


GPS for Success: A Practitioner-Based Study With High School Students

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Abstract

We describe the conceptual framework and practitioner-based study outcomes of a school-based substance use prevention intervention focused on strengthening student commitment to their personal vision. This study found increases related to goal clarity and identification of a mentor following the intervention. We suggest implications for future school-based substance use prevention services and future research to evaluate the program.

Keywords

goal setting, social/emotional learning, drug prevention, personal vision, practitioner-based study

Introduction

School counselors play pivotal roles in enhancing students' progress through school and their decision-making to lead successful lives (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2019). One area of significant concern for school counselors is problematic substance use and at-risk behavior. Alcohol and drug prevention programs traditionally have been school based; with access to most of the nation's youth and the potential to address diverse adolescent groups, schools are a suitable location for educating adolescents about health risks (Coker & Borders, 2001; Eisen, et al., 2000; Gottfredson, 1996; Wyrick et al., 2001). With regular access to students throughout their developmental years, schools also may have the only consistent early access to the most crime-prone youth (Gottfredson, 1996). School counselors implement substance use prevention programs and assist students who are actively using illegal or illicit substances (Hagedorn & Young, 2011; Lambie & Rokutani, 2002; Mullen et al., 2019). In this article, we provide a conceptual framework GPS for Success (GPS, 2021), a social/emotional intervention to prevent and reduce substance use in schools. We also describe a practitioner research study that pilots the processes and mechanisms needed for more extensive, rigorous evaluation of GPS for Success and include reflections and unanticipated outcomes.

Common school-based drug-prevention programs seek to educate students about the adverse effects of drug use and support abstinence through a yearly commitment to living a drug-free life. Some programs currently used in schools are D.A.R.E. (<https://dare.org/>), Just Say No, Red Ribbon Week (Red Ribbon, 2021), and Reconnecting Youth (<http://reconnectingyouth.com/>). These programs address typical

needs such as supporting confidence (Just Say No), family connections (Reconnecting Youth), and skills to resist drugs and violence (D.A.R.E.), but come with little support or training for the facilitators. The largest drug-abuse prevention campaign in the United States, Red Ribbon Week, is an annual week-long campaign, committed to supporting awareness, advocacy, and resources around drug prevention (Red Ribbon, 2021). Researchers have found mixed outcomes when examining these abstinence-based prevention interventions delivered in schools (Hsieh & Hollister, 2004; Lui et al., 2017). Traditionally, substance abuse prevention programs like the ones listed have focused primarily on psychoeducation and raising awareness; however, an emerging body of literature has demonstrated that substance use recovery and prevention is also associated with psychosocial and well-being factors such as hope, meaning in life, emotional intelligence, and social connections (Gutierrez, 2019; Gutierrez et al., 2020; Merchán-Clavellino et al., 2020; Wyrick et al., 2001). A recent article exploring the success of drug prevention programs reported findings that supported the need for coordination and cooperation among stakeholders such as peer groups, teachers, and parents (Tahlil & Aiyub, 2021). Ex-drug user participants reported that cooperation among external stakeholders, such as the Department of Education,

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schools, and community health agencies, was important (Tahlil & Aiyub, 2021). Efficacious prevention programs also seek to address cultural values, developmental needs, and attitudes of the group (Edalati & Conrod, 2018). Outcomes from previous research suggest a new model and framework to address substance abuse in school-aged children, one that engages interpersonal relationships and self-awareness rather than drug-focused education. Although these models for substance use prevention and recovery are receiving more attention, these types of resources are not widely implemented in schools.

Substance Use in School-Aged Youth

Problematic substance use continues to be a concern among school-aged youth. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration noted that the occurrence of alcohol use among 12- to 17-year-olds was 9.4% in 2019 (McCance-Katz, 2019). Furthermore, it is estimated that 47% of adolescents will use an illicit drug by the time of graduation (Johnston et al., 2019). In a study of eighth-graders, 22.8% used alcohol, 12.8% used marijuana, and 8.9% used illicit drugs (Miech et al., 2017). Singh et al. (2016) noted that between 2011 and 2015, high school students' use of tobacco products increased, with e-cigarettes demonstrating the highest increase rates; they found a similar trend with middle school students. In a more recent study of middle and high school students in Pennsylvania between 2009 and 2017 (Shah & Watson, 2020), 69.8% reported using alcohol at some point in their life, followed by vaping (28.9%). A review of these studies highlights the prevalence of problematic substance use among adolescents.

Although school counselors have the skills and abilities to offer substance use prevention (Hagedorn & Young, 2011; Lambie & Rokutani, 2002), they often do not have specific training in substance use topics and access to programs to address this need. Specifically, Carlson and Kees (2013) identified that school counselors felt a low comfort level with addressing addiction and substance use. The lack of comfort felt by school counselors is especially concerning based on Burrow-Sanchez and Lopez's (2009) findings that almost all school counselors in their study ($N = 289$) encounter use of alcohol (98.87%), marijuana (98.50%), and cigarettes (96.84%) in their work with students. Thus, training in the implementation of substance use prevention programs is a significant need for school counselors, as is prevention programs to aid them in supporting student success in school and career. A useful approach is to conceptualize the need to address student substance use within the framework of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2019), highlighting the importance of classroom interventions that focus on prevention.

GPS for Success

In response to the persistent need to prevent substance use among school-aged youth, the organization My Life, My Power

developed the GPS for Success program (GPS for Success, 2021). The GPS for Success program involves a train-the-trainer model (Orfaly et al., 2005) that is free to educators and law enforcement officers. In-person training of practitioners to use GPS for Success, lasting approximately 4 hours, includes review of the key themes, the online classroom, and the manual. Training also includes details and examples of how to use the activities provided in the manual and online classroom in a way that is tailored to the needs of the school, as described by the program website (<https://www.mylifemypower.org/gpsforsuccess/>). The GPS for Success training (a) provides an overview of the program and (b) offers an experiential training to increase practitioners' understanding of the core program tenets. In schools, GPS for Success is a five-session program in which the facilitator (i.e., teacher, counselor) conducts 20- to 30-minute classroom lessons that have students reflect on their personal vision, purpose, mission, support team, and commitment to change.

Implementation

The first step to implement the program is to train program facilitators, who then deliver the GPS for Success intervention to school-aged youth. Program implementation follows this sequence across all modules: introduction of lesson content and multimedia presentation (i.e., videos), engagement with printable or digital activity, completion of extension activities, and review and discussion.

GPS for Success Themes

The first theme and related activities support students as they create a personal vision for their life. Visions can be general (money and/or rich), or specific (a professional basketball player). The information garnered from this activity supports the next theme, purpose. Exploring purpose with students provides an opportunity for facilitators to gain an understanding of what is most meaningful for the student. For instance, if a student's vision was to be "rich," further exploration into purpose might uncover that the student seeks stability or notoriety. The next theme, mission, allows for students to create a "game plan" for how to achieve their vision and purpose, allowing a shift in focus from monetary riches to also include stability, if that is the underlying purpose. The fourth theme, team, encourages students to discern who is important for them to be around to support their overall mission and what role those teammates will have. Commitment, the final theme, supports students in recognizing and committing to their vision, purpose, and mission, and in finding ways to remain committed despite challenges. Table 1 includes a breakdown of these five session themes and describes the session and critical activities.

The conceptual framework of the GPS for Success program is founded on several established educational and psychological theories. First, the program is rooted in self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2017). SDT has a significant

Table 1. GPS for Success Session Breakdown.

Session	Theme	Brief Description	Key Activities
1	See Your Vision	The goal is for students to reflect on their vision for life, create a plan to achieve their vision, utilize their resources, and set attainable goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Reflect on future self and ideal life •Examine support network •Reflect on emotional well-being •Create goals and action steps to work toward vision •Create vision statement
2	Understand Your Purpose	The goal is for students to start thinking about their purpose in life, and if they don't know their purpose, to help them define and understand it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Identification of pleasures, strengths, topics of interest, and interesting service activities •Reflection on why they choose these things •Define their purpose
3	Establish Your Mission	The goal of this session is to apply what has been put in place with vision and their purpose and help them figure out their mission, which serves as a game plan for achieving their life ambitions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Review and reflection of vision and purpose •Associate words and people that will receive value •Create a mission statement •Set short-term and long-term goals with action steps
4	Build Your Team	The goal of this session is to discuss the importance of having a supportive social network to overcome challenges that may arise. Students also will determine the essential qualities of mentors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Identification of qualities they want in a "team" member •Real-world application for reinforcement •Classification of characteristics they want in a mentor
5	Commit Your Life	The goal is to have students recognize the importance of commitment and how to keep a positive perspective and outlook when challenges arise. Students also create a commitment to pursue their vision, purpose, and mission.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Review of vision, purpose, and mission •Create commitments associated with what they want to achieve in life •Complete a commitment inventory •Identify limiting beliefs •Create daily and weekly commitments •Accountability to new commitments in all areas of their lives

focus on how a person's independence supports or hinders their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. SDT also involves six mini-theories, such as cognitive evaluation, basic psychological needs, and goal contents theory. SDT is an element of motivational interviewing (Miller & Rollnick, 2012), an evidence-based approach for supporting individuals who engage in problematic substance use. Research has also shown that SDT is a useful theory to apply in the study of substance use (Moore & Hardy, 2020).

Two other theories with which the GPS for Success aligns are emotional intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997) and social capital theory (Lin & Erickson, 2008). The emotional regulation-based goals in GPS for Success align with the four-branch model of emotional intelligence that includes perceiving emotions in self and others, the use of emotions to manage thinking, understanding one's emotions and the information they convey, and managing and controlling emotions to achieve specific goals. Researchers have shown findings that link enhanced emotional intelligence as a protective factor for problematic substance use (Kun et al., 2019; Riley & Schutte, 2003).

The third theory that aligns with the GPS for Success program is social capital theory (Lin, 2001). Social capital is simply "resources embedded in social relationships" (Lin & Erickson, 2008, p. 4) but can also be understood as the social resources

one creates by social networking. Elements of the GPS for Success program address students' identification, evaluation, and examination of social resources for securing personal goals and visions. Positive social capital is tied to substance use among school-aged youth (Curran, 2007; Wen, 2017), with higher social capital relating to decreased substance use. The integration of social capital theory aids students in building a healthy support network that can help them achieve identified goals.

Each of these theoretical frames seems disparate in presentation but they integrate into a synergistic framework that amplifies motivation for prevention. As noted by Ford (1992), human motivation is best understood through a systems lens with the understanding that motivational theories that highlight only a single motivational construct are not far reaching enough. Understanding motivational systems provides the most comprehensive account for motivation, one that considers all the primary systems that regulate human motivation, including the systems described here: self-determination, goal setting, emotion, and social relationships. Building from this theory, Ford and Smith (2007) created the Thriving with Social Purpose framework, which revealed that setting goals, increasing emotional wisdom, and generating optimism serve to amplify motivation, thus deterring substance abuse and other risky behaviors. The GPS for Success program is consistent with this

framework in its support for exploration of internalized goals and visions, deepening an understanding of the purpose of life, crafting missions to support achievement of personalized goals, supporting social relationships through teams, and emphasizing resiliency through commitment.

Implementing GPS for Success at a High School

This study explored the GPS for Success drug prevention program in a school that was seeking a replacement for previous drug prevention programs. Parents and school administration sought a drug prevention curriculum that supported students examining and creating action toward personalized goals. They were supportive of the GPS for Success program implementation in lieu of previous drug prevention programs that taught students about drugs and risks of drug use, and created a culture of fear. The school leadership chose GPS for Success to meet the needs for drug prevention due to (a) its affiliation with the program developer, (b) cost (the program was offered for free as part of a grant), and (c) its endorsement by the state's High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) organization. The school's counselors were open-minded and flexible, eager to try new activities that met school concerns and therefore open to how to infuse drug prevention without teaching about drugs. Teachers had moderate buy-in; integrating this program took 15 minutes in homeroom on most days for approximately 5 academic weeks.

A team of professionals within and outside of the school collaborated to implement and evaluate the GPS for Success program. The first author was the director of school counseling ("director") at the time of implementation and has a background in counselor education and supervision. The external research team consisted of faculty from a university in the region, including Authors 2 and 3 ("researchers"), who were recruited to assist with the quantitative evaluation of the program. The developer of the GPS for Success program (the fourth author, "trainer") also trained the director on how to implement the program. Three school counseling support staff, with teachers and school personnel, directly implemented the program within the school setting.

The trainer, who created the program content, created pre- and post-test measures to evaluate it and trained the director on how to implement the program at the school. Then, the director trained the school staff, who worked collaboratively to ensure that the program was completed with consistency throughout the school, encouraged teachers to make use of the program materials where applicable, and facilitated conversations with students as described by the program design. After completion of the program, the researchers were recruited to evaluate it. The researchers obtained institutional review board approval from their university and then examined the pre- and post-test data to evaluate the outcome of the intervention.

Purpose of This Study

The GPS for Success program serves as a mechanism for school counselors and other educators to deliver a classroom-based

prevention intervention to reduce substance use prevalence among school-aged youth while also instilling social/emotional skills. Although GPS for Success has been developed and is being implemented across the country, no previous study has evaluated this program's effectiveness. Therefore, our goal for the current practitioner-based study was to share director experiences and test the methods and procedures of the program, which is consistent with the framework for development research and recommendations for this type of research (Institute of Education Sciences & National Science Foundation, 2013; Leon et al., 2011). In this study, we also examined implementation outcomes for the GPS for Success program and the participants' satisfaction with the program experience overall.

Method

The practitioner-based study was completed at a single private school in the southeastern part of the United States. The GPS for Success program was initially conducted by the director following the established implementation protocol in the implementation manual provided by the trainer, engaging all team members involved in the facilitation process where appropriate (i.e., staff, teachers). The director then engaged the researchers to evaluate the data from this study and disseminate the project results. This study follows a pre-test/post-test only nonexperimental research design (Mills & Gay, 2016).

Participants and Procedures

We implemented the GPS for Success program with a focus on high school-aged students with the intent of evaluating the impact of this program with this target population. The demographic characteristics for the pre-test ($n = 52$) and post-test ($n = 45$) groups is presented in Table 2. Participants were between the age of 16 and 19 and identified as male at higher rates in both pre- and post-intervention surveys (72.2% and 84.4%, respectively). Racial and ethnicity data vary between pre- and post-test with most participants identifying as Latino/a or African American in pre- and post-test responses (34.6% and 40%, respectively). These demographics include a complete representation of the school; all high school students were invited and participated in this program. Mortality of participants and shift in demographic data reflect the loss and addition of students to the school population. Upon receiving approval from the school administrators, the director of school counseling organized the delivery of the GPS for Success program. Informed consent forms were sent home and returned, indicating parental approval for students' participation in the program and program evaluation. Students gave assent prior to program delivery. Students completed instrument packets before and after the delivery of the GPS for Success intervention. The director did not collect any identifying information from the students and did not pair their pre-test and post-test results.

Table 2. Participant Demographic Qualities.

Demographics Qualities	Pre-test (<i>n</i> = 52)	Post-test (<i>n</i> = 45)
Age		
16–19	52 (100%)	45 (100%)
Gender		
Female	15 (28.8%)	7 (15.6%)
Male	37 (72.2%)	28 (84.4%)
Race/ethnicity		
African American/Black	6 (11.5%)	18 (40.0%)
Asian	0 (0%)	1 (2.2%)
White	15 (28.8%)	9 (20.0%)
Latino/a	18 (34.6%)	2 (4.4%)
Other race/ethnicity	13 (25.0%)	15 (33.3)

Thus, the data were treated as independent samples. Upon completing the GPS for Success intervention, the director submitted the archival data to the researchers for an independent evaluation of the program. Before examining the data, the researchers received approval from their university's institutional review board. A total of 52 high school students completed the pre-test survey and 45 students completed the post-test survey for a total of 97 cases.

Intervention Implementation

The GPS for Success Program (see Table 1) is a psycho-educational and experiential social/emotional program aimed to prevent drug use. It includes 20- to 30-minute discussion activities delivered over a 5-week period aimed at shifting the focus away from drugs and developing students' personal vision and mission, creating a plan of action, building a team in life, and making a commitment to the plan (GPS, 2021).

The program was delivered in person by the director who completed a required 4-hour live training led by GPS for Success trainers. To aid in treatment fidelity, the GPS for Success developers created an online digital platform and program implementation manual that outlines lesson-by-lesson instructions for the program's facilitation. This program was delivered to students in a mixed approach, using virtual and in-person avenues. During homeroom each day, students engaged with material using the following process. Each week began with an introduction of the theme (vision, purpose, mission, team, commitment) and multimedia presentation (i.e., videos). Students were then directed to engaged in their GPS digital classroom to complete short activities on the weekly theme, such as completing values assessments and life goal statements, identifying and inviting trusted members to their team, and completing activities to support their own commitment to goals they set for themselves. The director, staff, and personnel also found ways to incorporate GPS for Success themes into daily activities. For instance, if students were distracted from academic goals, the GPS for Success material could be used to remind students of their goals and their own commitment to

work at achieving them. When conflict arose, staff and the director would revisit team values and reframe the shared goals and allow students to manage peer differences.

Instrumentation

Prior to the program evaluation, the GPS trainer created a packet of measures to evaluate different anticipated outcomes, in consultation with a clinical psychologist familiar with the program but not part of the research team. The survey packet included a demographic questionnaire and a program evaluation scale.

Program Evaluation

The program evaluation scale (see Table 3) included 10 statements that described different aspects of the program content, and students rated their level of agreements ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). These items did not go through a scale development procedure and do not have evidence for their validity. The Cronbach's alpha for scores on these seven items was .67, indicating questionable internal consistency reliability. Still, the scale was not intended to represent a single construct but instead evaluate various elements of the GPS for Success program.

Program Satisfaction

The GPS for Success program intervention program manager created several yes/no items to capture the participants' experience. The questions included: (a) "I liked participating in the GPS for Success Course," (b) "I have used the GPS for Success info in my daily life," and (c) "I think all students should take the GPS for Success course." The team also evaluated program satisfaction with the question, "Since the GPS for Success course, have you chosen to use drugs/other substances less or more frequently?" with response options of less, more, and I have never used drugs/other substances.

Data Analysis

The data from the GPS for Success program intervention included two independent samples of scores (pre-test and post-test groups) on the program evaluation scale. To examine the differences between these two groups, we applied several independent-samples Jonckheere-Terpstra tests (T_{JT}). The first test (T_{JT}) is used to determine statistical significant of non-parametric data for which there is an expected ordered difference in medians. In our case, we expected the pre-test group to have lower scores on the ordinal scales than the post-test group; thus, the second test (T_{JT}) best fits this design as compared to the Mann-Whitney U test, which does not examine the difference of scores based on an ordinal nature of the independent variable. We also calculated the *r* effect size statistics (.10, .30, and .50 equal a small, medium, and large effect, respectively; Sink & Stroh, 2006). Finally, we reported descriptive statistics.

Table 3. Pre-test and Post-test Scores for GPS for Success Program Participants.

Program Evaluation Scale Item	Pre-test (n = 52)		Post-test (n = 45)		Change		Z	R
	M	SD	M	SD	Score	T _{JT}		
I write down my goals and action steps to achieve them faster.	2.89	1.25	3.51	1.49	+ .62	1473.0	2.24*	.23
Having a mentor in my life is important to help guide me to make better choices.	3.71	1.02	4.33	.90	+ .62	1592	3.22*	.33
I have clear goals for my future.	3.81	.95	4.29	.84	+ .48	1509.0	2.60*	.26
My choices have an effect on me and everyone around me.	3.92	.99	4.16	.71	+ .24	1293.5	.95	—
When it comes to group work, people can rely on me to do my part.	4.02	.98	4.22	.95	+ .20	1314.0	1.11	—
Being honest with myself, and looking at my strengths and weakness is important for gaining a clearer sense of who I am.	4.14	.91	4.16	.64	+ .02	1120.5	-.39	—
Being responsible for my actions is a key to growing and being successful.	4.42	.78	4.42	.84	.00	1196.5	.22	—
I enjoy giving back to my community and seeing others happy.	4.23	.83	4.22	.85	-.01	1166.5	-.03	—
When I have a problem, I figure out a way to solve it.	4.14	.86	4.09	.87	-.05	1139.0	-.24	—
If someone disagrees with me, I try to understand how he/she sees things.	4.10	.89	4.00	.91	-.10	1108.0	-.48	—

Note. N = 97. * p < .01.

Results

Pre-test and post-test scores across all items are reported in Table 3. As indicated in the change score column, the post-test survey's average score was high compared to the pre-test score. We highlight the three independent samples Jonckheere-Terpstra tests (T_{JT}) conducted to compare the program evaluation scale items that returned statistically significant results based on pre-test and post-test administrations. The first (T_{JT}) test showed a statistically significant trend of higher medians for pre-test scores ($M = 3.81$, $SD = .95$) and post-test ($M = 4.29$, $SD = .84$; $T_{JT} = 1509.0$, $z = 2.60$, $p < .01$, $r = .26$) on the item "I have clear goals for my future." The (T_{JT}) test also indicated a statistically significant trend of higher medians for pre-test ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.02$) and post-test scores ($M = 4.33$, $SD = .90$; $T_{JT} = 1509.0$ $z = 3.22$, $p < .001$, $r = .33$) on the item "Having a mentor in my life is important to help guide me to make better choices." In the final analysis, the (T_{JT}) test again showed a statistically significant trend of higher medians for pre-test ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 1.25$) and post-test scores ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.49$; $T_{JT} = 1473$ $z = 2.24$, $p < .05$, $r = .23$) on the item "I write down my goals and action steps to achieve them faster." Information about the other analyses that were not significant are reported in Table 3.

Next, to examine participants' satisfaction with the program, we evaluated their responses to three questions about their experience in the GPS for Success program intervention. In response to the item "I liked participating in the GPS for Success Course," 29 participants (64.4%) indicated yes, 12 (26.7%) indicated no, and 2 (4.4%) indicated both yes and no, with 2 (4.4%) leaving the items blank. For the item "I have used the GPS for Success info in my daily life," 7 participants (16.5%) indicated yes, 36 (80%) indicated no, and 2 (4.4%) did not respond. For the item "I think all students should take the GPS for Success course," 34 participants (75.6%) indicated yes, 6 (13.3%) indicated no, 3 (6.7%) indicated yes and no, and 2 (4.4%) did not respond. To the final item, "Since the GPS for Success course, have you chosen to use drugs/other substances less or more frequently?", the majority of participants indicated they have never used drugs, alcohol, or tobacco products ($n = 36$, 80.0%); 5 participants (11.1%) indicated that they use these substances less and 1 (2.2%) indicated using them more, with 2 (4.4%) not responding to this item.

Discussion

We conducted a practitioner-based study to test a method to implement and evaluate the GPS for Success program. This project was the first attempt at implementing this program while also capturing data on the effects. The results across the 10 program evaluation items indicated that the students had the opportunity to become self-aware, noting their reflection of goal setting and the importance of a mentor. These outcomes are valuable as the GPS for Success program allowed

students to identify their own values and create their own goals aligned with the clarified values. Participants reported increased use of personal goals and development of an essential skill in writing them down. These findings also substantiate that the core elements of the program impact the students in an intended way based on their responses to the scale.

The GPS for Success program provided an avenue for students to explore, cultivate, and begin to create action steps and relationships around their personal values. Self-determination theory seeks to explain the role of internal and external motivational factors and is most effective when individuals have insight into their values as a source of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). In appraising the practical significance of the findings, it is essential to recognize that studies of the effectiveness of preventive interventions have tended to show attenuated effects for programs implemented in everyday settings in which experimental controls on implementation and research design were impractical (Weisz et al., 2005). However, using programs like GPS for Success may improve personal motivation and decrease groupthink.

By assisting in clarifying personal goals, school counselors are equipped to remind students of their motivation and redirect students when they act in ways contrary to their identified value system. This can also be useful in substance abuse prevention. By reminding students of their life values, adults and mentors can help facilitate more meaningful relationships and cultivate prosocial behaviors like school retention and drug abstinence. As a school counselor, the director was able to use material garnered from the GPS for Success program to remind students of personal goals, encourage them to set aside differences with peers, and remain committed to actions that aligned with their revealed values in an efficient format.

The results of this study indicated that participants were satisfied with the experience, demonstrated by responses from two thirds of the students that they enjoyed the program. Similarly, three fourths of the participants felt that all students should complete the program, which speaks to the value of the experience. We were surprised that only 16.5% of the participants reported using GPS daily. However, these responses are predicated on the validity of the times, and something as simple as the word *daily* in the item may have influenced participants to report in a way that does not accurately represent their use of the program. Students engaged in GPS for Success as a student body as part of homeroom, and this may have impacted their awareness of daily use, creating a bias in this particular data. Furthermore, most participants reported that they had not used drugs previously, which is contradicted by other research (Miech et al., 2017; Singh et al., 2016) and may reflect social desirability bias, or may be inaccurate due to sampling bias, a product of this independent school. This result could also support the use of programs that do not specifically target drug behaviors but instead address the social/emotional needs of students, enabling increased insight, choices that align with goals, and positive relations.

Reflections from the Director

The lead author acted as the director for this study and highlights a few portions of her experience here. An important consideration is that the school in this study is an independent school with a small but diverse student body. Students were moderately invested in the program initially, at times joking about the material. However, with continued guidance, students saw the benefit of identifying goals for themselves. For instance, one student initially responded to the vision portion by indicating their interest in being a super-hero, and several other students indicated interest in being famous Manga artists. Although their answers were initially in jest, school counselors, teachers, and other students were able to discuss the mission behind these chosen careers, which created connections among students who might not have noticed common interests and supported career-focused conversations aligned with the ASCA National Model (2019).

The school experienced a shift in culture with GPS for Success language, particularly related to team and commitment, heard with anecdotal frequency by the director, staff, personnel, and reported by parents and family members. Parents contacted the director to report that their child was talking about their interests at home, describing new and positive social relationships at school. A final consideration was a specific and unpredicted outcome: During the time of implementation, two female students were having ongoing issues centered around cultural demographics. As a result of their shared experiences in GPS for Success, they were able to identify how they had similar values despite their external differences and repair their relationship. These outcomes were not measured or reported in the results, being outside of the collected data; however, they are important because they indicate use of the program outside of traditionally measured success.

Implications for School Counselors and Future Implementation Studies

Substance use is a significant concern for school-aged youth. Although this study did not directly assess that issue, GPS for Success is intended to prevent problematic substance use based on the program's theoretical structure. The results from this practitioner-based study provide some evidence that the program achieves its intended aims: increasing goal setting; identification of a vision, purpose, and mission; and building a support network. Although more research is needed on the impact of GPS for Success on students' substance use, these results show promise and feasibility that the program can produce a change for students.

As researchers have noted, there is a need for outcome-based research that aids school counselors in addressing students' needs (Griffith et al., 2019), and for training to help school counselors better support students facing substance use issues (Carlson & Kees, 2013). The conceptual framework behind GPS for Success is designed to be accessible to practitioners, easy to learn and implement, and support focus on reducing

substance use among school-aged youth. Thus, this program's presentation and the results from an initial pilot of the intervention may benefit practitioners seeking such an intervention. Interested school counselors could use this program as part of their implementation of direct student services to deliver a social/emotional program and reduce substance use among youth.

Research Limitations and Implications for Future Directions

Several limitations must be noted. A primary limitation is attributable to the use of nonexperimental research design and the use of unpaired data. These two features introduce significant threats to the validity of the findings. Furthermore, the measures used in this study were also created by the trainer for evaluation purposes and did not have evidence for their reliability or validity. An additional limitation is the mortality of participants which can impact the reliability of the findings. Future research on this program should include more robust measures for constructs related to the program's outcomes and engage a more stable student population.

A vital feature of this practitioner-based study was to test the intervention methods that will guide future development and research. The process of completing this study, and the tentative findings, support the development of a more rigorous evaluation of the program. Future studies should use experimental designs that incorporate paired data, control groups, and random assignment to better understand the program's immediate and lasting implications while also accounting for threats to the validity of the results. Use of measurement tools that are standardized and normed with adolescents would also benefit future research; for instance, researchers might use the Personal Growth Scale (Robitschek et al., 2012) or Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger et al., 2006) to assess the outcomes of the five core themes.

Although the participants found the GPS for Success program helpful, providing a clear outcome of the program in drug prevention is difficult due to the longitudinal outcomes not measured by this study. To this end, future investigations could undertake more comprehensive research designs, seeking to understand the long-term implications of the GPS for Success program on individuals and communities. Another direction for future research could include examining the training facilitators undergo in preparation to deliver the program.

Finally, GPS for Success created a shift in culture at the school in this study. Additional research on the shift in culture and community would be beneficial by exploring how implementation of GPS for Success and other SEL programs can not only impact expected goals (in this case, increased vision and commitment) but can also create unexpected outcomes such as conversations with teachers and family members.

Conclusion

School counselors are tasked with enhancing students' social/emotional experiences and dealing with a broad range of youth

issues (ASCA, 2019). Models such as GPS for Success can support school counselors' efficacy, creating a consistent language and conversation about thinking and acting aligned with the student's self-determined purpose and mission. In managing peer relationships, the shared language of teamwork and commitment can facilitate healthy influences among students, with the shared goal of increasing goal-driven behaviors. Findings of the current study suggest that GPS for Success may assist students in clarifying their personal goals and developing mentors. More research could support the evidence that the program reduces problematic behaviors while increasing motivation for healthy decision-making.

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