Caldwell-West Caldwell Public Schools & The Bridge, Inc.
The Peace Model Project

Year One External Evaluation Review
(August 2016)

Presented to the Leadership of the Caldwell-West Caldwell Public Schools and The Bridge, Inc.

Project: The Peace Model Project
Lead Agency, Caldwell-West Caldwell Public Schools

Funder: U.S. Department of Education
School Counseling Grant

Duration: Three Years (May 1, 2015 – April 30, 2018)

Focus: Year One, ending on April 30, 2016

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The preparation of this document was supported by Grant S215E150461
from the U.S. Department of Education, School Counseling Programs.
Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent
the official views of DOE or the management team of the grant project.

About this Report. The purpose of this Year 1 review is to provide information to the Peace Model Project leadership and its partners regarding the pace and extent of progress toward achieving the stated outputs and outcomes of the grant. It is a companion to the previous Evaluation Brief—Baseline Data Report, submitted in January 2016. To ensure that it is self-contained and complete, the overview and certain elements from that report are included where appropriate. Year 1 output and, to the extent available, outcome data are provided along with an operational assessment of Year 1 project activities.

It is important to note the following: while the first year of the Peace Model Project (PMP) was not considered by the management team and counselors as a planning year, since they dove right in and actively implemented their proposed strategies, the Evaluation Team is treating its review as an initial review, gathering preliminary data about various aspects of the students' emotional health, counseling activities, and disciplinary referrals, as well as parents' perceptions, in order to set the stage for a meaningful baseline comparison. This approach would give the Project additional time to bring all activities to a higher level of functionality before being reviewed for effectiveness in Year 2.

As such, the data gathering and analysis strategy we adopted in the Year 1 review was not intended to measure progress toward outcomes, which were, nonetheless, examined at a high level where possible; our intent, more importantly, was toward gaining a good understanding of the pre-intervention landscape. The Year 2 review will study more closely the extent of progress toward outcomes, and perceptions and reactions of students and other constituents regarding various PMP-sponsored activities.

This report is structured as follows:

- The overview in Section A sets the context for the Peace Model Project, describes the PMP community, and presents the methodology used by the Evaluation Team.
- Section B includes a review of progress towards goals achieved in Year 1.
- Section C presents the results of our operational assessment focusing on the primary factors that impacted the Peace Model's progress during Year 1, along with accomplishments achieved and challenges to be addressed in Year 2 and subsequent years, including suggestions for how they may be addressed.
- Section D addresses the evaluation of Year 2.
- Section E describes the process of gathering baseline data and preliminary observations.
- After the list of citations (Section F), the appendices introduce the PMP team (Appendix G1), indicate how our evaluation methods seek to measure progress

toward stated outputs and outcomes (G2), present a simplified PMP logic model (G3), and offer further details regarding the baseline data (G4).

About the Group i&i Evaluators. The Evaluation Team maintains its objectivity and professional independence in its reviews. Comments and recommendations it shares with the Peace Model Project leadership emanate from its collective interest in, and commitment to, the success of the project. Throughout all of the evaluation activities, its members maintain strict confidentiality and are committed to the protection of privacy of all human subjects involved.

Senior members of the Evaluation Team include Toufic Hakim, PhD, and Kathy Wiener, MPA. Other members who contributed significantly to this report through data gathering, analysis, and review include: Dane Bozeman, PhD; Lauren Silverstein, PhD; and Eve Wenger, MBA.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Peace Model Project Context

The notion of schools as spaces for social emotional learning is gaining traction across the country; it is a concept rooted in research indicating that cognition and emotion are connected, interrelated processes. The increase in private support for similar initiatives and feature films such as Disney/Pixar's *Inside Out* are but a few examples of the attention now placed on mindfulness among children. Elementary students who perform well academically also exhibit healthy emotional awareness and social behavior.

Developed out of concern for disciplinary infractions and disruptive behavior in the school district, including verbal disrespect, bullying, or harm to self, the Peace Model Project (PMP) was informed by the latest child-development research, and funded through a U.S. Department of Education, School Counseling Programs grant. The Project is sited at four elementary schools (Jefferson, Lincoln, Washington, and Wilson) in Northern New Jersey. The Caldwell-West Caldwell School District serves as the lead agency, with The Bridge, Inc., a community-based non-profit, as project partner.

The Project's Goals, Accomplishments, and Challenges

PMP seeks to enhance the overall emotional health and wellbeing of elementary school students by: (a) helping them develop stress-reduction, coping, and self-regulation skills; (b) addressing bullying/harassment behaviors by improving student relationships with peers, families, and the school community; and (c) providing appropriate services to students experiencing mental-health problems.

The Project had set four goals and 13 objectives over the life of the grant. Its goals are to: (1) Recruit qualified and experienced mental health staff for each of four schools; (2) Help students develop skills: stress-reduction, coping, self-regulation; (3) Help reduce bullying/harassment by improving student relations with peers, families, and the school community; and (4) Provide appropriate services for students experiencing significant mental health problems.

The Evaluation Team's Year 1 review revealed significant accomplishments that have been achieved toward the Project's process goals, which were met and exceeded, and output goals; none of which would likely have been achieved without Department of Education funding, including:

- Qualified, properly credentialed mental health professionals were engaged and housed at every school, delivering adequate mental health services to elementary school students with significant need.

- Peace Rooms were established and made available to students and Counselors to varying degrees at each of the four schools.
- Small-group sessions were offered to children in need Grades 3-5 and enrichment programs were offered across all schools and all grades.
- The School Counselors made psychotherapy referrals as needed to external qualified professionals.
- Screenings for mental health challenges were provided to some percentage of students, and all students who were screened and in need of clinical treatment received services, either at the school or off-site.

We take special note of the compelling vision expressed by the lead partners and the dedication and passion of the Project Director and the School Counselors who worked hard to build a meaningful new program, serve the students in the schools, and start to develop a more positive school environment.

Nonetheless, PMP experienced a number of challenges that had a significant impact on Year 1 of the Project, including: (1) the receipt of reduced grant funding without a commensurate modification of the Project deliverables; (2) the Project's start that did not fully coincide with the beginning of the school year; and (3) insufficient planning time that led to the lack of clarity in key areas such as consistency of roles, expectations, and guidance for key protocols and decision-making among the schools.

Key Learning and Considerations for the Future

The first year of PMP proved very fruitful, not only in the progress it accomplished in launching the Project, but also in a number of important learning outcomes that emerged from the experience. The most important learning was specific to the critical role of the lead partners engaging the schools and community in collective efforts, the need for strong working partnerships between Principals and Counselors, and the challenges of integrating school community engagement activities with the highly professionalized clinical project functions.

Reflecting on Year 1, including these and other important insights, will provide a tremendous opportunity for the PMP partners to expand the breadth and depth of the Project in Year 2 and beyond. To do so will require additional planning, broadened engagement of Project stakeholders, including teachers and parents, and closer coordination of roles and responsibilities. The potential for a collective community approach could indeed make a real and positive impact on improving overall school climate at the four elementary schools—possibly first steps toward all schools, as well as the broader vision shared by the District Superintendent and The Bridge Executive Director of healthier children, family, and community.

A. OVERVIEW

A1. The PMP Context

Social emotional learning is being gradually recognized as a very significant dimension of education. If schools provide space for intellectual, social, and emotional development, why should education solely focus on the acquisition of academic knowledge and skills? After all, brain research indicates that cognition and emotion are connected, interrelated processes. "Neural mechanisms underlying emotional regulation are the same as those underlying cognitive processes" (Bell and Wolfe, 2004). The interaction of cognition and emotion influences one's focus, decision-making, and learning (Cacioppo and Bernstorn, 1999), all of which affect social behavior.

The ability to accept emotions as natural human impulses, be they anger, sadness, joy, or frustration, and to translate emotionally charged experiences into socially acceptable behaviors are the desired, compound outcome of social emotional learning. This is often referred to as emotional regulation. Gaining emotional awareness and communicating about emotions is a critical developmental skill, which correlates with how socially competent children are and how well they are liked by peers, teachers, and other adults (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004).

Research also points to the non-surprising conclusion that children who exhibit healthy emotional adjustment and social behavior perform academically well in elementary school (Cohen 2005). Emotional health influences self-image and identity, interactions with peers, and relations with adults.

National Scene. The expressed need for holistic child development has catalyzed a bourgeoning movement seeking to incorporate into the educational experience serious opportunities for self-reflection toward gaining greater awareness and understanding of one's inner emotional world as one step toward resolving internal conflict and conflict with others. Mindfulness awareness initiatives focusing on children have popped up across the country. From work by the Hawn Foundation and Mindful Schools to films such a *Quiet Revolution* and Disney/Pixar's *Inside Out*, these efforts have been informed and inspired by what is known about brain plasticity and studies that connect self-awareness and mindfulness with reduced stress and burnout, expanded capacity for compassion, increased optimism and kindness toward others, enhanced positive mood, and improved ability to achieve calm and slowdown before reacting. (Davidson, 2003; and Condon, 2013). This national perspective has influenced the development of the Peace Model Project.

Local Setting. It is within this larger context that the Peace Model Project was developed at the four Caldwell-West Caldwell elementary schools, a suburban school district in New Jersey. Its objective was to address a disconcerting local situation that presented the

District and The Bridge, Inc., its neighboring community-based partner, with an urgent need to act.

High levels of social anxiety and depression have been observed within the schools and across the State, manifesting themselves through increased instances of panic attacks and poor anger management, and affecting the quality of education and overall school environment. In New Jersey, nearly one in five young people engaged in self-harming acts and more than one in 10 considered or planned suicide—with rates higher among female youth (NJ Education, 2011). During the 2012-2013 academic year, one in four students at the Caldwell-West Caldwell elementary schools had disciplinary infractions for disruptive behavior, verbal disrespect, or bullying, with increasing rates of self-harm and alcohol and drug addiction in higher school grades within the District.

These behaviors and emotional triggers are possibly affected by changes in family structure and high rates of divorces among parents. They are further incited by easy access to graphic stories of human-caused tragedies through video-game technology, on-demand streaming, and social media. The sum total is a concern about mental and emotional health and wellbeing.

Goals & Objectives. The Project, funded by a U.S. Department of Education's School Counseling grant, sought to set up a physical space at every elementary school, referred to as the Peace Room, that are "safe and supported spaces where students can decompress, reduce anxiety, and have quiet, restorative time while learning to self-regulate their emotions so they can better meet life's challenges."

The Project, referred to as a school-wide positive behavioral and mental-health support program, sought to address three major needs identified in the schools, shown below.

Student & Service Needs to be Addressed, as per grant application:

- Help students develop stress-reduction, coping, and self-regulation skills.
- Help reduce bullying/harassment by improving student relationships with peers, families, and the school community.
- Provide appropriate services to students experiencing mental-health problems.

PMP's main proposed strategy was to appoint trained counselors at the four schools, which had previously shared mental health professionals on a rotating basis. The intent was for the new counselors to engage in individual and group counseling, and serve as resources for students and advisors to principals, teachers, and parents in mental health and emotional wellbeing. They would also offer classroom training in character education (*Character Counts!* was initially chosen as the preferred model) and help develop and

offer professional development and emotional education opportunities to teachers, parents, and the community.

Addressing one of the funders' priorities, PMP was to improve school engagement, school environment, and school safety, as well as improve family and community engagement. (The priority for supporting military families was a secondary focus; it was not explicitly addressed by the project, nor was it examined in this first-year report). The ultimate aim of PMP is "transform the school culture."

As highlighted by the PMP Logic Model, constructed by the Evaluation Team based on the grant application and shown in Appendix G1, the PMP intervention adopts a three-way approach:

- ✓ School-wide: Students making use of ***Peace Rooms*** and participating in ***Character Counts!***
- ✓ Groups: Students forming ***Small Groups*** to enhance coping skills
- ✓ Individual Services: Students receiving ***Individual Counseling*** when needed.

Over the duration of the grant, this approach is consistent with the Project's aim to accomplish four goals and 13 objectives, shown in Table 1, which are a combination of activity outputs, process outcomes, and student developmental outcomes.

Table 1. PMP Stated Goals & Objectives
Goal 1. Recruit qualified and experienced mental health staff for each of four schools. - *Objective 1a:* Hire 2.5 FTE school counselors. - *Objective 1b:* Hire 1 child-adolescent psychiatrist, to be shared by the four schools.
Goal 2. Help students develop skills: stress-reduction, coping, self-regulation. - *Objective 2a:* Provide 100% of students at all four schools with access to Peace Rooms. - *Objective 2b:* Provide 20% of students in need with small group programming to help them develop skills to cope effectively with challenges and overcome adversity. - *Objective 2c:* Refer 100% of students who struggle the most with self-regulation skills with referrals to highly experienced outside providers.
Goal 3. Help reduce bullying/harassment by improving student relations with peers, families, and the school community. - *Objective 3a:* Place 100% of students in *Character Counts!* - *Objective 3b:* Provide 20% with small group programming designed to enhance social skills, problem-solving skills, conflict-resolution skills, and effective communication skills. - *Objective 3c:* Provide 100% of those who struggle most with relationships with referrals to highly experienced outside providers. - *Objective 3d:* Show a combined 30% decrease in disciplinary referrals at schools.
Goal 4. Provide appropriate services for students experiencing significant mental health problems.

- *Objective 4a:* Screen 100% of students for significant mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression.
- *Objective 4b:* Of those screened, provide 100% with treatment, either on site or through referrals for identified mental health issues.
- *Objective 4c:* Provide 100% of those receiving treatment with ongoing case management and follow-up to ensure continued treatment effectiveness.
- *Objective 4d:* Screen 100% of students in crisis situations with immediate assistance, either on site or through referrals.
- *Objective 4e:* Reduce to 0% referrals to local ER for mental-health-related reasons.

A2. The PMP Community

The grant-funded Peace Model Project is a partnership between the Caldwell-West Caldwell (CWC) School District, New Jersey, and The Bridge, Inc., a neighboring not-for-profit community-based organization established in 1970 that provides behavioral healthcare services. The two organizations have had a longstanding working relationship; for many consecutive years, psychotherapists from The Bridge served Caldwell-West Caldwell students as part-time school counselors, and both organizations engaged in joint activities. This collaborative project builds on such a long-term partnership.

The Project aims to enhance the overall emotional health and wellbeing of students at the District's four elementary schools: Jefferson, Lincoln, Washington, and Wilson. The Project's main strategy was to recruit and support five psychotherapists who would serve as on-site school counselors (one full-time counselor at each of Jefferson, Lincoln, and Washington, and two half-time at Wilson) and engage in social emotional educational activities with students, parents, and teachers.

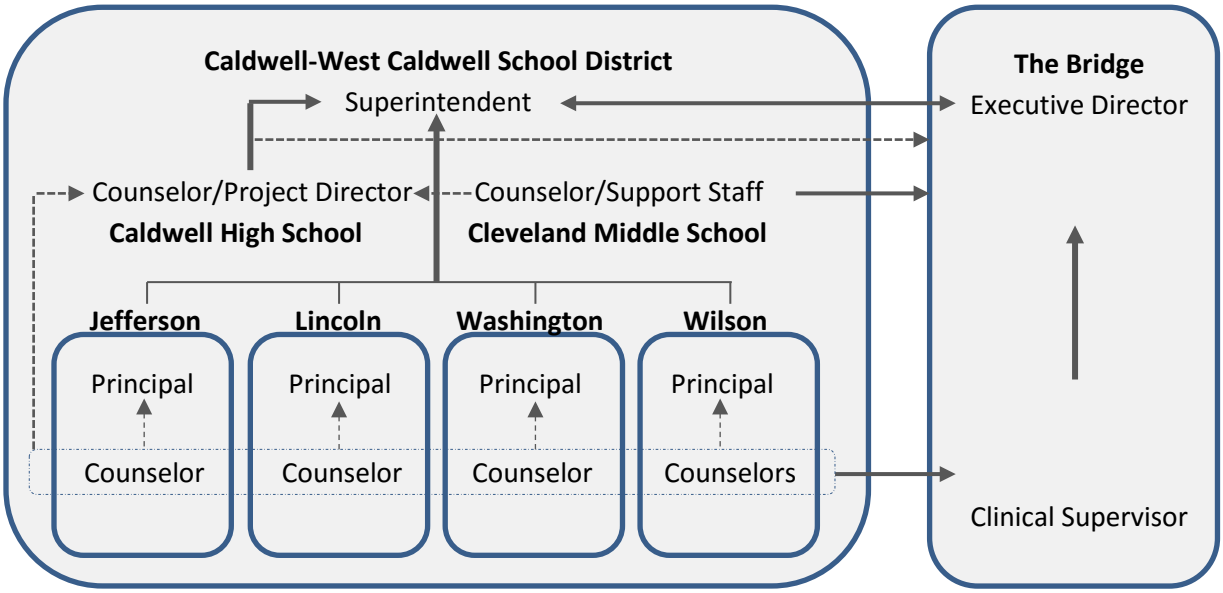
The five counselors, identified through a regional search, were employed by The Bridge and reported to a Clinical Supervisor in the area of clinical treatments. They also interfaced closely with the Project Director when it came to implementation of activities, school relations, and daily operations; later, a new PMP Support Staff, an employee of The Bridge who served as the School Counselor at the Grover Cleveland Middle School, supported them. The Project Director, who continued with her full-time role as School Counselor at James Caldwell High School, administered the Project in a part-time capacity and reported managerially to the District.

The four elementary School Principals engaged with the Counselors at different levels and stayed informed about PMP-related issues through regular discussions with the Superintendent and Project Director. The Executive Director of The Bridge and the Caldwell-West Caldwell Schools Superintendent maintained regular contact and were in close communication with the Project Director.

As discussed later, parents and teachers were informed of PMP through various announcements. The teachers were involved directly with the Counselors when their

students required emotional support and also indirectly through a number of educational programs delivered to their students.

The chart below provides a visual of the organizational and staff reporting complexity.



The Four Schools. As depicted in the PMP organizational structure, the Project focused on the District's four elementary schools and maintained strategic connections, through its Director and one of its staff members, with both the middle school and the high school. This connection gave the Project a district-wide perspective.

The four elementary schools are nestled in residential areas in suburban Northwest Essex County, a county neighboring New York City and encompassing the City of Newark that has some of the most affluent and the most impoverished communities in the nation. Their student population is predominantly White (above 80%), with a growing Hispanic/Latino community of new immigrants.

Combined, the four schools serve 1,142 students in grades K through 5 (Table 2).

Table 2. Student Enrollment by Grade Level at CWC Elementary Schools (2015-6)

	Total	K	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Jefferson	**296**	36	52	53	54	57	44
Lincoln	**232**	25	41	34	46	44	42
Washington	**360**	63	52	51	78	66	50
Wilson	**254**	32	41	32	52	39	58

A3. The Evaluation Methodology

Throughout Year 1, the Evaluation Team gathered data relevant to the operation, outputs, and outcomes of PMP via a number of activities:

- ***Review of Documents***
  - Examined various documents, including the grant announcement and application, reports from the PMP staff to the? funder, *Character Counts!* teaching materials, qualifications of counselors, and newsletters by counselors shared with parents and the community.

- ***Interviews & Conversations***
  - Five meetings with the entire PMP Team, which included the five School Counselors, the Clinical Supervisor, and the Project Director. Later meetings involved the PMP Support Staff. The initial meeting also included the School District Superintendent and Communications Director, one of the school principals, and the Executive Director of The Bridge, who also participated in other meetings.
  - Individual interviews with each of the four elementary schools' Principals, the Superintendent, and the Executive Director of The Bridge.
  - Numerous individual conversations with the PMP Project Director and a private conversation with the new PMP Support Staff.
  - Focus group interviews of four of the School Counselors and an individual conversation with the fifth one, who was unable to join the group conversation.

- ***Student & Parent Survey Analysis***
  - Two school climate surveys, required by the State of New Jersey, administered to all students in grades 3 to 5 at all four elementary schools in October 2015 and May 2016 (482 respondents)—we chose the State's survey instead of the survey we had designed to avoid duplication, since the former had been administered two weeks before we were to administer ours.
  - Parent surveys, designed by the Evaluation Team and administered through the Office of the Superintendent, for parents with children in grades 3 to 5 (November 2015, 260 respondents) and grades K to 2 (May 2016, 186 respondents), six months later.
  - Short student surveys/polls for one classroom of students in each grade, K to 2, at every one of the four schools, designed by the Evaluation Team and administered with the help of the School Counselors toward the end of the school year (a total of 206 respondents).
  - Principals' Survey, designed by the Evaluation Team, completed by three out of four School Principals.

- ***Direct Observations***
  - Tours of Peace Rooms at Jefferson and Washington Elementary Schools.
  - Observations of two classroom sessions taught/facilitated by School Counselors at these two schools.
- ***Data Reports***
  - Tables of data initiated by the Evaluation Team, completed by School Counselors at the end of the academic year, regarding overall emotional health and wellbeing of students by focusing on the extent of counseling services, nature of behavioral issues, number and type of disciplinary referrals, and scope of educational programming.

The Evaluation Team also explored at its own expense the development of an emotional application using mobile or computer tablet technology that students could use on a regular basis. The app would allow us to capture anonymously the emotional mood of students, grades, and schools, and train them to become more attuned to and aware of their emotions and how to translate them to pro-social behavior. Groundwork was done toward that objective. The possibility for designing and activating such an application will be explored further in Year 2 with input from the Counselors.

B. PROGRESS TOWARDS GOALS

Progress toward Goals & Objectives

In this subsection, we will review and comment on progress achieved during Year 1 of the grant toward each proposed goal and objective. We are presenting the review below by process, output, and outcome goal. Even though the review is presented piecemeal, it is the combination and integration of all activities and services that would lead, it is anticipated, to: (a) enhanced student coping and self-regulation skills; (b) better interpersonal relations among students and with teachers, parents, and other adults; and (c) an improved school climate and culture. It is not possible in a Year 1 review to capture the latter; our attempt below is to: (a) assess the extent and pace of progress toward goals and objectives; and (b) build baseline data that would allow us to observe tangible change.

Preview of Progress. Regarding goal-oriented achievements to date, we note that:

- PMP significantly exceeded its process goals. Mental health professionals were engaged at every school, bringing the student-to-counselor ratio much more in line with the national standard, and external professionals were effectively identified and tapped for further clinical treatment when needed.
- Laudable, steady, and measurable progress was achieved regarding output goals. Individual counseling services were considerably expanded and a broader peace-building, emotional well-being program was built through a series of accessible small-groups to those in need and by the extensive design and delivery of the *Character Counts!* program that touched every student at every school.
- Early gains were made vis-à-vis proposed outcomes, which need to be sustained and for which measurement approaches need to be further identified.

Process Goals. Two process goals were proposed: appointment of mental health staff (G1) and provision of mental health services (G4).

☑ **Met & Exceeded**	**Goal 1.** Recruit qualified and experienced mental health staff for each of four schools. - *Objective 1a:* Hire 2.5 FTE school counselors. - *Objective 1b:* Hire 1 child-adolescent psychiatrist, to be shared by the four elementary schools.

- **Appointing New School Counselors.** The PMP Leadership Team appointed a Project Director in early Summer 2015. The Director, who was selected from within the School District and still served throughout the year as the full-time Counselor at James Caldwell High School, engaged to coordinate and manage all aspects of the

Project as an added assignment for an annual stipend. She worked with the CWC School District and The Bridge to identify, through a formal regional search, five qualified and properly credentialed school counselors: four were appointed to full-time counseling positions (Jefferson, Lincoln, and Washington) and two in a half-time capacity, sharing a full-time position at Wilson. The five School Counselors were employed by summer's end through The Bridge, and placed in their respective schools, where they have worked to build relationships with their corresponding School Principals.

Prior to PMP, the student-to-counselor ratio across the four schools was 788 students to one counselor. Besides the high-ratio concern, access and availability of counselors proved problematic. PMP significantly reduced this ratio to 285 students per counselor when the four schools are treated as one entity; the ratio varies between 232 and 360 among the schools, with two out of four ratios effectively conforming with the 250-to-1 ratio recommended by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2005) and all four ratios significantly more robust than a number of state-recommended ratios, including the 834-to-1 ratio by the California Department of Education (CA, 2003). It should be noted that research has been limited on this issue, but a preliminary empirical study of 23 elementary students over four years showed that a reduction to the ASCA ratio lowers the probability of disciplinary recurrence by up to 25% in a given year (Carrell, 2006).

The Evaluation Team learned that two of the School Counselors will not be retained in Year 2 for issues of "cultural fit" and other "performance issues." When the search for a new counselor is completed, the intention is for each school to have one full-time counselor.

The School Counselors reported to a new licensed psychologist at The Bridge, who served as their Clinical Supervisor and met with them and the Project Director almost weekly as a group, and with each of them individually on a regular basis to review cases, set up tracking procedures, and provide clinical guidance. The PMP Director interfaced consistently with the Counselors and worked with them on programmatic issues and on implementing PMP activities.

During the second half of the year, with the aim of supporting the School Counselors in their on-site activities and guiding them as they build connections with Teachers and Principals, a new Support Staff joined the team. She had been serving, and continued to serve, as the Grover Cleveland Middle School's Counselor, with both of her roles as School Counselor and PMP Support Staff supported by The Bridge. Upon joining, she participated in the weekly meetings and worked closely with the Project Director to support the Counselors with their non-clinical programmatic needs.

- ***Suggestions for Consideration:***

  (1) Roles and responsibilities of School Counselors need to be more clearly delineated, especially in terms of engagement with the School Principals and teachers, and a periodic performance review instituted with a mechanism and milestones for improvement established.

  (2) Opportunities for professional development and mentoring need to be made available and encouraged for School Counselors, especially in the area of "teaching," considering that they are expected to do much more than provide psychotherapy and counseling. The main vehicle for cultural change will be engaging students across six different grades and different ages, and developing cognitive skills around fairly sophisticated curricula that deal with intrapersonal and interpersonal issues and relations.

  (3) Better guidance is needed for School Counselors on how to build advocacy for PMP at their schools and involve Principals and teachers in conversations around the philosophy of PMP and how a school culture can be changed. As stated later in the report, the role of Principals in this aspect of the work is critical.

- **<u>Providing Access to Psychiatric Services</u>.** In terms of a new psychiatrist in support of PMP, the leadership had decided after much deliberation to engage two external child-adolescent psychiatrists for crisis/emergency referrals and consultation on a per diem basis.

☑ **Met & Exceeded**	**Goal 4.** Provide services for elementary school students experiencing significant mental health problems.

- **<u>Providing Adequate Mental Health Services</u>.** The presence of the School Counselors on a full-time basis was a major improvement compared to the limited access to counseling that had been available prior to the grant. Only two school counselors (1.5 FTE) had served the four schools on a rotating basis. The School Principals in many instances had to address behavioral issues on their own, and mental health needs were addressed when possible on pre-determined days. According to the Principals, the new arrangement facilitated by the grant drastically increased the level of access to real-time, on-demand counseling and, with it, reduced the level of anxiety by both Teachers and School Principals.

  Beyond serving students who needed mental-health interventions or treatments provided by Counselors through their programming and partnerships with their respective teachers and Principals, the prospect for shifting the treatment from intervention to prevention. As services broadened from individual clinical attention to those who need it, which would continue in a more systematic, reliable manner, the

possibility of evolving the approach to cultivating a climate of emotional wellbeing for all students became more apparent. Such a climate could potentially be achieved through group programming and classroom teaching, and turning Counselors into significant go-to resources and active members of their school community.

A description of screening for mental health and behavioral challenges and issues identified is presented under Output Goals.

- ***Suggestion for Consideration:***
  - Protocols and procedures for addressing mental-health and social-behavioral crises and interventions need to be in place and reviewed annually, especially with regards to: (a) how Counselors and Principals should interact; (b) the role of the Clinical Supervisor at The Bridge in this process; (c) who has final authority on approach; (d) what sort of follow-through is appropriate; and (e) and who will be responsible for oversight.

Output Goals. A number of output objectives were proposed under Goals 2-4. They represent the level of activity in which staff engages and the extent of services provided or workshops offered, which were organized with the intent to produce results that make a desired difference (outcomes). By themselves, they do not guarantee results; but they are an essential component of progress measurement.

It should be noted that these process objectives were anticipated to be met over the three-year life of the grant. The review below examines the first-year progress.

☒ **Steady & Significant Progress**	- *Objective 2a:* Provide 100% of students at all four schools with access to Peace Rooms. - *Objective 2b:* Provide 20% of students in need with small group programming. - *Objective 2c:* Provide 100% of students who struggle the most with self-regulation skills with referrals to highly experienced outside providers. - *Objective 3a:* Place 100% of students in *Character Counts!* - *Objective 3b:* Provide 20% with small group programming designed to enhance social skills, problem-solving skills, conflict-resolution skills, and effective communication skills. - *Objective 3c:* Provide 100% of those who struggle most with relationships with referrals to highly experienced outside providers.

- **Providing Access to Peace Rooms.** Serious attempts were made to identify and dedicate a safe, welcoming, and open space at each school to serve as the Peace Room and be accessible to all students at any time (Objective 2a). The proposal suggested that such space be appointed with furnishings and materials that would

make it comfortable and conducive to quiet time for emotional regulation or decompression as needed.

The actual output has not reportedly been consistent across all schools, especially considering that physical space management is commonly a very challenging requirement. All four schools had set aside space, in all cases considered adequate by the School Principal, and dedicated it to the School Counselor and PMP; in one case, the space was shared with another staff member but was available for private conversations on demand.

Members of the Evaluation Team visited two schools and were exposed to two different types of Peace Rooms: (1) a large classroom dedicated to PMP, in which the School Counselor conducted individual clinical sessions and regularly met with her classes of students to engage them in the PMP-identified curriculum; and (2) a good-size, well-accessorized room/office that was set aside for PMP, in which clinical sessions were held and which students can visit whenever needed. In the latter example, the School Counselor would visit student classrooms to conduct the regular PMP activities.

- **Offering Small-Group Sessions & Enrichment Programs.** Every School Counselor assembled formal and informal groups that met during lunch or recess. Students in these programs were generally self-selected, but in some cases students were invited by Counselors to join. The intention to involve one-fifth of students in need may not have been fully achieved since no procedure was set through PMP to specify what "in-need" meant or determine how students will be invited to participate (Objectives 2b and 3b). Nevertheless, at least eight groups were reportedly formed at every school involving students primarily in Grades 3 to 5, with varying sizes and varying degrees of activity and meeting consistency. Counselors stated that a total of 201 group sessions were held through the year across the schools. The number of students in these groups is not firmly known; it is estimated based on raw figures noted by the Evaluation Team to be between 10 and 15% of the total student population.

  In addition to these sessions, each Counselor held regular sessions for each grade on a rotating basis, starting twice a month and then adjusted to a more realistic schedule that would not interfere with academic curricular demands (Table 3). All students (100%) engaged in multiple such sessions (Objective 3a), which covered a wide variety of topics, from mindfulness awareness to tolerance and coping (see below). Members of the Evaluation Team attended two such sessions and noted effective delivery, class management, and engagement by the Counselors, and high student interest and participation. In parallel, parents received companion resources and tips through the Counselors' newsletters.

Table 3 – Number of Counselor-led Classroom Sessions per Grade Across Four Schools						
Total	**K**	**1st**	**2nd**	**3rd**	**4th**	**5th**
238	41	37	38	41	41	40

The classroom sessions revolved around concepts included in *Character Counts!*, which dealt with six important character pillars: trust, respect, citizenship, responsibility, caring, and fairness. Counselors had to develop their own lesson plans and introduced related topics, among them: exploring feelings, conversation skills, positive self-talk, handling conflict, and acts of kindness. Starting in Year 2, a new evidence-based Peace First curriculum will reportedly be introduced to ensure greater consistency of lesson plans and learning outcomes.

- ***Suggestion for Consideration:***
  - More deliberate team planning and better tracking of group activities are recommended to ensure consistency in forming the groups, identifying discussion themes, and measuring effectiveness of results.

- **Making Psychotherapy Referrals.** Frequent referrals were made, with proper follow-up, to external psychotherapists (48 students) and psychiatrists (eight students, nine times) as deemed appropriate (Table 4). It is not clear to the Evaluation Team whether 100% of students who struggled with emotional self-regulation or relationships received such referrals or how these issues were actually identified (Objectives 2c and 3c), but the professional judgment of the School Counselor is deferred to in such instances. It is to be noted that students in third and fifth grades received the largest number of referrals, with similar frequency distribution across the four schools.

  Relationships with external service providers have been established. There were quite a few conversations (estimated at more than 50 based on data from Counselors) with external professionals around issues experienced by the referred students. The referral system is expected to continue to run smoothly over time.

Table 5 – Number of Referrals per Grade Across Four Schools (First Row: Psychotherapy Referrals; Second Row: Psychiatric Referrals)						
Total	**K**	**1st**	**2nd**	**3rd**	**4th**	**5th**
48	6	7	5	14	6	10
8	3	1	-	2	-	2

Teachers and parents were involved in dozens of conversations with Counselors regarding issues faced by students. These conversations, which were not consistently tracked, were initiated by either party, and took place in most cases

multiple times during the intervention, helped clarify the counseling philosophy and the necessity of involvement by all parties to ensure success of intervention.

☒ **Steady & Significant Progress**	- *Objective 4a:* Screen 100% of students for significant mental health challenges, such as anxiety and depression. - *Objective 4b:* Of those screened, provide 100% with treatment either on site or through referrals for identified mental health issues. - *Objective 4c:* Provide 100% of those receiving treatment with ongoing case management and follow-up to ensure continued treatment effectiveness. - *Objective 4d:* Screen 100% of students in crisis situations with immediate assistance, either on site or through referrals.

❖ **Screening Students for Mental Health Challenges.** Counselors worked from their early days to establish the clinical process for providing mental health services, which starts with screening and leads to treatment on site or referrals to treatment off-site. The number of screenings reported by Counselors amounted to 269 or 23.6% of all elementary school students (Table 6). Counselors screened more students in Grades 3 to 5, but higher ratios of students who needed attention were found in lower grades.

It is not clear whether Counselors were formally charged with screening every student and what the procedure for doing so. Screening appears to have been reactive to student needs.

Table 6 – Number of Students Screened* for Mental Health or Behavioral Challenges

Total	K	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
269	15	28	29	79	59	59
156	14	19	15	50	29	29
58.0%	93.3%	67.9%	51.7%	63.3%	49.2%	49.2%

(*) Second row: Number of students identified to have challenges. Third row is ratio of the number of students identified to have challenges to the number of those screened.

Issues students were noted to face include: (a) emotional challenges relating to social, general or separation anxiety, and mood issues (which were most prevalent); (b) social interactions; (c) adjustments due to medical issues with students or their families; and (d) academic or learning difficulties. No clear differences in students' issues were discerned among grades.

The grant proposal suggested that screening would involve the use of validated scales, such as the Beck Depression Scale or the Spence Children Anxiety Scale. One school is exploring the use of the Multidimensional Students Life Satisfaction Scale, but in Year 1 there was no standard and scales were not

uniformly used at the four schools. It was reported that decisions relating to the use of scales and pre-/post-intervention measures to be kept for evaluating progress would be made in Year 2.

All Counselors participated in periodic observations of student behaviors and interactions during lunch, recess, and during their own classroom sessions, which is how they invited the students for initial conversations and screening. It was stated in conversations with the PMP Staff that in every case proper procedure was followed for informing parents and School Principals, taking into account HIPPA regulations and privacy rules.

- **Providing Clinical Treatment.** According to data reported by the School Counselors, every student who was found in need of mental health treatment or emotional help received clinical treatment at the school or was referred elsewhere. On average, five in-school counseling sessions were provided for each student with consistent follow-up. Here again, no significant difference is observed among schools. There were examples of intensive counseling support provided to a few students; in one case, due to separation anxiety experienced by a student in Kindergarten and a tenacious refusal to come to school, the Counselor spent morning hours before class with that student for a few weeks.

  Counselors stayed in close contact with parents as was deemed necessary. During Year 1, across the four schools, there was communication by phone, email, or in person with 46 parents once, and with 57 parents multiple times for follow-up regarding their children's situation and counseling advice.

  Additionally, as reported, Counselors intervened in crisis situations and addressed the needs of 93 students beyond supporting the ones who received repeat counseling. In specific, separate crisis situations involving two third-grade students, a total of 77 full individual sessions was required. It is not possible to conclude from conversations with Counselors and reported data whether Counselors were involved in intervening with every student crisis that took place at school; in one reported case, the Counselor was part of a team effort to support a student coping with a family loss.

- ***Suggestion for Consideration:***
  - In order to address the output measured more directly, it may be necessary to develop a mechanism for linking screening to treatment and follow-up, and a process for ensuring that Counselors are involved in addressing crisis situations, to be tracked in a standard way across the four schools.

Outcome Goals. Six goals/objectives stand at the level of outcomes, i.e., they establish expectations of results to be achieved. They fit under student learning outcomes

(acquisition of character development skills, stress-reduction, and coping techniques) and program outcomes (reduction of frequency of disciplinary referrals and elimination of referrals to ER).

☒ **Too early to assess**	**From Goal 2.** Help students develop skills: stress-reduction, coping, self-regulation. - *From Objective 2b:* Help students in small groups develop skills to cope effectively with challenges and overcome adversity. - *From Objectives 2c & 3d:* Show a combined 30% decrease in disciplinary referrals at schools. **From Goal 3.** Help reduce bullying/harassment by improving student relations with peers, families, and the school community. - *From Objective 3a:* Foster through *Character Counts!* the six Pillars of Character: Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring, and Citizenship. - *From Objective 4e:* Reduce to 0% referrals to local ER for mental-health-related reasons.

Progress toward these outcomes will be assessed in Year 2 and measured in Year 3 through a summative review. They will be measured by students' own perceptions and reporting via surveys but also through responses to case scenarios presented in focus groups selected through statistically identified samples.

It is clear that the classroom activities, group counseling sessions or conversations, and individual counseling sessions provided significant help to students toward developing stress-reduction skills and self-regulation, and helped contribute to an environment with improved student relations among themselves and with others. However, it is not known at this stage whether these activities led to statistically significant increases in stress-reduction and coping skills, or an improved environment when it comes to bullying and harassment. More data will be gathered in the next two years to gain greater insights into these outcomes. Nevertheless, given the scope of the review, the Evaluation Team may not be able, without gathering individual data about each student or a statistically valid sample of students, to reach such a conclusion empirically.

Data were gathered and will be treated as baseline for disciplinary referrals and referrals to local emergency rooms, against which Objectives 2c, 3d, and 4e will be measured.

- Disciplinary referrals were not reported at every school in Year 1. For three of the schools, there were a total of 145 incidents (37+84+ 24), and two schools did not track them by grade. Among the issues noted: (a) lack of compliance; (b) conflict with other students and fighting; (c) inappropriate physical contact; and (d) verbal assault and signs of disrespect. Schools did not track

repeat referrals. Two fifth graders were suspended at one of the schools, one of them twice.

- Only two students were referred to the ER (from two different schools) for psychiatric clearance given the threat of self-harm.

A Note about Professional Development. The involvement of teachers and parents in PMP as argued in the next section is critical to its sustainability and success. Professional development for teachers and workshops for parents around themes relevant to the purpose and philosophy of PMP were considered and incorporated into the Counselors activities. PMP funding was used to conduct a few such programs; such efforts included: (a) hosting district-wide bullying prevention programming; (b) offering a parents' workshop on positive parenting; and (c) involving all Counselors in in-service training relating to the State-mandated Intervention & Referral Services, with which PMP activities had to be well aligned.

C. OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT

C1. Important Factors Impacting Year 1 Progress

The first year of the Peace Model Project was primarily devoted to planning and staffing the initiative, as well as developing relationships between counselors and the schools to which they were assigned. The Evaluation Team's operational assessment of Year 1 was informed by observing meetings of various staff and stakeholders convened by the Project Director, individual interviews with the project's lead partners and four School Principals, and principal surveys.

This section summarizes key findings with regard to accomplishments achieved and challenges experienced, as well as several areas of opportunity to which PMP may consider shifting its focusing in the future.

In considering the progress achieved during Year 1, it is important to understand the PMP within the context of several important factors:

- Federal grants such as this rarely provide sufficient resources of funding to plan new programs. Rather, grantees are often expected to be primed and ready for grant implementation immediately upon announcement of the award. Given the absence of adequate time and resources, the operational progress made in Year 1 is quite impressive, even laudable.
- The U.S. Department of Education funded only a portion of the budget originally proposed by the lead partners. Despite what has been referred to as a significant reduction, there was no corresponding shrinking of the scope, project goals, or grant deliverables.
- While funding was received for a "school counseling" program, the grantee proposed to also create measurable improvements in "school climate," with project leaders and counselors expressing great interest in sustaining the initiative beyond the initial three-year grant period in order to have a significant impact on the school district and the community.
- In spite of a good working history between The Bridge and the CWC School District, there is perhaps a natural tension created as a result of the organizational arrangement: Counselors were appropriately housed in the schools and needed to work closely with School Principals and Teachers, yet were employed by, and received clinical supervision from, The Bridge. This may require special attention to reporting relationships, protocol, and communications. It should also be added that many individuals involved in PMP are relatively new to their positions, among them: the Director of The Bridge, the Clinical Supervisor, and four of the five Counselors. Building individual relationships requires time.

C2. Accomplishments & Bright Spots

- ***Lead Partners – The School District and the Bridge***
  The Bridge Executive Director and Superintendent of Schools expressed a shared vision and passionate commitment to the success of this project. During Year 1, they established a new working partnership and have been accessible to one another and to others engaged in the work. This shared leadership has resulted in significant progress in Year 1, and commitment to the PMP in the schools appears to have grown, albeit more rapidly in some schools than in others. The project was fully staffed and operational with all administrative grant requirements having been met and the Superintendent of Schools and The Bridge Executive Director taking an active interest in the evaluation process.

- ***The Staff – Director and PMP Counselor/Staff Support***
  The Peace Model Director committed an extraordinary amount of time and effort to getting the project up and running in Year 1. This included the hiring of staff and working daily to meet the diverse needs of counselors, principals, lead partners, the clinical supervisor, and the evaluators. As a result, processes were in place to support project planning, collaboration, and clinical supervision.
  In addition, the Project Director was employed at the James Caldwell High School and the School Counselor from Grover Cleveland Middle School was engaged to support and facilitate counselor/school relationships, directly connecting all six District Schools to PMP. Counselors reported that they were well supported by the administrative team.

- ***Schools – Students, Parents, Teachers & Principals***
  At the end of Year 1, to reiterate what was stated under the Goals Progress section, there was at least one qualified and credentialed counselor in each of the four elementary schools (Jefferson, Lincoln, Washington and Wilson) and two schools had dedicated a room to counseling and other Peace Model activities. Students were actively engaged in individualized counseling and group sessions, included related peer activities. All four School Principals participated in evaluation interviews and expressed appreciation for the Counselors and their work. The rate of parent participation in evaluation surveys was robust, and Counselors reported some interest on the part of teachers in the project. The School Counselor and Principal at Washington appeared to have developed an especially strong working partnership to move the project forward.

- ***Counselors & Clinical Supervision***
  It was clear to the Evaluation Team that the Counselors were highly dedicated to their schools, their students, and the goals of the project. As stated in the previous section, students received counseling and referral services and parents received

related support as appropriate. The Counselors participated in weekly group and individual supervision and felt supported by their peers, often communicating outside of regularly scheduled meetings. Two schools (Washington and Jefferson) had dedicated a room to the project to be used for counseling and related Peace Model activities which counselors had decorated and filled with posters, toys, and educational materials. *The Character Counts!* curriculum was implemented at all four schools with limited success, and a new curriculum has been identified to replace it in Year 2.

C3. Critical Challenges and Considerations for the Future

- **Cultivating the Capacity for Collective Action**

  For PMP to sustain school counseling services beyond current funding by the Department of Education and expand its focus to address specific improvements in school climate, further investments will be required by lead partners, as well as the engagement of stakeholders community-wide, involving parents, teachers, principals, and community partners in an intentional collaborative effort.
  The extensive time required for planning and implementing program start-up activities in Year 1 means that only two years of funding under the Education's School Counseling grant remain. The proposed Advisory Council was not established as planned, nor was planning to convene such a Council initiated.

  The extent of awareness about the Peace Model Project—and perspectives as to its purpose—varied considerably among participants in the evaluation interviews and focus groups, each with his or her own expectations, experiences, and vantage points. With regard to language, the term "Peace Model" does not appear to be in frequent use, which suggests a time-sensitive opportunity for the lead partners to strengthen the extent and quality of communication, collaboration, and common messaging between all those contributing.

  Convening as a collective group of committed partners could help to generate a deeper understanding of the shared work, identify issues of concern, and build consensus around decisions related to future direction. While organizing diverse project stakeholders (including parents, teachers, and representatives of appropriate community organizations) takes time and effort, it will be time and effort well spent if it leads to a deeper understanding of, and commitment to, the Project. In recent years, research about Collective Impact initiatives, largely emanating from the Stanford Center for Social Innovation (Kania and Kramer, Winter 2011) has provided a useful framework for considering how to approach the creation of a group that could potentially gain support from vocal champions who will advocate for the project's growth and development. Such a collaborative

entity could possibly have a significantly greater impact than might a traditional Advisory Council.

Considerations for Year 2 and Beyond:

- Reflect on Year 1 progress and engage key stakeholders in planning for the future.
- Explore how lead partners may better support short and long-term goals.
- Seek creative ways to strengthen the coordination of roles and functions (see organization chart presented earlier).
- Engage School Principals in meaningful discussions about the purpose, outputs, outcomes, impact, and sustainability of the project.
- Improve communication among School Principals with their school's teachers and parents.
- Consider establishing a collective group of parents, teachers, principals, counselors, community organizations, and lead partners to collaboratively develop a shared vision, common agenda, and outcome measures, working closely to coordinate their efforts, learn from one another, solve problems, and enhance the visibility of the Peace Model Project in the community.

❖ **Enhancing and Refining Project Implementation**

It is exceedingly hard work to build a start-up project such as the Peace Model from scratch, especially given limited prior infrastructure, insufficient time for planning, and the significant cut to the grant budget which was not accompanied by a proportionate cut in the scope and project's deliverables. In Year 1, without the benefit of an operational leadership team in place, the Project Director focused her attention on hiring the counselors and putting other critical project components in place. The need to do so expeditiously was exacerbated by a late start date. The approach taken was both necessary and pragmatic, and it led to significant Year 1 accomplishments. Significant challenges experienced included: (a) the absence of needed decision making and communication protocols; (b) a lack of effective coordination between the school engagement and clinical supervisory functions of PMP; and (c) a curriculum that did not meet the Counselor's needs because it only provided a broad framework that did not include lesson plans.

In Year 1, as the central point of contact for all things PMP, the Project Director worked to balance multiple demands of lead partners, School Principals, Counselors, and the Clinical Supervisor, as well as the funder and the Evaluation Team. The lack of organizational infrastructure required that she be "all things to

all people" managing what are often competing, and sometimes conflicting, needs of multiple stakeholders.

Furthermore, counseling in a school context is as unique to the school as the school culture itself. Add to that the state-dictated Intervention & Referral System (I&RS) with its procedures and protocols. Parents did not appear to have a complete understanding of this new project and sometimes had concerns about the stigma associated with their children receiving counseling. While the Counselors are highly trained and well-qualified professionals, they were not trained to be teachers as stated earlier and yet they were responsible for delivering a curriculum to students. In addition, they had the responsibility of engaging School Principals and teachers in the effort with little active support from lead partners. The PMP Counselors appeared to fully embrace the vision of enriching and improving school climate, but they will have little influence to do so without more active support from, and engagement in PMP by, lead partners, School Principals, teachers, and parents.

The State of New Jersey's I&RS mandate appears to align well with the goals of the Peace Model Project. The process and the nature of its guidelines presented an opportunity to engage Counselors as resources and contributors to data collection and analysis, professional development, intervention, and referral services. As such, some of the PMP activities had to either fit within, or complement, the existing process. While this may have posed some challenges, it served as a context for the conversation and increased interaction between the Counselors and School Principals. An additional challenge was posed by the fact that two schools had very limited space available, which may have adversely affected the unhindered ability of their Counselors to properly counsel and treat students in confidential setting when needed and without interruption.

Considerations for Year 2 and Beyond:

- Build on relationships developed in Year 1 to further school engagement in Peace Model Project activities, including engagement of School Principals and teachers.
- Reinvest in the Project Director's efforts to build a coordinated management team, working with the Clinical Supervisor and School Counselor Staff Support, and implement plans for strengthening the integration, school engagement, and clinical supervision activities.
- Strengthen the team's capacity, with lead partner support, to more evenly share overall project responsibilities.

- Convene regular meetings of lead partners with the management team to review project progress and timeline, identify issues, and develop collaborative solutions.
- Identify, address, and communicate clear expectations and decision protocols with significant input from the Counselors.
- Enhance training and professional development, including I&RS, for all Counselors with strong support for new Counselors entering schools.
- Obtain funder approval to implement and closely monitor the implementation of the evidence-based Peace First curriculum.

❖ **Expanding the Focus on School Climate**

The achievements of Year 1 focused primarily on developing the essential counseling components of the project and built a foundation for the strengthening and expansion of efforts to include specific goals related to improving school climate. From the perspective of the Counselors, school counseling and school climate are intimately related; the most important single factor in creating true impact in this area is establishing a strong partnership with School Principals.

For a number of reasons, including many competing demands on Principals' time and the absence of their direct involvement in the development of the program design presented in the grant proposal, Principal engagement in PMP appeared to have been inconsistent, with the extent of engagement varying from school to school. While the Superintendent of Schools (and to some extent the Project Director) engaged Principals in meaningful discussions about PMP, as stated earlier, their involvement was also complicated by the fact that Counselors were not their direct reports, but were employed by and received clinical supervision from The Bridge. This suggests a need to consider the unique challenges of such a structural relationship and identify ways to improve coordination among leadership and management.

The Superintendent and Principals made reference to specific discussions taking place in their regular meetings about the PMP initiative, addressing questions or matters of concern. In Year 1, however, there appears to have been little, if any, planning or coordination of project activities across schools and very limited teacher and parent engagement. Pulling all four schools together as one PMP community would of course be quite challenging given competing demands on time and differences in Principals' individual leadership styles and school culture. However, the failure to do so may result in a significant lost opportunity to transition the Peace Model Project from a school counseling program in Year 1 into a hybrid that incorporates the strong emphasis on school climate emphasized by the lead partners and described in the funding proposal.

Considerations for Year 2 and Beyond:

- Strengthen connections and collaboration between lead partners, School Principals, management team, and Counselors as described above, deepening the involvement of School Principals as active partners, site leaders, and advocates.
- Plan and implement a coordinated Peace Model Project activity/activities across all schools.
- Provide more guided encouragement and support for teacher and parent engagement, essential for the sustainability of PMP's outcomes.
- Clarify language and messaging used to describe the Project's purpose and goals among all partners in the community, using PMP-oriented language and terms.
- Improve consistency and frequency of PMP communications in school and in the community, including expanding the newsletter to combine the efforts of all schools, Counselors, and others.
- Develop a long-term sustainability plan that institutionalizes counseling services in the four PMP schools. This plan would support the progressive growth and development of this Department of Education school counseling program into a continuing school climate initiative with a solid record of accomplishment and strong community support positioning it effectively with funder interest.

D. About Year 2 Evaluation

We are aware that the budget does not support a comprehensive evaluation. We also recognize that a thorough, rigorous outcomes study that allows us to correlate changes in coping skills, perspectives about emotions, social behaviors, resolving conflicts, and dealing with bullying issues to PMP activities cannot be done without gathering detailed longitudinal information for a statistically defined sample of students.

To the extent that the budget could support a comprehensive study, the Evaluation Team would consider designing such an evaluation, establishing a data system to support it, and then conducting the study. We can capture data about coping skills, for example, but cannot tie such data statistically to the work that's been done through PMP.

E. Baseline Data

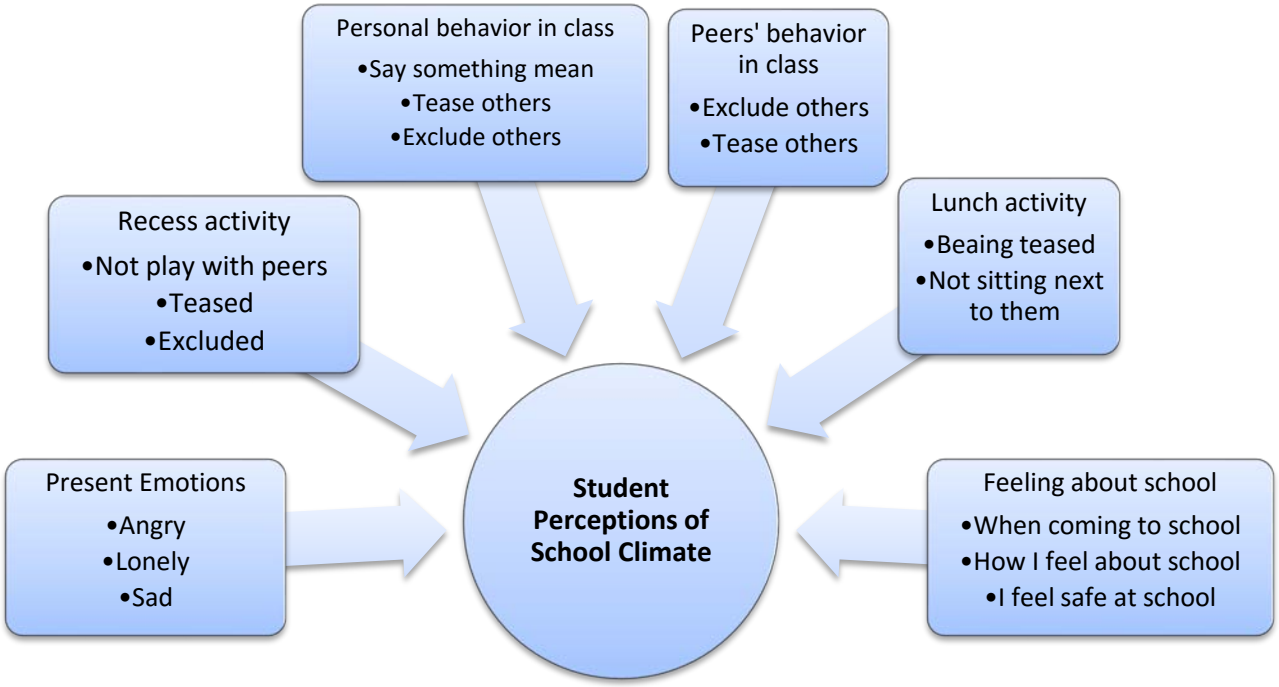
Setting the Baseline

As was stated in the methodology section, the Evaluation Team administered a number of surveys to construct an image of the school climate that will serve as the Year 1 baseline data for following reviews in Years 2 and 3. These instruments included: (a) two identical surveys for students in Grades 3 to 5, which were set by the State and administered by the schools six months apart, (b) two identical surveys for parents, administered six months apart, one for parents of students in Grades 3 to 5 and the other for parents of children in K through second grade, administered six months later; and (c) one age-appropriate poll for a sample of students across all grades (one classroom per grade at each school).

The questions centered on, among other issues: (a) students' emotional state before school, during school, and after school; (b) the nature of their interactions with peers; and (c) access to adults to talk to about difficult issues when needed.

Preliminary Observations

Grades 3 to 5. The first baseline report was produced in January 2016 based on surveys administered in October 2015. For students in Grades 3 to 5, a few factors were identified statistically as affecting perceptions of school climate (as seen in the diagram below).



- Among all survey responses, students were likely to associate their overall perceptions with the six factors presented in the diagram, for instance the likely association between not playing with peers (as a sub-factor of the recess activity factor) and how a student respondent perceives the overall school climate (elaborated upon in Table 1, Appendix G3).

- The frequency distribution of various responses will be used for comparison across consecutive surveys. Of note, our second follow-up surveys affirmed these six factors and, through a Pearson Chi-square analysis, identified that most sub-factors persisted as shown in the diagram (i.e., did not significantly differ between these two surveys). Those that did change in a statistically significant way are perceptions of: (a) current feelings of sadness; (b) teasing others or being teased; (c) saying something mean; and (d) general feelings when coming to school and about school.

- There were five key observations to note from the surveys: (1) female fourth graders appeared more likely to express negative attitudes about the factors above; (2) there were higher levels of loneliness, anger, and sadness for students in fourth grade; (3) higher levels of exclusion and teasing during recess were reported by fourth graders than by others; (4) teasing and excluding others in the classroom were more predominately reported among male students; and (5) the perception of being teased in class was most often reported among third graders.

Factor analysis revealed the following parents' perceptions: (a) teachers are the most important players in creating a positive school community; (b) it was important that children felt happy when returning from school and that they liked school; (c) their children rarely experienced conflict in school; and (d) their children actively engaged in discourse about their school day once at home.

More importantly, parents noted that:

- Children had low levels of coping skills, especially among third graders who, parents reported with concern, did not have adults with whom to talk at school when upset.
- Third graders experienced fear, stress, and higher levels of conflict.
- There was less open communication between parents and their third-grade male students than between parents and female children or children in other grades.

Both students and parents see the school as a safe place. Generally, the most important factor in affecting a school's climate is to see the school as a supportive community.

Grades K to 2. The 204 responses gathered during anonymous, age-appropriate, in-classroom polls were evenly distributed among schools, grades, and gender.
The questions, asked of students, were designed to elicit students' attitudes about their "feelings" during specific periods of the day and in specific locations. Students were also asked to rate their personal reactions to what to do to feel better and to whom they can talk when being bothered by another person. Responses will serve as the baseline.

In reviewing the distribution of students' responses, a few observations can be made:

- At least four out of every five elementary students believe they know what they need to do to feel better or know to whom they can talk when being bothered by another person.
- When going to school, students appear more likely *Calm* and less likely *Sad*, *Angry* or *Afraid*.
- When in school and when going into the PMP classroom, students appear more likely to be in a *Happy* or *Calm* emotional state and less likely to be in a state of being *Sad*, *Angry* or *Afraid*.
- When coming home from school, students are more likely to be *Happy* and less likely to be *Angry* or *Afraid*.

To determine any potential relationship between students' responses and grade level or gender, a series of bivariate analyses were conducted. Specifically, cross-distribution analyses with Pearson Chi-square analysis was used to determine the independence of students' responses to questions related to emotional state and personal knowledge. Tables 2 and 3 in Appendix G4 provide results in which there is a high likelihood "of no independence" between students' responses, actual grade, and gender—in other words, any differences may not be due to chance.

In reviewing the cross-distribution of students' responses across grade and gender, several observations can also be made, among them:

- Students in Kindergarten are more likely than their counterparts in Grades 1 or 2 to feel *Tired* when coming to school in the morning and feel *Afraid* and ***not*** feel *Calm* when going into the PMP classroom.
- Boys are more likely than girls to feel *Angry* when in school and when going into the PMP classroom.

Regarding parents' responses, the following has statistical significance:

- Parents with children in Kindergarten are more likely to believe their children's teachers are sensitive to children's feelings than parents with children in Grades 1 or 2.

- Parents with children in Kindergarten are more likely to believe their children are not bullied than parents with children in Grades 1 or 2.
- There were no other significant differences in parents' responses to the questions when cross-distributed across the items within the model with grade or gender. This suggests the parents' responses fit the model outlined in the original report.

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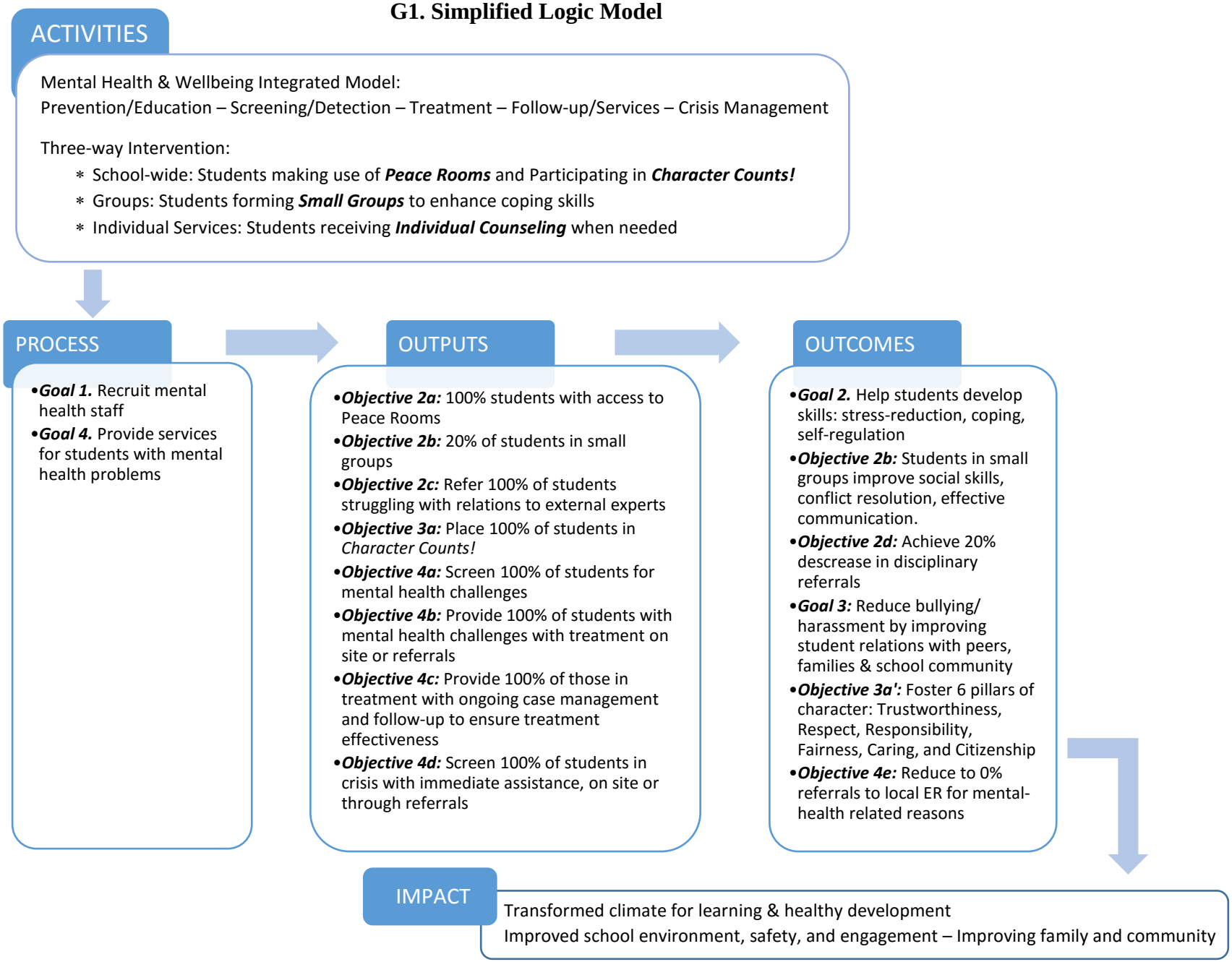
G. Appendices

G1. Logic Model
G2. Staff & Leadership Roster
G3. Alignment of Evaluation Method with Outcomes
G4. More on Baseline Data

G1. Simplified Logic Model



G2. Staff & Leadership Roster (Professional credentials not shown)

Project Director: Mary Cunningham

School Counselors (2015-2016):

Jefferson – Radha Collins

Lincoln – Lauren Rubino

Washington – Sady Horn

Wilson – Julia Yoskowitz and Daniela Montineo

Support Staff: Debbie Santulli

Clinical Supervisor: Joel Levine

Executive Director of The Bridge: Inya Chehade

Superintendent of CWC Public Schools: James Heinegg

School Principals:

Jefferson – Tim Ayers

Lincoln – Adam Gehrer

Washington – Barbara Adams

Wilson – Scott Keena

G2. Data-Gathering Tools, Implementation & Relation to Goals

Activity/Data Gathering Tool		Goals' Progress Measured	Frequency	Responsibility
A1.	Meetings with Director & Staff	Goals 1& 2 Insights for Goals 3 & 4	Three times Annually | Y1-3	Evaluation Team
A2	Individual Interviews/Short surveys of Principals (alternating), Superintendent, and The Bridge CEO or designees	Goals 1 & 2	Annually Y1: Early on Y2: Middle of year Y3: Toward end	Evaluation Team
A3.	School Records (about project and its operation, as well as workshop evaluations)	Goal 1 Goal 3 – Objective 3a	Annually Y1: Early Y2-3: Toward End	Evaluation Team in collaboration with Project Director (workshop evaluations to be handled by staff with input from Evaluation Team)
A4.	Observations (Peace Rooms; *Character Counts!* Activities; Teacher, counselor & parent workshops) – Sample of each	Goal 1 Goal 2 – Objective 2a, 2b Goal 3 – Objective 3a Goal 4	Ongoing Y1-3	Evaluation Team In collaboration with Schools' Counselors and Administration
B1.	School Records (in aggregate: student attendance, disciplinary referrals, participation in Peace Room and *Character Counts!* etc.)	Goal 2 – Objectives 2b, 2c, 2d Goal 3	Annually Y1-3 Toward End	Project Director & Schools' Administration in collaboration with Evaluation Team
B2.	Student Counseling Records (in aggregate: records regarding counseling sessions and students in treatment))	Goal 2 – Objective 2b Goal 4 – Objectives 4a, 4b, 4c, 4d, 4e	Annually Y1-3 Toward End	Schools' Counselors in collaboration with Evaluation Team
C1.	General Student Body Poll (Perceptions & Attitudes)	Goal 2 Goal 3	Three times annually Y1-3	Schools' Counselors & Administration in collaboration (and supported by) Evaluation Team

C2.	Parental Perceptions Survey	Goal 2 Goal 4 – Objective 4c	Once annually Y1-3	Evaluation Team in collaboration with Project Director
C3.	Student Emotional Monitor | Tentative	Goal 2	Ongoing / Weekly TBD	Evaluation Team with Project Director and Schools' Administration
C4.	Psychological Scales	Goal 2 – Objective 2b	Collected annually 1 pre & 1 post treatment as applicable	School Counselors (with input from Evaluation Team)
C5.	General School & Student Emergency Records (in aggregate)	Goal 4 – Objective 4e	Reviewed Once Annually Y1-3	School Counselors & Schools' Administration (with input from Evaluation Team)
C6	Conversations with Project Advisory Board	Goal 4	Annually Y1-3 Toward End	Evaluation Team

G4. Highlights of Baseline Data Analysis

Table 1. Associations of Student Perceptions with Overall Perception of School Climate

Students were more likely to associate feelings at time of survey, *Angry*, *Lonely*, or *Sad,* as a factor affecting their overall perceptions of school climate.
Recess activities are associated with the facts that another child may not be playing with them, and the perception of being teased or excluded from groups.
How mean they perceive they are to others, how often they tease others, or how often they exclude someone from certain activities are associated with their own behavior in class.
Peers' behavior in class is associated with their perception of themselves being excluded or teased by others.
What happens at lunch was more likely associated with their perception of someone teasing them or someone not sitting next to them.
Students' general feelings about school can be associated with how they feel when they come to school, how they feel about school, and whether they feel safe at school.

Table 2. Cross Distribution of Students' Emotional State and Knowledge by Grade

		Grade					
Emotional state or personal knowledge	Response	K	One	Two	Total	Pearson χ^2	p-test
When I go to school in the morning, I am usually tired.	Yes	13	30	30	73		
	No	45	44	44	133		
	Total	58	74	74	206	5.98	0.050
When I go to this classroom, I usually feel afraid	Yes	5	1	1	7		
	No	53	73	73	199		
	Total	58	74	74	206	6.71	0.035
When I go to this classroom, I usually feel calm	Yes	9	22	27	58		
	No	49	52	47	148		
	Total	58	74	74	206	7.21	0.027

Table 3. Cross Distribution of Students' Emotional State and Knowledge by Gender

Emotional state or personal knowledge	Response	Gender: Boy	Gender: Girl	Total	Pearson χ^2	p-test
When I am in school, I usually feel angry	Yes	11	0	11		
	No	102	93	195		
	Total	113	0	206	9.56	0.002
When I go to this classroom, I usually feel angry	Yes	10	1	11		
	No	103	92	195		
	Total	113	93	206	6.10	0.014