Extension Specialist handles the program supervision and evaluation, while the direct implementation is done by Extension system agents. These agents are tasked with implementing our program within their local communities and collecting the data that helps the Specialist understand the impact of their work across the state.

## Extension Specialist:

Assess local needs, initiate programming, program leader, data analysis, compliance, reporting, training, providing program materials, graduate & undergraduate student supervision

## Extension Agents:

Implementation of curriculum, data collection, data organization and submission to Specialist, connect with schools and other community partners

## Schools

## Programming

In an effort to improve social skills, decrease bullying, and increase bystander advocacy, Be SAFE *Safe, Affirming, and Fair, Environments* was implemented in schools across Alabama. Be SAFE is a new research-based curriculum developed by specialist at Michigan State Cooperative Extension. Be SAFE is a classroom-based curriculum that targets the peer group, rather than individual bullies or victims. The program goals are to improve social and emotional skills, while educating and preventing bullying, bias, and harassment among adolescent peers. The program takes a positive youth development approach to bullying and provides youth with role playing, discussion, and problem solving activities to help youth intervene in bullying situations (Olsen & Pace, 2013).

## Challenges and Solutions

While designing, implementing, and conducting an outcome evaluation of the Be SAFE bullying prevention program, we engaged in a process evaluation. The process evaluation was designed to assess program implementation effectiveness. After considering feasibility, meeting with Extension Agents, and observing data patterns, new and innovative ideas were applied to our program design. Using components of the Be SAFE logic model, we illustrate the challenges specific to the program design and our current solutions.

### Inputs

Extension Agents

Curriculum

School Cooperation

### Outputs

Pre-Post Measures

Extension Agent Training

### Outcomes

Program Effectiveness

Feasibility

### Input Challenges

#### Curriculum Length

Through a formative evaluation process it was reported that the Be SAFE curriculum was too long (Duke & Scott, under review). The length of the curriculum proved to be a significant issue in program feasibility.

#### Challenges

- Agents were unable to commit the amount of time necessary to implement the program at its original length.
- Schools were not able to devote the necessary amount of time to non-academic programming.
- Adolescents were not able to stay engaged for such a long program.

#### Solution

- Made the curriculum reasonable, from 32 lessons to 7
  - Agents are able to spend less time implementing this program.
  - Adolescents are taught main points of program so that the curriculum was digestible and appropriate for the population.
  - Program lessons fit class times and became a reasonable amount of non-academic time.

Feedback was received from participating agents on which lessons they felt were most effective and kept students most engaged. Program outcomes were also examined to find which lessons were the most effective for the students. That data assisted evaluators in the adaptation of the BeSAFE program which is currently being used in Alabama middle schools.

### Output Challenges

#### Measure Length

Feedback was received from Extension agents regarding the length of the pre- and post-test measures to assess program effectiveness. A great deal of missing data was observed by the evaluation team and agents relayed the frustration demonstrated by the students. Agents and students had difficulty with the administration of the measures due to the length.

#### Challenges

- Agents had limited resources to print the pre- and post-test materials.
- Students would not submit complete data on the measures.

#### Solution

- A new pre-post-test was developed to be more concise while capturing key outcomes of the program.
- New ways of collecting data are being explored (i.e. worksheets, crossword puzzles)
  - The new measures are more feasible given the agent's resources.
  - Students are submitting less incomplete data with the shorter measure.

### Extension Agent Training

Extension agents have various levels of experience with research. Thus, evaluation was not fully understood and valued by those implementing the program.

#### Challenges

- Agents would not collect or submit data after implementing the program.
- Students were not aware of the importance of the data being collected, thus would not answer completely or truthfully.

#### Solution

- Agents were trained on evaluation and data collection.
  - Evaluators attended agent trainings to discuss the importance of evaluation and the data being collected.

Addressing the concerns of the agents, students, and evaluators helped to improve the data collected from the program. This improves the evaluation of the program by improving the measure of effectiveness.

### Conclusion

As with any community-centered research and evaluation projects, there are challenges associated with researching within the Extension System. However, through evaluation, many challenges in the implementation of the program were able to be addressed. Conducting a process evaluation on our programming efforts gave us the opportunity to improve our outcome-driven data. Our attention to program improvement has allowed us to adapt the program to improve its feasibility and effectiveness.

### References

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