MEMORANDUM November 17, 2022

TO: Najah K. Callander
Executive Director, Family & Community Engagement

FROM: Allison E. Matney, Ed.D.
Executive Officer, Research and Accountability

SUBJECT: **PILOT INTERVENTION TO INCREASE ATTENDANCE AMONG MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRLS AT-RISK OF DROPOUT: A TWO-GROUP PRETEST–POSTTEST QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN**

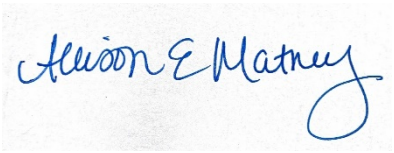
Project inSIGHT, delivered by Girls Inc., is a girl-centered program that uses a three-tiered school-based program delivery model to provide multitiered services (workshops, group mentorship, and one-on-one counseling). The primary purpose of the study was to expand understanding of the effects of female-specific non-academic programming on female truancy rates, behavior, and academic performance compared to female campus peers who did not receive services. Students' eligibility for participation and behavior were measured using data from the Purple system, which is based on attendance, behavior, and teachers' Student Assistance Forms (SAFs). A student color-coded red had seven or more flags, yellow (3–6 flags), and green (0–2 flags). In the 2021–2022 academic year, Project inSIGHT was piloted at Fleming Middle School and Key Middle School. Campus names were masked for the analysis.

Key findings include:

- In the 2021–2022 school year, Project inSIGHT supported 168 girls from Fleming Middle School and Key Middle School.
- A higher proportion of students at Campus 1 (57.6%) compared to Campus 2 (19.4%) were flagged for attendance and behavioral issues, meeting the requirements for intervention.
- Participants at Campus 1 accessed multitiered services (50.8%) and at Campus 2 participants primarily accessed one level of service (51.4%).
- At Campus 1, there were a significant difference in the average absences between Project inSIGHT participants (Mean = 10.2; S.D. = 8.6) and non-participants (Mean = 15.9; S.D. = 13.9) for the 2021–2022 school year ($p < .01$).
- At Campus 2, the mean rate of absences was comparable between participants and their campus peers.
- At Campus 1, a higher percentage of participants met the Approaches Grade Level Standard on the STAAR 3–8 math (67.3%) and reading (72.4%) compared to their campus peers (54.4% and 70.7%, respectively).
- At Campus 2, a lower percentage of participants met the Approaches Grade Level Standard on the STAAR 3–8 math (42.6%) and reading (61.5%) compared to their campus peers (57.7% and 73.5%, respectively).
- At Campus 1, the proportion of participants coded yellow in the Purple system at the start of the program increased one level to green (30.3%) and 15.2 percent of participants coded as red increased two levels to yellow by the end of the program ($p = .01$). There was no statistically significant difference in behavior pre- and post-intervention at Campus 2 ($p = .17$).

- Project inSIGHT participants at Campus 2 did not exhibit positive short-term (from intake to program completion) improvements in the three outcomes examined: (i) behavioral change, (ii) attendance, and (iii) academic performance in reading and math.

Further distribution of this report is at your discretion. Should you have any further questions, please contact me at 713-556-6700.



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Attachment

cc: Max Moll
Cesar Martinez
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ANALYZING DATA, MEASURING PERFORMANCE.

EVALUATION REPORT

BUREAU OF PROGRAM EVALUATION

Pilot Intervention to Increase Attendance among Middle School Girls At-Risk of Dropout: A Two-Group Pretest–Posttest Quasi-Experimental Design

Prepared by Georgia Graham, PhD

Abstract

In the 2021–2022 school year, Project inSIGHT supported 168 girls in 2 middle schools (grades 6–8). The purpose of the study was to expand understanding of the effects of female-specific non-academic programming on female attendance rates, behavior, and academic performance compared to female campus peers who did not receive services. The research found campus-level variation in participant selection, delivery, and outcomes. Campus 1 used a less structured delivery that deviated from the intended delivery model; however, participants included in the program more closely aligned with the targeted population. While Campus 2 closely adhered to the intended program delivery protocols, participants selected for participation were not aligned with project objectives. Over eighty percent of participants at Campus 1 had ten or more absences, compared to forty percent at Campus 2. Project inSIGHT participants at Campus 1 had a significantly higher percentage of students who met or surpassed the Approaches Grade Level Standard on the STAAR Math test compared to non-participants (67.3% vs. 51.4%, respectively). Campus 1 had a significantly lower mean rate of absences at the end of the Project inSIGHT program than their campus peers who did not participate ($m = 10.2$ vs. $m = 15.9$, $p < .01$). Project inSIGHT participants at Campus 2 did not exhibit positive short-term (from intake to program completion) improvements in the three outcomes examined: (i) behavioral change, (ii) attendance, and (iii) academic performance in reading and math.

Introduction

During the 2019–2020 school year in Texas, 1.4 percent of students who dropped out of school did so in the seventh or eighth grade, and 30.4 percent dropped out in grade nine (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2021). One-third of dropouts in grades 7–9 were females. Research has shown gender disparities exist in risk factors associated with school dropout. Therefore, early identification and intervention to address risk factors before high school becomes critical.

Middle school is a critical time in a student's life. Research demonstrates the importance of middle schools in retaining at-risk students (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007; Lee et al., 2018). However, current discussions no longer focus on middle school, there has been a shift in focus on high school, and recently educators have made an argument for pre-kindergarten intervention to avert dropouts (Ehrlich, Gwynne, & Allensworth, 2018). High school dropout culminates in a long-term process of disengagement from school that starts in elementary, with increased tension by middle school, and implosion by grade 9 (Entwisle, Kabbani, & Alexander, 2001; McKee & Caldarella, 2016).

Recognizing the vital role middle schools play in addressing high school dropout rates, the Houston Independent School District (HISD) focused on preventing early dropout among female middle school students. During the 2021–2022 school year, the Project inSIGHT program was piloted at Key Middle School and Fleming Middle School through Girls Inc. of Greater Houston. The Project inSIGHT program aims to prevent dropout among female students in middle school, and ensure participants successfully transition to high school. The purpose of this study is to assess the short-term (from intake to program completion) effectiveness of the Project inSIGHT in improving school attendance, academic performance, emotional efficacy, and self-confidence of female students.

Background

In 1995, the Girls Inc. of Greater Houston was established (Girls Inc. Houston, 2021). The Houston site is part of the national Girls Inc. organization, founded in 1864 to serve girls and young women experiencing upheaval in the aftermath of the Civil War (Girls Inc., 2021). Over time, Girls Inc. and its affiliates adapted to meet the specific environmental challenges facing girls and young women, always working in partnership with schools and communities; and guided by a fundamental belief in the inherent potential of each girl. Today, Girls Inc. continues to be guided by the founding core value of creating a safe gathering place for girls to learn in a shared sisterhood; and a strong premise that each girl can develop their own capacities, self-confidence, and grow up healthy, educated, and independent (Girls Inc., 2021).

Theory of Change

The Girls Inc. model is intended for girls 9–18 years old. The model is based on a learning theory called the experiential learning cycle, which focuses on experiences, discussions, interactive activities, and reflections to help all girls realize their potential and exercise their rights in a girl-centered environment (Girls Inc., 2021; Figure 1). The activities are based on hands-on, girl-centered curriculum designed to be engaging, influential, welcoming, and inclusive. In the learning environment, girls learn life skills by engaging in group activities through role-play, group discussions, problem-solving, group interactions, games, friendly competitions, educational experiences, and field trips (Girls Inc., 2021). Through the Girls Inc. model, girls learn knowledge, skills, and attitudes that can be applied to their lives, and learn how to share those skills with their peers, family members, and teachers.

About Project inSIGHT

Project inSIGHT employs a comprehensive, multi-tiered program to address the needs of girls from 6th through 8th grade at risk for school dropout, ensuring they remain in middle school and continue to high school (Girls Inc. Houston, 2021). The program addresses academic and non-academic risk factors related to school failure and dropout faced by middle school girls. The risk factors include social-emotional learning (SEL) and character education or teaching good characters – such as improving self-esteem, leadership skills, healthy relationships, and substance abuse prevention. In addition to girls at risk of school dropout, any girl interested in the program could request to participate (Girls Inc. Houston, 2021).

Trained Girls Inc. staff facilitate Project inSIGHT activities and discussions with students at their respective campuses. Licensed social workers and a team of graduate-level social work interns support the program implementation (Girls Inc. Houston, 2021). The project uses a three-tiered school-based program delivery model to provide a combined 3 hours of programming per week via:

1. Workshops covering various topics, including anti-bullying, leadership, teamwork, financial literacy, media literacy, and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) to help girls improve communication, form healthy habits, develop interpersonal skills, and increase social-emotional health.
2. Regular small group mentoring sessions with mentors who are part of a professional organization or university group. Mentoring occurs during school or after-school, depending on the program schedule determined by the campus.
3. One-on-one case management services are provided by social workers and social work interns to increase girls' engagement in school and help them make positive decisions. Social workers and interns provide referrals, goal setting, and supportive listening to the students through weekly informal assessments.

Literature Review

Research has explored the causes and consequences of school dropout. The consensus among researchers is that school dropout has clear and measurable adverse consequences for both individuals and society, which include the negative effects on employment, lifetime earnings, and physical health; an increased risk of incarceration; and social costs associated with these outcomes (McKee & Caldarella, 2016; Vaughn et al., 2020).

School dropout is a complex problem with multidimensional individual factors (academic,

cognitive, behavioral, and psychological) that cuts across family and school domains (Entwisle, Kabbani, & Alexander, 2001; Vaughn et al., 2020). Though middle school dropout rates are low, the transition from middle school to high school is not fluid, especially when examined in the context of low school engagement. Early detection and support for students at risk for school dropout become critical (Balfanz, Herzog, Iver, 2007; Vaughn et al., 2020). At the start of the middle grades, many students become disengaged, which reduces the likelihood of graduating (Balfanz, Herzog, Mac Iver, 2007).

School Engagement

Student academic indicators, such as poor grades, test scores, and grade retention in elementary, middle, and high school, are linked to an increased likelihood of high school dropout (Lee-St. John, Walsh, Raczek, Vuilleumier, Foley, Heberle, & Dearing, 2018). However, school engagement is one of the most prevalent constructs associated with school dropout (Teuscher & Makarova, 2018). Indicators of school engagement, such as classroom behavior, perceptions of school belongingness, and extracurricular involvement, are linked to school dropout (Archambault, Janosz, Fallu, & Pagani, 2009). More commonly, truancy is the most common indicator of engagement (e.g., Vaughn, Maynard, Salas-Wright, Perron, & Abdon, 2013; Maynard, Vaughn, Nelson, Salas-Wright, Heyne, & Kremer, 2017). Furthermore, truancy is the most significant problem facing American schools and a global issue (Kethineni et al., 2021). While there is no uniform definition of truancy, common indicators include unexcused (without parent or authority permission) intentional absences from school (Kethineni et al., 2021).

Research on school dropout suggests the decision to drop out of school was not a sudden or immediate choice, but rather the result of a long-term process of withdrawal from school (Teuscher & Makarova, 2018). In looking at the long-term process of dropping out of school, Entwisle, Kabbani, & Alexander (2001), conducted a study on high school dropout rates in Baltimore. The study used odds ratios from univariate logistic regression analyses to predict dropout based on family background, academic performance, parent's attitudes, and student engagement attitudes and behaviors (Entwisle, Kabbani, & Alexander, 2001). They found that high school dropout culminates in a long-term process of disengagement from school that grew in middle school and manifested in grade 9 (Entwisle, Kabbani, & Alexander, 2001). Additionally, school engagement had a stronger effect on high school dropouts in grade 9 than academic performance.

Experiential Learning Cycle

The Girls Inc. model is grounded in theories of experiential learning, with student engagement seen as the cornerstone of the learning cycle. David Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory is concerned with the learner's internal cognitive processes. Kolb (1984) describes learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (McLeod, 2017, p. 3). Effective learning is realized when a person progresses through a cycle of four stages: (i) having a concrete experience followed by (ii) observation of and reflection on that experience, which leads to (iii) the formation of abstract concepts (analysis) and generalizations (conclusions), which are then (iv) used to test the hypothesis in future situations, resulting in new experiences (McLeod, 2017). Burnard (1989) states, "experiential learning is learning through doing [and]… learning through reflecting on the doing… If we are to learn from what we do, we must notice what we do and reflect on it (p. 2)." Building experiential learning theories into activities creates a true learning event. Research has shown an increase in learning when activity-based, hands-on, experiential learning events are used. This is especially true for students with a high risk for school dropout (Beaudin & Quick, 1995).

Research Questions

Prior research links the high rate of dropout in the 9th grade to elementary and middle school engagement, attendance, and academic performance, along with other school and family factors. The overall purpose of this study is to evaluate Project InSight to improve understanding of the effects of female-specific non-academic programming on female truancy rates and academic performance. More specifically, the study evaluates the short-term effectiveness of the program model on participants' attendance compared to their female campus peers who did

not receive services. An equally important purpose was to assess the fidelity of program implementation: the extent to which the intervention-as-delivered matched the intervention-as-planned in terms of adherence, quality of delivery, and exposure.

Through a process and outcome evaluation, the research aims to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent was Project inSIGHT delivered as planned at HISD pilot campuses?

2. Was there a significant difference in academic performance and attendance of students after participation in the program?

High school dropout is a long-term process of withdrawal from school that begins in elementary and middle school due to several factors, including attendance and academic performance. Attending school is the logical precondition for classroom learning (Cook, Dodge, Gifford, & Schulting, 2017). Project inSIGHT aims to improve attendance and academic performance among middle school students by building a sense of belonging.

Methods

The study employed a quasi-experimental design with an intervention group and a control group.

Sample

The sample consisted of female students from the two HISD middle schools where the program was piloted during the 2020–2021 school year. In 2021–2022, Project inSIGHT supported 168 girls in 2 middle schools (grades 6–8), with female students in the same schools serving as a comparison group (**Table A1**, p. 14).

Data Source

The research uses a triangulation approach to data collection to increase the credibility and validity of the research findings (Noble & Heale, 2019). Most studies reviewed here assessed the continuation of multiple local projects at their original sites using an organizational unit of analysis. Several data sources were used: workshop observation (n = 4), survey instrument for each tier of service (n = 3), record review of program and assessment data, semi-structured interviews (n = 3), and focus groups with program staff and campus staff (n = 2). The data collected provided an understanding of the program implementation: identification, selection, recruitment, and delivery.

Girls Inc. of Houston provided the data on the program hours, including the frequency of contact hours and services accessed for each participant. Academic assessment data included students' 2021-2022 State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) for math and reading. STAAR data was retrieved from Cognos, a data querying software. The STAAR is an annual state-mandated criterion-referenced assessment that measures students' academic performance and achievement. The first administration and first-time testers were used in this study. Spring 2021 reading and math results were used as a baseline measure.

Measures

Student demographics. Students were coded as "1" if economically disadvantaged, received free and reduced lunch (SES), special education, emergent bilingual, and gifted/talented. Race/ethnicity was coded as "1" for Black, "2" Hispanic, and "3" non-Hispanic other. Each student was coded as '1' for those who participated in the intervention program and '0' for the control group.

Behavior change. Participants' change in behavior was measured using two factors: (i) *Perceived self-efficacy,* which refers to confidence in their ability to exercise control of their motivation, behavior, and social environment (*e.g., I have healthy coping skills in my life*); and (ii) *perceived self-confidence, an* attitude of acceptance and trust in their skills and abilities, having a sense of control over one's life, and building support needed to succeed (e.g., *I am confident in myself*) (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997).

Also, students' behavior was measured based on data from the Purple system. In the Purple system, students were flagged for attendance, behavior, and teachers submitted Student Assistance Forms (SAFs) every three weeks. A student color-coded red had seven or more flags, yellow (3–6 flags), and green (0–2 flags). Those coded red or yellow in the Purple system were eligible to participate in Project inSIGHT. By the end of the program, it was expected that

participants' behavior would improve by one color level. For example, a student coded as red at the start of the program should move to yellow by the end of the program, and those coded as yellow at the beginning of the program should move to green by the end of the program (red → yellow, yellow → green).

Statistical analyses

Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows, Version 28.0.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL). The difference between the treatment group and control group demonstrated the effectiveness of the intervention compared to no intervention. Pearson chi-square analyses for categorical variables and independent sample t-tests for continuous data were conducted to test baseline group differences on measures of perceived self-confidence and perceived self-efficacy variables, attendance, and academic performance.

Limitations

One limitation was the possible selection bias for program participation. The program criteria were that Tier 2 and Tier 3 students in need of support would participate in the program. The recruitment criterion was self-selection; all female students at the campus were allowed to enroll in the program, which increased the likelihood that those self-selected may not have been the target population for the intervention.

Results

To what extent was Project inSIGHT delivered as planned at HISD pilot campuses?

The research draws on the program logic model, with linkages built between program activities and outcomes to assess implementation fidelity (Emshoff, 2008). Implementation fidelity is conceptualized as the extent to which an intervention was implemented as designed based on the activities (Carroll, Patterson, Wood, Booth, Rick, & Balain, 2007). Implementation fidelity is described and defined in the literature in terms of five components: (i) adherence to program design, (ii) quality of delivery, (iii) participant responsiveness, and (iv) exposure (Carroll et al., 2007).

i. *Was the program delivered as intended?*

In terms of adherence, the delivery protocol, as well as the recruitment and selection strategies, were modified from the initial design to meet campus needs. The planned identification and referral process was initially based on campus referrals of students to Girls Inc. programming based on PurpleSENSE (Purple) data. Purple is an online data management system that helps campuses coordinate mental health and social resources for students (ProUnitas, 2022). The Project inSIGHT program was intended to provide a combined 3 hours of programming per week, consisting of workshops, mentoring sessions, and one-on-one case management. The targeted students were those students coded as red or yellow in the Purple system (Tier 2 and Tier 3 students).

Selection

Girls Inc. staff delivered informational presentations at both campuses to ensure all girls were aware of the program and provided the opportunity to sign-up. Girls were chosen from among those who self-selected to participate in the program. This selection strategy was included to avoid any potential stigma associated with participation in the program by singling out girls with academic or behavioral challenges. As one interviewee stated, “when a student is referred to the program, it suggests there is an issue.”

From the girls who self-identified, at Campus 1, priority was given to at-risk students who displayed behavioral problems in class or personal problems at home, followed by Tier 2 and Tier 1 girls who were doing well academically but needed to “let her light shine.” There were over 30 girls who signed up at each grade level. Campus staff selected from those who self-identified or based on issues identified by teachers on the Student Assistance Form (SAF). At Campus 2, Tier 2 students were prioritized; they are at risk for developing more serious problem behavior. To ensure a balance, Tier 1 students who self-identified were also selected to participate. Only two Tier 3 students at Campus 2 participated in the program at the request of Project inSIGHT staff.

Based on the selection process at the beginning of the program, the highest proportion of students who participated was coded as green in

the Purple data (**Figure 2**, p. 6). Campus 2 had a higher proportion of students coded green compared to Campus 1 (42.4%). The targeted group for intervention reflected the smallest proportion of participants at both campuses. However, Campus 1, had three times the number of students meeting the targeted level of yellow (39.4%) and red (18.2%) compared to Campus 2 (12.9% and 6.5%, respectively).

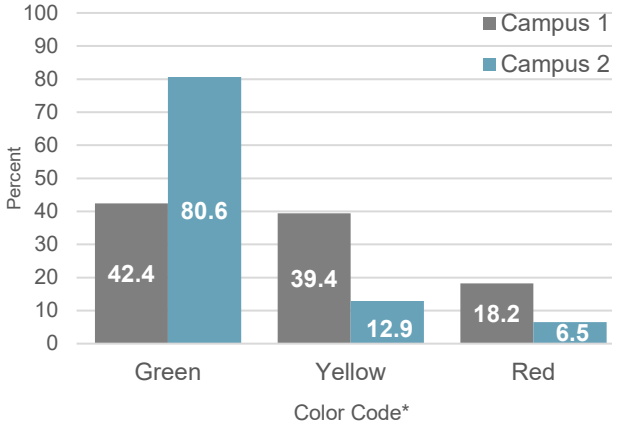
Structure

As highlighted in the campus interviews, the program structure was modified to adhere to district and state requirements that schools focus on strategies that address learning loss. This limited available times for students to participate in non-academic activities. With a focus on increasing student attendance, students needed to be engaged in the program during the school day, with access to a combined 3 hours of programming (mentoring, workshop, and one-on-one case management) a week before, during, or after school for each grade level. However, due to post-pandemic related restrictions, programming was modified and varied at each campus, ranging from an open group or drop-in model one hour per week before or after school, during lunch or SEL periods, to two 1-hour workshops of structured programming.

Campus 1 used a less structured approach, delivering Project inSIGHT mentorship and ELC workshops twice a week for 30-minute increments during lunch for each grade level. Most of the girls brought their lunch to the mentorship session, eating their lunch while participating in the activity (making body scrubs). Also, there was limited observed interaction between mentors and girls. The workshop delivery model was altered due to time limitations, which meant that not all stages of the experiential learning cycle were applied (reflection and generalization). Students worked on activities, concepts were introduced, and discussed the application. However, there was insufficient time to go through the full learning cycle (activity, reflection, generalization, and application).

Campus 1 also offered a drop-in after-school mentorship session once a week for all grade levels, which was terminated on March 9, 2022, because students joined other extracurricular activities that conflicted with the program timelines. Some girls transferred to the lunchtime program. Unlike Campus 1, workshops at Campus 2 were delivered based on the experiential learning cycle. There was a more structured delivery of the mentorship and workshop activities. Mentorship and workshop activities were delivered twice a week for 1-hour each during SEL periods for grade 6 and grades 7 and 8 combined.

Figure 2. Distribution of Participants by Color Code



*Color Code: Students were flagged for attendance, behavior, and SAFs: red = 7+ flags, yellow = 3–6 flags), and green =0–2 flags.

ii. *How well were the programs' features delivered?*

Quality can be defined as "the extent to which a provider approaches a theoretical ideal in terms of delivering program content" (Dusenbury, Brannigan, Falco, & Hansen, 2003, p. 244). Quality, therefore, is conceptualized as congruence between the intervention theory, more specifically, the change principles, and the program quality (Dusenbury et al., 2003).

The change principles, strongly informed by the experiential learning cycle theory, provided the following quality constructs included in the mentorship and workshop observation checklist: (i) a **learning environment** that is engaging, welcoming, inclusive, and girl-centered; (ii) **experience,** provide learning activities that allow everyone to participate and share their expertise relating to issues or strategy; (iii) allowing for **reflection**, after the learning activity participants can think and feel about what they just did; (iv) **generalization of ideas** into how they see the world, where participants move from the level of immediate thoughts and feelings to the level of

concepts and ideas; and (v) **application of ideas learned,** participants try out their new learning through new behaviors (Burnard, 1989).

Learning environment

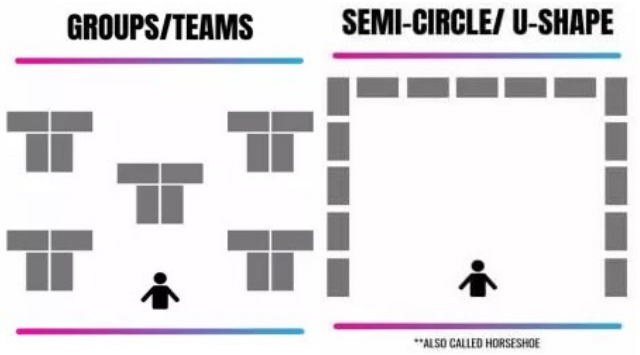
The learning environment refers to the physical space, as well as the social, emotional, and instructional elements of the room. At both locations, the learning environment was designed to be inclusive and welcoming. The environment at Campus 1 was more relaxed. For the most part, students were not greeted as they entered the space. At Campus 2, it was observed that facilitators greeted students as they entered the program room. However, interns and mentors tended to be less interactive with students at the start of the program. The learning environment was organized according to two table arrangements: table groups or semi-circle (**Figure 3**).

For mentorship, the learning space was organized into 'table groups', with four-to-five students assigned to one-to-two mentors. The table group arrangement appeared to work well, as it fostered improved communication between mentors, girls, and the facilitator. However, the table groups worked well with smaller groups. In those observed instances with more than 20 girls, the table group proved cumbersome, as the noise level made it challenging for discussion between mentors/mentees and facilitators. At Campus 2, the ELC workshop used a semi-circle/U-shape design, which encouraged discussion between the facilitator and the girls. However, the program space was cluttered and disorganized, sometimes inhibiting multidirectional communication, and impeding the movement of staff and youth while participating in activities. While at Campus 1, the space was less cluttered and organized in table rows, but frequently had students who were not in the program entering and leaving the room.

Experience

Campus 1 provided youth with an 'experience' using hands-on activities, but there was insufficient time to allow everyone to participate and share their perspective on the topic. While at Campus 2, the facilitator drew on students' experiences to introduce concepts through questioning and probing. For example, in one of the mentorship sessions, the facilitator introduced the concept, mentors worked with their mentees to further discuss the concept, and each group reconvened with the larger group to reflect on their discussions. Similarly, with the ELC workshops at Campus 2, students participated in a learning activity, reinforced through probing questions and discussions, to help students connect the activity to the concept.

Figure 3: Workshop Table Arrangements



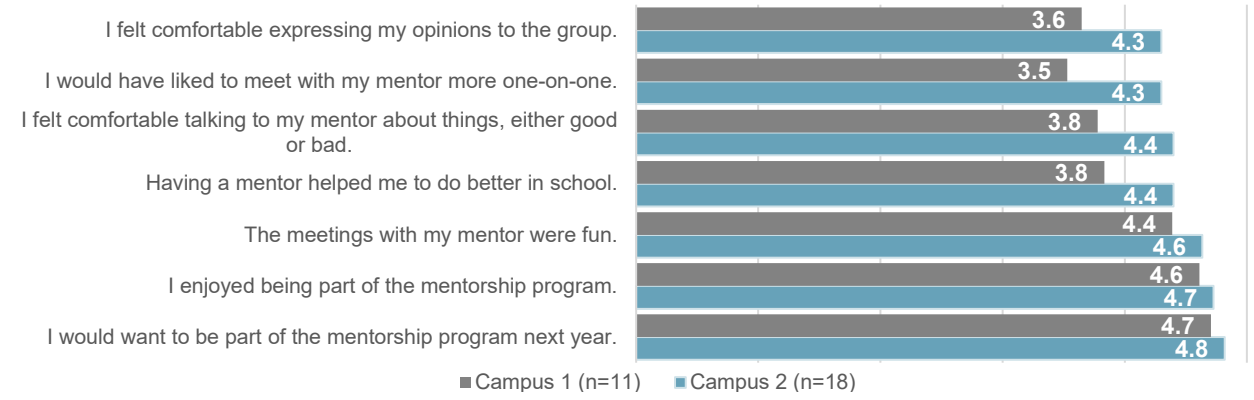
Reflection

After the experience, students had the opportunity to think and express their feelings about what they did. As discussed above, this step of the learning cycle was observed only at Campus 2. During the mentorship, mentors asked probing questions to facilitate discussion among their mentees. An example of a mentorship activity would be a self-esteem session, where mentees participated in a discussion that required mentees to identify what they 'did well'. Following the discussion, mentees wrote one thing they did well on a compact mirror. Several girls had difficulty identifying something they did well. Many commented "*I am not good at anything*". Likewise, at Campus 2 during the ELC workshop, the facilitator provided the girls with opportunities to self-explore, asking individual questions and probes to reinforce learning.

Generalization and application

This stage of the ELC model was evident during the Campus 2 workshop. The girls were probed to provide strategies they could use to address personal challenges, for example, the stress in school. The youth were less engaged in discussions on the effects of stress on those around them, and what they could do when confronted with stress in the future. In terms of application, the youth were more engaged, as they

Figure 4. Student Rating of Mentorship Workshops on 5-Point Likert Scale



actively identified strategies for dealing with stress (meditation, breathing, etc.) and were challenged to identify individuals in their life that they could contact when feeling stressed.

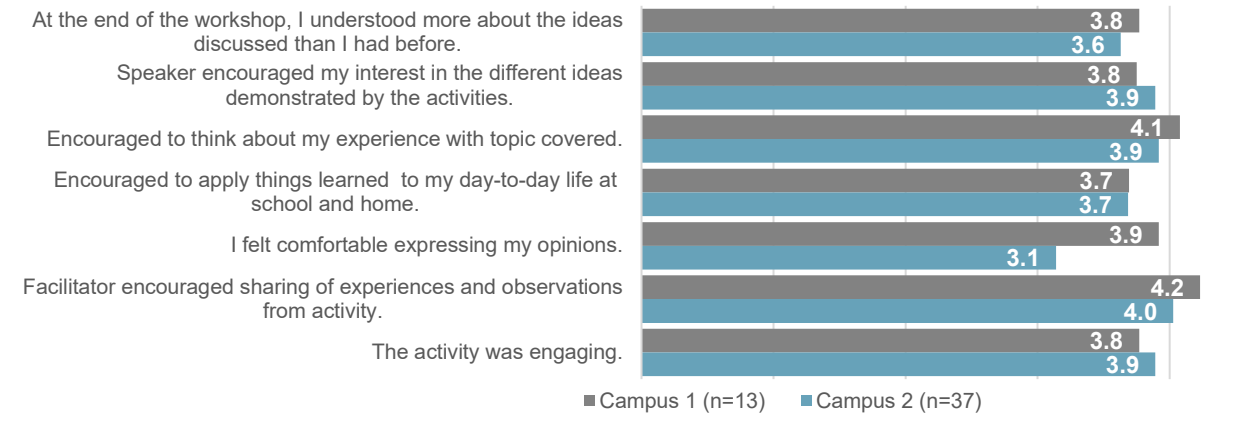
iii. *How engaged were students in activities?*

Responsiveness ratings capture the degree to which students were engaged or actively participating. They were assessed using items in Figure 4. Student Rating of Mentorship Workshops on a 5-Point Likert Scale from the student feedback forms for workshop and mentoring sessions at Campus 1 (n = 23) and Campus 2 (n = 54) (**Figure 4**). Overall, students rated their experience in the workshop as excellent. The mean rating at Campus 1 was higher; however, there was a higher variation in response (m = 4.4). Campus 2 had a lower rating but less variation (m = 4.1).

Descriptive analysis of the mentorship feedback survey showed the workshops delivered at Campus 2 were rated higher than at Campus 1 across all survey items (Figure 4 and **Table A2**, p. 14). Noteworthy, students at Campus 1 rated a lower level of agreement on having a mentor *helped them do better at school* (m = 3.8), wanting to meet with a mentor more one-on-one (m = 3.5), being comfortable talking about things good or bad (m = 3.8), and feeling comfortable expressing their opinions to the groups (m = 3.6). These items may be related to the learning environment at Campus 1, which was more relaxed with less interaction between facilitators/mentors and mentees.

Based on the experiential learning cycle (ELC) workshop feedback survey, as shown in **Figure 5** and **Table A3** (p. 14), items rated higher by participants were being able to share activity experiences and observations, and the speaker encouraged me to speak about my own experience. The items were rated higher at Campus 1 (m = 4.2 and 4.1, respectively) than Campus 2 (m = 4.0 and 3.9, receptively) (Figure 4). The campuses were on par with all other items,

Figure 5. Student Rating of ELC Workshops on 5-Point Likert Scale

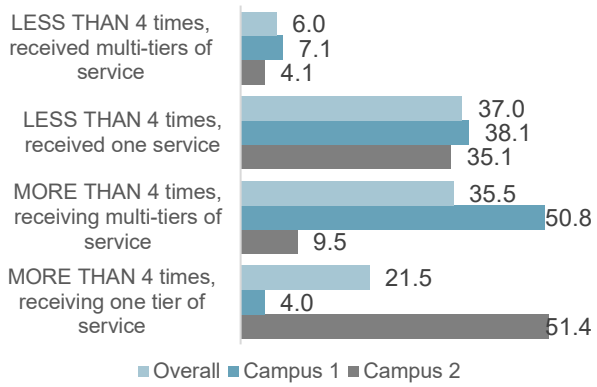


except *I felt comfortable expressing my opinion*. Campus 1 had a mean rating of 3.9 and Campus 2 had a mean rating of 3.1. Interestingly, the average group size at Campus 2 was larger than that of Campus 1.

iv. *Were students exposed to the full program?*

The Project inSIGHT program was delivered for approximately 24 weeks during the 2021–2022 academic year. Due to several no-school days and campus cancellations, the girls had the opportunity to attend sessions for approximately 109 days between September 2021 and April 2022. As a result, the program was available an average of 7.8 days per month during the school year, with 168 girls attending an average of 5.5 times in the school year. In terms of exposure, the data revealed that a sizable portion (57.7%) of the sample received a full (35.5%) or nearly full (21.5%) dose of the program (**Figure 6**). For the most part, participants at Campus 1 accessed multitiered services, and those at Campus 2 primarily accessed one level of service (Figure 6). There was a high percentage of girls at Campus 1 who accessed multiple services more than 4 times in the school year (50.8%). While Campus 2 showed a high percentage of girls who received one tier of services more than four times in the school year (51.4%) (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Participants frequency and number of services received

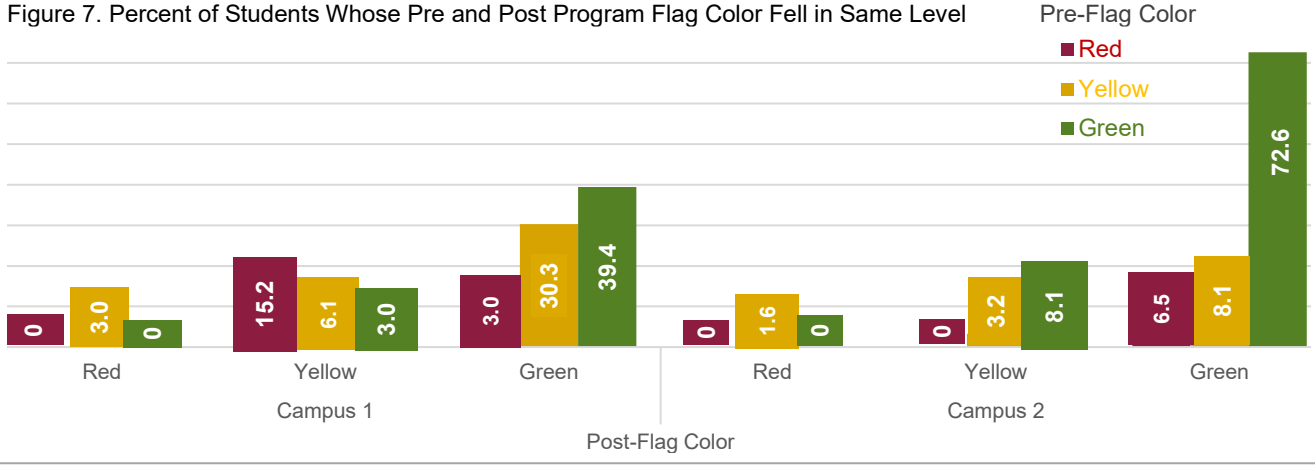


Was there a significant difference in academic performance, attendance, and behavior after participation in the program?

Participants' change in behavior was measured by three factors: (i) perceived self-efficacy (confidence in the ability to control motivation, behavior, and social environment) and (ii) perceived self-confidence (acceptance and trust in skills and abilities and having a sense of control over one's life and building support needed to succeed), and (iii) documented behavior (Purple data).

Frequencies for the color level at the beginning of the program and end of the program by campus are provided in **Figure 7**. The Chi-square test of association was used to determine whether the proportion of girls at the two-pilot campus whose behavior was coded red or yellow at the start of the school year changed by the end of the school year. The Purple flag color codes were retrieved for 95 participants who participated in Project inSIGHT. An exact McNemar's test determined that there was a statistically significant difference in the proportion of participants in each flag color category at Campus 1 pre- and post-intervention ($p = .01$) and no significant difference at Campus 2 ($p = .17$).

Figure 7. Percent of Students Whose Pre and Post Program Flag Color Fell in Same Level



A cross-tabulation of the girl's pre-program color code and post-program color code showed that at Campus 1, the girl's color code fell into the same category pre-and-post (39.4% were green and 6.1% were yellow) (Figure 7). For the remaining sample, pre-program behavior and post-program behavior changed (Figure 7). Of the proportion of participants coded yellow at the start of the program, 30.3 percent increased one level to green, and 15.2 percent of participants coded as red increased one level to yellow by the end of the program.

Attendance

When attendance patterns were considered, in terms of frequency of absences, 22.2 percent of 6th graders were absent for ten or more days, and 12.0 percent were absent for twenty or more days in the prior year (Table A2, p. 14). By grade 6, chronic absence is a proven warning sign that a student is at risk for school dropout (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997; Cook, Dodge, Gifford, & Schulting, 2017; HISD, 2022). There was a higher proportion of students at Campus 1 who participated in the program and had ten or more absences (**Figure 8**). At Campus 2, the inverse was true, higher proportion of students who did not participate in the program had ten or more absences (Figure 8).

As shown in **Figure 9**, participants at Campus 1 had a lower mean rate of absences at the end of the Project inSIGHT program than those who did not participate. The difference in average absences between Project inSIGHT participants (Mean = 10.2; S.D. = 8.6) and non-participants (Mean = 15.9; S.D. = 13.9) for the 2021–2022 school year was significant (t (644) = 5.99; p <.01). At Campus 2, the mean rate of absences was comparable between participants and their campus peers (Figure 9). At Campus 2, the difference in average absences between Project inSIGHT participants (Mean = 15.7; S.D. = 8.6) and non-participants (Mean = 5.9; S.D. = 13.9) for the 2021–2022 school year was not significant (t (286) = 1.66; p = 0.20).

Academic Performance

Project inSIGHT participants at Campus 1 had a higher percentage of students who met or surpassed the Approaches Grade Level Standard on the STAAR reading compared to non-participants at both campuses (**Figure 10**). At Campus 1, a higher percentage of participants (67.3%) met the Approaches Grade Level Standard on the STAAR 3–8 math compared to their campus peers (54.4%). At Campus 2, a lower percentage of participants (42.6%) met the Approaches Grade Level Standard on the STAAR 3–8 math compared to their campus peers

Figure 8. Student absences by campus and participation, 2021–2022

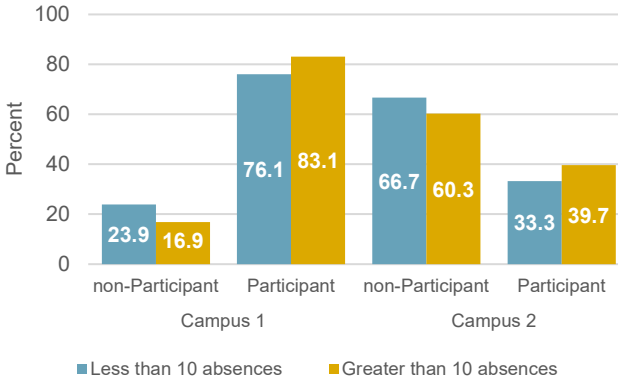


Figure 9. Difference in Mean Absences for Project inSIGHT Participants and non-Participants by Campus, 2021–2022

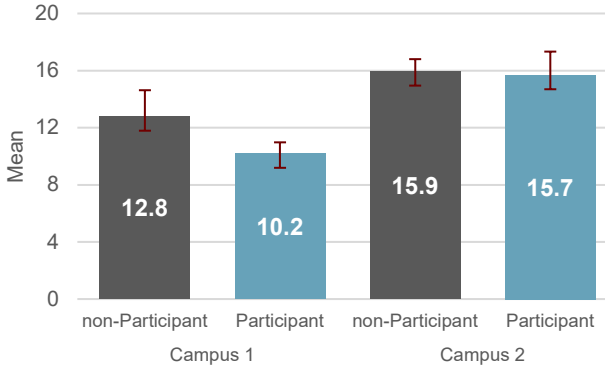
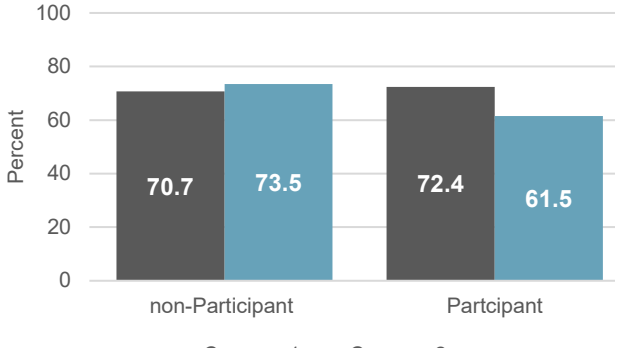


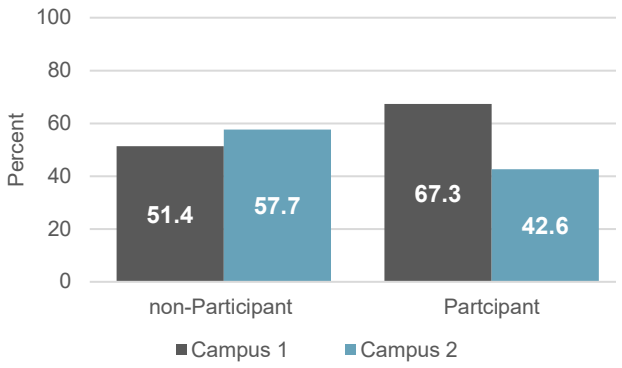
Figure 10. Percent of Project inSIGHT Participants Who Met or Surpassed Approaches Grade Level Standard on STAAR Reading Compared to Campus Peers



(57.7%). The Chi-square statistic tells us that there was no statistically significant association between participating in the program and passing STAAR reading at Campus 1 (p =.08) and a significant association at Campus 2 (p =.04).

For grade 3–8 reading, a higher percentage of participants (72.4%) at Campus 1 met or surpassed the Approaches Grade Level Standard on STAAR compared to campus peers (70.7%) (**Figure 11**). As with math, Campus 2 had a lower percentage of participants who met the Approaches Grade Level Standard on the STAAR 3–8 readings (61.5%) compared to their campus-level peers (73.5%). There was no statistically significant association between participating in the program and meeting the Approaches Grade Level Standard on the STAAR 3–8 math at Campus 1 (p =.74) and Campus 2 (p =.10).

Figure 11. Percent of Project inSIGHT Participants Who Met or Surpassed Approaches Grade Level Standard on STAAR Math Compared to Campus Peers



Discussion

Frequent absences in elementary and middle school were associated with school disengagement, academic failure, and eventual dropout. Project inSIGHT was designed to improve school engagement of middle school girls by increasing attendance, emotional efficacy, and self-confidence. In 2021–22, Project inSIGHT supported 168 girls in 2 middle schools (grades 6–8), with female students in the same schools serving as a comparison group.

Campus 1 selection strategy for program participation focused on girls who required intervention based on student's level (Tier 1, Tier 2, or Tier 3), teacher recommendations, and student self-selection. Students were dispersed across the three Purple flag levels, 18.2 percent were coded as red needing intervention, 39.4 percent were coded as yellow, and 42.4 percent were coded as green needing no intervention. Of those who self- selected, Campus 2 gave priority to Tier 2 students, with 80.6 percent of participants coded as green in Purple, 12.9 percent yellow, and 6.5 percent red.

Campus 1 used a less structured approach, delivering Project inSIGHT mentorship and workshops twice a week for 30-minute increments during lunch for each grade level. Due to the short time frame, the focus was on engaging students in various hands-on activities. The experiential learning cycle was not included in the implementation. Campus 2 was able to incorporate the experiential learning cycle, delivering more structured mentorship and workshop activities twice a week in 1-hour increments. Participants at Campus 1 had a higher mean rating for the experiential learning cycle, while participants at Campus 2 rated the mentorship program higher.

In terms of behavior, at Campus 1, the girl's Purple level fell into the same category pre-and-post (54.2% were green and 25.0% were yellow). While at Campus 2, of the girls coded yellow at the start of the program, 41.7 percent increased one level to green, and 62.5 percent of participants coded as red increased to yellow by the end of the program. Campus 1 had a statistically significant lower mean rate of absences at the end of the Project inSIGHT program than their campus peers who did not participate (p <.01). For Campus 2, there was no statistically significant difference between the mean rate of attendance for participants and non-participants (p = 0.20). Project inSIGHT participants at Campus 1 had a higher percentage of students who met or surpassed the Approaches Grade Level Standard on STAAR 3–8 reading and math compared to non-participants at both campuses.

Recommendations

Positive short-term improvements from intake to program completion was exhibited by Project inSIGHT participants. However, the results varied by campus on the three outcomes examined: (i) behavioral change (change in Purple classification), (ii) attendance, and (iii) academic performance in reading and math. Campus 1

showed positive short-term improvement, and Campus 2 showed no improvement.

The differences between campuses could be related to the recruitment and selection strategy used by each campus, and changes in program delivery structure. Campus 1 showed a higher percentage of students who met the selection criteria for program participation compared to Campus 2. The result may be selection bias, as the groups differed, on average, before the beginning of the program. In the presence of bias, differences in the post-test may simply be differences present before providing the intervention (Roberts, Vaughn, Beretvas, & Wong, 2016).

Program activities were adjusted to meet the needs of participating campuses. Campus 1 used a less structured approach, while program delivery at Campus 2 was more closely aligned with the initial design. Research has found that, on average, better fidelity correlated with better program outcomes, confirming some level (high to moderate) of implementation fidelity observably mediates program impact (Hill, 2019). Though Campus 2 had a higher level of implementation fidelity, the moderate dose delivered at Campus 1 indicated some increase in student results on the three program outcomes. It is recommended that Girls Inc. works closely with HISD Wraparound Specialists to improve the recruitment and selection of participants that uses a diversified strategy based on data, referrals, and self-selection.

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APPENDIX

Table A1. Demographic characteristics of program participant and non-participant at each campus

		Fleming MS (N=171)						Key MS (N=282)					
		Total Population		Participant		non-Participant		Total Population		Participant		non-Participant	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Socioeconomic Status	Econ. Dis.	165	96.5	117	95.1	48	100.0	275	97.5	71	97.3	204	98.1
	At-Risk	135	78.9	92	74.8	43	89.6	199	70.6	57	78.1	142	68.3
	SPED	21	12.3	13	10.6	8	16.7	24	8.5	4	5.5	20	9.6
	Limited English Proficiency (LEP)	47	27.5	32	26.0	15	31.3	95	33.7	25	34.2	70	33.7
	Gifted/ Talented (GT)	12	7.0	9	7.3	3	6.3	9	3.2	3	4.1	6	2.9
	Dyslexia	9	5.3	5	4.1	4	8.3	8	2.8	4	5.5	4	1.9
Ethnicity	Black	99	57.9	77	62.6	22	45.8	155	55.0	42	57.5	113	54.3
	Hispanic	67	39.2	42	34.1	25	52.1	123	43.6	30	41.1	93	44.7
	Other	5	2.9	4	3.3	1	2.1	3	1.1	1	1.4	2	1.0
Home Lang.	Spanish	53	31.0	33	26.8	20	41.7	101	35.8	25	34.2	76	36.5
	English	118	69.0	90	73.2	28	58.3	180	63.8	48	65.8	132	63.5
Absences	Less than 10 days	110	65.9	76	63.3	34	28.3	146	61.1	38	56.7	108	62.8
	Greater than 10 days	20	12.0	17	14.2	3	2.5	50	20.9	19	28.4	31	18.0
	Greater than 20 days	37	22.2	27	22.5	10	8.3	43	18.0	10	14.9	33	19.2

Econ. Disad. = Economic Disadvantaged
Home Lang. = Home Language

Table A2. Descriptive of student rating of mentorship

Survey Items	Campus 1 (n=11)	Campus 2 (n=18)
The meetings with my mentor were fun.	4.4	4.6
Having a mentor helped me to do better in school.	3.8	4.4
I felt comfortable talking to my mentor about things, either good or bad.	3.8	4.4
I would have liked to meet with my mentor more one-on-one.	3.5	4.3
I felt comfortable expressing my opinions to the group.	3.6	4.3
I enjoyed being part of the mentorship program.	4.6	4.7
I would want to be part of the mentorship program next year.	4.7	4.8
Overall, I would rate my experience in the mentorship program as excellent.	4.5	5.0

Table A3. Descriptive of student rating of workshops

Survey Items	Campus 1 (n=13)	Campus 2 (n=37)
The activity was engaging.	3.8	3.9
We were encouraged by the facilitator to share our experiences and observations from the activity.	4.2	4.0
The speaker encouraged my interest in the different ideas that were demonstrated by the activities.	3.8	3.9
The speaker encouraged me to think about my own experience with today's topic.	4.1	3.9
I was encouraged to apply the things I learned today learned to my day-to-day life at school and home.	3.7	3.7
I felt comfortable expressing my opinions.	3.9	3.1
At the end of the workshop, I understood more about the ideas discussed than I had before.	3.8	3.6