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Prepared for
Healthcare Foundation of La Porte
286 West Johnson Road, Suite E
Post Office Box 517
La Porte, IN 46352

Prepared by
RTI International
3040 East Cornwallis Road
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709
Project 0217072
Overview and Objectives

*Partners in Prevention*, a grant initiative funded by the Healthcare Foundation of La Porte (HFL), helps La Porte County, IN, schools identify and implement evidence-based programs to prevent substance use and promote social-emotional learning.

Over the course of 3 years, 11 *Partners in Prevention* grantees will provide evidence-based programming to students in Pre-K through grade 12 across 37 public and private schools.

Evaluation Overview

HFL is working with RTI International to document which programs grantees are implementing; how they are implementing them; and how implementation relates to student, teacher, and school outcomes. This work will help grantees improve the quality of their implementation, and it will suggest the resources and supports that HFL may wish to provide to its grantees in the future.

Evaluation Methodology

In Year 2 of the *Partners in Prevention* evaluation, RTI collected three complementary sets of data to help describe implementation of the initiative. We conducted a Web-based survey and telephone interviews with all grant directors. We also conducted a Web-based survey of 275 program implementers.

In addition, RTI collected outcome monitoring data to assess trends related to student and school outcomes. We analyzed Year 1 school-level data related to academic achievement and student behavior from the Indiana Department of Education. We also analyzed grantee-collected data for several schools that had pre- and posttest data.

Finally, we assessed classroom climate and the extent to which *Partners in Prevention* programming was embedded in schools for the first 2 years.

Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations

Adapting to COVID-19

- Navigating implementation during the COVID-19 pandemic has been a major feat for all grantees. **Although COVID-19 disrupted implementation in many ways, grantees have creatively adapted program implementation.** In their survey responses, most grant directors reported providing the *Partners in Prevention* programs in both in-person and virtual formats. Grant directors also noted that
student and teacher COVID-related stressors heightened awareness of the importance of social and emotional learning (SEL) programs.

- **Grant directors reported on additional supports from HFL or technical assistance providers that would be helpful**, given COVID-19-related challenges: additional funding or support for technology resources (e.g., computers and hot spots for students); support in getting online and other resources from program developers; and additional data collection process and instrument support.

**Implementation Quality and Challenges**

- **Despite ongoing COVID-19 disruptions, grantees delivered considerably more program lessons in Year 2 than in Year 1.** Grant directors estimated that for 16 out of the 18 programs being implemented, most or all of the lessons would be completed. When implementers were surveyed this spring, 60% had already completed program implementation with all their students, compared with 8% at the same time in Year 1. About half of implementers who completed implementation in Year 2 reported delivering all required lessons; more than one-third delivered almost all required lessons.

- **As in Year 1, approximately half of implementers reported following the curriculum guide very closely.** Most commonly, implementers skipped or shortened portions of lessons to save time, especially given COVID-19-related school closures, or to increase student engagement. Some adaptations also had to be made because of COVID-19 constraints.

- **Although most implementers reported strong student engagement during in-person learning, a majority still reported that engagement was sometimes or often a challenge,** especially among secondary school students. Implementers reported the lowest student engagement with remote learning. Implementers reported good student understanding of lessons.

- **In Year 2, implementers continued to confront time-related challenges.** More than half reported sometimes or often feeling the need to prioritize academic subjects. For five grantees, policies related to school schedules limited time available for SEL or substance use prevention programming. Adapting and teaching programs virtually posed many challenges. Unsurprisingly, analysis of the implementer survey showed that reporting a greater number of implementation challenges was negatively related to implementation quality.

**Recommendations**

- **Within the constraints of COVID-19, continue to increase program “dose” by helping implementers deliver all program lessons.** Some implementers adapted to COVID-19 limitations by being more flexible in integrating lessons with other parts of the school curriculum, while other grantees emphasized having a set time for implementation. Strategizing on how to address the time barrier and providing ongoing structures of support, including reporting and feedback, can help implementers complete lessons.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

• Continue to address challenges to curriculum adherence (i.e., time and student engagement) that led implementers to skip or shorten portions of the lessons. Acknowledging that implementers have had to adapt program content to COVID-19 protocols, this was the area of quality with the most room to grow.

• Provide training and technical assistance on strategies to increase student engagement while maintaining fidelity to the curriculum. This training should be tailored to the developmental stage of the students being served. Because implementers reported the most inconsistent engagement among middle school students, specific technical assistance that addresses the developmental needs of students at that level may be helpful.

Implementer Attitudes and Leadership Support

• As in Year 1, implementers perceived high principal support, and, on average, continued to have the same high level of enthusiasm for Partners in Prevention programs and level of belief that the programs will benefit their students. As grant directors emphasized in interviews, implementer buy-in is critical to success. Analysis of implementer survey data confirmed the strong relationship between implementer attitudes toward the program, especially belief in its benefits, and multiple dimensions of implementation quality.

Recommendation

• Integrating SEL into schools requires a long-term investment. Continue to nurture implementer buy-in, among both new and ongoing implementers. Strategies include setting expectations early, cultivating implementer champions and coaches, and providing support and recognition from school leadership. Continue to educate staff about social-emotional learning, share positive developments, and celebrate all progress (e.g., one grantee started an SEL newsletter featuring contributions from teachers).

Sustaining and Embedding Partners in Prevention Programs

• Given so many COVID-19 challenges, the overall level of sustainability planning among grantees remained about the same as in Year 1. For most grantees, HFL was the sole source of funding for their Partners in Prevention programs. In Year 2, grantees gave more attention to key stakeholders. (Virtual learning also increased parental exposure to the Partners in Prevention programs.)

Recommendation

• In the coming year, provide grantees with concentrated technical assistance to further solidify and start to execute plans for sustainability. Grantees can build on their efforts to engage stakeholders.
Training and Technical Assistance

- **In Year 2, COVID-19 posed a major barrier to training.** Among the grantees that were able to conduct training (8 of 11), most focused only on new implementers. In total, 79% of implementers surveyed reported receiving any program training during the initiative.

- Whereas in Year 1, most grantees received technical assistance for developing logic models and implementation plans, in Year 2, most grantees received technical assistance for implementation challenges, including COVID-19 barriers, and implementation monitoring. Grant directors really valued the technical assistance.

Recommendations

- **As feasible in Year 3, increase training to continue to improve implementation quality and program embeddedness.** Continue to develop internal training capacity and professional development supports, such as through PLCs and booster training sessions.

- In addition to providing technical assistance related to sustainability, continue to help grantees establish structures of support for quality improvement and monitoring implementation and outcomes.

Monitoring Implementation and Outcomes

- Grantees increased their monitoring of program implementation in Year 2, with 9 of 11 grantees requiring that implementers report implementation information.

- In Year 2, grant directors reported observing and hearing more about positive changes in students’ behaviors and interactions. Most grantees reported receiving positive feedback from parents about the program.

- RTI analyzed trends in student outcomes for the first year of implementation:
  
  - The small number of schools that were able to provide program pre- and post-test data for curriculum knowledge showed favorable trends. COVID-19 impeded evaluation data collection for many grantees.
  
  - It is still too early to assess program outcomes, and we cannot isolate the influence of COVID-19. Student achievement and behavior outcomes captured in the Indiana Department of Education administrative data reflected several positive changes for Year 1; however, these outcomes were also influenced by COVID-19 disruptions. Changes observed for La Porte County students were generally similar to those of students in the comparison county, Madison County (e.g., decreases in rates of out-of-school suspensions and grade retention); however, schools served by Partners in Prevention showed a marginally significant greater rate of decline in unexcused absences.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- For the outcome of classroom climate, implementers reported improvement in students’ relationships with their peers.

Recommendation

- **Continue to help grantees develop capacity to monitor implementation and trends in student outcomes.** We also suggest that grantees document and share success stories and experiences from students, parents, and school staff. Sharing these experiences will complement the aggregate data and help build a community of support for the SEL and prevention programming.
In January 2019, the Healthcare Foundation of La Porte (HFL) launched *Partners in Prevention*. This grant initiative helps La Porte County, IN, schools identify and implement evidence-based programs to prevent substance use and promote social-emotional learning (SEL).

In January 2019, HFL awarded planning grants to 12 public school districts and private schools. These planning grants funded organizations to identify the most appropriate evidence-based programs for their students and to develop plans for effective and sustainable implementation. In spring 2020, HFL awarded implementation grants to 11 planning grant recipients to support program implementation for the 2019–2020, 2020–2021, and 2021–2022 school years.

RTI International is the contracted evaluator for the *Partners in Prevention* initiative. RTI’s role is to examine the nature and quality of program implementation and to evaluate the outcomes of *Partners in Prevention* programs for students, teachers, and schools. This work will help grantees improve the quality of their implementation, help stakeholders understand trends in outcomes, and suggest resources and supports that HFL may wish to provide to its grantees in the future.

The logic model on the following page shows the anticipated results of *Partners in Prevention*. The model also shows how its components align with evaluation data sources.

In Years 1 and 2 of *Partners in Prevention*, RTI collected data to help describe implementation of the initiative, including a Web-based survey of grant directors, telephone interviews with grant directors, and a Web-based survey of program implementers. We also analyzed trends in student outcomes using administrative data from the Indiana Department of Education and grantee-collected data (e.g., pre- and posttests of curriculum knowledge) from the first year of implementation.

**The purpose of this report is to share what RTI has learned about Year 2 of *Partners in Prevention* implementation.** The *Methodology* section details the evaluation methods RTI used. The *Grantee Leadership and Staff* section addresses leadership support, implementer characteristics and attitudes, and program alignment with school policies. In *Resources and Supporting Structures*, we review the human, financial, and capital resources undergirding program implementation. In *Partners in Prevention Program Implementation*, we detail interventions conducted with students and teachers, including the successes and challenges schools encountered. In *Monitoring Outcome Trends*, we present outcome monitoring findings for student and school outcomes. Finally, in *Lessons Learned*, we summarize Year 2 findings that can be used to help strengthen *Partners in Prevention* and similar school-based prevention initiatives.
Partners in Prevention Evaluation Logic Model

**INPUTS**
- Partners in Prevention funding
- Funding from outside organizations
- Technical assistance from EDC
- Training from curriculum developer, vendor, or trainer
- Implementation oversight from grant leadership
- Grantee and school resources (e.g., classroom space)

**OUTPUTS**
- Trained implementers deliver evidence-based programming with fidelity to pre-K through 12th-grade students at funded schools
- Grant leadership undertakes activities to improve teachers’ social-emotional competence

**SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES**
- Theorized to change by the time students complete a program

**STUDENTS**
- Increase in perceived risk of substance use
- Decrease in favorable attitudes toward substance use
- Increased commitment to school (absences)
- Increased modeling of social-emotional competence in the classroom
- Improved competence in responding to negative student behavior

**TEACHERS**
- Increased modeling of social-emotional competence in the classroom
- Improved competence in responding to negative student behavior

**INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES**
- Theorized to change by the end of Partners in Prevention

**STUDENTS**
- Increase in healthy interactions, and decrease in violent and other unhealthy interactions, with parents
- Reduced initiation of substance use among students
- Cessation of substance use among students already using
- Improved academic outcomes (grades, graduation rates, standardized test scores)
- Reduced school disciplinary issues (suspensions, expulsions)
- Improved classroom/school climate
- Program(s) are embedded in schools, part of school culture (includes sustainability)

**LONG-TERM OUTCOMES**
- Theorized to change in the years after Partners in Prevention concludes

- Reduced rates of substance use, dependence, and overdose in La Porte County

**CONTEXTUAL FACTORS**
- Leader support of program(s)
- Alignment of program(s) with state standards, school policy, and school mission
- Staff and student voice in program planning and implementation
- Implementer characteristics
- Implementers have favorable attitudes about program(s)
- Parental and peer attitudes about substance use
- Peer substance use

Measures: G = grant director survey  I = implementer survey  A = school administrative data (Partners in Prevention & comparison schools)  Y = Indiana Youth Survey
This section describes the methodology of the evaluation. Year 3 of the evaluation will include the same elements.

**Grant Director Surveys**

RTI conducted a Web-based survey of Partners in Prevention grant directors. Topics for the survey included training and oversight, implementation completion, barriers to and facilitators of program implementation, COVID-19-related implementation issues, parent involvement, and sustainability.

In January 2021, RTI sent each grant director an e-mail invitation to participate in the survey, along with a personalized link. We expected the survey to take about 30 minutes to complete. All grant directors completed the survey.

**Implementer Surveys**

RTI conducted a Web-based survey of Partners in Prevention program implementers. Topics for this survey included training, resources, leader support, program alignment with school mission, staff voice in programming, implementer self-efficacy and attitudes about programming, details of program implementation, COVID-19-related issues, classroom climate, and the degree to which programming was embedded in schools.

RTI collaborated with grantee staff to obtain e-mail addresses for current program implementers. Each implementer then received an e-mail with a personalized link to participate in the survey. We expected the survey to take about 30 minutes to complete.

The Year 2 implementer survey was open from March 8 through April 16, 2021. RTI sent survey invitations to 312 implementers across the 11 grantees. RTI sent automated reminders to nonresponders at three points during the survey period and sent a request to grant directors to follow up with their implementers to encourage them to respond.

A total of 280 individuals opened the survey. One respondent reported that they were not implementing, or planning to implement, any programs on the lists that grant directors provided, and they were immediately exited from the survey. Another respondent later reported that they started the survey by mistake and were not a program implementer. They exited early in the survey and RTI removed that survey from the database. Finally, three other respondents exited at the beginning of the survey without answering any questions.
Together, this resulted in an analytic sample of 275 implementers across all grantees, with a net response rate of 88%.

In addition to producing summary statistics, we used multilevel models to examine correlates of implementation quality.

**Grant Director Interviews**

RTI conducted 60- to 90-minute telephone interviews with all grant directors from March 25 to April 16, 2021. These interviews more deeply explored the topics covered in the grant director survey, including implementation approaches and timeline, financial and policy barriers and facilitators, key implementation barriers and facilitators, adapting implementation to COVID-19, sustainability progress, and lessons learned to date.

**School Administrative Data**

As part of outcome monitoring, RTI compiled school-level administrative data from schools being served by *Partners in Prevention*. We also compiled data for schools in Madison County, IN, to compare what happened during the same time period in a demographically similar county that is not served by *Partners in Prevention*.

RTI is using these data to examine whether there are shifts in patterns over time of school-level outcomes after implementation of *Partners in Prevention*. We will also examine whether these trends look different from trends among Madison County schools, which are not receiving *Partners in Prevention* programming.

In Year 1 of the evaluation, RTI obtained administrative data from the Indiana Department of Education for graduation; grade retention; attendance; absences; suspensions and expulsions; dropout; and scores on the ISTEP, IREAD, ACT, and SAT for the 5 years preceding implementation (2014–2015 through 2018–2019).

In Year 2, RTI obtained administrative data for the 2019–2020 school year, the first year of implementation of *Partners in Prevention*. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ISTEP and IREAD were not conducted in 2020; thus, we were not able to include those data in this year’s analysis. RTI will continue to gather and analyze administrative for each year of the evaluation (through 2021–2022).

The subsection COVID-19 Considerations discusses other COVID-19 impacts on the evaluation, including student outcomes.

**Grantee-Collected Data**

As part of their *Partners in Prevention* initiative, grantees collected one or more measures related to program outcomes. In Year 1, RTI reviewed each grantee’s data

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1 One grantee had two project directors; RTI interviewed both.
2 The ACT and SAT were only available from 2014–2015 through 2017–2018 so far.
collection plans and identified the topics—referred to as “domains” in the evaluation—that grantees most commonly measured. Then, RTI and HFL identified 12 domains of grantee-collected data that would be used for the evaluation. HFL and RTI requested that grantees report on all domains for which they have already collected, or plan to collect, data as part of their *Partners in Prevention* grant. One domain, program embeddedness, was dropped in 2021 because grantees were not able to provide adequate data for that domain. (However, this topic is covered in grant director interviews and grant director and implementer surveys.) Some measures are annual, and some are collected via pretest and posttest conducted at different times during the same school year.

In fall 2020, RTI asked grantees that collected data in Year 1 to submit a school-level summary statistic (i.e., mean and standard deviation, percentage, count) from each round of data they collected in Year 1, using a spreadsheet template. In this year’s grant director survey, most grant directors reported that, given COVID-19 disruptions, they were not able to complete all the evaluation data collection activities that they had planned for last year. Nonetheless, all 11 grantees were able to provide administrative discipline data (e.g., office referrals), and many provided other types of data, as summarized in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Number of Grantees Submitting Any First-Year Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discipline data (e.g., office referrals)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student curriculum knowledge</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorable/unfavorable attitudes toward substance use</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived risk of harm of substance use</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance use</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social-emotional skills</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and emotional well-being</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Having a single year of grantee-submitted outcomes data limits the analyses that can be conducted this year. However, RTI was able to use Year 1 pre- and posttest data provided by three grantees, as summarized in the table below. We analyzed three domains for which there were a sufficient number of pairs of pre- and posttest data: student curriculum knowledge (five schools), social-emotional skills (five schools), and favorable or unfavorable attitudes toward substance use (three schools).
RTI used meta-analysis to combine and analyze the summary statistics that grantees submitted. The meta-analysis framework treats each grantee as if it conducted a separate study of whether Partners in Prevention affected outcomes; this approach allows for the analysis of evaluation measures even though they will vary somewhat from grantee to grantee.

Nonetheless, the small number of schools (three or five) prevents generalizing these findings for the Partners in Prevention initiative as a whole and limits the statistical power to detect differences. In future reports, RTI will use additional data provided by grantees to assess changes in target outcomes (e.g., substance use) over multiple years.

**COVID-19 Considerations**

On March 13, 2020, in response to the emerging COVID-19 pandemic, La Porte County’s six public school districts decided to close their school buildings. On March 19, Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb ordered all school buildings, public and private, closed. School buildings remained closed through the end of the school year. During the 2020–2021 school year, school systems in La Porte County still grappled with COVID-19 and had to undertake such measures as periodic school building closures with remote learning and varying adaptations to the evolving pandemic.

Schools’ shifts to online instruction and hybrid models, as well as social distancing requirements, caused grantees to modify their Partners in Prevention implementation strategies. This year’s evaluation gathered information from grant directors and program directors about COVID-19-related implementation challenges and adaptations.

COVID-19-related school closures and disruptions will also complicate our ability to accurately assess outcomes of the initiative. Many grantees cancelled spring 2020 data collections, which limits the amount of Year 1 grantee-collected data that will be available for future RTI analyses. COVID-19 disruptions also impeded some of grantees’ planned data collection for Year 2.

In addition, COVID-19-related disruptions, including school closures, may also have direct effects on student behavior and outcomes. Because case rates were similar in La Porte and Madison Counties, and schools in both counties closed in spring 2020, COVID-19 may have affected families and children in both counties in similar ways. Note that local Indiana school systems changed many of their policies and practices during COVID-19—
for example, how attendance was measured and student behavior managed during remote learning in La Porte and Madison Counties. These changes also affect the patterns of outcomes.

**Limitations**

All research and evaluation has limitations. For *Partners in Prevention*, limitations include the following.

**Self-reported data.** All survey and interview data are self-reported. Self-reported data can be influenced by limitations of memory and social desirability. In spite of these limitations, overall validity and reliability of grant director and implementer data should be sufficiently high. Surveys and interviews provide an efficient, and sometimes the only, way to gather important data for the evaluation.

**Representativeness of the data.** Several factors influence representativeness of the data across the grantees, including survey response rates. With the high survey response rate for implementers (88%), we expect that these data should be sufficiently representative of implementers; however, it is possible that nonrespondents were different from respondents in some ways.

A second consideration is the extent to which larger school systems contribute more weight to the overall evaluation. Because larger school corporations contribute more schools, implementers, and students to the evaluation, they are more heavily represented in some data sources, such as the implementer survey. On the other hand, the grant director surveys and interviews have one response per grantee.

A third consideration is the predominance of the Second Step program. Although *Partners in Prevention* grantees implemented nine different programs, Second Step was the most commonly implemented program, implemented in about two-thirds of *Partners in Prevention* schools. More than three-quarters of implementers surveyed were implementing Second Step as their primary program. Thus, implementer survey findings and other results will be heavily influenced by Second Step.

Finally, the representativeness of the data that grantees provide depends on their ability to obtain high student participation rates for each round of data collection (e.g., for pre- and posttest of curriculum knowledge or repeated administrations of the Indiana Youth Survey). The number of students participating in grantee data collection also affects the statistical power to detect differences over time.

**Statistical power to detect changes over time.** For the grantee-collected data, the ability to detect differences over time is also limited by the number of schools providing data for

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3 In 2019–2020, because testing was cancelled, the state of Indiana did not require the usual waivers for those students who are graduating despite not passing the required examination. Because this policy was statewide, it should have had the same effect on both LaPorte and Madison Counties.
the different outcome domains. With more schools reporting data, we would have greater statistical power to detect changes over time.

Confounders. In any evaluation, factors external to the program being evaluated can make it difficult to determine to what extent outcomes are caused by the program or by other factors. The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically affected schools, students, and their families. We do not know what student outcomes would be in the absence of COVID-19 and cannot isolate program and COVID-19 effects. In addition, although Madison County students showed similar patterns of achievement and behavior in the administrative data before Partners in Prevention, there may still be other important factors affecting changes in the two counties over time. We also do not have any detailed information about the SEL programs or COVID-19 policies and practices in Madison County schools.

In spite of these limitations, the rich evaluation data provide valuable information for program monitoring and quality improvement and for building our understanding of patterns of outcomes over time, which in turn will enable us to better serve La Porte County students.
Mission Alignment and Organizational Policies

Previous studies of prevention programs have identified school contextual factors, that influence implementation success. In this section, we examine these factors: alignment, leadership support and staff voice, and implementer characteristics and attitudes.

Mission Alignment

Grant directors and implementers responded to survey items about whether substance use prevention programming and programming to promote SEL were consistent with their organization’s mission. Among implementers, 74% agreed that substance use programming was consistent with their schools’ mission, and 90% agreed that SEL programs were consistent with their mission. (These proportions are about the same as in Year 1, 70% and 94%, respectively.)

As in Year 1, a majority of grant directors reported that their organization had policies consistent with requirements of the Partners in Prevention model. Fifty-five percent (down from 70% in Year 1) reported that their organization had policies requiring substance use prevention programming for students. Consistent with Year 1, 73% (8 out of 11 grant directors) reported policies requiring social-emotional programming for students, and 73% (a slight increase from Year 1) reported policies requiring the use of evidence-based programming or practices with students.

Conversely, grant directors also provided information about any organizational policies that hindered Partners in Prevention implementation. Consistent with the findings from

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5 Throughout this report, “organization” refers to school (for single-school grantees) or school district (for multi-school grantees).
Year 1, about half of grant directors reported that policies limiting the time available for prevention were a barrier to *Partners in Prevention* implementation. This finding was supported by interviews, in which some grant directors said that the most challenging school policies were those related to scheduling and lack of preparation time. For one school, the *Partners in Prevention* programming was delivered in a stand-alone class to mitigate challenges with timing and schedules. (See the Implementation Challenges subsection for complete information on policy challenges.)

**Leadership Support and Staff Voice**

On average, grant directors and implementers agreed that their leaders had knowledge, commitment, and motivation to support substance use prevention and SEL programming. All grant directors also agreed (with 73% strongly agreeing) that school leaders were supportive of program implementers.

As shown below, in Year 2, implementers reported about the same level of principal advocacy and motivation to promote SEL as in Year 1, but these levels for substance use prevention were slightly lower. The perceptions of higher support for SEL may reflect that most of the *Partners in Prevention* programs focus broadly on SEL, and the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened awareness of the importance of SEL. Implementers reported about the same levels of principal support whether they were serving elementary, middle, or high school students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During the 2020-2021 school year, our school’s principal has been:</th>
<th>Percentage of Implementers Who Agreed with Statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A strong advocate for promotion of SEL</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivated to ensure that efforts to promote SEL are a success</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive of staff implementing SEL</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A strong advocate for substance use prevention</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivated to ensure that substance use prevention efforts are a success</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive of staff implementing substance use prevention programming</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grant directors reported that their leaders were involved with a number of *Partners in Prevention* activities. The graph below shows the numbers of grantees that reported organization leaders’ involvement in various *Partners in Prevention* activities in Year 1.
and Year 2. In Year 2, grant directors reported more leadership involvement in most of these activities. In both years, leaders engaged most frequently in planning and monitoring.

In their interviews, grant directors emphasized the importance of leadership for a program’s success. Grant directors cited support from school principals, administrative leadership, and school boards in the success of program implementation.

**Almost all grant directors reported that at least one implementer was part of the team that made decisions** about program logistics (e.g., classes or times when *Partners in Prevention* programs would be implemented) and whether they themselves would serve as implementers. With regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, almost all grant directors reported that one or more implementers were involved in the team that made decisions about adjustments that needed to be made to the intervention.

**Implementers**

The majority of implementers (86%) were general education teachers, either of multiple subjects (62%) or of a single subject (24%) other than physical education, health, or wellness. Eight percent were school counselors, guidance counselors, or social workers. They had 1–44 years’ experience in teaching, instruction, or program facilitation, with an average of 15 years of experience.

In Year 1, most implementers were new to SEL/prevention programs. In Year 2, 73% of implementers had taught the program for *Partners in Prevention* in the previous year. In addition, 18% reported that they had also taught another program focused on SEL or the prevention of risk behaviors such as substance use, sexual risk behavior, or violence.
In Year 2, most implementers reported having confidence in their ability to implement the *Partners in Prevention* programs. Implementers generally reported that they understood the program well enough to implement it effectively (55% agreed and 35% strongly agreed). Most believed they could do a good job teaching students about substance use prevention (74% agreed or strongly agreed), and a high percentage believed they could do a good job teaching students about social-emotional skills (92%). Nonetheless, just over half (54%) believed that they are better at teaching other subjects than at implementing the *Partners in Prevention* program; most of the rest were neutral.

**On average, implementers had positive attitudes about the programs they delivered.**

As in Year 1, most implementers believed that if they did a good job teaching their *Partners in Prevention* program, their students would experience such benefits as improved social-emotional skills and academic outcomes, fewer school discipline issues, lower likelihood of substance misuse, and a healthy and productive future.

Implementers were also asked how likely it is that their students would benefit from any SEL or substance use prevention program. On a scale of 0 (no benefit) to 100 (benefit a great deal), implementers, on average, rated the benefit of any SEL program at 82 and any substance use prevention program at 72—about the same as last year. Implementers also reported about the same mean level of enthusiasm as in the previous year for implementing their *Partners in Prevention* program, with a mean of 73 on a scale of 0 to 100. The distribution of implementers’ rating of their level of enthusiasm appears below. Although the ratings skew high, there is still some room for growth. Implementers’ level of enthusiasm was moderately correlated with their perception of the level of benefit of these programs to their students.

In their interviews, grant directors described strategies they used to build and maintain positive attitudes about programming among implementers, including providing emotional support. Grant directors mentioned increasing the amount of communication...
with implementers to offer additional support, especially in light of challenges related to COVID-19.

Grant directors mentioned that implementers continue to feel gratified by the positive response that they observed in students' behavior. Grant directors highlighted anecdotal examples that encouraged implementers, including positive changes in how students interact in both virtual and in-person classrooms and use of the coping mechanisms from Partners in Prevention programming.

Multiple entities provided resources to support the Partners in Prevention initiative. HFL provided direct funding to grantees and also funded technical assistance services. In rare instances, outside funders also provided resources. Grantees and schools contributed their own human and capital resources to the initiative, including the training and oversight that functioned as a resource to implementers. The next section describes all of these resources in greater detail.

### Financial Support

As in Year 1, grant directors expressed overall satisfaction with the amount of funds available to implement programming. Some grant directors reported financial concerns related to COVID-19, as many of the Partners in Prevention initiatives transitioned to virtual platforms. One grant director struggled to procure enough devices for each student in the initiative, and another lamented having spent money on print materials that went unused.

### Outside Funding

For most (eight) grantees, HFL was their sole source of funding for the implementation and administration of Partners in Prevention programs. In their
surveys, three grant directors reported receiving support from other sources, including the federal government (the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act [CARES] Act of 2020), the Indiana Department of Education, and other private foundations (e.g., Lilly Endowment Counseling Initiative; Freeman Assists Communities with Extra Support [FACES]). In their interviews, grant directors also reported using additional resources from the state of Indiana, as well as leveraging local community organizations. One grant director partnered with an organization that specialized in grief counseling to address COVID-19-related loss among students’ families.

**Grantee and School Resources**

Beyond the funding that HFL provided, grantees contributed their own human and capital resources to their *Partners in Prevention* projects.

In their survey, we presented implementers with a list of nine resources that are needed to support program implementation and asked them to report whether their school currently had enough of each. The graph below shows the responses from Year 1 and Year 2. As in Year 1, implementers reported some school resource shortfalls in the area of time. In Year 2, implementers also reported that they had adequate funds for program supplies and training but did not have enough funds to hire substitute teachers to cover time when implementers received program training.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources to support program implementation</th>
<th>Do not have enough</th>
<th>Have a lot less than we need</th>
<th>Have a little less than we need</th>
<th>Have enough</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to a copier to prepare program handouts</td>
<td>![Graph] Year 1</td>
<td>![Graph] Year 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space for implementing a prevention program</td>
<td>![Graph] Year 1</td>
<td>![Graph] Year 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School staff with time to implement prevention</td>
<td>![Graph] Year 1</td>
<td>![Graph] Year 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class time needed for program implementation</td>
<td>![Graph] Year 1</td>
<td>![Graph] Year 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to ongoing technical assistance</td>
<td>![Graph] Year 1</td>
<td>![Graph] Year 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff time for activities outside of implementation</td>
<td>![Graph] Year 1</td>
<td>![Graph] Year 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funds for purchasing program supplies</td>
<td>![Graph] Year 1</td>
<td>![Graph] Year 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funds to hire substitute teachers during training</td>
<td>![Graph] Year 1</td>
<td>![Graph] Year 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funds to pay for program training</td>
<td>![Graph] Year 1</td>
<td>![Graph] Year 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Year 2, we also asked implementers about resources specific to remote learning. When asked if they had the technology for staff to implement prevention programming with students during remote learning, 64% of implementers stated that they did have enough resources, and fewer than 10% of implementers said that they had a lot less than needed or none of this resource. Similarly, when asked if they had the technology for students to participate in prevention programming during remote learning, 67% of implementers stated that they had enough resources, and fewer than 7% reported that they had a lot less than needed or did not have the resources.

**Ninety-five percent of implementers said that their school had someone they could turn to for guidance about the implementation of their Partners in Prevention program.** Ninety percent of implementers (an increase from 82% in Year 1) reported that there was someone who could provide general guidance about substance use prevention strategies, and 95% (the same as Year 1) said that there was someone who could provide general guidance about SEL strategies.

## Training

Grant directors reported on the training for each of the programs that were implemented for Partners in Prevention. **Grantees adapted their training in a variety of ways in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.** Three grantees (27%) reported that they did not conduct training on any programs. Of the grantees that did provide training, the majority provided it only to new implementers, with only two grantees requiring returning implementers to undergo training. Grantees that did conduct training used several different modalities, including virtual training (e.g., webinar, video conference) with a live trainer (two grantees), self-study training that did not involve interaction with a trainer (three grantees), and in-person training (one grantee). An additional two grantees reported new implementers being trained by an experienced implementer who was not official certified as a trainer, but they did not specify whether this training was in person or virtual.

Among programs that used a live trainer model (either in person or virtually), grantees also employed various types of trainers. A certified trainer from within the grantee organization led training for half of programs (two of the four), and an uncertified trainer from within the grantee organization led trainings in three of the four programs. In contrast to Year 1, when program developers or vendors led almost half of program trainings, in Year 2, developers or vendors led only one of the trainings.

In their interviews, grant directors discussed the adaptations to training due to COVID-19. Several grant directors reported that implementers pivoted to virtual trainings (both live and pre-recorded) whenever possible, supplemented by webinars and individual study. One grant director noted that with formal in-person training unavailable, implementers adopted a train-the-trainer approach, with the support of the initiative staff. Another grant director mentioned that the lead implementer added extra, informal opportunities for
implementers and teachers to learn during lunch breaks and in-service sessions and based the content on input about topics of interest.

Among the implementers surveyed, 45% reported participating in any training during summer 2020 or the 2020–2021 school year, 34% of respondents had participated in training before the current school year, and 21% had not yet participated in any training.

Technical Assistance

HFL contracted the Education Development Center (EDC) to provide implementation technical assistance to Partners in Prevention grantees.

At the time of their surveys (January 2021), grant directors reported having had an average of 12 hours of direct contact with their EDC technical assistance provider during the 2020–2021 school year, an increase from an average of 6 hours of direct contact at this time in Year 1. All grant directors reported receiving technical assistance themselves, and about half reported that their implementers also received technical assistance. A handful of grant directors reported that other staff had direct contact with EDC for technical assistance, including data collectors (two), counselors and administrators (one), and curriculum developers (one).

The most common topic for EDC’s technical assistance was addressing implementation challenges, followed by monitoring implementation against implementation plan. There were also new topics for technical assistance, including adapting to online/hybrid learning and adapting to other COVID-19 challenges. This is a shift in focus from Year 1, when the most common topics were developing a logic model and developing an implementation plan. The table below presents common areas of technical assistance received by grantees each year.

All grantees agreed that the ongoing technical assistance from EDC had been useful. Almost all grantees (90%) also agreed that technical assistance from curriculum developers had been useful.

In their interviews, grant directors continued to highlight technical assistance as a valuable component of implementation, especially given the COVID-19 challenges. One grant director noted, “I think sometimes it’s important to have an objective sounding board. Someone who has lived and breathed SEL for a while longer than you have, that has knowledge of other programs across the state or the country that they have drawn experience from, in sharing that out, and gives you another layer to consider.” Another grant director reflected,
Technical assistance is great because it's hard to see the picture when you're in the frame. So, you have the outside eyes looking in, and they're able to give you different ways of looking at things. They have lots of experiences of working with other schools and other districts, so they bring a nice, fresh set of ideas and ways of thinking.... I think it really helps with efficiency, and it helps cut down on us wasting any time because we're not experts—by no means—on any of this stuff, and we're constantly growing and learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technical Assistance Topic</th>
<th>Number of Grantees Receiving EDC Technical Assistance for This Topic (n = 11 grantees)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addressing implementation challenges</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring Implementation against implementation plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing a logic model</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapting to other COVID-19 challenges</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing an implementation plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fostering sustainability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selecting measurement tools for monitoring &amp; evaluation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using measurement tools for monitoring &amp; evaluation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning transition to online or hybrid learning because of COVID-19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating curricula into schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Securing training for Implementers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Implementation Oversight**

In their interviews, grant directors described using various strategies to monitor the progress of implementation, including observations, self-report of implementation details, and online program tracking. This diversity of approaches was also reflected in grant director surveys, as shown in the table below.
A few grant directors also described using informal and formal individual and group meetings to discuss implementation schedule and fidelity. Additionally, another grantee offered implementers weekly reminders and check-ins to provide support and regular feedback.

### Observations

Grant directors reported on whether they observed their organization’s implementers delivering *Partners in Prevention* programming during the 2020–2021 school year. **At the time of survey completion (January and early February), 45% of grantees had already observed program sessions, and another 18% had not observed yet but planned to.** Although the overall percentage of grantees completing or planning observations in Year 2 is very similar to that in Year 1 (just over 60%), the percentage of those who had completed observations by the time of the grant director survey was substantially higher in Year 2 than in Year 1: 45% and 27%, respectively.

Of the seven grantees doing observations, five grant directors reported that all observations were being conducted in person. Two grant directors reported doing only virtual observations. (In their interview, however, one of those two discussed conducting both types of observations.)

### Settings Observed

Among grantees conducting observations, just over half (four) planned to observe all of their implementers. On average, the remaining grantees planned to observe, on average, 22% (range 1%–40%) of implementers. Grantees planned to conduct up to five observations per implementer, with a median of two. The median is consistent with Year 1, but the range is smaller. In their interviews, about half of grant directors...
discussed cancelling observations or reducing the number of observations they planned to do in Year 2 because of the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions.

For some grantees, grant directors and their staff let implementers know ahead of time when observations were going to be held or asked for volunteers to be observed. At least one grantee reported both announced and unannounced observations to help increase accountability.

Five of the seven grantees conducting observations planned for observers to receive some type of training. For most grantees (four), the observer training involved completing the implementer training for the program. A few grantees reported planning to have observers do the train-the-trainer training for the program, program-specific observation training, or general observation training. One grant director, whose organization did not provide observation training, noted that this type of training was not made a priority because of the ever-changing learning formats in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

All grantees conducting observations planned to give implementers feedback about these observations, with just under three-quarters having already provided feedback by the time of the grant director survey.

Implementers also reported on observations. As in Year 1, about one-quarter of implementers reported that they had been observed (19%) or there were plans for them to be observed (4%). These numbers are smaller than the percentage of grant directors saying they conducted observation, which may be explained at least in part by the fact that several grantees were observing only a sample of implementers. In addition, implementers may have been less aware of virtual observation than they would have been of in-person observation.

Among the implementers who had been observed, over 90% reported that they were observed providing in-person instruction. Just over 10% reported that they were observed while giving live or synchronous virtual instruction; about the same percentage was observed during recorded or asynchronous instruction. Finally, 85% reported receiving feedback from the observations, a statistically significant increase from 67% in Year 1 ($p < .05$).

**Implementer Self-Report**

Most grant directors—82% or nine grantees—reported that they required all of their implementers to self-report on their implementation, such as through an implementation checklist of session activities. This represents an increase from 64% (seven grantees) in Year 1. One grant director described in their interview tracking both required lessons and supplementary lessons implemented. All but one of these grantees reported that they had provided, or planned to provide, feedback to implementers on these data.
About two-thirds of implementers (68%) said that they had been asked to report information from their implementation, a figure that is similar to Year 1 but smaller than the percentage of grant directors saying that this reporting is required of implementers. This difference may be partially explained by—as several grant directors also noted in their interviews—some grantees’ use of curricula that track lesson implementation as part of their online components. One grantee described that with their online curriculum, an implementer clicks a button when they have finished a given lesson and that is automatically reported to the grant director. In this context, implementers may not recognize that they are reporting on their implementation.

When asked how often they reported information on their implementation, the common response was monthly (54%), followed by 14% quarterly and 11% weekly. As in Year 1, among those asked to report implementation information, a minority (38%) had reported information and received feedback on it.

Follow-up

Among the grantees that collected observation or self-reported implementation data from implementers, all but one planned to provide some sort of follow-up for implementers with unsatisfactory implementation. As in Year 1, the most common of these approaches was to provide follow-up training or one-on-one mentoring or coaching (four grantees each).
Programming for Students

Programs and Grades

HFL provided *Partners in Prevention* planning grantees with a list of 30 evidence-based substance use prevention and SEL programs that they could implement for the initiative. Ultimately, grantees chose to implement nine different programs in Years 1 and 2. The table below summarizes implementer and grant director survey data showing the number of grantees, schools, and implementers implementing each program. *The most commonly implemented program continued to be Second Step, followed by Botvin LifeSkills Training.* Individual grantees implemented up to three programs (counting Second Step: Elementary and Second Step: Middle as separate programs), totaling 19 programs across grantees (the sum of the “Grantees” column below). The numbers of grantees and schools implementing each program are about the same as last year, but the numbers of implementers fluctuated for some programs. For example, the total number of staff reporting implementing Botvin LifeSkills decreased from 60 to 19. On the other hand, the total number for Second Step: Middle increased from 49 to 67 and the number for School Connect doubled from 14 to 28.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Number Implementing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grantees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botvin LifeSkills Training(^c)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscious Discipline</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Action</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ripple Effects</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Step: Elementary(^d)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Step: Middle(^e)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Connect</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too Good for Drugs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too Good for Violence</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Among implementer survey respondents. Actual number of implementers is typically higher because of survey nonresponse.  
\(^b\) Nine percent of implementers reported implementing more than one *Partners in Prevention*-funded program. In the implementer survey, any questions that ask about experiences with a single program ask the respondent to focus on the one program that they implemented with the most students.  
\(^c\) Three grantees reported in the survey that they are implementing Botvin Lifeskills, but we know the actual number is four grantees.  
\(^d\) Second Step Elementary includes at least one respondent implementing Second Step Early Learning for Pre-K.  
\(^e\) One implementer who selected Second Step: Middle had chosen the adjacent drop-down option of working at their county’s high school instead of the middle school, and we assume this was an error.
Grant directors and implementers both reported on whether any of their schools implemented any SEL or substance use prevention programs beyond their Partners in Prevention programs during the 2020–2021 school year. Three grant directors each reported implementing one other SEL or prevention program, including Zones of Regulation, Second Step Bullying Prevention, and Five Star—Middle School. Four percent of implementers reported that they were implementing another program this year, including Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, PATHS, Zones of Regulation, Slumberkins, Little Fish Club, SEL videos (unspecified), programs from the Youth Service Bureau of La Porte County, programs from a nonprofit agency to prevent sexual abuse, and use of the EL education model (formerly known as Expeditionary Learning), which includes an emphasis on character.

Implementers most often served students in kindergarten through 10th grade. There were relatively few implementers for Pre-K or grades 11 and 12.

As in Year 1, several grantees delivered lessons to students in their main classrooms or homeroom periods, according to interviews. Lessons were delivered either by the students’ classroom teachers or by a counselor or lead implementer who visited the classroom at designated times. Other grantees implemented in teacher advisory or elective periods. When lessons were delivered in elective periods, the students’ health and wellness class was typically used. More than one grant director shared, however, that because of COVID-19 restrictions, schools did not always have one uniform setting in which program lessons were delivered. In these schools, program delivery tended to vary...
by grade level. For example, sixth-graders might watch recorded lessons, whereas younger students would join live Zoom calls with their teachers.

**COVID-19 Effect on Programming**

During the 2020–2021 school year, program implementers had to cope with COVID-19-related school closures. As shown in the table below, about half of the implementers surveyed reported that their school delivered virtual instruction for all students (school buildings were closed) for 1 month or less, 68% for 2 months or less, and 82% for 3 months or less. The remaining 18% of implementers reported full virtual instruction for periods ranging from 4 to 10 or more months.

In the context of COVID-19, schools employed multiple modes of program delivery. In their surveys, grant directors reported providing 61% of the Partners in Prevention programs both in person and virtually; they provided 22% of programs only in person and 17% only virtually.

Among program implementers surveyed, 89% reported delivering the program in person, 45% did live or synchronous virtual instruction, and 18% used recorded or asynchronous instruction. A few implementers said that their counselor delivered the program in class, through Zoom, or in recorded lessons. When recorded/asynchronous instruction was used, most often the implementers were the ones responsible for delivering and helping to prepare the recorded content or assignments (61%), followed by others within their school corporation (37%).

In their interviews, grant directors stressed the ongoing importance of prevention programming during the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, as the COVID-19 virus...
spread, school buildings closed abruptly, leaving little time for educators to adjust. A couple of grantees were able to shift to delivering *Partners in Prevention* lessons online, but others were unable to complete program lessons with students. One grant director reflected on how schools’ priorities had to shift during this period:

> I think it brought everybody down to just the most basic level of what is the most crucial thing to try to get right now. So..., we were all focusing on just how kids were going to eat or how they were going to have Wi-Fi or anything like that.... I think that those very basic level needs kind of took precedence over some of the other things, and even school-related, because I know that everyone was just trying to figure out what to do.

During the 2020–2021 school year, however, despite the uncertainty of COVID-19 and increased workloads, grantees resumed or continued to deliver *Partners in Prevention* program lessons. Grant directors offered examples of the ways in which teachers and staff had to be resourceful and creative to get students much-needed prevention programming.

Grantees occasionally needed to adapt the setting in which lessons were delivered. Some grantees held lessons outside for most of the fall and winter. Doing so allowed classes to continue in person but occasionally restricted some aspects of prevention programming, such as when students needed to access computers for individual online lessons. In one case, rather than having students work independently on online lessons, the counselor adapted the program content into lessons that could be delivered in a group setting. At least one grantee combined same-grade, remote students across buildings to receive online lessons as a group from a school counselor. These students would normally receive in-person instruction from their school’s counselor with their own class.

Grantees also adapted lesson content. Some program activities were not possible in an online setting; others were limited by social distancing requirements. Approximately half of grantees faced this challenge.

As for reported staffing changes, some grantees had to adjust who was implementing program lessons in the face of temporary quarantines or implementers’ need to remain remote during the school year due to COVID-related health risks.

Grant directors pointed to a number of things that made implementation more successful in the face of COVID-19 challenges. Some tried to maintain consistent scheduling of program lessons. Others took extra steps to engage remote students more effectively during lessons.
Challenges and uncertainty notwithstanding, multiple grant directors noted that some changes they were required to make because of COVID-19 had unexpected benefits. One grant director felt that having to implement under so many different conditions strengthened their school corporation’s capacity to adapt to different ways of teaching and learning. At least one found that after students were all given electronic devices on which to do their schoolwork, it became easier to share additional digital SEL resources that families can use. One of the most important benefits, however, seemed to be an increased awareness among school communities of the importance of SEL. As one grant director observed:

I feel like the one thing that COVID has brought to our corporation—and I feel like [to] other corporations, as well—is just a greater acceptance, or even just seeing how much social-emotional learning is needed and how much all of this has affected our students and even staff. So in general, I feel like there’s just been more of an awareness for the need.

**Program Access**

Twenty-two percent of grant directors reported that because of COVID-19 disruptions, there are some groups of students, such as home-schooled students, that they have not been able to reach as intended with program lessons.

Almost all implementers surveyed (98%) reported that their students receiving in-person instruction were invited to participate in the *Partners in Prevention* program, and 57% reported that their students receiving online instruction were invited to participate. Fifteen percent of implementers reported that they would not be able to reach some students as intended because of COVID-19 disruptions. Most often, they were unable to reach students learning virtually (e.g., virtual academy). Other groups included those being home schooled, students who did not log into the virtual lessons, and children who were quarantined. On average, implementers estimated that they were not able to reach 10 students, with a range from 1 to 50.

**Program Delivery and Schedules**

Although program delivery and schedules were affected by COVID-19, for approximately half the grantees, however, implementation schedules were set at the beginning of the year and remained mostly unchanged. Although grantees continued to grapple with the pandemic during the school year, unlike in spring 2020, they were able use the summer to plan for fluctuating circumstances. “The [program developer] came out with some guidelines over the summer that our implementation team looked at,” shared one grant director, “and we were able to figure out ways to adjust the program, so implementation has gone uninterrupted this year.”
Most grantees appeared to begin implementation near the start of the school year, with a handful reporting minor delays as a result of COVID-19. In Year 2, grantees seemed less likely to stagger the rollout of programming to different groups of students, though some grantees did continue to offer programming to different groups of students at different times. For example, one grantee offered programming to half of the students in the fall semester and to the other half in the spring semester.

Implementers also reported on their implementation schedules. By the spring 2021 survey, a majority of implementers (60%) reported having completed program implementation with all of their students, and most of the remaining implementers expected to finish implementing the program by the end of the year. (See the Implementation Quality subsection for a detailed discussion of lesson completion.)

Whether they completed implementation or not, on average, implementers delivered programming over the course of 7.2 months (more than 1 month longer than in Year 1). Seventy-five percent of implementers delivered program lessons over a 6- to 9-month period. Most implementers (62%) implemented program lessons or content weekly during their program implementation time frame. Another 21% delivered lessons 2 or 3 days per week, 9% delivered lessons daily, 7% delivered them every other week, and less than 1% delivered them monthly.

**Implementation Quality**

Implementation quality is a key determinant of program outcomes. For the Partners in Prevention initiative, the concept of implementation quality includes such dimensions as adherence to a curriculum manual, delivery of all program lessons (dose), strong program delivery skills among implementers, and interest and engagement among students.

In their interviews, many grant directors described the quality of program delivery as high. One grant director noted variation across implementers and reflected on the benefits of their decision to transition implementation from the teachers to the counselors. This grant director remarked, "You're getting quality right off the bat because that's what they

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6 See, for example:
went to school for, and that's what they studied for, so there's a really big difference there.”

**Lesson Completion (Dose)**

Grant directors were surveyed about how much of their planned program lessons they expected to complete this year. The 11 grant directors provided estimates for 18 of the 19 Partners in Prevention-supported programs that they were implementing. For nine (50%) of the programs that they were implementing, grant directors expected to complete all the lessons in the 2020–2021 school year; for seven (39%) programs, most of the lessons; and for two (11%) programs, some of the lessons.

Grantees were able to deliver more lessons this year than last year. In this year’s survey, we also asked grant directors about program completion last year. Grant directors reported completing most of the lessons for 56% of programs (10), some of the lessons for 33% of programs (six), and all of the lessons for 11% of programs (two).

We also surveyed implementers about program completion. At the time of the March-April 2021 implementer survey, 60% of implementers reported having completed program implementation with all of their students, 11% had completed all sessions with
some of their students but not with others, and 29% had not yet completed implementing the program with any of their students. These numbers are a significant increase from the first year of implementation, when only 8% of implementers surveyed at this time period had finished implementing programming with all of their students. Finally, at the time of this survey, 7% of implementers had not yet started implementing the program; that number was 3% last year.

Among the 60% of implementers who reported completing implementation at the time of the spring survey, 51% had delivered all of the required sessions to their classes, 36% almost all the required sessions, 8% about half of the required sessions, and 1% a few required sessions. (Most of the remaining 4% were implementing a program that was not lesson based.) Among the 40% of implementers who had not yet finished implementing programming at the time of the survey, 77% expected to finish implementing all program sessions by the end of the 2020–2021 school year. Accordingly, about 61% of implementers will have completed implementing all the required sessions this year and about 83% will have completed almost all the required sessions. (These implementer-level estimates are similar to the above grant director estimates at the program level.)

The survey also asked implementers to look back to the 2019–2020 school year to estimate about how much of their planned program lessons they were able to complete that year, considering the spring 2020 COVID-related school closures. Eighteen percent of implementers reported completing all of the planned lessons, and 42% completed most of the planned lessons.

**Adherence to the Curriculum**

In their interviews, some grant directors reported implementing programs with fidelity. Others reported that the challenges that came as a result of the pandemic affected the availability of resources to implement the programs with fidelity. One grant director shared, “Well, if we’re talking about fidelity of the program, [we were] pretty good except for the period of time that we didn't have devices in every classroom, and [the] period of time where [the students] weren't in classrooms.”

Nearly half of implementers (48%) reported following their program’s curriculum guide very closely. This response did not differ significantly from last year. Another 41% reported following the curriculum guide somewhat closely, sometimes adapting the material as appropriate. Nine percent of implementers reported not following the guide very closely, frequently adapting the material, and 3% reported not using the curriculum guide.
Student Engagement and Understanding

With few exceptions, as they did last year, grant directors gave highly positive reports of student engagement. Several grant directors pointed to various strategies that implementers used to keep students engaged with the curriculum. A grant director shared, "One teacher would even try to make [the program] a little bit more engaging for students, and he'd pretend to do different voices for different characters or ask questions and then pretend to be a student—try to make it a little bit more engaging for the students to watch." Another grant director said, "Well, [the program] lends itself to a lot of engagement, and [the program implementer] would try to ramp that up a little. She's, of course, following the script, but where it says ‘Give an opportunity for one or two students to respond,’ she's making sure there's an opportunity for more students to respond, and [she’s] calling on the virtual students as well as the in-person students."

For in-person learning, most implementers reported strong student engagement in Partners in Prevention programming. As in Year 1, nearly 60% of implementers reported that their students were either almost fully engaged (45%) or fully engaged (14%), and 32% reported that students were somewhat engaged. (On a 1–5 scale, the mean level engagement this year was 3.64, compared to 3.61 last year.) For remote learning of program lessons, only 24% of implementers reported that students were almost fully or fully engaged; 46% reported that students were somewhat engaged, and 30% reported that students were barely or not at all engaged.

As shown below, levels of engagement reported by implementers also varied by student grade level. Implementers serving elementary school students tended to report the highest level of engagement in in-person Partners in Prevention programming, with 74% of implementers reporting that students were almost fully or fully engaged in in-person lessons.
### Student Engagement in In-Person Programming
**Implemeneter Report by Student Grade Level (n = 225)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Student Engagement</th>
<th>Percentage of Implementers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all engaged/bored</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barely engaged</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat engaged</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almost fully engaged</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully engaged</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because of rounding, numbers may not add up to 100%.

By contrast, implementers serving high school students reported the highest level of engagement in remote programming, with 40% of implementers reporting students were almost fully engaged. Reported engagement was most inconsistent for implementers serving middle school students. Eighteen percent of implementers reported that their middle school students were barely or not at all engaged in in-person program learning, and 42% reported that their middle school students were barely or not at all engaged in remote program learning.

### Student Engagement in Remote Programming
**Implemeneter Report by Student Grade Level (n = 109)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Student Engagement</th>
<th>Percentage of Implementers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all engaged/bored</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barely engaged</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat engaged</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almost fully engaged</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully engaged</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because of rounding, numbers may not add up to 100%.

A prerequisite for engagement in the lesson is attendance, which can be challenging with remote learning. Implementers reported that, on average, when lessons were delivered
remotely (whether live/synchronous or asynchronous), about 72% of students attended. This reported average remote attendance decreased with higher grades, from 76% for elementary school to 68% for middle school and 53% for high school.

Most implementers (76%) believed that their students had good (59%) or excellent/complete (18%) understanding of program lessons. This response did not significantly differ from last year.

**Program Adaptation**

Consistent with last year, about a quarter of grant directors surveyed (three of 11) asked their implementers to make changes to one of their Partners in Prevention programs. Two grant directors requested skipping or shortening of program activities or lessons, one requested changing the format of program activities (e.g., substitute discussion for role play, modify worksheets or homework assignments), and one requested wording changes to one lesson for middle school to address concerns about cultural fit with their school.

The implementer survey asked the implementers who reported that they followed their program’s curriculum guide “somewhat closely” or “not very closely” to report what changes they made. As shown in the table below, shortening program content was the most common type of change, followed by repeating, reviewing, and adding content. Although 10% more implementers reported skipping or shortening program activities or lessons this year than last year, this difference approached but did not reach statistical significance ($p = .10$). Among implementers who did not follow the guide closely or only somewhat closely, the top three reasons were

- wanting to increase student engagement (57%),
- wanting to increase student comprehension (40%), and
- not having enough time because of school closures due to COVID-19 (39%).

Two implementers noted making changes because of COVID-19 adaptations—specifically, that some activities were difficult to implement online and that students could not work with partners or move around the room. The table below provides the most common reasons for each type of change that implementers made.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change Made</th>
<th>Percentage of Implementers Making Change&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Top Reasons for Change in Year 2&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skipped or shortened program activities or lessons</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeated or reviewed program activities or lessons</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presented additional activities, lessons, or content that were not part of the program</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed the format of program activities (e.g., substituted discussion for role play, modified worksheets or homework assignments)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed program language or examples</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed the order of activities or lessons</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivered lessons at a frequency different from what program recommends (e.g., implemented lessons on consecutive days instead of weekly)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. <sup>a</sup> Percentages are among implementers indicating that they followed a program guide “somewhat closely” or “not very closely.” They exclude implementers who followed a curriculum guide very closely (48% of implementers), did not use a curriculum guide (3%), or had not yet begun implementation for the year (7%). <sup>b</sup> Percentages are among implementers indicating that they made each specific type of change. Implementers could select more than one reason for making a change. Therefore, within table cells, percentages may sum to more than 100%.
Correlates of Implementation Quality

To further investigate factors related to implementation quality, we conducted multilevel models using implementer survey data. These models accounted for multiple implementers reporting within a school. The following summarizes important factors (implementer survey variables) that showed a significant relationship to each dimension of implementation quality, holding constant selected other school, district, and implementer characteristics. For each quality metric below, we present variables showing a statistically significant positive or negative relationship to that outcome. Implementers’ level of perceived program benefits for students and the number of implementation barriers were factors that cut across quality metrics.

Student Engagement in In-Person Learning
(5-Item Scale; n=188)

Variable(s) showing a positive relationship:

- Implementers’ perception of principal support for SEL and prevention programming (8-item scale). Sample items: “During the 2020-2021 school year, our school’s principal has been…
  - ...A strong advocate for the promotion of social-emotional learning in our school
  - ...Supportive of staff implementing programming to promote social-emotional learning”
- Implementers’ level of enthusiasm for teaching the program (rating from 0-100)
- Implementers’ level of perceived program benefits for students (6-item scale). Sample item: “I believe that if I do a good job teaching [PROGRAM], the students I teach will have better social and emotional skills”
- Implementers’ years of teaching or facilitating experience in their career
- Serving elementary school students

Variable(s) showing a negative relationship:

- Having a greater number of implementation barriers on a frequent basis
Student Engagement in Remote Learning  
(5-Item Scale; n=99)

Variable(s) showing a positive relationship:

• Implementers’ level of perceived program benefits for students (6-item scale)  
• Implementers’ years of teaching or facilitating experience in their careers

Variable(s) showing a negative relationship:

• Having a greater number of implementation barriers on a frequent basis

In addition, perceived principal support showed a positive, marginally statistically significant relationship. (The sample size of implementers reporting on remote learning was relatively small.)

Student Understanding  
(5-Item Scale; n=232)

Variable(s) showing a positive relationship:

• Implementers’ level of perceived program benefits for students (6-item scale)  
• Implementers’ confidence in their ability to implement the program well (4-item self-efficacy scale)

In addition, having a greater number of implementation barriers showed a marginally statistically significant negative relationship to student understanding.

Adhering to the Curriculum Guide  
(4-Item Scale; n=210)

Because the Conscious Discipline program does not have a lesson-based curriculum, we have excluded it from the models of adhering to the curriculum guide and completing all lessons.

Variable(s) showing a positive relationship:

• Implementers’ level of enthusiasm for teaching the program (rating from 0-100)

Variable(s) showing a negative relationship:

• Having a greater number of implementation barriers
In addition, teaching the program last year showed a marginally statistically significant negative relationship to level of adherence to the curriculum guide.

To look more closely at implementers with the highest levels of adherence, we also examined factors associated with following the curriculum guide “very closely” compared to following it less closely (i.e., somewhat closely, not very closely, or not at all).

- Implementers’ level of perceived program benefits for students was strongly positively associated with following the curriculum guide very closely, whereas teaching the program last year and having a greater number of barriers were negatively related to following the guide very closely.

**Completing All the Lessons with All Classes**

This quality metric applies to those who completed implementation. The sample size for this outcome was smaller (n=125), limiting power to detect statistically significant relationships.

*Variable(s) showing a positive relationship:*

- Serving middle school students

*Variable(s) showing a negative relationship:*

- Reporting time as a frequent barrier

**Other Relationships: Implementer Self-Efficacy**

(*4-Item Scale; n=211*)

Finally, we also examined factors associated with implementers’ confidence in their ability to implement the program well.

*Variable(s) showing a positive relationship:*

- Implementers’ level of enthusiasm for teaching the program (rating from 0-100)
- Implementers’ level of perceived program benefits for students (6-item scale)

*Variable(s) showing a negative relationship:*

- Having a greater number of implementation barriers
Intervention for Teachers

One of the intended components of *Partners in Prevention* is activities to improve teachers’ social-emotional competence. The grant director survey asked them to report what activities, if any, they implemented.

Four grant directors reported that they had implemented or would be implementing activities during the 2020–2021 school year to specifically improve teachers’ social-emotional competence:

- One grantee organization held live virtual training for staff on building online communities and practicing self-care. The grantee also hosted monthly luncheon seminars and 30-minute after-school workshops on SEL-related topics, provided professional development days for adult SEL workshops, and published staff SEL newsletters starting this school year.

- One grantee organization distributed informational materials to staff on self-care.

- Another grantee organization planned to host a staff webinar related to adult SEL.

Five grantees reported having no activities specifically focused on teachers’ social-emotional competencies (beyond exposure to the *Partners in Prevention* student lessons), and two grantees left the question blank.
Implementation Successes

Navigating implementation during the COVID-19 pandemic was a major feat for all grantees. In their surveys, grant directors listed what they considered to be the greatest accomplishment or success of their Partners in Prevention grant in Year 2, outside of COVID-19. In Year 1, the most common success grant directors reported (50%) was that implementation was happening and going well. Although in Year 2, three (27%) grant directors similarly considered their greatest success to be implementation progress, it was no longer the most common response. **Four (36%) grant directors cited students who put into action the information and skills from Partners in Prevention programming as their greatest success.** These grant directors noted that they had seen this uptake themselves or had been told about it by teachers or parents. One grant director reported seeing positive outcomes in their evaluation data, with students who completed the programming in Year 1 scoring higher on Year 2’s pre-programming assessment. A few grant directors also said that increasing awareness and having organized conversations about SEL were major successes.

In interviews, grant directors shared many program-related accomplishments and the factors that contributed to those accomplishments. **Consistent with the grant director survey, two of the most common examples were that grantees successfully implemented some or all of their selected prevention programs and that they saw positive changes in students’ interaction and behaviors.** One grant director said that not only had the school corporation successfully implemented the program, but also teachers had “taught in every scenario that you could imagine this year,” including virtual, hybrid, and in-person instruction.

Multiple grant directors also observed positive changes in how students interacted and behaved with their peers, teachers, and even at home. “They’re learning. It’s just neat to hear them,” one grant director recounted. “Another third grader was telling her friends, ‘Mom and Dad were arguing about something... and I told them they both needed to do belly breaths’, which is a Second Step strategy. Several relayed similar anecdotes of students using the program-taught skills and language—for example, in solving conflicts or managing their emotions. “They were able to identify, they were able to control, they were able to sense what was going on. They created a safe space; they were good to go.”

Other successes cited by grant directors in their interviews included increasing awareness of and conversations about SEL among implementers, school staff, and parents. Two grant directors linked this heightened awareness to some extent to COVID-19 and school closures. One noted that implementers saw more clearly the
importance of Partners in Prevention programming with kids isolated at home. Another grant director observed, “There have been different ways that we can try to communicate those things to parents... but for them to be able to actually see a lesson that they would've never been able to see because it happens in the classroom, I think was a really unexpected but positive outcome of virtual learning.”

Overall, grant directors attributed these successes to a variety of factors. Implementers played a large role in a program’s success. Two grant directors also noted the importance of implementers’ flexibility, adaptability, and creativity in a year with so much continuous change. Several grant directors mentioned the importance of implementers’ having buy-in and being engaged. One grant director said, “The teachers that teach it believe in it and really enjoy the curriculum. And that's huge because that means it's being delivered with authenticity and passion that you want.” Some implementers seemed to improve with each experience and practice and some appeared to engage more fully after seeing positive changes in the students.

Two grant directors described the importance of transparency and setting expectations with implementers early, even before starting the program, so that implementers understand very clearly what is being asked of them. Grant directors also described a few different successful strategies to increase buy-in, focused on peer encouragement, such as the use of teacher champions and coaches, as well as newsletters with articles from fellow teachers about the importance of SEL.

Grant directors also identified characteristics of programs and implementation approaches that they thought facilitated success. Several grant directors said that a set schedule of implementations and time for implementation supported consistent implementation, especially as implementation modes changed. “Our curriculum director... made a fantastic decision before the school year started that we built in SEL time in all the schools, from elementary to middle school, so that the implementers had this consistent time. And it was built in the schedules whether we were at home or then if we were to come back, or we had a hybrid model, and we've actually had all three.” Other facilitators or implementation that grant directors noted were easy-to-implement programs and support from the program developer.
Implementation Challenges

Grant Director Reports

Challenges Related to COVID-19

Grant directors were asked, for each program their sites implemented, to what extent a set of issues posed a barrier to implementation in a COVID-19 environment. The issues that were most commonly reported to be moderate or major barriers to implementation were the increased time demands placed on teachers and implementers, teacher or implementer stress, student stress, students’ absence from online or remote learning (unrelated to internet access), and a lack of student engagement in online or remote learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers to Implementation in Context of COVID-19</th>
<th>Number of Programs (n = 18)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not a Barrier/Minor Barrier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/implanter stress</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ absence from online/remote learning (unrelated to internet access)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased time demands placed on teachers/implanter</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student stress</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of student engagement in online/remote learning</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools’ prioritization of academic subjects</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Periodic school closures</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of online/remote lesson materials for the program</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The program does not fit well with online/remote learning</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ lack of internet access at home</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementers’ lack of experience or confidence teaching the program virtually</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of online/remote data collection materials for the program</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of teacher/implanter buy-in and engagement with SEL/prevention</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many of the challenges that grant directors discussed in their interviews in Year 2 were similar to those reported in Year 1 but often exacerbated or complicated further by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In their interviews, just under half of grant directors cited teachers’ being overstretched as a challenge to implementation. Many teachers had additional responsibilities and stress working to adapt to remote learning and other COVID-19 protocols. A couple grant directors described how this especially heavy workload made prevention programming feel even more burdensome to implementers and limited their time and ability to be as involved as had been planned. One grant director noted,

[Teachers] completely flipped everything that they've ever done into a virtual setting, and they're trying to get students engaged and trying to make sure their students are getting what they need for different subjects. Then to also implement the SEL curriculum, too—I know that they were overwhelmed in so many ways.

Grant directors also mentioned time-related challenges. One grant director observed, “The biggest complaint from teachers in general was time, and they just needed more time. I guess that's something that, no matter what, we're unfortunately not able to provide them with.” In both interviews and surveys, grant directors described the continued additional burden on staff to adapt programming to a virtual environment and learn new technologies. In their surveys, a couple grant directors said that school or district leadership did try to provide flexibility in teacher schedules and IT staff support to try to help overcome some of these challenges.

In their interviews, some grant directors described challenges implementing programs virtually that were developed for in-person administration. Two grant directors mentioned not receiving the resources they needed from the program developer to shift to remote learning, whereas another grant director specifically mentioned the helpfulness of the developer and TA provider in getting these resources. A few grant directors also described reduced participation and engagement in remote programming and said that some schools did not have enough devices to provide each student the needed technology to participate from home.

COVID-related implementation challenges continued after in-person instruction resumed. Several grant sites had repeated and unexpected shifts between modes throughout the year. “We get about a 3-day notice of our shift, so we've gone with—Is that the Boy Scout motto, always be prepared? We are definitely living our best Boy Scout life here.” Some grant directors reported that many of the interactive in-person activities could not be implemented or did not work as well while instructors and students were maintaining social distance in the classroom. One director provided an example of a lesson that was designed to include
small group activities where they’re with five or so students where they get to play games and do plays and skits and stuff. We kind of just did a lot of that from the seats. So I would say that that was probably the biggest hurdle that we had to jump, because it was... obviously not as it was intended to be. So I don’t know that it was as effective.

Because of the limited amount of in-person time and social interaction when back in school, at least one grant director reported that implementers felt less inclined to use their online lessons while in school.

Grant directors also discussed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their ability to train implementers. Several grant directors reported either that trainings run by the developer were cancelled or that school staff were not able to attend them because they required travel: “There was no... way for [a new implementer] to travel and get trained in a traditional way with the pandemic and everything else.” In response, some grantees developed alternative training models, including having experienced implementers train new staff. A few grantees reported that despite their efforts, fewer staff than planned were trained in Year 2. Grantee efforts to involve parents have also been reduced or delayed by pandemic restrictions, as in-person events have not been possible.

Some grant directors also discussed challenges with data collection and evaluation related to the COVID-19 pandemic, including cancelled surveys and reduced student participation in remote surveys. Even when data were collected, comparison to previous years to assess program impact may not be possible. One multisite grant director expressed concern about being able to track progress and success:

We didn’t have detentions, and attendance was a really funny thing during the lockdown, and discipline, office referrals, all those sorts of things, obviously were not [the same].... They were things we were going to use to gauge our success, and that was not possible.

Several grant directors worry that losing a year of typical implementation and evaluation data will hurt their chances of sustaining the program internally or receiving additional external funding. One expressed,

[We] were really rolling that first year with our goals. I mean, it was exciting, and then bam, COVID happened. I don’t want to use COVID as an excuse because as just people and humans in general, we have to adapt, but I don’t believe we’re going to get a fair shake on what we can do.

Grant directors were asked what types of supports would be helpful from HFL or technical assistance providers to help their organization implement the Partners in Prevention initiative given these COVID-19-related challenges. Their survey responses
included additional funding or support for technology resources (e.g., computers and hot spots for students), support in getting online and other resources from program developers, and additional data collection process and instrument support (e.g., providing grantees with fillable forms, online pre- and posttests, and more analysis support).

Grant directors expressed appreciation for all the support their schools have received from HFL. Several grant directors asked for clear and consistent communication and guidance regarding Partners in Prevention grant expectations, including reporting requirements and deliverables. Some noted that it is also challenging to introduce new data collection or surveys into a schedule stressed by COVID-19. Grantees requested continued understanding of the challenges and stress currently on schools and implementers that will likely continue.

Financial Challenges

In response to an open-ended survey question about their greatest Year 2 challenge, no grant directors named financial challenges. During their interviews, most grant directors reported no financial limitations this year. Although grant directors generally reported that they were adequately funded by their grants, a few grant directors noted that additional funding could help compensate implementers for program training and delivery and could help fund access to digital and updated versions of program materials.

About half of grant directors noted that the COVID-19 pandemic would affect future prevention programming funding. One public school grant director discussed how the pandemic had reduced the number of students in schools, which may reduce the funding public schools receive and create uncertainty in the budget available for programming and sustainability of Partners in Prevention programming. Conversely, a few grant directors reported that their schools have received or will receive new or additional funding or equipment in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that helped or will help support Partners in Prevention programming.

Policy Challenges

In their surveys, grant directors were presented with a list of seven potential policy challenges and asked to say whether and by how much those challenges limited their organizations’ ability to deliver prevention programming to students.

As shown in the table below, three policy areas were commonly identified as either major or minor barriers, including policies related to school schedules, academic benchmarks and associated time requirements, and limitations on what prevention content can be taught in schools. Overall, fewer than half of grantees reported any given policy barrier,
and a number of grantees reported no or very limited policy barriers in their interviews. Grant directors were also more likely to report that policies were minor barriers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Barrier</th>
<th>Number of Grantees</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policies mandating school schedules (e.g., start/end dates, start/end times)</td>
<td>Major Barrier</td>
<td>Minor</td>
<td>No Barrier</td>
<td>Don't Know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that limit the amount of time available for prevention programs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies that limit what prevention content can be taught in schools</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies mandating academic activities/benchmarks that, in turn, limit the</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amount of time available for prevention programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies that allow individual students (or their parents) to opt out of</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prevention programming</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies that restrict what data can be collected or used for program</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monitoring and evaluation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies that limit administrators’ ability to require teacher involvement</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in prevention programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies that limit ability to apply for, request, or use funding for</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prevention programming</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Implementer Reports**

Implementers also provided information on challenges. In their survey, they responded to a list of potential challenges, reporting whether each had interfered with their ability to implement program sessions. As shown in the graph below, more than half of implementers experienced challenges with not having enough time, having students who were not engaged or interested in sessions, implementing activities in a remote setting, needing to prioritize academic subjects, and having other more pressing demands during session time. Almost a quarter of implementers reported having to prioritize academic subjects as often being an issue. A subset of items, marked with an
Items marked with an asterisk were also asked in Year 1.

However, when the implementer survey asked respondents to report their greatest challenge, almost half of the implementers expressed that there was insufficient time to deliver curricula to students, particularly during a hybrid learning environment that often limited the amount of time teachers had with students.

To address this time-related challenge, some implementers integrated Partners in Prevention lessons with other parts of the school curriculum, used a flexible implementation schedule (e.g., adjusting the day of the week of implementation as needed), or shortened lessons or split them up into multiple parts.

The other common challenge reported was low student engagement, particularly during virtual and hybrid implementation. Implementers addressed this challenge by supplementing activities with a variety of different virtual engagement methods, including chat, e-mail, discussions, and written exercises to increase privacy while students were home. Implementers reported significant challenges related to having a classroom with both in-person and virtual students. Some implementers implemented with the remote students separately or excluded those students from the programming. Some other implementers who did include students in different modes reported very specifically calling on both students in the classroom and those online when asking questions. To increase student engagement and understanding in all modes, implementers also
reported changing the given language, providing personal and real-life examples, and building in rewards for participation.

Only about 17% of implementers reported bringing their greatest challenge to their Partners in Prevention grant director, down from 31% in Year 1. About half of implementers who reported bringing their greatest challenge to their grant director answered the subsequent question about how the grant director may have addressed the challenge. Implementers generally reported that their grant director was supportive. Almost half (11) indicated that they generated a solution with their grant director, six did not indicate if the issues was resolved, four described supportive conversations that resulted in, essentially, encouragement to keep trying (e.g., to address time-related issues), and four indicated that there was no real solution. In these last four cases, implementers typically indicated that the issue was out of the grant directors’ control. For example, implementers reported that their grant director could not control social distancing guidelines or change their schedule and academic time requirements.
This section provides preliminary findings for outcome data for the first year of implementation of *Partners in Prevention*. As discussed in the Methodology section, very limited outcome data were available in the first year. In addition, with COVID-19-related disruptions, most grantees were not able to complete program implementation as planned in the first year.

**Student Outcomes**

**Adapting to COVID-19 Schooling Disruptions**

The grant director and implementer surveys asked respondents for their perceptions of the extent to which the *Partners in Prevention*-supported curricula helped their students adapt to COVID-related schooling disruptions, such as learning from home. Over half of implementers surveyed (56%) reported that the curricula helped to a moderate (28%), small (25%), or major extent (4%). Eight percent did not think that the program helped students adapt to COVID-19 disruptions, and over one-third (36%) of implementers reported that they did not know. Grant directors reported similar perceptions: 64% reported that the *Partners in Prevention*-supported curricula helped their students adapt to COVID-related schooling disruptions, and 36% reported that they did not know.

**Grantee-Collected Data (for 2019–2020 School Year)**

As noted in the Methodology section, this year three grantees submitted outcome data that they collected for the 2019–2020 school year—the first year of program implementation. For the student outcomes of curriculum knowledge and social-emotional skills, these grantees submitted pre- and posttest summary statistics for five schools. For attitudes toward substances, the grantees submitted pre- and posttest summary statistics for three schools.

These outcome data come from three programs: Botvin LifeSkills, Too Good for Drugs, and Too Good for Violence. Grant directors estimated that they completed most but not all of the lessons for Botvin LifeSkills, most but not all of the lessons for Too Good for Drugs, and most or all of the lessons for Too Good for Violence.

**Curriculum Knowledge**

Overall, the five schools showed an average score increase of 16 points; this change is marginally statistically significant ($p = .05$). The graph below displays the percentage change in student curriculum knowledge from pretest to posttest by school. (Each bar represents a school.) For example, if a school had an average pretest score of 50 and an average posttest score of 75, we would say their student curriculum knowledge scores improved 50%.
The statistical power to detect differences is limited by the relatively small number of schools. In addition, there was considerable variation within classes in the students’ changes in scores, reflecting variability in the degree of learning. Grantees can also use the pre- and posttest information that they collect to identify areas where a significant number of students may need additional instruction or reinforcement.

The changes in scores also varied considerably by school. Note that in the school with the smallest change in score, the students had an unusually high pretest score; the grant director reported that the students in that school had had recent exposure to some substance use prevention material before the program started.

**Social-Emotional Skills and Attitudes Toward Substances**

We also examined changes in pre- and posttest scores for social-emotional skills and favorable or unfavorable attitudes toward substances. We did not find any statistical difference in these scores for the first year of program implementation.

For social-emotional skills, the pre- and posttest scores for five schools showed an average increase of 0.7%, which was not statistically significant. Schools did vary significantly in their scores. For favorable or unfavorable attitudes toward substances, the pre- and posttest scores for three schools had an average, nonsignificant, increase of 1.6% in favorable attitudes toward substances.
Starting in fall 2021, grantees will provide RTI with summary statistics from their Year 2 data collections. For domains with sufficient data, RTI will examine changes from Year 1 to Year 2.

**School-Level Administrative Data**

RTI obtained school-level administrative data for 15 variables related to student achievement, behavior, and standardized testing. We examined trends for the 5 years before *Partners in Prevention* implementation among schools served by *Partners in Prevention*, as well as in Madison County schools. Because of COVID-19 disruptions, not all outcomes had data available for the 2019–2020 school year. The latest available data for attendance rates, ISTEP grades 3–8, ISTEP grade 10, IREAD, SAT performance, and ACT performance are from the 2018–2019 school year, and thus the results are the same as those found in the *Partners in Prevention* Year 1 Annual Report and are not reported here.

For the outcomes for which 2019–2020 data were available (graduation rates, grade retention, excused/unexcused absences, disciplinary data, and dropout data), the change between baseline (defined as the 2018–2019 school year) and the first follow-up time point was assessed by calculating the difference score from baseline to follow-up and regressing the value on the baseline score, school type (elementary or secondary), and whether or not the given school was participating in *Partners in Prevention*.

As seen in the table, from 2018–2019 to 2019–2020, rates for graduation, grade retention, out-of-school suspensions, and yearly and cohort dropouts decreased for both *Partners in Prevention* and comparison schools. The difference between the two groups in the drop was nonsignificant. Rates of unexcused absences decreased in schools served by *Partners in Prevention* at a greater rate than in comparison schools, at a marginally significant level ($p = .08$). Rates of excused absences and in-school suspensions remained stable for *Partners in Prevention* schools from 2018–2019 to 2019–2020 and did not statistically differ from those in Madison County.

The table also shows small line graphs of trends from the 2014–2015 to the 2019–2020 school years. Schools served by *Partners in Prevention* are represented by a solid line; Madison County schools are represented by a dashed line. The red portion of each line represents the change from 2018–2019 to 2019–2020 that was tested for this report.

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7 Note: The ISTEP and IREAD tests were cancelled in the 2019–2020 school year because of COVID-19.
### Monitoring Outcome Trends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Change From 2018–2019 to 2019–2020 School Year</th>
<th>Mini Graph, 2014–2015 to 2019–2020 School Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Achievement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation</td>
<td>Rates decreased for both groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade retention</td>
<td>Decreased for both groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Behavior</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excused absences</td>
<td>Did not change for either group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unexcused absences</td>
<td>Decreased for both groups. Schools served by Partners in Prevention decreased at a greater rate than comparison schools, at a marginally significant level (p = .08).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-school suspension</td>
<td>Rates remained stable for Partners in Prevention schools and decreased for comparison schools, but the difference between groups was not statistically significant.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-school suspension</td>
<td>Rates decreased for both groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expulsion*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School dropout (cohort)</td>
<td>Rates decreased for both groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School dropout (annual)</td>
<td>Rates decreased for both groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Very few expulsions were reported for both Partners in Prevention and comparison schools. Because of this data sparseness, significance testing was not possible for this outcome.

Schools in both La Porte and Madison Counties showed improvements in many, but not all, student outcomes during the 2019–2020 school year. Some outcomes, such as decreases in rates of out-of-school suspensions, were likely influenced by spring 2020 COVID-19-related school closures.
During this early stage of the initiative, it is not surprising to see an overall lack of difference between La Porte and Madison Counties’ schools in terms of outcomes from administrative data. This was the first year of implementation, and with the interruption of COVID-19, most grantees were not able to finish delivering all the program lessons.

Moreover, indicators of program effects may increase as students are exposed to the programs over multiple years; many grantees serve multiple grades. In addition, grantees are focusing most on elementary school students, followed by middle school students. To see overall effects on high school outcomes, such as graduation rates, we may need to wait for more program participants to reach high school grades.

For the next evaluation report, Year 3, RTI will be able to examine changes in administrative data from Year 1 to Year 2. As with this report, we will compare patterns before and after the start of Partners in Prevention and with Madison County comparison schools. COVID-19, of course, also influenced school practices and student outcomes behaviors in Year 2 and will continue to be a limiting factor for assessing outcomes.

**School Outcomes**

**Programs Embedded in Schools**

The evaluation examined multiple facets of how Partners in Prevention programs were embedded in schools. These included education and involvement of non-implementing staff in programming. In their surveys, grant directors reported on the school staff, beyond implementers, who participated in program training. They also reported on staff who did not participate in training but received information about program content or messages. Nearly half of grant directors (46%) reported that they trained at least some non-implementing staff, and 73% reported that they shared program messages with non-implementing staff during the 2020–2021 school year. One grantee noted that the self-administered program training was available to all teachers, and another provided all district staff with access to SEL workshops and newsletters. Two other grantees said that they did not provide formal training last year—in one case because of COVID-19 and in the other because their program certification is still valid. Three fewer grant directors reported training any non-implementing staff this year than last year, whereas one more grant director shared program messages with non-implementing staff.

As shown in the table on the next page, grantees were most likely to educate non-implementing teachers; school administrators; and school board members, trustees, or superintendents about Partners in Prevention programming. One grantee expanded to providing training to bus drivers. No grantees reported training or providing program information to guidance counselors, school psychologists, coaches, custodial staff, or nurses.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Non-Implementing Staff</th>
<th>Number of Grantees</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers not implementing program, school librarian*</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School administrators (e.g., principal, head of school)</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School board members, trustees, superintendent</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical or secretarial staff, school aides</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus drivers</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School caseworkers or social workers</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance counselors, school psychologists</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service providers for students with disabilities (e.g., speech or physical therapist)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food service staff</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaches</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Custodial staff</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School nurses or nurses in school-based clinic</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*According to the 2021 survey, grantees did not train or share program content with librarians.

Through their surveys, grant directors also reported on parent involvement in *Partners in Prevention*. As shown in the table below, compared with last year, parental involvement notably increased. This year, 64% of grant directors (seven of 11) reported that parents provided positive feedback about program implementation and 27% (three) grant directors reported that parents participated in planning for *Partners in Prevention*. In addition, for 67% of the programs implemented, grant directors reported that on two or more occasions this year, their schools provided parents with information and activities to reinforce the program at home. For another 22% of programs, grant directors said that schools have not yet provided this information to parents but will do so at least once during the program this year. Finally, for one program, one grant director reported that schools do not provide this information to parents, and another grant director did not know. In total, for 89% of programs this year (similar to last year), grant directors reported that they have shared or will be sharing program information.
Implementers also responded to a series of questions about the degree to which Partners in Prevention programming was embedded in their schools.

- Fifty-eight percent of implementers (compared with 65% last year) reported that program materials or messages were often (28%) or occasionally (30%) incorporated into the school environment, such as in posters or morning announcements.

- Almost two-thirds of implementers (64%, compared with 61% last year) reported that program concepts or messages had been incorporated into their school’s school-wide expectations. Just over one-quarter of implementers (28%) said that they did not know whether this had happened.

- Most implementers (77%) reported often (29%) or occasionally (48%) referencing program content or messages when interacting with students outside of program implementation; this number was about the same as last year’s.

Implementers reported on their involvement of other school staff in Partners in Prevention programming. Two-thirds of implementers (66%, compared with 76% last year) reported that other staff members assisted them with program delivery. Most commonly, this staff member was a guidance counselor (assisting 55% of implementers), followed by a school social worker (assisting 10% of implementers).

More than two-thirds of implementers (69%, compared with 61% last year) reported mentioning school support services during program delivery: school health services (35%), school mental health or counseling services (59%), or drug and alcohol counseling services at school (10%).

In their interviews, more grant directors than in the previous year described ways that they were embedding prevention programs into their schools. Several grant directors reported that teachers were more receptive to programming this year than last year because they had more awareness of the program and could see the potential benefits to classroom management. One grant director commented,
Last year the teachers—it was definitely something different, something new, but... a lot of them... bought into it and did what they were supposed to do.... I think the buy-in and the success will only grow because you realize it's not really another thing that's being added to your plate.

Another grant director shared, “[Teachers] were appreciative of the curriculum in general because I think that it’s something that they know is going to help them in their classrooms.” Other grant directors communicated that some of their teachers were too stressed and overwhelmed with remote learning to fully buy in to embedding programming.

One grant director had success with incorporating some of the lessons at the high school level, specifically teaching the benefits of meditating and focusing on breathing:

   I think that's something that a lot of the student service staff have been trying to work on with the students. When we see our high-anxiety and high-stress students come in, [we] have those conversations with them on their coping mechanisms and what they're doing. And if they don't mention their breathing or whatever, that's something that we've tried to start working on with them because that's something that they can obviously do in school to bring those stress and anxiety levels down.

Overall, grant directors reported that continued engagement with teachers and staff about the programming facilitated buy-in from teachers to embed programming.

**Sustainability**

*For the purposes of this evaluation, sustainability was considered a component of programs' being embedded in schools.* In their survey, grant directors responded to questions about their involvement with nine different facets of sustainability planning. For each they responded on the following scale:

- No discussion (0)
- Limited discussion with no clear plan (1)
- Discussion with tentative plan (2)
- Discussion with firm plan (3)
- Executed plan (4)

As shown in the table below, grantees’ sustainability planning often fell between the stages of “limited discussion with no clear plan” and “discussion with tentative plan.” The overall mean sustainability planning score was 1.5—about the same as it was last year. For three areas of sustainability planning, grantees, on average, had at least a “discussion with a tentative plan” (i.e., a mean score somewhere between 2 and 3). Grantees varied in their progress in making plans for sustainability.

This year, grantees have given more attention to key stakeholders. Seven grantees held discussions with tentative (three) or firm (four) plans identifying key stakeholders who might support the programs. Eight grantees developed tentative (three) or firm (five)
plans related to how the programs align with the mission and goals of potential future stakeholders. Four grantees held discussions local leaders with a tentative (two) or firm (two) plan as to how the programs relate to the community’s overall prevention needs.

In the area of funding, nine grantees have held discussions with a tentative (six) or firm (three) plan to determine the funds needed to sustain the *Partners in Prevention* programs. Six grantees had discussions with a tentative (four) or firm plan (two) related to making the programs a line-item budget of their school corporation, school, or community. Finally, five grantees held discussions with a tentative (three) or firm (one) plan or executed a plan (one) to secure funds by applying for additional grants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sustainability Planning Component</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Determine how the program aligns with the mission and goals of potential future stakeholders</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determine the funds needed to sustain <em>Partners in Prevention</em> programs</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify key stakeholders who might support the program</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make the program a line item in the budget of your organization, schools, or community</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure funds by applying for additional grants</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present outcome data to potential stakeholders (e.g., school board members, principals, parents)</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss with local leaders how the program relates to the community’s overall prevention needs</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure funds from sources other than grants</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turn over ownership of the program to the community, schools, or other organizations</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Items were scored as No discussion = 0, Limited discussion with no clear plan = 1, Discussion with tentative plan = 2, Discussion with firm plan = 3, and Executed plan = 4. The number of grant directors responding to these items ranged from 9 to 11; the percentages are among those responding to each item.

Moving into their second year of funding, grant directors are thinking more about plans for sustainability than they were in the initial grant year. Most grant directors have plans to sustain the *Partners in Prevention* programming beyond the grant funding period. As one grant director stated,

> It's not like we’re trying to buy curriculum for thousands of students. We’re a small place and we can afford to buy the curriculum we need for those. So if we have trained teachers, and if we have curriculum, we can go forward in the mode that we're using right now without tremendous financial outlay.
In contrast, some of the grant directors expressed concerns with securing funding to continue programming. Specifically, one grant director mentioned that their organization would not be able to afford a transition to a digital format that was recently created for Second Step.

Another essential component of sustainability, as cited by several of the grant directors, is getting buy-in from key stakeholders. Several grant directors reported that having buy-in from policy makers is important for sustainability because those individuals are in the position to de-prioritize programs like Partners in Prevention. One grant director expressed frustration:

We all know that kids got to be ready to learn and that’s where SEL comes in. But you have state mandates and other things that—sometimes well-intentioned legislators focus on certain things that they really don’t understand because they don’t live it and breathe it. They just take somebody else’s word or interpretation.

### Classroom Climate

The implementer survey presented implementers with a series of statements about the general climate of their classrooms, not just during Partners in Prevention programming. Classroom climate dimensions included students’ enjoyment of their schoolwork, relations among students, and degree of difficulty mastering the schoolwork. Implementers responded on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). As shown in the table below, on average, implementers agreed that their students were satisfied, were neutral to slightly positive about how well their students got along, and they disagreed that students had difficulty with their schoolwork. **One classroom climate component changed from last year—the peer relations score significantly improved (p < .001).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom Climate Component</th>
<th>Sample Item</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student satisfaction</td>
<td>Students are happy with the class.</td>
<td>3.81 (agree)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer relations</td>
<td>All students in the class get along well with each other.</td>
<td>3.01 (neither agree nor disagree)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom difficulty</td>
<td>Only the brightest students can do all the work.</td>
<td>2.33 (disagree)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scores: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.
Summary of Implementation Lessons Learned across Data Sources

The data presented in this report provide insights that can be applied by Partners in Prevention grantees, HFL, and other organizations engaging in school-based SEL and prevention efforts. The following presents some highlights of lessons learned this year.

In Year 2, grantees made considerable gains in implementation compared with Year 1. In spite of ongoing COVID-related challenges, grantees successfully implemented Partners in Prevention programs, typically adapting implementation to multiple formats, from virtual to hybrid to in-person. Grant directors and implementers continue to report strong leadership support, and grantees reported increased involvement of their leadership in Year 2. On average, implementer enthusiasm and outcome expectancies continue to remain high, similar to Year 1. Along with the important progress achieved in Year 2, there remains room for growth.

Even with COVID-19 disruptions in Year 2, grantees sharply increased levels of program completion compared with Year 1. When implementers were surveyed this spring, 60% had already completed program implementation. Just over half of those who completed implementation were able to deliver all the required lessons. Barring major COVID-19 disruptions, one area for growth next year would be to continue to increase the proportion of implementers who are able to complete all of the lessons.

Adherence to the curriculum guide remains an area for improvement. About half of implementers reported following the curriculum guide very closely. Most commonly, implementers skipped or shortened portions of lessons to save time, especially given school closures for COVID-19, or to increase student engagement. In Year 2, implementers also had to make adaptations for the COVID-19 context.

Although student engagement during in-person learning was generally strong, many implementers still reported challenges with engagement, especially among secondary school students learning in person and elementary and middle school students learning remotely. Many implementers could benefit from technical assistance and strategies to increase student engagement while maintaining fidelity to the curriculum.

Other common challenges impeded implementation. In Year 2, implementers still faced frequent challenges, including lack of time and the need to prioritize academic subjects. Of course, implementers also reported distinct challenges posed by COVID-19, including difficulties of implementing program activities remotely, more limited time with students during hybrid learning, and implementer and student stress. In Year 2, almost all grantees reported receiving technical assistance to address implementation challenges.
LESSONS LEARNED

Increased training in Year 3 could help improve implementation quality. COVID-19 interfered with training of implementers in Year 2. Three grantees were not able to provide any training and most of the other grantees only provided training to new implementers. With COVID-19 constraints, grantees relied more heavily on virtual training and self-study, while a couple of grantees tried to develop more internal training capacity.

Implementation oversight increased in Year 2 and can be further strengthened. More grantees required implementers to regularly report on implementation in Year 2 than in Year 1 (an increase from 7 to 9 grantees). However, similar to Year 1, 38% of implementers received any feedback on the information that they reported by the time of the survey. On the other hand, among implementers who were observed, a significantly higher proportion reported receiving feedback in Year 2 than in Year 1. Increased communication and feedback can help implementers address barriers to completing lessons.

Implementer attitudes, including how they believe the programs benefit their students, are significantly related to implementation quality. Continue helping staff increase their understanding of how their implementation of SEL and substance use prevention programs benefits their students, schools, and community.

Sustainability planning is a major area for growth and technical assistance for Year 3. On average, the level of sustainability planning (mean score) remains about the same as Year 1. Grantees’ sustainability planning typically fell between “limited discussion with no clear plan” and “discussion with tentative plan.” However, grantees have made increased efforts related to identifying stakeholders and program alignment with their missions.

Additional Lessons Learned from Grant Director Interviews

In their interviews, grant directors shared the advice they would give to (hypothetical) new Partners in Prevention grantees.

Planning

As grant directors responded to questions on how the program has progressed, they reflected on the components that they considered to be valuable in the planning and pre-implementation process. Several grant directors stressed the importance of assembling a supportive team whose members are flexible, are willing to share responsibilities, offer diverse perspectives, and are led by a dedicated leader. Another component that two grant directors identified as critical for program success was being intentional in selecting a program that best meets the particular needs of their school. As one grant director said,
I think you need to know your student demographics and your teachers and staff. I think that you have to have a very intentional plan and fully understand what the curriculum can bring to the table and then what it's going to take to implement that curriculum successfully.

To identify the best program fit for their school, several grant directors suggested reaching out to people who have experience in and have been successful with program implementation. When asked about what advice they would give to other schools implementing these programs, one grant director stated,

I would definitely say, first of all, is meet with people that have already done it. Learn from our successes, learn from our failures, learn from our challenges that we have.

**Getting Buy-In from Key Stakeholders**

Several grant directors recommended securing buy-in from teachers, staff, school leadership, and parents before implementing. These key stakeholders can facilitate program uptake, participation, and sustainability.

One grant director reflected on the school’s decision to have less staff involvement:

We didn't have as many people involved in evaluating other programs and stuff like that [as] maybe we should have. We had teachers involved, but not all of the teachers. Maybe we should have had all of the teachers as part of the conversation. Maybe we should have done it by grade level or something like that. But we really wanted to have something that we were doing uniformly school-wide.

Consistent with Year 1, two grant directors highlighted the benefits of including a stipend for implementers to help gain their buy-in and commitment. One grant director mentioned putting more time in the grant for counselors.

Additionally, one grant director mentioned that getting buy-in from principals was beneficial, as the principals were best suited to recommend staff in their school who would be the most effective implementers.

A few grant directors highlighted the importance of gaining buy-in from parents to ensure that program messages delivered at school could be reinforced at home. One grant director shared,

I still think we haven't hit the mark for that parent engagement part. And so I feel that needs to continue on and... needs to remain a priority for next year. If the home and the school are sending the same message and using the similar tools, then that's only going to benefit the kids more.
Using Data

Three grant directors stressed the importance of collecting and using the appropriate data. These data can be used to help inform program process and progress. One grant director offered the following reflection about the use of data:

One of the things that we need to learn more about and do better is just [find] a way to gather meaningful data that goes beyond the anecdotal. And, unfortunately, we’re not in a place where we can be giving advice about that because we haven’t necessarily done that well. But I think we’re wanting to learn more and better ways to do that, and that would be an important feedback loop to have.

The lessons learned in Year 2 of Partners in Prevention can guide quality improvement and inform sustainability efforts on the part of schools, grantees, technical assistance providers, and HFL. These efforts, in turn, may help strengthen the impact of Partners in Prevention on student, teacher, and school outcomes.