Blueprints Promising Programs FACT SHEET

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School Transitional Environmental Program

The School Transitional Environmental Program (STEP) is based on the Transitional Life Events model, which theorizes that stressful life events such as making transitions between schools, places children at risk for maladaptive behavior. Earlier research has shown that, for many students, changing schools leads to poor academic achievement, classroom behavior problems, heightened anxiety, and increases in school absenteeism, all of which may lead to dropping out of school and other behavioral and social problems. By reducing school disorganization and restructuring the role of the homeroom teacher, STEP aims to reduce the complexity of school environments, increase peer and teacher support, and decrease students' vulnerability to academic and emotional difficulties.

Program Targets
STEP best benefits those students at greatest risk for behavioral problems who attend large, urban junior or senior high schools with multiple feeders and which serve predominantly non-white, lower-income students.

Program Content
STEPS's success is achieved through redefining the role of homeroom teachers and restructuring schools' physical settings. Together, these changes increase students' beliefs that school is stable, well-organized, and cohesive.

Students are assigned to homerooms in which all classmates are STEP participants. Teachers in these classrooms act as administrators and guidance counselors, helping students choose classes, counseling them regarding school and personal problems, explaining the Project to parents, and notifying parents of student absences. This increased attention reduces student anonymity, increases student accountability, and enhances students' abilities to learn school rules and exceptions. All Project students are enrolled in the same core classes, which are located close together in the school, to help participants develop stable peer groups and enhance their familiarity with school.

Program Outcomes
Evaluations performed at the end of ninth grade demonstrate that STEP students, compared to control students, display:

- ෮ Decreases in absenteeism and increases in GPA;
- ෮ Stability of self-concept (compared to decreases for control students); and
- ෮ More positive feelings of the school environment, perceiving the school as more stable, understandable, well-organized, involving, and supportive.

Long-term follow-up indicated that STEP students, compared to controls, had:

- ෮ Lower dropout rates (21% versus 43%), and
- ෮ Higher grades and fewer absences in 9th and 10th grades.

Replication carried out in two lower to lower-middle class high schools and three junior high schools showed that STEP students, compared to control students, had:

- ❧ Fewer increases in substance abuse, delinquent acts and depression;
- ❧ Fewer decreases in academic performance and self-concept; and
- ❧ Lower dropout rates.

A replication including students from lower risk backgrounds demonstrated similar results. One year after the program, STEP students, compared to controls, demonstrated:

- ❧ Less self-reported delinquency, depression and anxiety; and
- ❧ Higher self-esteem, academic performance, and school attendance.

References

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