



Prevention Matters
Year 3 Evaluation Report

November 15, 2021

Table of Contents

Commonly Used Abbreviations	iv
Executive Summary	1
Introduction	1
RTI's Role and the Evaluation	4
Methodology	6
1 Grant Director Surveys.....	7
2 Grant Director Interviews	7
3 Implementer Surveys.....	8
4 School Administrative Data.....	10
5 Grantee-Collected Data	11
6 Indiana Youth Survey.....	12
7 Observations	13
8 Methodological Limitations.....	13
Learning about Implementation	15
1 Implementation Models	16
1.1 Programs Implemented	16
1.2 Students Served.....	18
1.3 Implementation Approaches.....	19
1.4 Implementation Schedules	19
1.5 Changes to Implementation due to COVID-19	23
1.6 Implementers.....	35
1.7 Implementer Training and Support	37
1.8 Implementation Monitoring.....	42
1.9 Program Integration and Coordination.....	48
1.10 Partnerships.....	51
1.11 Parent Involvement	54
2 Implementation Progress	57
3 Implementation Quality	57
3.1 Grant Director Reports of Implementation Quality.....	58
3.2 Implementer Reports of Implementation Quality	60
3.3 Adaptations	66
3.4 Correlates of Implementation Quality	70

3.5	Year 3 Successes	76
4	Challenges	77
4.1	Financial Challenges.....	77
4.2	Policy Challenges.....	78
4.3	Challenges Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic	80
4.4	Implementation Challenges Unrelated to COVID-19...	84
5	Sustainability.....	86
6	Grantees' Year 4 Plans	92
	Learning about Impact	93
1	Grantee-Collected Outcomes Data	94
2	School-Level Administrative Data.....	99
	Lessons Learned	102
1	Summary of Lessons Learned across Data Sources.....	103
1.1	Strengths and Growth.....	103
1.2	Areas for Improvement.....	104
1.3	COVID-19 Pandemic	105
2	Additional Lessons Learned from Grant Directors.....	105

Commonly Used Abbreviations

CARES Act	Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act
EDC	Education Development Corporation, technical assistance contractor
IDOE	Indiana Department of Education
ILEARN	Indiana Learning Evaluation Assessment Readiness Network
INYS	Indiana Youth Survey
IREAD	Indiana Reading Evaluation and Determination
ISTEP+	Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress-Plus
RTI	RTI International, the contracted evaluator for the <i>Prevention Matters</i> initiative
SEL	social-emotional learning

Executive Summary



The Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation has committed more than \$13 million to the *Prevention Matters* grant initiative to help Marion County schools identify, implement, and sustain evidence-based substance use prevention programs. Over the course of 4 years, *Prevention Matters* will allow about 160 schools to provide students with an array of programs that have been proven through research to help students avoid substance misuse.

The 2020–2021 school year represented Year 3 of the *Prevention Matters* initiative. Nearly all grantees worked to build on their second year of implementation during this first full academic year of implementing during a global pandemic. All grantees faced implementation challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic; however, the extent to which these challenges impacted outcomes and implementation progress varied greatly based on the grantee.

RTI International, the contracted *Prevention Matters* evaluator, continued to document which programs grantees implemented, how they implemented them, and whether programs influenced student outcomes. This evaluation aims to help grantees hone their implementation approaches and inform the field of school-based substance prevention efforts more broadly.

Evaluation Methodology

In Year 3 of the *Prevention Matters* evaluation, RTI collected three complementary datasets to help describe implementation of the initiative:

- A Web-based survey of directors from 26 *Prevention Matters* grant projects
- Telephone interviews with a sample of seven grant directors
- A Web-based survey of 1,854 program implementers

RTI also undertook two activities to assess the impact of *Prevention Matters* on student outcomes. RTI compiled and analyzed school-level data on academic achievement, student behavior, and standardized testing from the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE). RTI also compiled and analyzed grantee-collected data on substance use and associated risk and protective factors.

Methodological Limitations

It is important to note that the data collection and analysis methods for any evaluation have limitations. For the *Prevention Matters* evaluation, limitations include the use of mostly self-reported data and the implementer survey response rate (51% in Year 3). In addition, schools moved between virtual and in-person learning a few times during the academic year because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which prevented RTI from conducting classroom observations as planned. Furthermore, the changes in learning mode (i.e., in-person and virtual learning) because of COVID-19 also complicated the collection and interpretation of Years 2 and 3 data.

Findings

Strengths and Growth

- In Year 3, most implementers surveyed were on track to finish or had finished implementation of their *Prevention Matters* programming lessons for the year. Furthermore, compared with Year 2, Year 3 data show a significant increase in the percentage of implementers who reported

completing all their *Prevention Matters* lessons (65% in Year 3 and 57% in Year 2), an increase that is likely due in part to schools resuming in-person learning for most of the school year and the normalization of virtual learning in Year 3.

- From Year 2 to Year 3, sustainability planning among Round 1 grantees¹ increased across all areas of sustainability planning examined. This increase is statistically significant in one area of sustainability planning—discussing with local leaders how the program relates to the community’s overall prevention needs. In Year 3, among Round 2 grantees,² sustainability planning increased or remained stable among five of the nine areas examined.
- Curriculum adherence among Year 3 implementers continued to represent an area of strength among grantees. Similar to Year 2, just over 90% of implementers reported following their curriculum guide somewhat closely or very closely. Moreover, at least one grant director observed increased implementation fidelity as a key grant accomplishment in Year 3.
- Despite the many challenges of 2020, two student outcomes show significant gains. Students’ knowledge about the *Prevention Matters* curriculum increased when comparing Year 2 pre- and posttest data.³ Students’ knowledge increased from 71% of items correct at pretest to 86% correct at posttest. Students’ scores on measures of social-emotional competence also improved. Social-emotional competence refers to skills such as self-

¹ Round 1 grantees received the first round of funding from the Foundation to implement programs in Year 1 (the 2018–2019 school year), Year 2 (the 2019–2020 school year), and Year 3 (the 2020–2021 school year). Most have now received additional funding to extend their program implementation through Year 4 (the 2021–2022 school year).

² Round 2 grantees received the second round of funding from the Foundation to implement programs in Year 2 (the 2019–2020 school year), Year 3 (the 2020–2021 school year), and Year 4 (the 2021–2022 school year).

³ These data have a 1-year data lag, so Year 2 data are the only available data that RTI can report at this time.

awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.⁴ Both changes are significant ($p < .05$).

Areas for Improvement

- In Year 3, there was a 30-percentage point decline in the proportion of implementers surveyed who indicated they received training compared with Year 2 (41% in Year 3 compared to 70% in Year 2). This decline was consistent among first-time and returning implementers; however, training declined 29 percentage points for returning implementers, which was more than the 19-percentage point decline in training among Year 3 new implementers. Recognizing this decline, the Foundation is encouraging all grantees to offer booster training in Year 4.
- Fewer grant directors required all or some implementers to report on their implementation progress (69%) in Year 3 than in Year 2 (89%), though this change is not statistically significant. Fewer implementers also reported being asked to share implementation progress information in Year 3 (57%) compared with Year 2 (68%). Furthermore, perhaps because of changes related to the COVID-19 pandemic, grant directors and staff did not plan to conduct observations as frequently or universally as they had in Year 2. Among those grant directors who either observed or planned to observe implementation in Year 3, only half indicated that they planned to observe all implementers. This compares with 89% of grant directors in Year 2 who indicated that they planned to observe all implementers. Similarly, the percentage of implementers who reported having been observed declined significantly.

COVID-19 Pandemic

- Grantees had varying responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some were not able to complete

⁴ The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (n.d.). *What Is the CASEL framework?* <https://casel.org/sel-framework/>

implementation, some were able to transition from virtual learning to in-person and then back to virtual learning, and some took creative approaches to continue implementing *Prevention Matters* despite the ever-changing school environment that the COVID-19 pandemic presented to schools.

Next Steps

In Year 4 of the *Prevention Matters* evaluation, RTI will continue to assess the implementation and impact of the initiative through surveys, interviews, classroom observations, and outcome data from IDOE and grantees. These assessments will be used to describe grantees' final year of implementation under the grant and their progress toward sustaining their *Prevention Matters* efforts, and to identify significant changes in Year 4 compared with Year 3.



Introduction

This section provides an overview of *Prevention Matters*. The Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation's *Prevention Matters* initiative is an important investment in the health and well-being of Marion County residents. Over the course of 4 years, *Prevention Matters* will allow schools to provide students with an array of programs that have been proven, through research, to prevent substance use and improve social-emotional outcomes.

In January 2018, the Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation launched *Prevention Matters*, a \$12-million grant initiative to help schools in Marion County, IN identify, implement, and sustain evidence-based substance use prevention programs.

In March 2018, the Foundation awarded 44 planning grants to Marion County school corporations; archdiocese deaneries; charter school networks; private school organizations; and individual, single-site charter, private, and Innovation Network schools.⁵ These planning grants funded organizations to identify the most appropriate evidence-based substance use prevention programs for their students from a list curated by the Foundation and to develop plans for effective and sustainable implementation.

In July 2018, the Foundation awarded implementation grants to 24 planning grant recipients to support program implementation for the 2018–2019, 2019–2020, and 2020–2021 school years (Round 1 grantees). The Foundation awarded five additional implementation grants in December 2018 to support program implementation through the 2021–2022 school year (Round 2 grantees). In summer 2019, one Round 1 grantee and one Round 2 grantee withdrew from the initiative, resulting in 27 grantees being funded for the remainder of the grant.

In March 2020, Indianapolis Mayor Joe Hogsett ordered all Marion County school buildings, public and private, to be closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. School buildings remained closed through the end of the school year.

Schools shifted to virtual instruction, which required grantees to modify their *Prevention Matters* implementation strategies. The Foundation engaged program developers to gather guidance and resources for implementing remotely and for involving families in programming. The Foundation and its technical assistance contractor, Education Development Corporation (EDC), provided grantees with a table summarizing this guidance and these resources.

The 2020–2021 school year began with nearly all Marion County school districts offering both in-person and virtual learning options, with specific options varying across grades. For instance, many schools only allowed their youngest students to resume in-person learning at the start of the year. Each school district developed a detailed reopening plan. Some plans were contingent on COVID-19 incidence rates,

⁵ Innovation Network schools are public schools that are within the Indianapolis Public Schools district but operate with the authority to make decisions about all aspects of their school, both academic and operational.

and others presented phase-in approaches that included hybrid scheduling (i.e., virtual learning mixed with in-person learning). However, on November 11, 2020, Mayor Hogsett ordered all public and private Marion County school buildings to return to virtual instruction by November 30, due to dramatic increases in COVID-19 incidence rates in Marion County and across the United States.

Virtual learning remained in place until after January 4, 2021, when the mayor announced that schools could return to in-person learning. Again, Marion County school districts developed reopening plans that varied in their approach and reopening date with some schools reopening as early as January 4 and others waiting until later to resume in-person learning. Indianapolis Public Schools, for example, implemented a schedule as of January 19, 2021, in which middle and high school students, based on the first letter of their surnames, returned to school in person either on Mondays and Tuesdays (with remote learning occurring on Thursdays and Fridays) or on Thursdays and Fridays (with remote learning occurring on Mondays and Tuesdays); all students participated in remote learning on Wednesdays.⁶

The changes from in-person to virtual learning greatly impacted Marion County schools. Yet, during the 2020–2021 school year, all 27 grantees continued to participate in the *Prevention Matters* initiative. One Round 1 grantee was planning to switch prevention programs during the 2020–2021 school year, and due to competing demands caused by the pandemic, decided to use the 2020–2021 school year to develop implementation plans for 2021–2022. Among the remaining 26 grantees, principals and administrators encountered numerous students and even teachers who lacked devices and internet connectivity needed to participate in virtual learning. In October 2020, the Indiana Department of Education awarded Marion County schools \$11.5 million in grant funds from the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER) to enhance the virtual learning capabilities of students and teachers.⁷ These grants aimed to ensure access to devices and reliable internet services for all Indianapolis students for the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school years.

Because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on *Prevention Matters* implementation and learning more broadly, the Foundation offered grantees the possibility of extending their implementation to Year 4. Twenty-four grantees (21 Round 1 grantees and three Round 2 grantees) will continue to implement

⁶ See <https://myips.org/blog/district/ips-returns-to-in-person-learning-on-jan-19/>

⁷ GEER_release_10-19 (citybase-cms-prod.s3.amazonaws.com)

Prevention Matters programming with funding from the Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation during the 2021–2022 school year. Of the three grantees not continuing their grants in 2021–2022, two shared with the Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation that they intend to continue implementing their programs with other funding.

RTI's Role and the Evaluation

RTI International is the contracted evaluator for the *Prevention Matters* initiative. RTI's role is to examine the nature and quality of program implementation and to evaluate the impact of *Prevention Matters* programs on student outcomes. This work will help grantees hone their implementation and will inform the field of school-based substance use prevention efforts more broadly.

To examine changes in the implementation of *Prevention Matters* programs and their impact over the course of the initiative, Year 2 – and in some cases Year 1 – data are reported comparatively with Year 3 data throughout this report. To complete the Year 2 (2019–2020) Report,⁸ RTI collected data to evaluate the 27 grantees and 3,033 implementers delivering 11 different prevention programs to approximately 75,625 students in 144 schools. Highlights from the Year 2 report include the following:

Seventy percent of implementers reported participating in trainings in Year 2, a 13% increase compared with Year 1. Despite the increase, implementer feedback indicated a disconnect between trainings implementers recalled receiving and those offered; grant directors reported that implementer training was offered for 98% of the *Prevention Matters* programs.

Year 2 was also impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused schools to close in March 2020. Despite the pandemic, grantees were able to implement their *Prevention Matters* program for a longer duration in Year 2 (an average of 6–7 months) compared with Year 1 (5–6 months). Over half of the implementers (57%) surveyed indicated they completed implementation in Year 2. Also, grantee-collected data and grant director feedback from interviews showed promising signs of grant impact on student curriculum knowledge and social-emotional competence.

⁸ Available at https://www.rmff.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/PM-Yr-2-evaluation-report_FINAL_121620.pdf.

RTI's Year 2 evaluation also identified four key areas where grantees could improve their implementation. First, implementation quality metrics such as adherence, dosage, and student engagement declined from Year 1 to Year 2. Interestingly, these metrics also varied greatly, with implementers reporting both greater student engagement and greater program dosage if they had completed implementation by the time of the implementer survey. Second, 80% of implementers made some sort of change to their programming from what appeared in a curriculum guide. Although most changes were made to improve student engagement and may have been recommended by technical assistance providers or program developers, these changes reinforced the need for ongoing implementation fidelity monitoring to track the nature and impact of the adaptations made. Third, sustainability scores decreased slightly from Year 1 to Year 2, which raised questions about whether grantees were planning and implementing approaches to sustain their programs after Foundation funds ended. Lastly, time limitations and staff turnover continued to serve as program implementation barriers in Year 2 as they had in Year 1.

This report shares what RTI has learned about Year 3 of *Prevention Matters* implementation. Moreover, this report presents the implementation progress reported in Year 3 of the *Prevention Matters* grants and the impacts that emerged during Year 2 in comparison to Year 1. The reported impacts of *Prevention Matters* are based on grantee-submitted data that are compiled from the previous year.

The Methodology section of this report provides more detail on the evaluation methods RTI used. The Learning About Implementation and the Learning About Impact sections discuss what RTI learned about *Prevention Matters* processes and outcomes. The Lessons Learned section summarizes Year 3 findings that schools and funders can use to help strengthen *Prevention Matters* and similar school-based prevention initiatives.



Methodology

This section describes the methodology used for the *Prevention Matters* evaluation. The evaluation includes five data sources: annual surveys of grant directors, annual surveys of program implementers, telephone interviews with grant directors, school-level administrative data from the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE), and information from grantees' required data collection activities. With the exception of IDOE data and some grantee-collected data, Year 3 data are self-reported by grant directors, implementers, and through student surveys.⁹ RTI will conduct classroom-based observations of *Prevention Matters* implementers in Year 4.

⁹ Throughout the report, comparisons are made between Year 2 (2019–2020) results and Year 3 (2020–2021) results. Whenever statistical significance testing was completed, the results of that testing are included.

1 Grant Director Surveys

RTI conducted the third annual Web-based survey of *Prevention Matters* grant directors March 1–12, 2021.¹⁰ Topics for the survey included implementation models (e.g., training approach, partnerships), barriers to and facilitators of program implementation, COVID-19's impact on implementation, and sustainability. Most questions were asked in relation to the overall grant project. However, the questions about program training models and provision of program information and activities to parents were asked for each program that the grant director reported implementing.

Each grant director received an email invitation to participate in the survey, along with a personalized link. RTI expected the survey to take about 30 minutes to complete.

Twenty-six grant directors completed the grant director survey.

2 Grant Director Interviews

RTI conducted 75-minute telephone interviews with a sample of seven grant directors in Year 3. The sample included a diverse set of grantees who varied based on the number of sites included in their grant-funded prevention programming, the type of schools (public [including charter] or private), and the prevention programs implemented. Each year RTI selects a new group of grant directors to interview to ensure all grant directors are interviewed by the end of the evaluation. Thus, the Year 3 grant directors interviewed were different from the 20 who participated in Year 1 or Year 2 interviews.

Interviews involved an in-depth exploration of the topics covered in the grant director survey, including implementation approaches and timeline, financial and policy barriers and facilitators, key implementation facilitators and barriers, sustainability progress, and lessons learned. Interviews examined implementation during all grant years (1–3), not just the third year of the grant. Once again, RTI

¹⁰ Note on data collection timing: In Year 1, RTI collected grant director surveys in January and implementer surveys and grant director interviews in March and April. The Foundation requested that these data collections occur later in the school year in Year 2, so that the data would reflect as much of the school year as possible. In Year 3, data collection from grant directors followed a similar timeline as in Year 2. The Year 3 implementer survey was slightly earlier than in Year 2. Therefore, when comparing Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3 survey and interview results, it is important to keep in mind that some differences may be due, at least in part, to differences in data collection timing.

asked questions about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on grant implementation.

Also, this year, grant directors were asked about whether they intended to pursue an optional fourth year of funding from the Foundation and how they expected a funding extension to affect their sustainability plans.

3 Implementer Surveys

RTI conducted the third annual Web-based survey of *Prevention Matters* program implementers. Topics for this survey included implementation quality, barriers to and facilitators of program implementation, training received, COVID-19–related implementation changes, and implementation monitoring. Some questions (e.g., those focused on implementation quality) were asked specifically about the program that the implementer reported delivering whereas others were asked about the overall grant implementation and all programs delivered by implementers. Implementers who reported delivering multiple programs were asked to respond about the program they implemented with the most students.

RTI collaborated with grantee staff to obtain email addresses for current program implementers. Each implementer then received an email with a personalized link to participate in the survey. With the addition of several COVID-19–related questions this year, RTI expected the survey to take about 25 minutes to complete.

The Year 3 implementer survey was open from April 12 to May 21, 2021. RTI sent survey invitations to 3,606 implementers representing 26 of 27 grantees. RTI sent six automated reminders to non-responders during the survey period and sent requests to grant directors to follow up with their implementers to encourage them to respond.

A total of 1,917 implementers opened the survey (53% open rate). Thirty-seven implementers (1.9% of those who opened the survey) reported that they were either not implementing, or not planning to implement, any programs that grantees were known to be implementing. Another six implementers (0.3%) responded to the survey and did not list a program that they were implementing. Four implementers (0.2%) reported implementing a program that is not part of *Prevention Matters*. These 47 implementers were excluded from RTI's analyses.

Nineteen implementers (1% of those who opened the survey) reported implementing a different primary *Prevention Matters* program than was reported by their grant director. Of those, three reported a secondary program that

matched grant director reporting. These three implementers were excluded from program-specific items but were included elsewhere. The remaining 16 implementers (0.8%) did not report a primary or secondary program that matched what was reported by their grant director and were dropped from RTI's analysis. These exclusions resulted in an analytic sample of 1,854 implementers for general items and 1,851 implementers for program-specific analyses.

Survey response rates by primary program implemented are shown in Table 1. It is important to note that Second Step implementers make up 89% of all implementers and all implementer survey respondents. Therefore, implementer survey results are heavily weighted toward Second Step implementation and may not fully reflect implementation of other programs.

Table 1. Year 3 Implementer Survey Response Rate, by Program

Program	Implementers Invited	Implementers Responding	Response Rate
Conscious Discipline	281	139	49%
Curriculum-Based Support Group	9	3	33%
Good Behavior Game	3	3	100%
LifeSkills Training	57	43	75%
PATHS	12	10	83%
Positive Action	1	0	*
Project Toward No Drug Abuse	4	0	*
Ripple Effects	19	5	26%
Second Step ^a	3,212	1,647	51%
Too Good for Drugs	8	4	50%
Total	3,606	1,854	51%

*Signifies that no response rate was calculated because none of the invited implementers responded.

^a Includes both Second Step Elementary and Second Step Middle.

Table 2 shows the response rates to the implementer survey among grantees of different sizes. Implementers from smaller grantees (i.e., those with one to eight implementers) were more likely to respond to the survey than those from midsize or larger grantees.

Table 2. Response Rate by Grantee Size

Size	N	Response Rate
1–8 implementers	6	72.4%
9–24 implementers	7	62.4%
25 or more implementers	13	49.0%

4 School Administrative Data

RTI obtained administrative data from IDOE for graduation, grade retention, attendance, absences, suspensions, expulsions, and dropout for the 2019–2020 school year. Throughout the evaluation report, whereas implementation results are reported for the 2020–2021 school year, student outcome data, including IDOE data, are reported for the 2019–2020 school year; these were the most recent data available at the time of reporting. New scores on the ISTEP+, ILEARN, and IREAD-3 were not available because of COVID-19–related cancellations of statewide testing in spring 2020.¹¹ However, RTI does plan to include results from spring 2021 tests in the analysis for the Year 4 annual report. RTI compiled these data for schools in which students in at least one grade are being served by *Prevention Matters*¹² and for all schools in Lake (i.e., northwest Indiana, near Chicago, Illinois) and Allen (i.e., Fort Wayne) counties, to compare what happened during the same period in demographically similar counties that were not served by *Prevention Matters*.

RTI used these data to examine whether there were shifts in historical patterns of school-level outcomes when *Prevention Matters* was first implemented and whether these trends look different from trends among schools not receiving

¹¹Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress-Plus (ISTEP+) and Indiana Learning Evaluation Assessment Readiness Network (ILEARN) are statewide standardized tests. ISTEP+ assesses mastery of math and English standards in grade 10, and prior to 2019, in grades 3–8. In spring 2019, ILEARN replaced the ISTEP+ for grades 3–8. ILEARN assesses student achievement and growth in multiple subject areas for grades 3–8; the *Prevention Matters* evaluation uses English/language arts and math scores. RTI used ISTEP+ grade 3–8 data to examine pre-*Prevention Matters* trends in the Year 1 evaluation report and will use ILEARN data in the Year 4 report to examine changes after *Prevention Matters* implementation. The Indiana Reading Evaluation and Determination (IREAD-3) assesses foundational reading standards for third-grade students statewide.

¹² Although *Prevention Matters* data are drawn only from schools implementing *Prevention Matters* programming, the measures themselves may not reflect the specific students who received *Prevention Matters* programming at that school. For example, a grantee may be serving only ninth graders, but ACT/SAT data from all students at the school are included in analysis.

Prevention Matters programming. Because of the widespread school building closures on March 12, 2020, that remained in place until the end of the 2019–2020 school year, some data related to absences, disciplinary measures, and test scores were incomplete or not comparable to prior years. Given that COVID-19–related school building closures affected all Indiana counties during this period, RTI expects comparisons between Marion, Lake, and Allen counties to remain valid. However, COVID-19 likely had effects on student outcomes, discipline, and absences, and counties may have responded in different ways to local health department guidance. The relevant data should therefore be viewed within the context of these realities.

5 Grantee-Collected Data

Grantees collected at least one measure of program implementation and one measure of program outcomes as part of their *Prevention Matters* project. Some measures were annual (collected once in Year 1 and once in Year 2), and some were collected via pretest (beginning of Year 2) and posttest (end of Year 2). Annual measures included results from the biennial INYS (see Indiana Youth Survey, below, and Learning About Impact, Section 1). In the Year 3 evaluation, RTI used these data to examine changes in these measures from Year 1 to Year 2 (Year 1 annual data compared with Year 2 annual data) and during Year 2 (Year 2 pretests compared with Year 2 posttests). With the inclusion in this year's report of multiple years of grantee-collected data, RTI is now able to assess whether and how target outcomes changed from year to year.

In Year 1, RTI reviewed each grantee's data collection plans. RTI identified the topics that grantees most commonly measured and then worked with the Foundation to identify 12 topics (termed "domains" within the evaluation) for which RTI would ask grantees to submit data (see Table 3).

In spring 2020, 24 grantees (23 Round 1 grantees, one Round 2 grantee) submitted Year 1 summary statistics for 113 schools.

In spring 2021, 25 grantees (21 Round 1 grantees, four Round 2 grantees) submitted Year 2 summary statistics for 133 schools. Counts of grantees and schools by domain appear in Table 3. Some grantees were unable to collect posttest data as planned because of school closures in spring 2020. This resulted in a smaller than anticipated dataset.

Table 3. Year 2 Grantee Data Submitted

Domain	Number Submitting Year 2 Pretest and Posttest Data		Number Submitting Matching Annual Data ^a	
	Grantees	Schools	Grantees	Schools
Curriculum adherence	0	0	15	74
Student curriculum knowledge	6	15	0	0
Substance use				
Alcohol	0	0	5	26
Marijuana	0	0	5	26
Opioid or prescription drugs	0	0	5	26
Tobacco	0	0	5	26
Vaping	0	0	4	12
Perceived risk of harm from substances	2	2	5	26
Personal substance use norms	2	2	3	11
Depressive symptoms	2	2	4	25
Disciplinary incidents other than suspensions or expulsions	0	0	19	60
Social-emotional competence	8	17	0	0

^a Annual substance use and perceived risk data from one grantee (one school) included in these counts were not analyzed due to the timing of data collection. These data will be included in the final report when analyses will permit inclusion of data collected at varying time points.

6 Indiana Youth Survey

The INYS is conducted every other spring by the Institute for Research on Addictive Behavior at Indiana University-Bloomington. Using student self-report, the INYS assesses the mental health and risky behaviors, such as substance use, of students in grades 6–12 across Indiana. The survey also asks students to answer multiple questions to measure correlates of those behaviors (e.g., students' perceived risk of harm from substance use). School and school corporation participation in the survey is voluntary. The *Prevention Matters* evaluation uses several measures from the INYS to examine changes in relevant student

outcomes over time. In Year 3, RTI collected and analyzed 2018 and 2020 INYS results from four grantees representing 25 schools.

7 Observations

The original *Prevention Matters* evaluation plan included observations of a sample of program sessions in Years 2 and 3. RTI hired and trained Indianapolis-area observers in February 2020 in preparation for starting observations in March 2020. RTI also obtained implementation schedules and implementer lists from each grantee and selected a random sample of 191 implementers to approach for observations. However, because of school closures for the COVID-19 pandemic, RTI was unable to conduct observations.

Because of ongoing adaptations to program implementation in response to COVID-19 and restrictions on entering schools, Year 3 observations were also canceled. Observations are planned for Year 4.

8 Methodological Limitations

For any evaluation, the data collection and analysis methods have limitations. For the *Prevention Matters* evaluation, these limitations include the following:

- **Self-reported data.** With the exception of administrative data from IDOE and some grantee-reported data, all data were reported by grant directors, program implementers, or program participants. Depending on factors like a respondent's interpretation of a question, their perception and memory of a situation, and their desire to provide responses that portray themselves in a positive way, self-reported data may not always align with objective reality. Unfortunately, self-reporting is often the most efficient way (as with student substance use) or only way (as with opinions or attitudes) to capture certain information.
- **Implementer survey response rate.** Just over half of implementers responded to the invitation to complete the Year 3 implementer survey. Because implementers who responded are different from the implementers who did not respond, the survey results in this report may not fully reflect the experiences of all implementers.

- **Large number of Second Step implementers.** Although *Prevention Matters* grantees implemented 11 different programs, 16 grantees (62%) implemented Second Step. Implementers of Second Step Elementary and Second Step Middle made up 89% of all implementers and 89% of implementer survey respondents. Therefore, the results are heavily weighted toward Second Step implementation and may not fully reflect implementation of the other programs.
- **Limited grantee-collected data.** The amount of data grantees submitted to measure student impact and program implementation ranged from no data (two grantees) to data matching 10 of the 12 measurement domains (one grantee). On average, individual schools submitted data for two or three domains. Data were only analyzed if they were collected more than once and measurement remained consistent across time points. In spring 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic affected many schools' abilities to collect complete data. As a result, aside from domains addressed by the biennial INYS, only changes in student curriculum knowledge, social-emotional competence, and disciplinary referrals are reported.
- **COVID-19 as a confounder.** In any evaluation, there is a risk that events external to the evaluated program will make it difficult to interpret data collected during and after that event. In other words, those events can *confound* the program and its potential impact on participants. The COVID-19 pandemic is arguably the single biggest confounder that school-based research has ever had to face. One cannot be sure how Years 2 and 3 data would have been different in the absence of COVID-19, nor can one completely disentangle whether shifts in data from Years 1 to 2 and Years 2 to 3 are the result of program-driven change, COVID-19, or something else altogether.



Learning about Implementation

This section describes the implementation models that grantees used for their *Prevention Matters* efforts. Specifically, this section examines the programs implemented, grades served, implementation settings, implementation schedules, changes in implementation caused by COVID-19, implementer training and support, implementation monitoring, program integration and coordination, partnerships, and parent involvement.

1 Implementation Models

As in past years, in their interviews, grant directors described a variety of approaches and timelines for introducing their programs in schools. Some grantees started with a smaller pilot program and expanded to all schools in the district. Others gradually added grade levels or buildings to expand the reach of their programs. Grant directors highlighted the benefits of not starting with full-scale implementation.

Most of the seven grant directors interviewed for the evaluation noted that, aside from adjustments made to meet COVID-19 safety requirements, their implementation plans remained unchanged. One multi-site grantee, however, chose to accelerate their timeline for expanding the program to all grades after receiving multiple requests from staff and principals to begin expanding.

“I feel like [implementing with a select group of teachers] was really a good opportunity for us to kind of work [the prevention programming implementation] out and not have everyone overwhelmed because we’ve tried some initiatives in the past where you go full-scale.”

1.1 Programs Implemented

The Foundation provided *Prevention Matters* planning grantees with a list of 25 evidence-based substance use prevention and social-emotional learning (SEL) programs that they could implement for the initiative.¹³ The 27 *Prevention Matters* grantees are implementing 11 of these programs, as shown in Table 4. The most commonly implemented program is Second Step, followed by Conscious Discipline. Individual grantees are implementing one, two, or three of these 11 programs. Across all grantees, grant directors reported in their surveys implementing a total of 49 programs.

¹³ To learn more about these curricula, see <http://rmff.org/preventionmatters>.

Table 4. Number of Implementing Grantees, Individuals, and Schools, by Program

Program	Number Implementing			
	Grantees ^a	Schools	Implementers ^b	
			Primary ^c	Additional ^d
Conscious Discipline	2	12	138	7
Curriculum-Based Support Group	2	3	2	3
Good Behavior Game	1	1	3	3
LifeSkills Training	7	22	43	5
PATHS	1	1	9	1
Positive Action	1	1	0	1
Project Toward No Drug Abuse	1	1	0	0
Ripple Effects	1	6	5	18
Second Step: Elementary	15	107	1,192	16
Second Step: Middle	16	66	455	15
Too Good for Drugs	2	3	4	1
Total	49	223	1,851	70

^a As reported in the grant director survey.

^b Among implementer survey respondents. Actual number of implementers is typically higher because of survey nonresponse.

^c Nineteen implementer survey respondents reported a primary program other than the program that their grant director reported implementing as part of *Prevention Matters*. Of these, three reported implementing the correct program as an additional program. Cases for which there was no match between implementer and grantee ($n = 16$) were dropped from analysis. The three cases in which the correct program was listed as an additional program were included in analyses of non-program survey items but dropped from analyses pertaining to program specifics.

^d A small percentage of implementers (4%) reported implementing more than one *Prevention Matters*-funded program. In the implementer survey, any questions that ask about experiences with a single program ask the respondent to focus on the one program that they implemented with the most students.

Grantees implemented two types of prevention programs: programs with a series of distinct lessons (e.g., *LifeSkills Training*) and programs that recommended SEL techniques or classroom management approaches that could be used throughout the day (e.g., *Conscious Discipline*). During interviews, some grant directors described their approach to selecting a prevention program. For example, one grant director shared, “We had meetings where we brought leaders in and really key

stakeholders across the district, outside people, community members, to try to get a feel for what everyone thought would be best.” Another grant director involved teachers and administrators in deciding which program to offer.

Although most grant directors reported that they chose to implement only one program, a small number of grant directors took a tiered approach that included delivering one program to all students (i.e., Tier 1) and then selecting a second program to deliver to individuals or small groups of students in need of extra support (i.e., Tier 2).

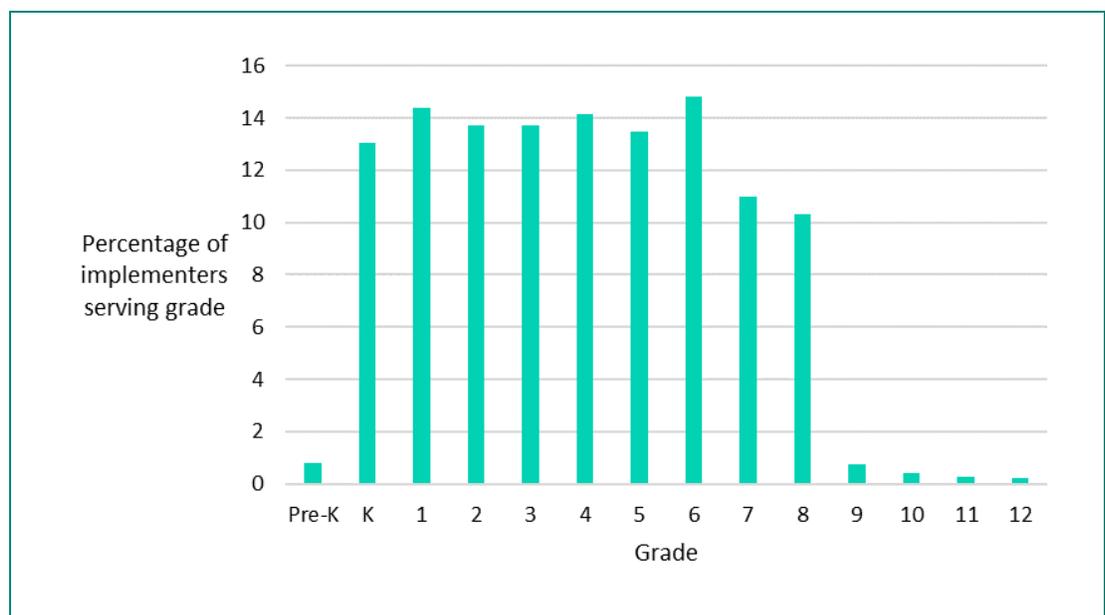
1.2 Students Served

The Foundation’s administrative records show that **grantees reached approximately 81,417 students in Year 3**. Although many of these students were likely served in Year 2, the increase from the Year 2 estimate (75,625) indicates that over 5,700 students received *Prevention Matters* programming for the first time in Year 3.

Each elementary grade was served by a similar number of implementers.

Slightly fewer implementers served students in grades seven and eight. As shown in Figure 1, relatively few implementers delivered programming to Pre-K students (who did not fall within the *Prevention Matters* K–12 target population) or high school students.

Figure 1. Percentage of Implementers Serving Each Grade



1.3 Implementation Approaches

Many *Prevention Matters* programs are designed to be delivered via full-class instruction. Others are intended to be used with small groups. Consistent with prior years, grant directors reported implementing their programs using a variety of approaches. In their interviews, some grant directors shared that program lessons were delivered to all participating students in a classroom during a designated time of day, such as an enrichment or advisory period. At these schools, multiple teachers were trained to deliver *Prevention Matters* lessons in individual classrooms. However, at least one grantee reported having a designated implementer who pulled students in small groups from their health class to receive *Prevention Matters* lessons. One grantee also used counselors to deliver a Tier 2 program to small groups. A few grantees employed peer leadership or coaching models in which select staff or teachers would monitor implementers' progress and offer guidance. One grantee started by having all teachers implement and then shifted during the pandemic to having select teachers create lesson videos and resources to be used by all teachers in their classrooms. Some grant directors indicated that their schools designated time for teachers to reinforce or supplement *Prevention Matters* program lessons in their classrooms, as needed.

1.4 Implementation Schedules

In their surveys, implementers reported on what happened with implementation schedules after programs launched (Table 5). During the period when they were implementing programming, most implementers (91%) delivered program lessons or content at least once per week. The most common frequency was weekly. Although this is generally consistent with the recommended session frequencies for *Prevention Matters* curricula, this is a statistically significant change from Year 2, when the most common frequency reported was 2–3 days per week. The overall decrease in reported frequency appears largely driven by Second Step implementers, who made up 89% of the survey respondents and who reported delivering lessons less frequently in Year 3 than in Year 2, but still attained the recommended frequency. It is conceivable that this change reflects adjustments made to scheduling in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Results from other analyses support the idea that COVID-19–related school changes affected the delivery of lessons (see Table 9). Another explanation for the decrease in lesson frequency among Second Step implementers may be that implementers were

more likely in Year 2 than in Year 3 to report on delivery of reinforcement lessons. The data collected from implementers do not allow for further exploration of this potential explanation.

The length of time over which implementers delivered programming to a specific group of students was quite variable, in large part because the curricula varied widely in the number of required sessions (8–140) and the recommended implementation frequency (daily to weekly). However, the average duration was just under 7 months, which is similar to the average duration in Year 2.

RTI calculated an intensity measure designed to approximate the total number of sessions that each class of students received.¹⁴ Estimated sessions implemented ranged from a single session to 200 sessions (i.e., daily implementation for 10 months or more), with an estimated median of between 36 and 40 sessions. This represents a slight and statistically significant increase over Year 2, meaning that on average, groups of students received more program lessons in Year 3.

Table 5. Implementation Frequency, Sessions, and Duration, by Program and Year

Program	Recommended Frequency of Session Implementation	Number of Annual Sessions in Program	Year	Most Common Implementation Frequency	Mean Implementation Duration, in Months	Mean Number of Annual Sessions Delivered (Estimated)
Conscious Discipline	Noncurricular school practice ^a		Year 1	Daily or weekly	4	46
			Year 2	Daily	6	70
			Year 3	Daily	6	87
Curriculum-Based Support Group	1–2/week	10–12	Year 1	Weekly	4	14
			Year 2	Weekly	6	37
			Year 3	^	^	^

(continued)

¹⁴ This measure was calculated by multiplying implementation frequency (daily = 20, 2–3 days per week = 10, weekly = 4, every other week = 2, monthly = 1, every other month = 0.5) by the implementation duration (number of months).

Table 5. Implementation Frequency, Sessions, and Duration, by Program and Year (continued)

Program	Recommended Frequency of Session Implementation	Number of Annual Sessions in Program	Year	Most Common Implementation Frequency	Mean Implementation Duration, in Months	Mean Number of Annual Sessions Delivered (Estimated)
Good Behavior Game	Noncurricular school practice ^a		Year 1	Daily	4	46
			Year 2	^	^	^
			Year 3	^	^	^
LifeSkills Training	Intensive: 2–3/week Extended: 1/week	Elementary school: 8 Middle school: 5–15	Year 1	Weekly	3	20
			Year 2	Every other week	5	16
			Year 3	Weekly	3	26
PATHS	2 or more/week	36–52 lessons	Year 1	^	^	^
			Year 2	^	^	^
			Year 3	^	^	^
Positive Action	Daily	K–6th grade: 140 7th and 8th grades: 70	Year 1	Daily or weekly	5	64
			Year 2	^	^	^
			Year 3	^	^	^
Project Toward No Drug Abuse	3/week (preferred); 2/week (permitted) ^b	12	Year 1	^	^	^
			Year 2	^	^	^
			Year 3	^	^	^
Ripple Effects	Varies depending on student needs		Year 1	Weekly	4	23
			Year 2	2–3/week	6	45
			Year 3	2–3/week	5	50
Second Step: Elementary	1/week ^c	22–25	Year 1	Weekly	6	57
			Year 2	2–3/week	6	64
			Year 3	Weekly	7	67

(continued)

Table 5. Implementation Frequency, Sessions, and Duration, by Program and Year (continued)

Program	Recommended Frequency of Session Implementation	Number of Annual Sessions in Program	Year	Most Common Implementation Frequency	Mean Implementation Duration, in Months	Mean Number of Annual Sessions Delivered (Estimated)
Second Step: Middle	1/week ^d	26	Year 1	Weekly	6	43
			Year 2	2–3/week	7	54
			Year 3	Weekly	7	52
Too Good for Drugs	1/week	10	Year 1	Weekly	3	14
			Year 2	^	^	^
			Year 3	^	^	^

^ To protect respondent privacy, RTI has not reported values for programs with fewer than five reporting implementers or one reporting school.

^a Implemented daily.

^b Three times a week is preferred; however, if an implementer needs to spread delivery out over a longer period, they may deliver twice per week.

^c With daily reinforcement and take-home activities.

^d Plus advisory activities.

Grant directors interviewed echoed the implementer survey results in that nearly all programs were implemented at least weekly. These interviews also offered more details on the variation in the program implementation schedules by grantee. Some grantees delivered weekly program lessons to students, and others delivered weekly lessons plus supplemental lessons once or twice per week. To facilitate consistent lesson delivery, one grantee instituted a daily designated time for teaching *Prevention Matters*–funded program content or addressing SEL. In this example, the grant director instructed teachers, “*There should be a designated 30-minute morning meeting time every day, no matter what. You may not teach a Second Step lesson every day in that 30 minutes, but you must take 30 minutes every day to connect with your students.*” This grantee spent time prior to the 2020–2021 school year building an online repository of SEL resources for teachers and refining their school’s scope and sequence to ensure more thorough program implementation. They also concentrated on spreading program lessons out to

allow sufficient time for the material to be discussed and “to tie in other culturally relevant resources.” Another grant director described their schools’ lack of consistent or adequate scheduling as an area for improvement in grant implementation. Under their grant, schools often arranged for program delivery to occur in morning advisory or homeroom periods. This approach resulted in teachers holding lessons or partial lessons between announcements, breakfast, and other activities. This grant director shared: “What I did [to fit the lessons into the school day] is I took a particular lesson, and I broke it down and gave [the principal] lesson plans for each day of the week as it related to the lessons.”



1.5 Changes to Implementation due to COVID-19

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, which led to the closure of schools in Marion County, Indiana, had significant implications for *Prevention Matters*. Most grantees selected prevention programs that were developed for in-person instruction, and those programs needed to be shifted to virtual instruction and online platforms. Given the social, economic, and health-related impacts of COVID-19, grantees worked with program developers and school leaders to adapt their implementation plans to the best of their abilities. In May 2020, Indiana began slowly reopening some sectors, although there were additional restrictions

in place for Marion County. The reopening of public schools for the 2020–2021 school year allowed some *Prevention Matters* programs to resume in-person implementation while prioritizing the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff. Through implementer and grant director surveys, RTI attempted to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted program implementation, delivery, and engagement in the most recent school year.

In the 2020–2021 Implementer Survey, RTI asked whether schools delivered *Prevention Matters* programming at all during the time when they offered virtual instruction to all students. A majority (79%) of the implementers reported delivering programming during virtual instruction time frames. However, over 20% of implementers were unable to deliver their programs for at least some period when virtual instruction was provided to students. Lack of consistent program delivery may have been caused by a lack of technology access and lack of implementer enthusiasm or comfort delivering lessons virtually, which also contributes to challenges in monitoring implementation fidelity. Furthermore, scheduling may have been a challenge with program delivery, as not all grantees had designated times for delivering *Prevention Matters* programming during synchronous virtual instruction. RTI asked implementers to rate, on a scale of 0 (low) to 100, (high), their enthusiasm for teaching their *Prevention Matters* program. Those who completed program implementation with all classes they taught indicated a higher level of enthusiasm ($M = 74.47$) than those who completed implementation with only some of their classes ($M = 66.12$), or those who did not complete implementation with any classes ($M = 66.61$).

As grantees adjusted to implementation over the past year, the ability to implement lesson-based programs and non-lesson-based programs while students were learning virtually may have differed. The results in Table 6 show that implementers of non-lesson-based programs were significantly less likely than implementers of lesson-based programs to offer prevention programming when their school was in 100% virtual instruction. Nevertheless, of the 145 implementers who reported delivering non-lesson-based programs, 72% still offered prevention programming during periods of 100% virtual learning.

Table 6. Prevention Matters Programming Offered during Virtual Instruction, by Program Type

<i>Prevention Matters Programming Delivered When School Offered Virtual Instruction</i>	<i>Percentage of Lesson-Based Program Implementers</i>	<i>Percentage of Non-Lesson-Based Program Implementers</i>
Yes	80%	72%
No	20%	28%
Total	100%	100%

Note. A lesson-based program is one that is structured around a curriculum that includes one or more didactic lessons that are taught to students and completed within a defined period. Non-lesson-based programs are those that are structured around a set of recommended activities that are not necessarily meant to be taught during a specified period.

In the same survey, RTI asked for how many months during the 2020–2021 school year did implementers' schools deliver virtual instruction to all students (i.e., when the school building was closed). Most implementers (82%), according to Table 7, reported their schools delivered virtual instruction to all students for less than half the school year (i.e., a total of 5 months or less). It is notable that nearly 8% of implementers delivered virtual instruction to all their students for the entire school year (i.e., 10 months or more). Although no school building was closed for the entire year, implementers may have selected "10 months or more" if they taught only students who chose to remain virtual all year. Variations across schools may be because of the different policies by school district or grade level and differing capacity to implement COVID-19 prevention procedures.

Table 7. Length of Time Virtual Instruction Was Delivered

Number of Months School Delivered Virtual Instruction to All Students (i.e., school building was closed)	Percentage of Implementers
1 month or less	22%
2 months	24%
3 months	18%
4 months	12%
5 months	6%
6 months	3%
7 months	1%
8 months	2%
9 months	4%
10 months or more	8%

In both the implementer survey and the grant director survey, RTI attempted to gauge which modalities were used to deliver *Prevention Matters* programs to students. Approximately 85% of respondents delivered their programs through in-person instruction, 70% delivered through live/synchronous virtual instruction, 16% delivered through recorded/asynchronous instruction, and 2% used some other mode of delivery. It is worth noting that the three primary modes of instruction could be used by a single implementer or grant director.

Since the pandemic and both state- and county-wide regulations affected school re-openings and curriculum delivery, RTI asked implementers if COVID-19 delayed the start of their program. Table 8 shows that roughly one-third (35%) of implementers reported that COVID-19 delayed the start of their program implementation. However, over half (52%) reported that the pandemic did not delay their start to program implementation.

Table 8. Implementer-Reported Delays to the Start of Program Implementation due to COVID-19

Response	Number of Implementers	Percentage of Implementers
Yes, COVID-19 delayed my start of program implementation.	620	35%
No, COVID-19 did not delay my start of program implementation.	903	52%
I do not know whether COVID-19 delayed my start of program implementation.	225	13%

These reported COVID-19-related delays in starting implementation may have influenced whether implementers were able to complete delivery of their program lessons. Table 9 shows that among implementers who responded that COVID-19 did not delay the start of implementation, 60% said that they were able to deliver all required lessons. Among those for whom COVID-19 did cause a delay in starting implementation, 37% said they were able to deliver all required lessons. The difference in these responses is statistically significant.

Table 9. Implementer-Reported Delays to the Start of Program Implementation due to COVID-19, by Program Dosage

Response	I delivered a few required sessions	I delivered about half of required sessions	I delivered almost all required sessions	I delivered all required sessions	Total ^a
Yes, COVID-19 delayed my start of program implementation.	6%	16%	42%	37%	101%
No, COVID-19 did not delay my start of program implementation.	1%	4%	35%	60%	100%
I do not know whether COVID-19 delayed my start of program implementation.	4%	7%	40%	50%	101%

^a Due to rounding, some totals add to more than 100%.

In some cases, implementers had to make adaptations to their program implementation in response to the changing circumstances such as the local learning environment, staff capacity, and student needs. Some implementers reported making changes from the curriculum manual because of COVID-19. As shown in Table 10, the most commonly reported reason for making changes in response to COVID-19 was the need to maintain physical distance between students (20%).

Table 10. Reasons for Curriculum Changes due to COVID-19: Year 3

Reason	Percentage of Implementers
Program activities, as written, could not be implemented in a virtual setting.	16%
Technology for remote instruction was unavailable, inaccessible, or unreliable.	4%
We needed to maintain physical distance between students.	20%

Note. The percentage of implementers is calculated from those who reported making curriculum changes. As detailed in Table 24, 81% of implementers reported making some type of curriculum adaptation.

Implementers used different information to decide whether and how to adapt their program implementation for online instruction. As shown in Table 11, the most common sources of guidance that grantees used to adapt their programs for online instruction include their own experience as implementers, guidance from school or organization leadership, and suggestions from peers.

Table 11. Sources of Guidance for Adapting for Online Instruction

Information Used to Decide Whether and How to Adapt Program for Online Instruction	Percentage of Implementers
My own experience	52%
Guidance provided by my school/organization leadership	23%
Suggestions from peers	19%
I did not receive any guidance	6%
Guidance provided by the program trainer	4%
Guidance provided by the program developer	2%
Guidance provided by online sources other than the program developer	1%
Other	1%
Guidance from the <i>Prevention Matters</i> technical assistance provider, EDC	<1%
Guidance shared by the Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation	<1%

Note. The percentage of implementers is calculated from those who reported making changes.

As displayed in Tables 12 and 13, most individuals and entities did not comment on the priority that should be given to *Prevention Matters* programming compared to instruction in academic subjects. Those who did comment and who indicated that prevention programming should be of equal or higher priority than academic subjects tended to be individuals in general school leadership positions and program implementers themselves.

Table 12. Individuals/Entities Who Indicated That the Program Being Implemented Was of a Lower Priority than Instruction in Academic Subjects

Individuals/Entities	Percentage of Implementers
Someone from my organization's grant staff	1%
A program trainer	1%
Someone in a general school leadership position	2%
Other	3%
I feel this way personally	7%
No one told me that the program was a lower priority than instruction in academic subjects.	80%

Table 13. Individuals/Entities Who Indicated That the Program Being Implemented Was of an Equal or Higher Priority than Instruction in Academic Subjects

Individuals/Entities	Percentage of Implementers
Someone from my organization's grant staff	5%
A program trainer	5%
Someone in a general school leadership position	25%
Other	2%
I feel this way personally	15%
No one told me that the program was an equal or higher priority than instruction in academic subjects.	54%

This point was echoed in the grant director interviews. For many grant directors, prevention programming took on increased importance during the COVID-19 pandemic. All interviewed grantees continued to deliver *Prevention Matters* lessons in the 2020–2021 school year in the face of changing circumstances and increased demands on implementers. Grant directors shared many examples of

teachers' and staff's resourcefulness in adapting and planning for different means of teaching program lessons.

When asked if they felt prepared to make these shifts and adaptations to the way they implemented programming during COVID-19, most implementers (71%) reported that they felt either "somewhat prepared" or "very prepared." As shown in Table 14, only about 7% of implementers reported that they did not need to make any shifts or adaptations for COVID-19. This low percentage could be an indication that the programs grantees selected to implement were tailored for virtual implementation and possibly included activities that did not require additional resources to implement. Conversely, this low percentage could be an indication that implementers chose to not implement their programs virtually, but instead implement only when students were allowed to return to schools in person. Some grantees may have chosen not to make any changes to their programming at the risk of not maintaining program fidelity or to the detriment of their students. Furthermore, implementers who reported feeling "somewhat unprepared" or "very unprepared" may have lacked the capacity or experience to implement such shifts in programming effectively.

Table 14. Implementer Preparedness to Make Changes to Program Implementation due to COVID-19

Extent to Which Implementers Felt Prepared to Make Shifts and Adaptations to Implementation	Percentage of Implementers
I felt very prepared.	22%
I felt somewhat prepared.	49%
I felt somewhat unprepared.	16%
I felt very unprepared.	6%
I did not need to make shifts or adaptations for COVID-19.	7%

Unlike spring 2020 when school buildings closed abruptly, most grant directors interviewed indicated that their schools and implementers were better prepared through planning to deliver prevention program lessons in a variety of learning situations (i.e., in person, virtual, hybrid) during the 2020–2021 school year. Still, grantees had to remain flexible as circumstances fluctuated throughout the school year. One of the many ways the pandemic affected implementation was to

alter the settings in which grantees implemented their programs, either permanently or intermittently. During the school year, grantees transitioned between delivering some combination of live (synchronous) online lessons, recorded (asynchronous) online lessons, and live, in-person lessons. Either to avoid having to make frequent changes to their program delivery method or to ensure greater consistency, some grantees shifted to virtual program delivery for all students for the whole year. Others shifted to virtual program delivery for all students only during temporary periods of 100% virtual learning. A few of the interviewed grantees offered virtual program lessons for all students who remained at home after school buildings reopened for in-person learning. In some schools, virtual students would join a live classroom lesson via computer and teachers would implement the program with a hybrid student population—some virtually and some in person. In other schools, virtual students completed a mix of synchronous and asynchronous program lessons.

A small number of grantees were unable to continue offering program lessons to some groups of virtual students. Grant directors cited a few reasons for discontinuing their program lessons for virtual students. One grant director shared that a grantee was not able to deliver virtual lessons to a particular grade level because of the format of their prevention program *“because we have the DVD version, that was not possible to do while we were virtual because Zoom will not let you have on a DVD and share your screen.”* This grantee was able to resume lessons with the students when they returned to in-person learning. Another grant director chose not to offer virtual lessons to younger students, a limited portion of whom chose to remain in virtual learning. As the grant director noted, with most students in the school returning to in-person learning, for students who *“are not in person, it’s almost like they’re not able to really receive those services because the work is just online and the teachers are not forced to be online all day.”*

One of the primary challenges of delivering instruction virtually was student engagement. RTI asked implementers to estimate what percentage of their instruction was done virtually and what percentage of students who received instruction online or virtually actually attended or participated. The responses from the implementer survey show that nearly one-third (31%) of implementers indicated that at least half of their instruction was done online or virtually. In general, the more virtual instruction that was provided, the higher the level of engagement and participation among students. Conversely, when less virtual instruction was provided, student engagement decreased. In fact, the lowest

proportion of virtual instruction yielded the lowest participation rate. However, implementers with more frequent online instruction reported higher student participation. Among implementers who reported that over three-quarters of their instruction was offered online, 61% of them indicated that over 75% of their students attended or participated in virtual sessions. By comparison, 8% of implementers offering virtual instruction had less than half the class participate in online sessions, while 30% to 40% of implementers with less frequent virtual instruction had similarly low participation. It is important to note that although implementers were able to measure attendance and participation, another barrier to virtual learning was monitoring student interest in, and fidelity to, programming.

Not all grantees were prepared for the multiple learning format changes that occurred during the school year. According to one grant director:

“We had only planned for in-person learning, and then when things took a hit again and we were forced to close [due to rising COVID-19 rates], at that point we were like, ‘Okay. We’ve got to get creative in the way that we do things,’ and so we created a virtual master schedule and then an in-person master schedule, and we just lived in between both of these worlds to meet the needs of students just depending on where we were [in terms of COVID-19 incidence rates] in the country at that time.”

In addition to adjusting to changes in lesson delivery settings, grantees also adapted the content of the program lessons. Many programs, particularly those designed for younger children, rely on interactive lessons and games to teach principles of SEL. Some of these activities were curtailed by social distancing requirements. For example, when students in a classroom needed to maintain physical space between one another, they could no longer turn to a partner to practice a skill. Many of the program games were not possible when grantees were delivering lessons virtually. As one grant director shared, *“We played a lot of Simon Says in my videos just because I was like, okay, we’re not going to be able to do that [the planned activity, in an online setting], let’s do something else that’s got the same goal.”* Most grant directors who described adapting lesson content or their lesson delivery mode (moving from in-person to virtual lesson delivery) did not mention receiving guidance from their program developer. However, one grant director mentioned that they relied heavily on resources provided by their program developer, commenting, *“If there was a stronger word than ‘outstanding,’ I would use it for the help [the program developer] provided.”*

These adaptations, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, occasionally resulted in changes to quality. Some grant directors noticed an improvement in implementer enthusiasm and, in turn, improvements in implementation quality as implementers delivered lessons with greater urgency. As one grant director reflected, *“Teachers were super excited specifically during COVID to bring those skills back. Students were at home so much more, and then when they came back to school it was just so interesting to see the decline in their work on social-emotional learning. I feel like COVID increased teachers’ perception of the program, and that forced teachers to provide a better quality in regards to the way that they were implementing.”* However, at least one grant director remarked on how the shift from in-person to virtual program delivery reduced lesson fidelity and, therefore, quality. Another grant director questioned whether students’ online program discussions were as rich as in-person discussions tended to be.

Shifts from in-person to virtual program delivery also affected the quality and even the collection of grant monitoring and impact data. Particularly in spring 2020, the pandemic limited schools’ ability to track discipline referrals and precluded state testing, two key approaches used to measure program impact. Grant directors had to modify their program-monitoring methods. One grant director shared that they shifted to conducting observations less frequently via Zoom. Another grant director noted that monitoring became more decentralized, which made it challenging to carefully track how and when implementers delivered their lessons. One grant director shared his apprehension about interpreting schools’ outcome data in the absence of information about how much program content students received.

Even with these challenges, many grant directors remarked that some unexpected benefits emerged as a result of the changes they were required to make during the pandemic. For example, some grant directors found that shifting school operations online enhanced implementation consistency and made it possible for more staff to attend trainings. At least one grant director found that the shift to virtual learning increased families’ engagement in the school, because parents and caregivers had greater access to the SEL content students were learning in their virtual classrooms. Another grant director found that having students together in smaller groups for more time when back in person, due to COVID-19 school guidance (e.g., eating breakfast in the classroom instead of the lunchroom) permitted more time for checking in with students and revisiting *Prevention Matters* lessons, if needed. Approximately half of the grant directors interviewed mentioned that one benefit of changes imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic

appeared to be a greater focus among teachers and staff on the importance of SEL for helping students cope with uncertainty and increased need. *“You can certainly tell that these kids have grown up in a very uncertain world,”* one grant director shared. *“In terms of self-care and time management and anxiety and emotion management... they were always important, but they’re extra important right now with everything else going on in their world.”*

1.6 Implementers

1.6.1 Roles

In their surveys, all but one implementer reported working for their schools. This implementer worked for an outside organization. Similar to Year 2, most implementers were either general education teachers teaching multiple subjects (69%) or general education teachers teaching a single subject other than physical education, health, or wellness (20%).

1.6.2 Experience

In the implementer survey, nearly three-quarters of respondents (72%) reported that they had experience implementing their *Prevention Matters* program prior to the current school year, with an average of 2 years of previous experience (range = less than 1 year to 24 years). This represents a substantial increase over the previous year, in which roughly half of implementers (48%) had prior experience implementing their *Prevention Matters* program. Among those implementers with previous experience, approximately two-thirds (64%) had implemented the program at their current school or school corporation during the 2019–2020 school year and just under one-quarter (23%) had implemented the program at their current school or school corporation during the 2018–2019 school year.

One-fifth of implementers (20%) said that they had previously taught another program focused on SEL or the prevention of risk behaviors like substance use, sexual risk behavior, or violence.

In their interviews, many grant directors remarked that implementers were glad to be implementing prevention programming. One grant director shared: *“It’s amazing the number of teacher implementers when I would go into the buildings and into their classrooms who would say to me after I visited during a lesson that...*

this [program] is something we have wanted for so long. We just never had a system or a structure through which we could deliver it.”

Many grant directors placed a high value on incorporating implementers into the planning stages of prevention program implementation. Grant directors who involved implementers from the beginning of implementation reported greater implementer support and ownership. Some grant directors credited the success of their programming to implementers who believed SEL contributed to positive student outcomes. A few grant directors commented that implementers were grateful that their prevention programming curriculum provided helpful vocabulary and language to explain the concepts and basic lesson plans for SEL. Furthermore, according to grant directors, implementers did not have to develop the entire curriculum themselves, so they were often able to customize their programming to respond to students’ needs.

Despite implementer enthusiasm for prevention programming, more than one grant director also spoke about the importance of academic outcomes in Indiana, including one who shared, *“If it doesn't have an academic result then, or result and percentage data for ISTEP or ILEARN or whatever standardized test that they're taking, then it kind of gets set to the side, because those are the priorities.”* Some grant directors observed that implementers who also taught academic subjects at times felt pressure to prioritize academic outcomes. One noted this may have been felt acutely during the past year as teachers’ focus shifted to remediation to address pandemic-related learning loss.

Some grantees observed that the COVID-19 pandemic increased implementers’ drive to implement SEL. As implementers became more aware of students’ home lives, including the emotional and economic challenges students and their families faced, grant directors found that implementers more consistently discussed the importance of SEL. However, some implementer efforts to engage students declined after students returned to school in person.



1.7 Implementer Training and Support

1.7.1 Grant Director Reports of Training and Support

All but one grant director interviewed trained large numbers of teachers to implement the prevention programs in their classrooms. In at least one instance, the grantee trained every homeroom teacher in their school to implement. Other grant directors trained a select number of implementers or received training themselves to provide prevention programming. Multiple grant directors highlighted the importance of having a prevention champion funded by their grant; among other roles, these individuals monitored implementer training and tracked lesson completion.

Most implementers received training to use their prevention programming curricula before they implemented it. Training was provided in varying formats across grantees. In some cases, curriculum developers traveled to school districts and conducted implementer trainings. In other instances, internal implementers who already had experience served as trainers for the new implementers. Other schools used online modules to train their implementers in the prevention curricula. Many grant directors described bringing in a curriculum representative

to train implementers as beneficial but often costly. In earlier years, some grantees coordinated with surrounding schools to fund travel for a curriculum trainer. However, in Year 3, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented this type of collaboration and in-person travel.

A few grant directors mentioned conducting, or wanting to conduct, follow-up or refresher trainings with their implementers. Refresher trainings helped reinforce programming content among implementers and provided an opportunity for curricula developers to incorporate and share curricula updates with implementers.

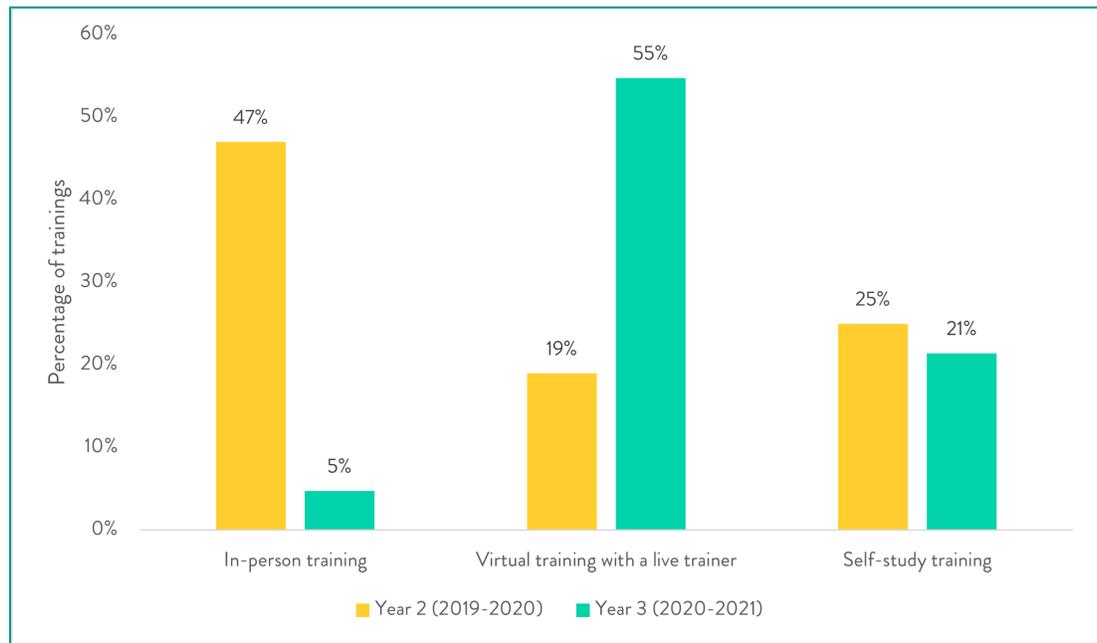
In addition to formal trainings, grant directors tried to support their implementers on a day-to-day basis by providing access to prevention coaches, social workers, and technical advisors. In addition, grant directors collaborated with teachers' unions to plan their implementation and discuss implementer issues as they arose. Grantees also leveraged peer support opportunities for implementers. For example, some implementers held weekly meetings of all implementers working with a particular grade to assist one another with prevention programming. Other implementers met regularly with implementers at other school districts to share lessons learned and garner advice. Most of the implementer support described by grant directors came from grantees' various partnerships (detailed in the Partnerships section).

Training format. In the grant director survey, grant directors were asked whether they offered training to new implementers of each program implemented, and if so, how those implementers were trained. Most grantees are implementing more than one *Prevention Matters*-funded program, and most grant directors offered training for more than one program. Six (23%) of the grant directors who responded to the survey reported that they did not offer training to new implementers in Year 3; however, most of these grant directors (n = 4) commented that they had no new implementers to train.

Among grantees who reported offering training to new implementers in Year 3, the most common format for the training was "virtual training with a live trainer" (55% of the trainings). In-person training was reported just two times (5%). As seen in Figure 2, this represents a large shift from Year 2, during which the most common training method was in person (47%) and virtual trainings with a live trainer comprised just 19%. This shift may reflect the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on in-person meetings. The remaining training formats were "self-study

(i.e., no interaction with a trainer)” and “other.” These two training formats represented 40% of the trainings offered to new implementers in Year 3.

Figure 2. New Implementer Training Format, Year 2 and Year 3



Among the 22 Round 1 grantees included in this analysis, nine grantees (41%) reported requiring follow-up training for some or all of their returning implementers. This is slightly less than in Year 2, when 48% of Round 1 grantees required follow-up training. An additional five Round 1 grantees offered, but did not require, follow-up training. Among the four Round 2 grantees, one reported that it offered, or planned to offer, follow-up trainings. The remaining three grantees did not offer or require returning implementers to complete follow-up training.

The 15 grant directors who provided follow-up training were fairly evenly divided in their rationales for offering that training, with many providing multiple reasons: 15 said they wanted to improve implementation quality over previous years, 15 wanted to remind implementers of information they might have forgotten from their initial training, 14 wanted to prepare implementers for program delivery in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and 11 wanted to provide supplemental or advanced information that built on information from

the initial training. One grant director offered follow-up training because implementers did not complete their initial training.

Trainers. Year 3 grant director surveys showed that for new implementer training involving a live trainer, both virtual and in person, about two-thirds involved training by either a certified trainer within the grantee organization (44%) or the program developer or vendor (24%). By contrast, trainers in Year 2 were most often from the program developer or vendor (34%). The remaining trainings in Year 3 (32%) were conducted by someone without an official certification.

COVID-19 had a significant impact on training plans this year. Fourteen grant directors (54%) reported that COVID-19 led them to change their training method (e.g., from in person to virtual). Eight (31%) reported that because of COVID-19 they did not offer planned trainings. These eight represented a mix of prevention programs. However, seven grant directors (27%) reported that COVID-19 did not change their training plans in any way. COVID-19 may have also decreased the number of trainings delivered by program vendors. All trainings led by someone from the program developer were conducted virtually. In their interviews, some grant directors mentioned being unable to hold previously planned trainings with vendors because those required travel, which was curtailed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.7.2 Implementer Reports of Training and Support

As shown in Table 15, 59% of first-time implementers reported participating in some sort of training during (or in the summer preceding) the 2020–2021 school year, with self-study training being the most common format. This is a change from Year 2, during which 78% of first-time implementers participated in training and in-person training was most common among all implementers (35%). Thirty-three percent of returning implementers reported participating in training for Year 3. This is also a decrease from Year 2, in which 62% of returning implementers reported participating in training. However, it is worth noting that, while only 33% of returning implementers reported participating in follow-up training, an additional 42% of returning implementers said they previously participated in training. It is possible follow-up training was less of a priority for grantees by Year 3, as more implementers had likely accumulated multiple years of program delivery experience.

While Year 3 implementer reports of training seem to fall short of the findings from the grant director survey, wherein grant directors reported providing

training for 42 of 49, or 86%, of programs offered, there are several possible explanations for this finding. Grantees may have *offered* training but not *required* the training for implementers. An implementer may have participated in a training, but they may not have recognized that it was a curriculum training because of how the activity was framed (e.g., calling it “professional development”). Unfortunately, data are not available to explore these potential explanations formally.

As shown in Table 15, the percentage of implementers who reported that they never received program training grew from Year 2 to Year 3 (from 18% to 26%, which is statistically significant). A substantially smaller proportion of implementers (41%) completed any type of training this year than in previous years. That training was also more likely to be self-guided than in previous years. Like the grant director survey results, the implementer survey results indicate that implementer training was likely affected by COVID-19 in Year 3.

Table 15. Training Participation

Implementer Participation in Training	Year 2 Implementer Survey (Training in summer 2019 or 2019–2020 school year)			Year 3 Implementer Survey (Training in summer 2020 or 2020–2021 school year)		
	Percentage of All Implementers	Percentage of First-Time Implementers	Percentage of Returning Implementers	Percentage of All Implementers	Percentage of First-Time Implementers	Percentage of Returning Implementers
Yes	70	78	62	41	59	33
In person	35	36	35	12	18	11
Self-study	23	27	18	16	26	13
Live virtual	16	19	12	14	21	13
Other	5	4	6	2	3	2
No, but I participated in a training prior to the current school year	12	5	20	31	6	42
No, I have never participated in a training for this program	18	18	18	26	35	24

Implementers from midsize grantees were more likely to have participated in training than implementers from smaller or larger grantees in Year 3:

- For grantees with one to eight implementers, 43% of all implementers reported participating in training in Year 3. In Year 2, training participation was 91% for these grantees.
- For grantees with 9–24 implementers, 57% of all implementers reported participating in training in Year 3. In Year 2 training participation was 77% for these grantees.
- For grantees with 25 or more implementers, 39% of all implementers reported participating in training in Year 3. In Year 2 training participation was 71% for these grantees.



1.8 Implementation Monitoring

Both grant directors and implementers reported on implementation monitoring.

1.8.1 Grant Director Reports of Monitoring

In their interviews, grant directors shared that they or other members of their *Prevention Matters* team monitored program implementation through observing implementation and collecting other monitoring data. Implementation observations helped grant directors and their staff ensure lessons were delivered, observe how implementers and students engaged with the program, and identify areas for improvement.

In the grant director survey, 81% of grantees reported that someone from grant leadership had already observed at least some program implementation (Table 16). Another 8% of grantees had not yet observed implementation but planned to do so. This is similar to Year 2, during which 89% of grantees had observed or planned to observe implementers' program sessions.

Table 16. Observation of Program Sessions at One or More Schools

Observation of Program Sessions	Number of Grantees (%)	
	Year 2	Year 3 ^a
Yes	20 (74%)	21 (81%)
Not yet but we plan to	4 (15%)	2 (8%)
No	3 (11%)	3 (12%)

^a Due to rounding, percentages total more than 100%.

Most grant directors who were interviewed reported that they or a member of their staff observed implementers delivering lessons in at least one mode of instruction—either in person or online during virtual instruction. At least one grant director reported their team was observing implementers in both modes.

Data from the grant director survey provide more detailed information about plans for program observations. Of the grantees who had or planned to observe program implementation, 78% reported that they were observing in-person instruction, and 65% reported observing live/synchronous virtual instruction. A quarter of grantees who had or had planned to observe implementation reported observing recorded/asynchronous virtual instruction.¹⁵

¹⁵ Data equal more than 100% because grant directors may have observed lessons delivered via multiple different modes (e.g., in person and virtual or in person and asynchronously).

Of the grantees who had observed program implementation, all but two (90%) had trained, or planned to train, their observers. This finding is very similar to Year 2. The most common type of training was for general training on conducting classroom observations (i.e., not specific to the prevention program being observed).

Among grantees who had observed, or who planned to observe, any implementation, a smaller proportion of implementers was observed in Year 3 than in Year 2. In Year 2, the large majority of grantees that conducted observations (89%) had planned to observe all their implementers. Among all grantees that conducted observations in Year 2, on average observation was planned for three-quarters (76%) of implementers. In Year 3, only half of grantees that conducted observations had planned to observe all their implementers. Among all grantees conducting observations, an average of 58% of implementers were to be observed. Instruction mode changes and restrictions limiting classroom visitors related to the COVID-19 pandemic may have contributed to this decrease in planned observations.

Most grantees conducting observations (91%) reported that they had already provided or planned to provide feedback on at least some of their observations. Year 3 was slightly higher than Year 2, during which 83% of grantees had provided or planned to provide feedback. This difference is not statistically significant.



In their interviews, nearly all grant directors reported collecting other types of monitoring data, most commonly on lesson completion and student lesson mastery. For example, one grantee reported using worksheets to assess if students understood a particular lesson and subsequently developed the appropriate skill set.

In their surveys, most grant directors reported requiring all (62%) or some (8%) of their *Prevention Matters* implementers to report information about their program implementation. This decreased slightly in Year 3 compared with Year 2, during which 89% of grantees required all or some of their implementers to report implementation information, but the difference is not statistically significant. As with observations, changes related to the COVID-19 pandemic may also have contributed to this decrease. In response to the pandemic, some grantees shifted to online or Web-based programming that automatically tracks implementer progress without additional reporting, which may not be captured here. Additionally, in their interviews, most grant directors discussed teachers being overstretched, and some reported being hesitant to add to teachers' burden during the pandemic by requiring additional reporting. At least one grant director shared during the interview that monitoring data were not collected as consistently as prior to COVID-19. See Section 4 for more information on challenges related to data collection.

Of the 18 grantees who required implementers to provide implementation data, 17 (94%) reported that they planned to provide feedback to at least some implementers on their implementation reporting. Grantees planned to share a similar level of feedback to implementers in Year 2 (21 of 24; 88%).

In the grant director survey, RTI asked grant directors whether and how their organizations followed up with implementers who were found to have unsatisfactory implementation. All but one grant director planned to follow up with implementers. As shown in Table 17, the most common types of follow-up were mentoring or coaching and follow-up training.

Table 17. Monitoring Follow-up Methods

Follow-up Method	Number of Grantees
One-on-one or group mentoring or coaching	13 (52%)
Follow-up training	7 (28%)
Observation of high-quality implementation by peers or mentors	4 (16%)
Collect additional data to monitor improvements	4 (16%)
Other	5 (20%)
We have not followed up and do not plan to	1 (4%)

1.8.2 Implementer Reports of Monitoring

About one-third of implementers reported that someone from the *Prevention Matters* project, like a grant director or program trainer, had observed their implementation (30%) or planned to observe their implementation (4%). This is a statistically significant decrease from Year 2 (43% had been observed and 4% planned to be observed). This decrease and variation from the percentage of grant directors reporting observation may reflect the decrease in the average proportion of implementers observed within each grantee.

The most common type of instruction observed was reported to be in-person instruction (78%). Thirty-eight percent of implementers reported observation of live/synchronous virtual instruction. Nine percent of implementers reported observation of recorded/asynchronous instruction. Twenty-two percent of implementers reported both in-person and some other type of virtual instruction.

Of those implementers who were observed, over two-thirds (69%) reported getting feedback on their observation, which is the same percentage as Year 2.

Fifty-seven percent of implementers reported that someone from their *Prevention Matters* project asked them to report information about their implementation. As with observations, this is a statistically significant decrease from Year 2 (68%).

In their interviews, some grant directors reported assigning a staff member to oversee or compile lesson completion data for a grade level or students in a particular building. This approach aimed to reduce the burden on teachers and standardize data collection.

Similar to Year 2, less than half (40%) of implementers who reported providing implementation information reported receiving feedback on the information they reported.

In the grant director survey, higher proportions of grant directors reported conducting observations and providing feedback on observations and implementation information than what implementers reported. Differences between grant director and implementer reports are expected. As discussed previously, grant directors reported only observing a subset of implementers, and feedback may have been provided only to some implementers or only if there was concern with what was observed or with the implementation information provided.

1.8.3 Correlates of Implementation Monitoring

Many factors may influence the frequency and quality of implementation monitoring. To understand some of these factors better, RTI examined implementer survey results to determine whether grantee size, time spent in virtual learning, and percentage of lessons delivered virtually were related to implementation monitoring.

Grantee size. For this analysis, grantees were divided into two size categories: those with fewer than 300 implementers and those with 300 or more. According to implementer reports, implementers were significantly more likely to be observed if they were part of a grantee organization with fewer than 300 implementers (50% observed), rather than a grantee organization with 300 or more implementers (29% observed). Grant director surveys reflected this trend. Among grantees with fewer than 300 implementers, grant directors, on average, reported that they planned to observe 73% of implementers; among those with 300 or more implementers, grant directors, on average, reported that they planned to observe 21% of implementers. Implementer surveys showed that smaller grantees (those with fewer than 300 implementers) were also significantly more likely to request that implementers report implementation information and to provide feedback on those reports. According to implementer reports, grantee size did not, however, affect the likelihood that implementers received feedback after being observed. Grantees with larger numbers of implementers were as likely as smaller grantees to offer feedback on observations.

Length of time spent in virtual learning. Longer periods spent in virtual learning were positively associated with implementer reports of being observed.

Implementers who reported being observed spent an average of 4.02 months teaching in a virtual learning environment, while those who reported that they were not observed spent an average of 3.38 months teaching in a virtual learning environment. This difference was statistically significant. Length of time spent teaching in a virtual learning environment is not associated with implementers' likelihood of being asked to report on implementation or their likelihood of receiving any monitoring-related feedback.

Percentage of lessons delivered virtually. No significant monitoring-related differences were seen between implementers who delivered varying amounts of program instruction virtually.

1.9 Program Integration and Coordination

Some grantees offered training for most, if not all, of the staff at their schools in their prevention program(s) or SEL more broadly. As one grant director highlighted, “[By training all of our staff it creates]... that common language, so that everybody's using the same language all the time when they're talking with students about social-emotional learning and issues that come as a result of that.” In contrast, other grant directors only had one person trained to implement prevention programming, which made it difficult to integrate their programs schoolwide.

In their surveys, grant directors reported on whether and how non-implementing school staff (e.g., teachers not implementing the program, administrators, custodial or food service staff, bus drivers) and non-school staff working with students outside of school hours (e.g., before- and after-school care providers, health care providers, clergy) participated in some form of program education. Specifically, they reported on the following:

- Whether non-implementing school staff participated in program training
- If non-implementing school staff did not participate in a formal training, whether schools shared program content or messages with them
- Whether non-school staff working with students outside of school hours participated in program training

- If non-school staff did not participate in a formal training, whether schools shared program content or messages with them

Nineteen grantees (73%) delivered some sort of program education to non-implementing school staff. Six grantees (23%) provided training to these staff, and 18 (69%) shared program messages with these staff (some grantees did both). Although training non-implementers was less common in Year 3 than in Year 2, sharing program content and messages was more common.

Nine grantees (35%) delivered program education to non-school staff. Five grantees (19%) provided training to these staff, and nine grant directors (35%) shared program messages with these staff (again, some did both).

When considering the percentages of grantees who provided training, shared program messages, or did both, these figures are somewhat higher than those from Year 2, during which 59% of grantees delivered any type of program education to non-implementing school staff and 26% delivered any type of program education to non-school staff. As shown in Table 18, the increase in providing education for non-implementing school staff is driven by Round 1 grantees, whereas the increase in educating non-school staff was driven by Round 2 grantees. It would be interesting to explore whether these increases were part of a larger push to increase focus on SEL during COVID-19 or perhaps part of grantees' efforts to plan for sustainability of their *Prevention Matters* programs as funding nears completion.

During times when implementers were not implementing their *Prevention Matters* program(s), 93% reported referencing program content or messages when interacting with students, including 31% who said they referenced program content often.

Table 18. Program Education for Non-implementing School Staff

Program Education Provided	Year 1	Year 2		Year 3	
	Percentage of Round 1 Grantees	Percentage of Round 1 Grantees	Percentage of Round 2 Grantees	Percentage of Round 1 Grantees	Percentage of Round 2 Grantees
To non-implementing school staff ^a	92	61	100	68	100
To non-school staff ^b	50	36	33	32	50

^a No differences by round or year are statistically significant between Year 2 and Year 3.

^b No differences by round or year are statistically significant between Year 2 and Year 3.

In their interviews, grant directors reported success using language learned from their prevention program(s) when behavioral problems occurred with students. Furthermore, using language from prevention program(s) helped reinforce the content for students and increased the presence of SEL in schools. Implementers' expectations for student behavior were also standardized across different classrooms and teachers; teachers developed and taught uniform expectations for attentiveness, engagement, and other social-emotional skills. Grant directors believed that developing a uniform language around SEL and a set of expectations for students increased teachers' ability to communicate effectively and enhanced students' ability to learn. As one grant director noted, *"It will put us on the path of a better understanding of our kids and ourselves and hopefully make a longer-term difference."* At least one grant director commented that their prevention programming helped influence their entire school district to adopt shared knowledge and goals regarding students' SEL. This shared knowledge was particularly impactful in larger districts whose priorities varied more from school to school; through their prevention programming, schools were able to identify a common language to use with their students and set similar goals across the schools in the district.

Grantees described having considerable success integrating SEL into the day-to-day activities of their schools when they designated a consistent time to implement SEL programming. These grantees also indicated that offering professional development opportunities and resources to teachers and staff

regularly was helpful to reinforce SEL and its integration into school activities. Lastly, some grant directors developed structures to track and monitor their integration of SEL values into the school environment to ensure their schools were consistently growing their SEL efforts.

Some grant directors noted the delay between implementing their prevention program and seeing the results in students, making it difficult at times for implementers to stay encouraged about the programming. Also, over the years, some implementers shared with their grant directors that beginning and ending numerous types of programs throughout their schools left some of them fatigued.

Some grantees commented on the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on social-emotional programming. At least one grantee commented on the recent racial tensions across the United States and their subsequent impact on social-emotional programming. The pandemic brought SEL to the forefront of academic priorities and provided greater insight into the difficulties students and staff face.

Grant directors are also recognizing the interconnectedness of culture, equity, race relations, academics, and SEL. As the 2020–2021 school year ended, grantees were considering how else they could enhance their social-emotional efforts to help their students and staff succeed.

One grant director stated, “I don’t think there’s anybody who would say they weren’t affected in some way over what’s happened over the past nine months, whether it be COVID, or the racial tensions or any of that. And so I think it’s helped all of us understand that we all need to focus on social-emotional learning, period. It’s good for all of us.”

1.10 Partnerships

Prevention Matters grantees were not required to enter into partnerships with other organizations. However, in general, partners can be a helpful resource for prevention program delivery, and many grantees’ grant applications discussed partnerships.

In their surveys, grant directors reported on any outside organizations that supported their *Prevention Matters* projects during the 2020–2021 school year. Similar to Year 2, on average, grantees reported having between one and two types of partner organizations. The most common partner types were mental and behavioral health professionals and organizations (16 grantees; 62%) and health care professionals or organizations (7 grantees; 27%).

Table 19 shows the resources grantees' partners provided during Years 2 and 3. Overall, partners most commonly provided mental health and medical services to program participants and their families. Consistent with Year 2, only one grantee reported receiving supplemental funding from a partner. Although partner support for mental health and medical services increased slightly, partner support declined in Year 3 across most other categories, though only one of these differences is statistically significant. One possible explanation for the drop in partner support is that COVID-19 likely had substantial effects on partners' capacity and ability to interact with grantees, children, and families.

Most of the seven grant directors interviewed described supplementing their *Prevention Matters* funding with external financial resources. Commonly, they reported receiving Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funding provided by the CARES Act. Some grant directors used Title Funds, state funding, and external grants, primarily for hiring additional personnel such as social workers and for creating new positions to benefit prevention efforts. These supplemental funds will help contribute to grantees' sustainability plans (see the Sustainability section).

In their interviews, some grantees described maintaining strong partnerships with their communities, using individual and organizational support to aid their *Prevention Matters* work. These partners include community mental health providers and substance abuse agencies, as well as local law enforcement. Some grantees have recruited experts in adverse childhood experiences¹⁶ and childhood trauma to help school staff and administrators acquire knowledge and strategies to strengthen their SEL work. Grantees also reported collaborating with district-level academic leaders, whose support allowed for the prioritization of schools' prevention efforts.

¹⁶ According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/fastfact.html>), adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are "potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years)," including experiencing or witnessing violence. ACEs have been associated with numerous negative outcomes in adulthood, such as chronic health issues and substance use.

Table 19. Resources Provided by Grantee Partners, by Year

Resources Provided by Partners	Number (Percent) of Grantees	
	Year 2	Year 3
Provided mental health services to <i>Prevention Matters</i> program participants	16 (59%)	17 (65%)
Provided medical or health services to <i>Prevention Matters</i> program participants	11 (41%)	12 (46%)
Provided services for parents or other family members of <i>Prevention Matters</i> program participants	10 (37%)	10 (38%)
Reinforced <i>Prevention Matters</i> program messages or lessons with students	9 (33%)	6 (23%)
Provided substance abuse services to <i>Prevention Matters</i> program participants	8 (30%)	4 (15%)
Provided additional information or instruction to school staff to supplement <i>Prevention Matters</i> program training	6 (22%)	3 (12%)
Assisted with decision-making or problem-solving for <i>Prevention Matters</i> project	5 (19%)	0 (0%)*
Presented additional information or lessons to students to supplement <i>Prevention Matters</i> programs	4 (15%)	3 (12%)
Supported <i>Prevention Matters</i> data collection, analysis, or reporting	4 (15%)	2 (8%)
Trained or provided technical assistance to staff on the <i>Prevention Matters</i> programs	4 (15%)	1 (4%)
Identified students to participate in <i>Prevention Matters</i> programs that target at-risk students	3 (11%)	4 (15%)
Shared lessons learned and best practices from <i>Prevention Matters</i> program implementation	3 (11%)	1 (4%)
Provided staff to implement <i>Prevention Matters</i> programs	2 (7%)	0 (0%)
Provided funding to supplement <i>Prevention Matters</i> funding	1 (4%)	1 (4%)
Assisted with fundraising for <i>Prevention Matters</i> programming	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

*Statistically significant change from Year 2 to Year 3 ($p < .05$).

A few grant directors also described providing external training and shared online resources with their principals and implementers to reinforce topics such as SEL and trauma awareness to best serve students. These grant directors highlighted how these efforts increased staff buy-in and their ability to offer more comprehensive, unified prevention programming. At least one grant director expressed a lack of knowledge about other resources to supplement their *Prevention Matters* or SEL activities.

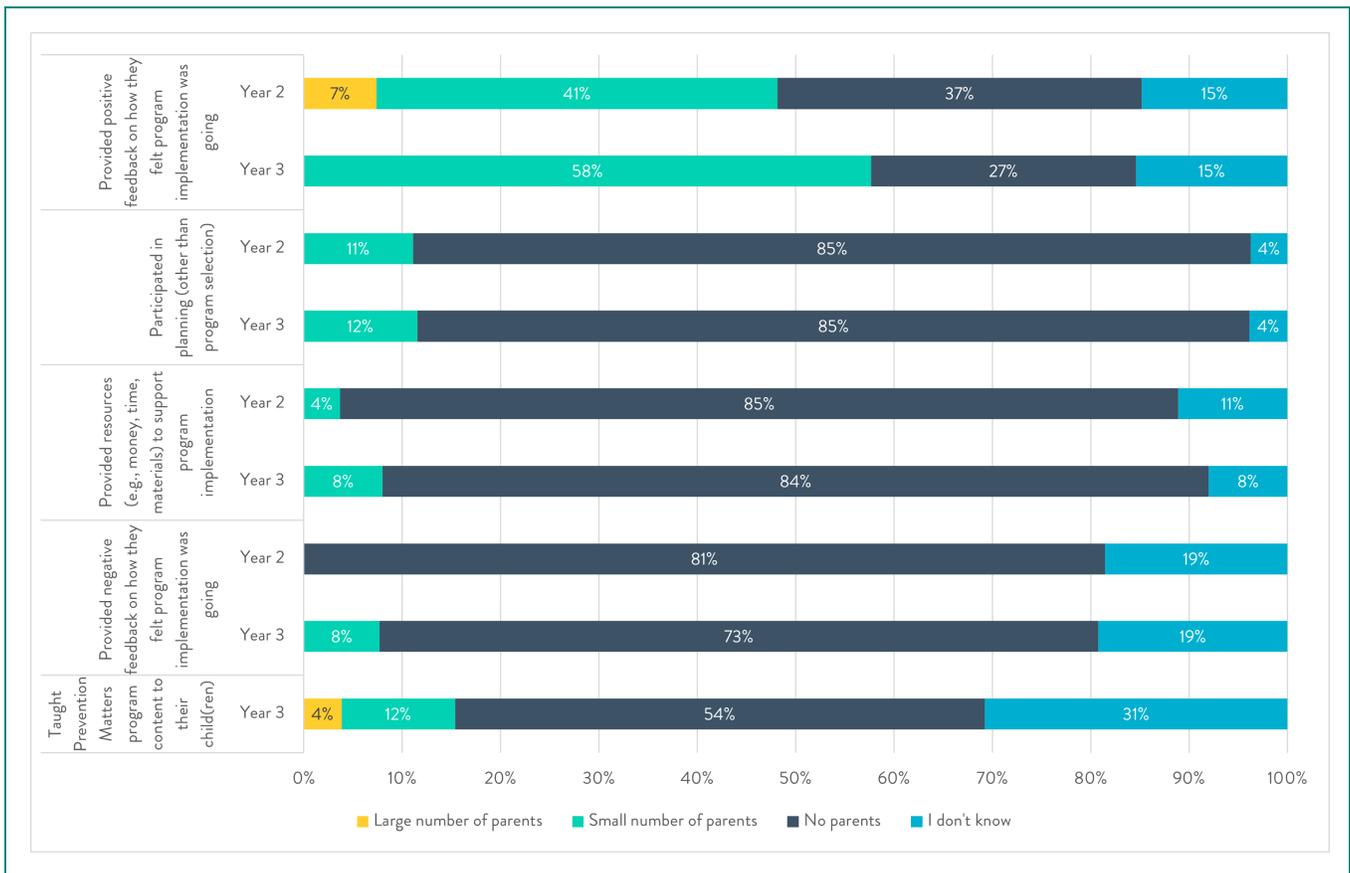
1.11 Parent Involvement

As with partnerships, *Prevention Matters* grantees were not required to involve parents in their efforts. However, involving parents can be a way to serve students in a more comprehensive way, and some grantees chose to do so.

Consistent with parent engagement not being an explicit component of the *Prevention Matters* model, parent involvement in programming appeared to be relatively low. In response to the grant director survey question about partner types, only two grant directors reported partnering with parent, family, or caregiver groups or representatives.

When asked about specific forms of involvement, few grant directors reported that parents had provided input, feedback, or resources for *Prevention Matters* programming, as shown in Figure 3. A notable exception was that more than half of grantees (n = 15; 58%) reported that parents had provided positive feedback on how they felt program implementation was going. This is higher than the Year 2 statistic of 48%. However, parents also provided more negative feedback in Year 3 (n = 2 grantees; 8%) than in Year 2 (0% of grantees). Neither of these differences is statistically significant. With significantly more *Prevention Matters* lessons delivered virtually in Year 3, it is possible that this increase in negative feedback is related to some aspect of virtual instruction. It will be important to note whether negative feedback increases again in Year 4 and potentially explore the nature of that feedback. It is also possible that with more lessons delivered virtually in Year 3, parents had more exposure to programming, which could explain the overall increase in feedback, both positive and negative.

Figure 3. Percentage of Grantees Reporting Parent Involvement in Year 3



In the survey, grant directors were asked whether schools provided parents with information and activities to reinforce program messages at home. Grantees, who on average offered between one and two prevention programs, reported providing information to parents for over half the programs offered (61%). Grantees intended to provide, but had not yet provided, information to parents for 10% of programs offered. For each program they implemented, grant directors also indicated how often they provided program-related information to parents. The most frequent level of communication with parents was on “two or more occasions” (24 programs or 49%). For seven programs (14%), schools did not provide any information to parents.

Consistent with Year 2, most grant directors reported in their interviews having difficulty engaging parents in prevention efforts. However, engaging parents was even more difficult during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, school restrictions prevented many parents from entering school buildings, which limited opportunities for face-to-face interactions. Also according to grant director

interviews, parents appeared overburdened by competing priorities intensified by the pandemic; many parents may have had less ability and time to engage in their children's school activities.

Some grant directors who were interviewed alluded to a possible advantage of students participating in remote prevention programming: parents may have had more direct exposure to prevention curricula. Virtual learning provided some parents with the opportunity to engage in their children's curricula and even adopt social-emotional techniques in their homes. One grant director relayed a testimonial from a parent, stating that the mother's exposure to the programming "*helped her as a parent to have words [related to SEL].*" However, many grant directors expressed concern that most parents were not equipped to assist with social-emotional programming in a virtual setting because they had not received the implementer training and would not be able to help students with the SEL curriculum adequately.

When possible, most grantees maintained their efforts to engage parents by informing parents of students' participation in prevention programming, distributing newsletters detailing program activities, maintaining open communication with parents, and providing resources to help parents understand the prevention programming in their children's schools.

2 Implementation Progress

Most of the grant directors interviewed reported that implementers were on track to complete nearly all the required lessons in Year 3. Furthermore, these grant directors shared that they were able to implement the required lessons in all grades they intended. In Year 3, a few grant directors also reported increasing program implementation beyond the required lessons to include supplemental prevention programming lessons or reinforcing some required lessons.

Some multi-site grantees noted that in Year 3, they were fully implementing their prevention programming and working to align the curriculum across their elementary and middle schools. As one grant director shared, *“The fact that [all sites] now have a consistent curriculum, we have a common language for what we do, that’s been huge for us as a district.”*

More than half of implementer survey respondents (65%) had finished implementing *Prevention Matters* programming with all their students by the time of the survey. The remainder had finished implementing with some but not all students (13%) or had not yet finished implementing with any students (22%). The percentage of implementers reporting having completed the program increased from Year 2 (57%). Note that the implementer survey was conducted earlier in the semester¹⁷ during Year 3 than during Year 2. As such, this increase in program completion is not simply an artifact of survey timing.

Among implementers who reported not yet having finished implementing their prevention programming, 58% expected to finish all sessions of their program by the end of the year whereas one-third did not. This percentage expecting to finish implementation by the end of the year increased significantly in Year 3 compared with Year 2; in Year 2, only 2% of those implementers who had not yet finished lesson delivery expected to complete their implementation for the year. This significant increase between Year 2 and Year 3 is likely due in part to many implementers stopping programming after school closures in Spring 2020.

3 Implementation Quality

For the purposes of this evaluation, implementation quality is defined as implementation *fidelity*. Implementation fidelity reflects the degree to which

¹⁷ The Year 3 implementer survey was open April 12–May 21, 2021. The Year 2 implementer survey was open May 13–June 3, 2020.

programs were delivered as the program developer intended. The *Prevention Matters* evaluation examines three aspects of fidelity:

- Adherence to program content and methods as outlined in a curriculum manual or guide
- Dosage, or whether students received sufficient exposure to the program
- Student engagement, including interest in and understanding of programming

3.1 Grant Director Reports of Implementation Quality

Grant directors' perceptions of how implementation quality in Year 3 compared with Year 2 varied. Several grant directors reported higher quality in Year 3 than in previous years, though a few grant directors believed that fidelity to the prevention programming decreased compared with the previous year. These grant directors suspected the decrease in quality was partly attributable to implementers' increased roles and responsibilities related to the COVID-19 pandemic and a stronger emphasis on academic priorities. As one grant director highlighted, *"There was probably less concern with total [implementation] fidelity [this year] as the prior year... just because the focus now is so much on learning loss that it probably wasn't... as deeply engaging."*

Some grantees reported that the COVID-19 pandemic increased the quality of programming because of an increased understanding of the importance of SEL and the *Prevention Matters* programming among implementers and local school communities. One grantee described seeing this change in the results of a teacher survey about their prevention programs that were administered prior to the onset of the pandemic and after school reopened: *"Initially, there were so many teachers that were like, 'I don't see the benefit.' However, once [teachers returned to the classroom and] we took another version of the survey, and the responses were completely different, [it] was really interesting to see how [teachers' buy-in] increased the quality of the program as well."*

Several grant directors suspected that increases in quality were related to greater implementer buy-in and increased experience in delivering the curriculum. One grant director shared, *"I think that our teachers are more comfortable with the curriculum. There's even more ownership and buy-in from them to deliver."* At least one grantee discussed having teachers serve as champions and coaches to

increase implementer buy-in and implementation ownership among their fellow teachers.

Some grant directors observed that quality varied across implementers, grades, and schools. *“There is always variance [in quality] between schools.... It's how much the building then takes on. We've got some buildings where they're incorporating [Prevention Matters programming] as a part of their morning announcements, and it's much more building wide.”*

In their interviews, most grant directors reported that students were engaged and enjoyed the program. *“The student interest and engagement really was remarkably positive. I mean, in the visits that I did... the kids were remarkably engaged.”*

However, some grant directors noted variation in student engagement by grade, with middle school being particularly challenging, as well as by instruction mode—that is, virtual versus in person (see Section 1.5). One grant director noted that engagement was *“pretty high for the most part until we switched to online format.”* The grant director went on to clarify that the lack of engagement online was not unique to the program but across all virtual learning.



3.2 Implementer Reports of Implementation Quality

As part of their surveys, implementers reported on how closely they followed the curriculum guides in teaching program lessons.¹⁸ Forty-one percent of implementers reported following the curriculum guide very closely (i.e., teaching the material as specified in the guide). Another 50% of implementers reported following the curriculum guide somewhat closely (i.e., sometimes adapting the material as appropriate). This is very similar to what implementers reported about Year 2 implementation prior to school closures (38% very closely and 50% somewhat closely). This measure of curriculum adherence did not vary significantly when comparing the implementers who had completed the curriculum by the time of the survey with those who had not completed their curriculum.

Implementers responded to questions about the proportion of required sessions that they delivered with their classes.¹⁹ Among implementers who had completed implementation with all students, 69% reported that they implemented all required sessions with all classes, and 27% reported implementing almost all required sessions. In Year 3 compared with Year 2, a higher percentage of implementers who implemented with all their students had completed all required sessions (69% and 45%, respectively).

Despite barriers to implementing *Prevention Matters* completely in person and the need to shift some activities to a virtual format, grantees did their best to engage students who participated in their programs. On their surveys, implementers reported on how engaged their students were and how much they seemed to understand the program content, using each of the program delivery modalities (Table 20).

¹⁸ RTI excluded implementers who said that they did not use a curriculum guide (n = 101) from these analyses.

¹⁹ RTI excluded implementers who reported that they did not know how many or which sessions were required (n = 77) or that their program did not have required sessions (n = 53) from these analyses.

Table 20. Student Engagement and Understanding Reported by Implementers, by Instruction Modality

Instruction Modality	Percentage of Implementers Reporting						
	Engagement	Fully Engaged	Almost Fully Engaged	Somewhat Engaged	Barely Engaged	Not at all Engaged/Bored	Don't Know
In-person		11	45	37	5	2	-
Live/synchronous virtual instruction		4	24	52	17	3	-
Recorded/asynchronous instruction		3	15	35	23	4	20
Instruction Modality	Percentage of Implementers Reporting						
	Understanding	Excellent/Complete Understanding	Good	Fair	Poor	Did Not Understand	Don't Know
In-person		23	58	16	2	1	-
Live/synchronous virtual instruction		9	47	37	6	1	-
Recorded/asynchronous instruction		4	32	31	13	2	19

During the delivery of program lessons in person, over half of implementers (56%) reported that students were either fully engaged or almost fully engaged in the program, which is higher than the 28% and 18% of implementers reporting fully or almost fully engaged students during live/synchronous and recorded/asynchronous sessions, respectively. When examining the level of engagement of students during live/synchronous remote instruction and recorded/asynchronous remote instruction, the greatest proportion of students in both groups were “somewhat engaged.” The data related to engagement in virtual instruction show a bell-shaped pattern, with relatively few implementers reporting that students were “not at all engaged/bored” or “fully engaged.” This

pattern was consistent across these two different modes of program delivery but was not the same for in-person program delivery, which had higher engagement.

In general, more implementers thought students had a good understanding of lessons across all program delivery modalities compared with those who thought students had a poor, fair, or excellent understanding or did not understand the lessons at all. In-person lessons seemed to yield the greatest understanding among students. Over 80% of implementers felt that students who participated in in-person lessons had either a good or excellent understanding. Likewise, 56% of implementers felt that students who participated in live/synchronous remote lessons had either a good or excellent understanding. However, only 36% of implementers felt that students who participated in recorded/asynchronous remote lessons had either a good or excellent understanding.

Overall implementation quality is summarized in Table 21. There is no significant difference from Year 2 to Year 3 in curriculum adherence. This may be because of continued adaptation in response to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on in-person learning and virtual instruction (see Section 3.3).

Table 21. Implementation Quality, by Year

Implementation Quality Metric	Means				Comparison
	Year 2		Year 3		
	All Implementers	Implementers Completing All Implementation by Time of Survey	All Implementers	Implementers Completing All Implementation by Time of Survey	
Adherence to curriculum guide <i>0 = Did not follow closely</i> <i>1 = Followed somewhat closely</i> <i>2 = Followed very closely</i>	1.33	1.39	1.32	1.35	Y2 → Y3 all: No significant difference ($p = .44$) Y2 → Y3 complete: No significant difference ($p = .15$)
Dosage (delivery of required sessions) <i>1 = A few</i> <i>2 = About half</i> <i>3 = Almost all</i> <i>4 = All</i>	3.09	3.34	3.36*	3.64 *	Y2 → Y3 all: Statistically significant increase ($p = .0001$) Y2 → Y3 complete: Statistically significant increase ($p < .0001$)
Student engagement ^a <i>0 = Not at all/bored</i> <i>1 = Barely</i> <i>2 = Somewhat</i> <i>3 = Almost fully</i> <i>4 = Fully</i>	2.47	2.59	2.58*	2.69*	Y2 → Y3 all: Statistically significant increase ($p < .0001$) Y2 → Y3 complete: Statistically significant increase ($p = .006$)
Student understanding ^a <i>0 = Did not understand</i> <i>1 = Poor</i> <i>2 = Fair</i> <i>3 = Good</i> <i>4 = Excellent/complete</i>	2.87	2.99	3.00*	3.12*	Y2 → Y3 all: Statistically significant increase ($p < .0001$) Y2 → Y3 Complete: Statistically significant increase ($p < .0001$)

Note. Significance testing was done via two-tailed t-tests, examining differences between pairs of mean scores.

^a To allow for the most accurate comparison to previous years, in Year 3 only student engagement and understanding during in-person instruction were included. This is the only modality examined because there was no overall measure of engagement or understanding in Year 2.

RTI examined dosage, or the amount of the intervention that is delivered, using implementer survey questions related to the amount of required curriculum sessions that were delivered. RTI also examined implementer survey reports of student engagement and understanding of the curriculum when learning in person. There are small but statistically significant increases from Year 2 to Year 3 in dosage, student engagement, and student understanding. When Year 3 implementers were limited to those who had completed all implementation by the time of their survey, the difference in dosage, student engagement, and student understanding between Years 2 and 3 increased even further. One possible explanation for this finding is that there is something systematically different between implementers who finish earlier and those who finish later or not at all, such as organization or enthusiasm, which contributes to both implementation timing and quality.

RTI also examined whether there were any differences in fidelity across curricula and implementation mode. Table 22 shows that there were 32 fidelity values, calculated by multiplying the 4 *Prevention Matters* programs with sufficient data (i.e., Conscious Discipline, LifeSkills Training, Second Step: Elementary, and Second Step: Middle) by 8 fidelity indicators. Twenty of the fidelity values are significantly different from the initiative-level average, as indicated by the red and green arrows. Several programs had fewer than five reporting implementers or one reporting school and were therefore excluded for privacy reasons.

It is important to note that explaining differences in programs' implementation quality can be complex. *Prevention Matters* programs serve different grade levels and have different program structures. Also, the types of schools that choose to implement one program over another may be different. In short, there are many factors that play into the ways in which a program is implemented.

As in Year 2, Year 3 data showed that Second Step was the most commonly implemented program, with 89% of implementers implementing a version at the elementary or middle school level. The large number of Second Step implementers increased the ability to detect statistically significant differences in survey responses. The elementary school version of Second Step, which comprised 64% of responses included for analysis, had higher than average engagement and understanding, which persisted across all implementation modalities. Second Step: Elementary also had higher than average dosage. The middle school version of Second Step, implemented by 25% of respondents included for analysis, had lower-than-average engagement and understanding across most modalities. This may be related to grantees' general challenge of engaging middle school students;

see Section 3.1. LifeSkills Training also had higher than average adherence and dosage.

Table 22. Implementation Fidelity by Program

Program	Fidelity Indicator, Difference from Mean of All Other Programs							
	Adherence	Exposure/Dosage	Participant Engagement			Participant Understanding		
			In-Person	Synchronous	Asynchronous	In-Person	Synchronous	Asynchronous
Conscious Discipline	↓	-	↓	-	-	↓	↓	-
Curriculum-Based Support Group	^	^	^	^	^	^	^	^
Good Behavior Game	^	^	^	^	^	^	^	^
LifeSkills Training	↑	↑	-	-	-	↑	-	-
PATHS	^	^	^	^	^	^	^	^
Positive Action	^	^	^	^	^	^	^	^
Project Toward No Drug Abuse	^	^	^	^	^	^	^	^
Ripple Effects	^	^	^	^	^	^	^	^
Second Step: Elementary	-	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Second Step: Middle	-	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	-	↓
Too Good for Drugs	^	^	^	^	^	^	^	^

↑ = Significantly higher than mean for all other programs.

↓ = Significantly lower than mean for all other programs.

^ To protect respondent privacy, values for programs with fewer than five reporting implementers or one reporting school are not reported.

- = No difference in the mean of the measure for the given program compared to the mean for other programs.

Implementers of Conscious Discipline had lower-than-average scores across several quality indicators. This may be a function of the quality questions being more relevant for a curriculum-based intervention than for an intervention like

Conscious Discipline, which is designed to change school practices. For example, for curriculum-based interventions, engagement and understanding are reported for the discrete times during which a program is being taught, whereas Conscious Discipline implementers may be reporting on engagement and understanding across all subjects and the whole school day.

3.3 Adaptations

Adapting a program to align with participants' backgrounds and needs can make lessons more engaging and effective for participants. However, adaptations that remove a program's essential ingredients have the potential to reduce effectiveness.

3.3.1 Adaptations Reported by Grant Directors

In their surveys, grant directors reported on whether their organization asked implementers to make any changes to the *Prevention Matters* curricula, and if so, what those changes were. Changes because of COVID-19 are reported in Section 1.5; this section provides information about grant directors' reports of adaptations related to factors other than COVID-19. Half of grant directors (14 grantees; 54%) reported asking their implementers to make changes. This finding remained consistent from Years 1 to 3, with 44% and 52% of grantees in Years 1 and 2, respectively, asking their implementers to make changes.

As shown in Table 23, the most common changes requested were presenting additional activities, lessons, or content that were not part of the program and repeating or reviewing program activities or lessons (9 grantees each; 35% of all grantees).

Table 23. Implementation Changes Directed by Grantees

Change Directed	Percentage of Grantees		
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3*
Present additional activities or lessons that are not part of the program	16	26	35
Repeat or review program activities or lessons	8	22	35
Deliver lessons at a frequency different from what the program recommends (e.g., implement lessons on consecutive days instead of weekly)	8	15	19
Change program language or examples	0	11	19
Skip or shorten program activities or lessons	4	11	8
Change the order of activities or lessons	0	7	4
Implement with a different type of student (e.g., grade level, risk status) than what the program targets	4	7	0
Change the format of program activities (e.g., substituted discussion for role play, modified worksheets or homework assignments)	4	4	19
Other	4	7	0
Did not make any changes	56	48	46

* In Year 3, grant directors were asked specifically to think about changes caused by factors other than COVID-19. Changes because of COVID-19 are reported in Section 1.5.

According to grant directors who participated in interviews, the COVID-19 pandemic drove most adaptations in Year 2 (the previous school year). Several grant directors, however, described making general adaptations to their program implementation in Year 3. More than half of those interviewed said that implementers believed some aspects of their prevention program were not relatable to their student population. To address this, implementers may have added examples and activities to program lessons to be more inclusive, engaging, and relatable. According to one grant director, *“One of the biggest things was just the way the students and the pictures looked...they weren't representative.... The other thing was that some of the stories were things that the students couldn't necessarily relate to, didn't match with the lives that some of our students were living.”* Curriculum updates distributed by some programs' developers helped

address this issue, and teachers further supplemented lessons with culturally relevant external resources. Another grant director decided to stop offering one of their selected programs after finding that it was not relevant or age appropriate. This grant director commented that the games included in the curriculum were not of interest to the high school students participating in the programming and instead sought to identify examples that would foster better student engagement.

3.3.2 Adaptations Reported by Implementers

Implementers who used a curriculum guide were asked to report the types of changes they made, if any. Eighty-one percent of implementers reported making some type of change (Table 24). The most common changes reported by implementers were skipping or shortening program activities or lessons (38% of implementers), repeating or reviewing content (26% of implementers), and presenting additional activities or lessons that were not part of the program (28% of implementers).

Table 24. Curriculum Changes Made by Implementers

Curriculum Change Made	Percentage of Implementers	
	Year 2	Year 3
Skipped or shortened program activities or lessons	45	38
Repeated or reviewed program activities or lessons	35	26
Presented additional activities or lessons that were not part of the program	35	28
Changed the format of program activities (e.g., substituted discussion for role play, modified worksheets or homework assignments)	26	23
Changed program language or examples	18	14
Delivered lessons at a frequency different from what the program recommends (e.g., implemented lessons on consecutive days instead of weekly)	16	14
Changed the order of activities or lessons	14	11
Implemented with a different type of student (e.g., grade level, risk status) than what the program targets	3	3
Other	1	2
Did not make any changes	20	19

Note. The percentage of implementers is calculated from those who reported using a curriculum guide. Percentages sum to more than 100% because implementers could select multiple types of changes.

Those implementers who reported making changes from the curriculum manual reported the reasons for these changes. As shown in Table 25, the most commonly reported reasons for making changes were related to increasing student engagement and comprehension (39% and 28% of implementers), not having enough time (32% of implementers), and minimizing disruptive behavior (15% of implementers).

Table 25. Reasons for Curriculum Changes

Reason for Making Curriculum Change	Percentage of Implementers		
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
I wanted to increase student engagement.	55	66	39
We didn't have enough time (not specified if related to COVID-19).	47	19	32
I wanted to increase student comprehension/retention.	46	55	28
I wanted to minimize disruptive behavior.	29	33	15
Program content or language was not culturally appropriate for my students.	10	11	5
We had extra time.	13	10	10
I forgot or made a mistake.	6	6	4
I did not have needed equipment or materials.	7	5	5
I disagreed with program messages/content/format.	2	3	2
My school/organization leadership directed me to make changes.	5	2	2
Other	3	6	3

Note. The percentage of implementers is calculated from those who reported making a change to their curriculum. Percentages sum to more than 100% because implementers could select multiple types of changes.

3.4 Correlates of Implementation Quality

RTI examined whether training and monitoring were related to implementation quality. These results are summarized in Table 26, which lists selected factors related to implementer training and monitoring, such as whether they participated in training or whether they received feedback based on observations of their sessions or implementation data they submitted. Then, for each of four quality indicators (engagement, understanding, adherence, dosage), the table depicts the average score (for student engagement and understanding) or percentage of implementers (for adherence and dosage) for those implementers who did have the factor (“Yes” columns) and did not have the factor (“No” columns), along with an indicator of whether any differences between the “Yes” and “No” implementers are statistically significant.

Table 26. Implementation Quality, by Training and Monitoring

Comparison	Mean Student Engagement Score ^a		Mean Student Understanding Score ^b		Percent of Implementers Following Curriculum Guide Very Closely		Percent of Implementers Delivering All Required Sessions	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
1. Implementer participated in Year 3 training (initial or booster)	2.66*	2.53*	3.00	3.00	44.2*	38.3*	48.7	51.3
2. Implementer was observed	2.67*	2.55*	3.08*	2.97*	44.0	39.3	55.1*	47.8*
3. Implementer self-reported implementation information	2.72*	2.41*	3.13*	2.84*	41.7	39.8	54.1*	44.9*
4. Observed implementer received observation feedback	2.78*	2.55*	3.14	3.01	46.9	41.2	60.4*	48.7*
5. Implementer who self-reported implementation information received feedback on that information	2.79*	2.67*	3.14	3.14	45.0	39.5	60.3*	50.8*

^a Student engagement includes in-person instruction only. 0 = not at all engaged/bored, 1 = barely engaged, 2 = somewhat engaged, 3 = almost fully engaged, 4 = fully engaged.

^b Student understanding includes in-person instruction only. 0 = did not understand, 1 = poor understanding, 2 = fair understanding, 3 = good understanding, 4 = excellent/complete understanding.

*Statistically significant at $p < .05$ between having a variable and not having the variable.

The first row of the table shows that on average, implementers who reported participating in a training in Year 3 reported significantly higher student engagement and a significantly greater likelihood of following the curriculum guide very closely. Although implementers who did not participate in training in Year 3 had a greater likelihood of delivering all required sessions than those who participated in training, the difference is not statistically significant. There was no difference in student understanding between implementers who reported participating in training in Year 3 and those who did not.

Implementers who reported that they were observed (Row 2) by someone affiliated with their grant program reported higher student engagement and student understanding, and they were more likely to follow the curriculum guide closely and deliver all required sessions than those who were not observed. The differences in student engagement and student understanding scores are statistically significant, as is the difference between those who delivered all their required sessions and those who did not.

There was a similar pattern among implementers who submitted self-reported implementation information (Row 3). These individuals reported significantly higher student engagement, student understanding, and dosage than implementers who did not submit implementation information. They were also more likely to report following the curriculum guide somewhat or very closely, although that difference is not statistically significant.

Implementers who reported receiving feedback based on observations (Row 4) or based on self-reported implementation information (Row 5) reported higher scores on each of the implementation quality indicators than did implementers who did not receive feedback from observations or from self-reported implementation information. However, the difference is statistically significant only for the student engagement and dosage indicators.

The quality of implementation, as measured by indicators like student engagement, understanding, curriculum adherence, and dosage, improved considerably when implementers received some degree of training or feedback on their delivery. This is underscored by the fact that the biggest differences in quality are related to feedback. Implementers who reported receiving feedback from observations or on self-reported data were much more likely than those who did not receive feedback to deliver all required lessons. Thus, it is important that grantees recognize this and act intentionally about training and monitoring throughout the implementation process to ensure the highest quality.

RTI also examined whether implementer experience was related to implementation quality in Table 27. In Year 3, returning implementers tended to implement more of the required sessions than new implementers, but new implementers tended to follow their curriculum guide more closely than returning implementers. However, it is important to note that, although these differences are statistically significant, they are fairly small and may not represent practical differences in quality. These differences between new and returning implementers' adherence and dosage were also seen in Year 2. However, in Year 3, student engagement and understanding during in-person instruction is not significantly different between new and returning implementers, as it had been in Year 2.

Table 27. Implementation Quality for Returning and New Implementers

Implementation Quality Metric	Means		Comparison
	Returning Implementers	New Implementers	
Adherence to curriculum guide 0 = Did not follow closely 1 = Followed somewhat closely 2 = Followed very closely	1.29	1.39	Statistically significant difference ($p < .01$)
Dosage (delivery of required sessions) 1 = A few 2 = About half 3 = Almost all 4 = All	3.42	3.20	Statistically significant difference ($p < .01$)
Student engagement ^a 0 = Not at all/bored 1 = Barely 2 = Somewhat 3 = Almost fully 4 = Fully	2.58	2.58	No significant difference ($p = .99$)
Student understanding ^a 0 = Did not understand 1 = Poor 2 = Fair 3 = Good 4 = Excellent/complete	3.02	2.96	No significant difference ($p = .21$)

^a To allow for the most accurate comparison between years, only student engagement and understanding during in-person instruction were included in Year 3.

With the increased use of virtual training and the decrease in implementer training delivered during the pandemic, it is important to examine whether this seems to have influenced implementers' enthusiasm for delivering program lessons and confidence in their ability to successfully implement the program. This analysis may also provide insights about the importance of training beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. In their surveys, in addition to reporting on the type of training they completed, implementers were asked to rate their level of enthusiasm, on a scale of 0 (low) to 100 (high), about teaching the prevention program. They were also asked a series of questions to assess their self-efficacy for delivering their prevention program lessons. A mean self-efficacy score was calculated between 1 (low) and 5 (high). As shown in Table 28, implementer enthusiasm and self-efficacy varied somewhat according to the type of training received. Implementers who reported the highest levels of enthusiasm were those who reported that they participated in "some other kind of training" (other than in-person, virtual with a live trainer, or self-study). Because of small sample size, however, this result is not statistically significant.

The second highest level of enthusiasm was reported by implementers who participated in in-person training. The lowest level of enthusiasm was reported by implementers who had never participated in any training for their program. Similarly, implementers with no prior training in their program reported the lowest level of self-efficacy for delivering the program. Each of these results is statistically significant when comparing the respondents who endorsed the training type with those who did not. The largest difference emerged among those who reported receiving no training in their prevention program. These results add support to the need to provide training to all implementers, not only to ensure program fidelity, but to potentially enhance implementer confidence and enthusiasm for delivering program lessons. It is important to note that respondents could report completing any, all, or none of the training types.

Table 28. Training Type and Implementer Engagement/Self-Efficacy

Type of Training Completed	Mean Implementer Enthusiasm (SD)	Mean Implementer Self-Efficacy (SD)
I participated in in-person training	75.28 (20.99)*	4.02 (0.50)*
I participated in virtual training with a live trainer	72.71 (22.36)	3.98 (0.52)
I participated in self-study training (i.e., no interaction with a trainer)	73.48 (20.85)	4.01 (0.51)*
I participated in some other kind of training	75.81 (20.86)	3.96 (0.52)
I did not participate in training this year, but did previously	72.79 (21.85)	3.94 (0.52)
I have never participated in training for this program	66.39 (22.63)*	3.83 (0.53)*

* Statistically significant difference from respondents not endorsing the training type ($p < .05$). SD, standard deviation.



3.5 Year 3 Successes

The Year 3 grant director survey asked grant directors to share information about their major accomplishments implementing *Prevention Matters* during the 2020–2021 academic year. Among the grant directors surveyed, these are the key accomplishments identified in their survey responses:

- Maintaining program implementation timeline and fidelity despite COVID-19 challenges
- Transitioning prevention programming to a virtual platform
- Increasing student awareness and ownership of their negative behaviors that resulted in out-of-school and in-school suspensions
- Expanding the grade levels that received *Prevention Matters* programming
- Increasing program implementation fidelity

During interviews, grant directors were asked to detail what contributed to the success they described in their surveys. Most grant directors attributed their grant implementation successes to their project teams' contributions. For example, one grant director shared, "*Special ed teachers are the unspoken rock stars in many schools.... It was my special ed team that stepped up and said, 'I believe in [the Prevention Matters programming], I'm going to help you with this.'*" Grant directors also referred to their staff as linchpins to their programs' success.

Some grant directors went further and attributed their grant implementation successes to programmatic buy-in among teachers and staff and to their dedication to helping students. Staff members believed that *Prevention Matters* programming positively impacted students, which inspired staff to be excited about grant implementation. Some grantees shared that their entire school community had extremely positive overall feedback about the program. One grant director stated, "*Of all the initiatives we have done, [Prevention Matters is] probably the one that's gone the best and probably has been the most successful.*"

Furthermore, some grant directors shared that the support and collaboration among all staff involved helped schools achieve their implementation goals. For example, one grant director indicated that teachers met according to grade level to

discuss the importance of lessons and the curriculum goals. Another grant director shared that they encouraged peer-to-peer meetings instead of leadership-led group meetings so that staff could relate to each other and provide support through shared experience.

A few grant directors described the success of prevention programming in helping students become more aware of their behaviors and daily interactions. These grantees viewed skill reinforcement and students' emotional growth as a major program implementation success. For example, one grantee highlighted that students could more clearly identify and describe their thoughts and feelings based on lessons covered in *Prevention Matters* programming.

“It’s awesome to see those students interacting and even using those skills even well after the lessons have been taught or being able to even just identify, ‘Hey, I think what I’m experiencing is anxiety. I think that I need to calm down right now.’ I think knowing that those skills were constantly being reinforced in the classroom was able to actually speak to and hone in on the students’ behavior, which was of course they would increase the class time and decrease negative behavior interaction for students.”

Lastly, at least one grant director noted that the program seemed to have varying impacts on students, depending on their age and program dosage. This grant director saw a smaller decrease in suspensions among middle school students compared with elementary students. They attributed that change to middle schoolers not “*having the constant reinforcement*” of program messages in the same way as elementary students.

4 Challenges

4.1 Financial Challenges

In response to an open-ended survey question about their greatest Year 3 challenge, none of the grant directors described financial challenges. Furthermore, among the grant directors interviewed, most reported no financial limitations, at least related to in-person instruction. At least one grantee reported financial challenges tied to remote program administration because of a lack technology resources. In this situation, students lacked access to devices or internet access at home. Furthermore, this grant director emphasized that its grant funding would not cover students' need for these “*resources at home or to ensure that [the*

resources] were working properly. [If the grant had this funding, the grant director felt the funds] would've been able to increase the number of students who were able to participate in [prevention programming]."

Although grant directors generally indicated that they were adequately funded by their *Prevention Matters* grants, a single-school grant director noted that additional funding could help improve program implementation by allowing them to hire dedicated implementation staff rather than adding prevention programming implementation to teachers' standard roles.

One grant director noted that their district is working to create an integrated SEL system, including *Prevention Matters* programs. The district has several SEL-related grants to support this effort, each with a very specific focus. Staff spent considerable time and energy to ensure the funds from each grant were used for their distinct purpose, which diverts staff time away from the SEL work. Although the grant director understood why grant funding may need to be siloed, broader grant funding might be more efficient for grantees.

4.2 Policy Challenges

In their surveys, grant directors were presented with a list of seven potential policy challenges and asked to indicate whether and to what extent those challenges limited their organizations' ability to deliver prevention programming to students.

As shown in Table 29, the most commonly reported barriers were around COVID-19–related policies. More than half of respondents reported minor or major barriers related to policies mandating school closures and school schedules.

The most commonly reported barriers from Years 1 and 2, time-related policy barriers and policies on academics and school schedules that limited the amount of time available for *Prevention Matters* programs (not related to COVID-19), were also identified by a number of grantees in Year 3. However, it was more common for grant directors to classify these policies as minor barriers than major barriers.

Table 29. Policy Barriers Reported by Grant Directors

Policy Barrier	Number of Grantees					
	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3	
	Major Barrier	Minor Barrier	Major Barrier	Minor Barrier	Major Barrier	Minor Barrier
Policies mandating academic activities/benchmarks that, in turn, limit the amount of time available for prevention programs	1	10	3	9	2	6
Policies mandating school schedules (e.g., start/end dates, start/end times) that limit the amount of time available for prevention programs	1	9	3	4	1	8
Policies that limit ability to apply for, request, or use funding for prevention programming	0	1	0	2	1	0
Policies that limit administrators' ability to require teacher involvement in prevention programs	0	0	0	2	0	2
Policies that allow individual students (or their parents) to opt out of prevention programming	0	4	0	1	0	1
Policies that limit what prevention content can be taught in schools	0	2	0	0	0	0
Policies that restrict what data can be collected or used for program monitoring and evaluation	0	5	0	0	0	0

(continued)

Table 29. Policy Barriers Reported by Grant Directors (continued)

Policy Barrier	Number of Grantees					
	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3	
	Major Barrier	Minor Barrier	Major Barrier	Minor Barrier	Major Barrier	Minor Barrier
COVID-19–Specific Policy Barriers ^a						
Policies that required school building closures and remote instruction due to COVID-19	-	-	-	-	7	11
COVID-specific policies mandating school schedules (e.g., start/end dates, start/end times) that limit the amount of time available for prevention programs	-	-	-	-	8	8
COVID-specific policies mandating academic activities/benchmarks that, in turn, limit the amount of time available for prevention programs	-	-	-	-	5	4

^a Asked only in Year 3 survey.

Grant director interviews echoed the grant director survey findings. Although few grant directors interviewed shared examples of policy barriers, those who did shared a sense of tension and difficulty implementing SEL interventions in concert with meeting academic commitments and requirements, particularly with schedule restrictions imposed by COVID-19 (see more detail in Section 4.4).

4.3 Challenges Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic

In Year 3, many schools started implementing *Prevention Matters* programming remotely in the fall and later moved to in-person implementation. However, COVID-19–related challenges remained a prominent theme across grant director interviews and surveys.

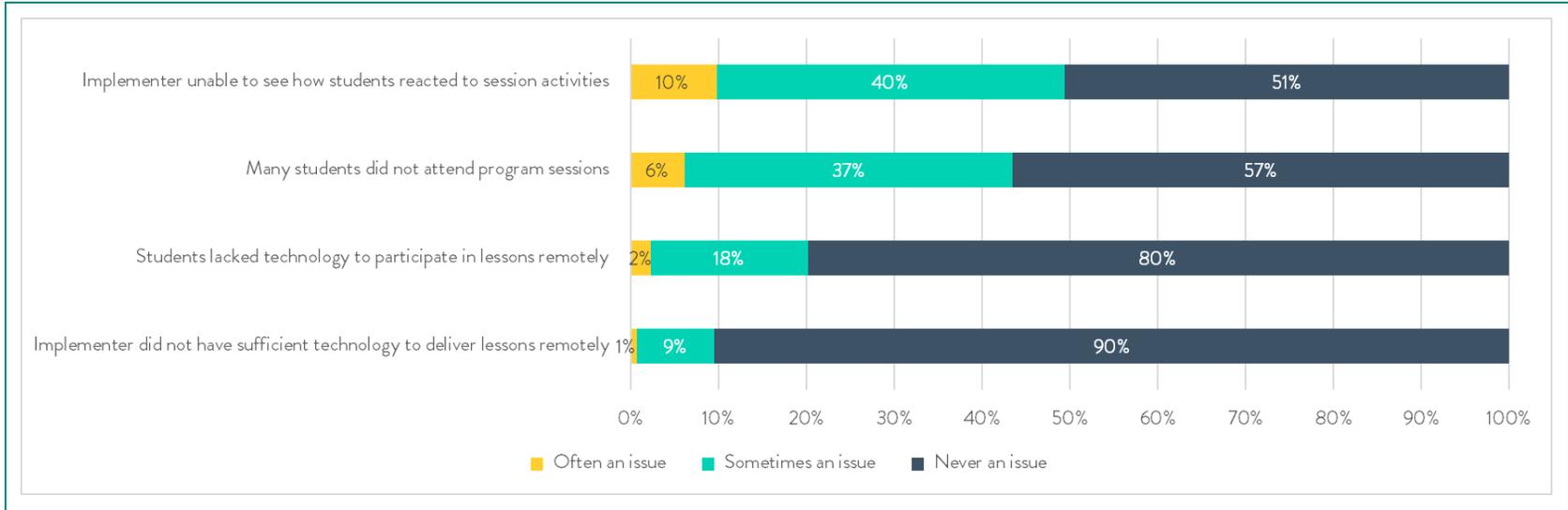
In the survey, eight grant directors indicated that their biggest Year 3 *Prevention Matters* COVID-19–related challenge was implementing their prevention program virtually. In their interviews, some grant directors elaborated on this challenge by

highlighting that implementing programs developed for in-person administration in a virtual setting was difficult for numerous reasons. For example, at least one grant director felt like they did not receive the resources they needed from the program developer to shift from in-person to virtual learning. Several grant directors reported that many curriculum activities did not work as well when implemented virtually and that remote learning limited their capacity to facilitate engaging discussions or initiate role plays with students, tactics that had previously helped students retain program principles and content.

Additionally, grant directors shared that inconsistent access to technology required for virtual implementation was a challenge for both staff and students. Ten percent of implementers surveyed reported sometimes or often lacking sufficient technology to deliver lessons remotely. Furthermore, implementers indicated that lack of sufficient technology was a larger problem for their students, with 20% of implementers reporting that students either sometimes or often did not have sufficient technology to access lessons remotely. Among grant directors interviewed, some discussed having some school-owned devices and technology resources for students to take to their homes for remote learning, but not having enough to accommodate all students with technology needs.

Grant directors also described reduced participation and engagement in remote prevention programming. Some grant directors reported reduced student attendance, with one noting they had *“a lot of students who would just choose not to participate in any [virtual] instruction. There would just be days where kids just wouldn't get on and participate at all.”* Forty-three percent of implementers surveyed reported sometimes (37%) or often (6%) many students did not attend program sessions (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Frequency of Implementation Issues Related to Virtual Learning



Even when students did attend virtual programming, student engagement was reportedly lower. About half of implementers surveyed reported that they were sometimes or often unable to see students' reactions to session activities due to implementing sessions remotely or asynchronously. During interviews, one grant director shared that *"students can relate to each other, or they relate to the teacher better when it's face-to-face."* Another grant director highlighted that these challenges with virtual engagement also extended to staff and team meetings, including staff who were part of the leadership team.

COVID-19–related implementation challenges continued after students returned to in-person instruction. Five grant directors responding to the open-ended survey question about their biggest Year 3 *Prevention Matters* COVID-19–related challenge shared that rapid and unexpected shifts between modes of instruction or hybrid instruction were difficult to manage. During interviews, some grant directors reiterated this challenge; these grant directors described shifts in teaching schedules in response to COVID-19 restrictions, which resulted in less time with students and less time for program implementation. As one grant director shared, *"Frequency of interactions with the students went from... every day to every other day. So, the actual time for implementation went down somewhere between a third and a half. And I actually did the math."* At least one grant director also noted that many of the interactive, in-person activities could not be implemented or did not work in the classroom where teachers had to maintain social distance between students.

Most grant directors who were interviewed discussed prioritizing academics and combatting learning loss over prevention programming, especially once students returned to the school building. As one grant director shared, *"There wasn't anything where anyone said we're going to step away from [prevention programming] or you don't have to do the lessons. I just think naturally the focus became less on [prevention programming] and more on trying to help students catch up."* This grant director feedback contrasts implementer survey findings in which the majority of implementers were not told to deprioritize prevention programming for academic subjects (see Table 12 for more details).

A common theme heard from almost all grant directors interviewed was the strain of the pandemic on staff and students across all modes of instruction. One grant director discussed the impact of the pandemic on implementation and the school community sharing, *"It felt incredibly overwhelming to even consider implementing one extra thing, because our schools and our families and our staff were kind of just paralyzed with what was happening in the world at that time."* The COVID-19

pandemic and related changes to the school environment increased demands on implementer time and energy. Some grant directors reported implementers and grant directors were overstretched with more responsibilities this year, which influenced the focus on implementation, including having multiple roles or titles and covering for absent staff. As one grant director described, *“The honest truth is everybody's hair is on fire right now. I mean, that's just the reality. Teachers' hair is on fire, every school staff person's hair is on fire, principals' hair is on fire, parents' hair is on fire, because we're asking people to do things that they're totally unaccustomed to doing.”* At least one grant director noted that, although classroom teachers already have limited ability to attend *Prevention Matters*–related meetings or trainings during the day, substitute teachers were not available in Year 3, making it even less feasible for classroom teachers to participate in grant-related trainings and meetings.

Some grant directors also discussed COVID-19–related challenges that affected data collection and evaluation. These challenges included canceled data collection with students and less consistent data collection among implementers. Even when data were collected, the ability to compare Year 3 data with previous years to assess program impact may not be possible because of the pandemic's impact on how data are collected or the meaning of the data in this context. For example, differences in student attendance rates collected in Year 3 compared with Year 2 may reflect the impacts of virtual learning and quarantine rather than any impact of *Prevention Matters* programming. One grant director expressed concern about being able to track implementation progress and success: *“It's really hard to analyze [our discipline data] because we were on a good trajectory of really tracking our discipline data, and seeing how that was going down over time, but discipline data kind of disappeared during the pandemic. So, you don't have a direct comparison anymore.”*

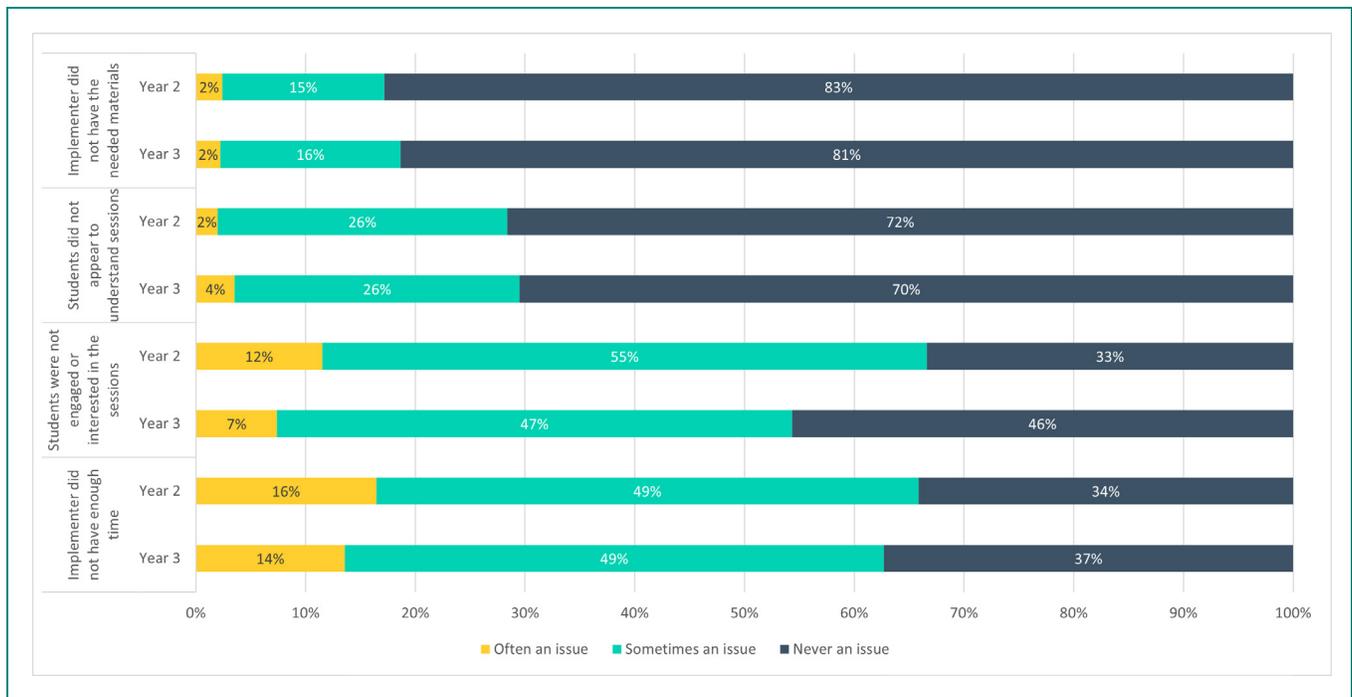
4.4 Implementation Challenges Unrelated to COVID-19

In an open-ended survey question, grant directors were asked about their biggest Year 3 *Prevention Matters* challenge unrelated to the COVID-19 pandemic. Six grant directors (32%) shared challenges with teacher buy-in, and four shared challenges around time and scheduling with competing demands. A few grant directors mentioned it was hard to disentangle these implementation challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many grant directors also discussed issues around cultural competency and relevance of the *Prevention Matters* program materials to their student population. Another grant director attributed low teacher buy-in and insufficient lesson completion to perceptions among implementers that programming was not applicable to their students. A few grant directors noted that one program developer has been working to release more culturally relevant material.

Figure 5 shows implementers' perspectives on implementation challenges not specifically related to COVID-19, taken from the implementer survey. In total, 63% of implementers sometimes or often felt they did not have enough time to implement, a slight decrease from Year 2 (65%). About half of implementers reported sometimes having an issue with not having enough time to implement program sessions. Another 14% of implementers reported they often had this problem.

Figure 5. Frequency of Implementation Issues, Comparing Year 2 and Year 3



Nineteen percent of implementers reported sometimes or often having an issue with not having the needed materials to implement program sessions, about the same as Year 2.

About one-third of implementers (30%) reported sometimes (26%) or often (4%) having an issue with students not appearing to understand the sessions (when teachers were able to see students' reactions), about the same as Year 2. Over half of implementers (54%) reported sometimes (47%) or often (7%) having an issue with students not being engaged or interested in the sessions (when teachers were able to see students' reactions), which is lower than in Year 2 (55% sometimes, 12% often).



5 Sustainability

Most grant directors interviewed in Year 3 expressed interest and described their plans to continue prevention programming after their *Prevention Matters* grant ends. As one grant director succinctly stated, “*We’re really well set up for sustainability.*”

Most grant directors focused on securing alternative funding and additional staffing to continue their prevention programming after Foundation funding ends. For example, some grantees have made plans to apply for future grants, created and passed local referendums to fund prevention programming staff, and reallocated funds from their school district to ensure *Prevention Matters*

programming can continue. Additionally, a few grantees have plans to grow their prevention programming after the grant funding ends. In these cases, grantees aim to engage more students at more school sites by increasing prevention staff and other capacity areas after Foundation funding ends and new funding and supports are identified.

Although most grantees applied for a Year 4 funding extension from the Fairbanks Foundation, some grantees noted that they currently have a surplus of funding from federal pandemic relief funding that the schools intend to use for SEL resources and to gain school community buy-in. These grantees and their schools are in the process of developing plans on how to allocate these funds.

In their interviews, grantees highlighted that staffing is a key part of their sustainability strategy. Most grantees included training and allocations for staff salaries in their sustainability plans. Some grantees created training plans and materials to provide to staff during onboarding and as a refresher to returning staff. These types of training strategies will assist in sustaining the program even after funding from the Fairbanks Foundation has ended.

Grant directors also discussed reasons to sustain programming. For most grantees, *Prevention Matters*-funded prevention programming was believed to be a key resource that appeared to have a positive impact on student behaviors and outcomes. Some grantees applied for the *Prevention Matters* grant with the notion that it would serve as a starting point to continue SEL efforts even after funding through the Foundation expired. One grant director shared, *"We haven't really viewed [our Prevention Matters-funded programming] as a program that we would just do for the duration of the grant availability. We've always included this as a long-term implementation that our general fund budget would absorb."*

Another grantee highlighted, *"I think the idea really has been to sustain the program and keep it going.... People like what Second Step has brought."*

Some grant directors shared that there have been positive impacts on their students, and this has alleviated the question of whether to continue and instead raised the question about how they can identify resources to ensure the program continues. Grantees are now focusing on what future implementation will look like; many grantees' sustainability plans aim to maintain current successes with the possibility of expansion.

In their surveys, grant directors responded to questions about their involvement with nine facets of sustainability planning. For each, they responded on the following scale:

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

As shown in Table 30, grantees fell between limited discussion with no clear plan and discussion with a tentative plan (i.e., mean score between 1 and 2) for many areas of sustainability planning.

RTI conducted a series of analyses to test whether sustainability scores changed for Round 1 grantees from Year 2 to Year 3 and whether Round 1 and Round 2 grantees had different sustainability scores.

For Round 1 grantees, the average total sustainability score, and most item-level scores, increased from Year 2 to Year 3. Only one of the item-level increases is statistically significant, but this may have been driven by small sample size (22 grantees). For Round 2 grantees, the average total sustainability score, and several item-level scores, decreased from Year 2 to Year 3 (the grantees' first and second full years of implementation). This follows a similar pattern to Round 1 grantees' transition from their first year in the initiative to their second, when sustainability scores fell. It is conceivable that grantees focused on planning in their first grant year, shifting to strengthening implementation in the second year, and then, as seen among Round 1 grantees, returning to more of a planning focus in the third year. Unfortunately, the data do not allow for a closer examination of this pattern.

In their surveys, three grant directors (12%) reported that their *Prevention Matters* programs were funded by sources beyond the Foundation. This figure is consistent with Year 2. Year 3 funding sources included state government and the grantee's school corporation or school.

Table 30. Sustainability Planning Scores, by Year

Area of Sustainability Planning	Mean Score			
	Round 1		Round 2	
	Year 2	Year 3	Year 2	Year 3
Determine the funds needed to sustain <i>Prevention Matters</i> programs	1.68	2.23	2.00	2.00
Determine how the program aligns with the mission and goals of potential future stakeholders	1.95	2.40	1.50	1.50
Identify key stakeholders who might support the program	1.59	2.00	2.00	1.00
Make the program a line item in the budget of your organization, schools, or community	1.73	2.05	0.75	1.00
Present outcome data to potential stakeholders (e.g., school board members, principals, parents)	1.32	1.57	1.25	1.50
Secure funds by applying for additional grants	1.09	1.36	2.00	0.50
Discuss with local leaders how the program relates to the community's overall prevention needs	0.77	1.55*	1.50	1.25
Secure funds from sources other than grants	1.27	1.76	2.00	1.00
Turn over ownership of the program to the community, schools, or other organizations	1.09	1.24	0	0.25
Total Score	1.37	1.70	1.53	1.11

* Difference from Year 2 to Year 3 is statistically significant ($p < .05$).

In their surveys, implementers were presented with a list of 11 resources needed to support program implementation. They were asked to report whether their school currently had enough of each resource. As shown in Figure 6, implementers reported that their biggest resource shortfalls were related to time and funding, similar to the pattern from Year 2 resource data.

Figure 6. Availability of Prevention Resources, as Reported by Implementers

Table 31 compares implementer reports of resource availability in Years 2 and 3 by examining the percentage who said they “have enough” or “a little less than we need” of each resource. Summed together, there is not a significant difference between the two years across all resources; however, when resources are considered individually, there were some items that showed a significant change. For example, the percentage of implementers who said they had enough or a little less than enough time increased from 69% in Year 2 to 73% in Year 3 ($p < .05$). Although one may assume that the ongoing challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic would negatively impact the time available to implement prevention programs in Year 3, it is possible the impact was felt more acutely at the time the implementer survey was conducted in the spring of Year 2. In general, the areas where implementers reported the greatest shortages related to training: funds to hire substitute teachers for when teachers receive program training, staff time for activities outside of implementation (including training), and funds to pay for program training.

Table 31. Resources in Adequate Amounts, as Reported by Implementers

Resource Type	Percentage of Implementers	
	Year 2	Year 3
School staff with time to implement a prevention program	69	73*
Access to a copier to prepare program handouts	94	97*
Space for implementing a prevention program	89	92*
Funds to hire substitute teachers for when teachers receive program training	52	51
Funds to pay for program training (excluding funds to hire substitute teachers)	59	63
Funds to pay for purchasing program supplies (e.g., paper, markers)	71	76*
Access to ongoing technical assistance for implementing a prevention program	82	86*
Class time needed for program implementation	59	69*
Staff time for activities outside of curriculum implementation, such as program training and administration	52	53
Technology for staff to implement prevention programs with students during remote learning	Not asked	91
Technology for students to participate in prevention programs during remote learning	Not asked	92
Average Score ^a	54.3	55.4

* Difference from Year 2 to Year 3 is statistically significant ($p < .05$).

^a Average score does not include “Technology for staff to implement prevention programs with students during remote learning” and “Technology for students to participate in prevention programs during remote learning” since these items were not asked in Year 2.

Consistent with Year 2, implementer reports of funding shortfalls are inconsistent with grant director data showing that *Prevention Matters* funding was generally sufficient (see Section 4.1). This suggests that grant directors and implementers may have different frames of reference for funding issues; grant directors know the *Prevention Matters* budget but may not have fully anticipated implementers’ resource needs, particularly related to staff and substitute time needed for training.

6 Grantees' Year 4 Plans

During Year 3 interviews, grant directors were asked about their plans to continue in Year 4. Some grant directors were planning to make changes to their implementation strategies based on experiences in Year 3. Others were in the planning stages to determine who will assist with implementation moving forward and how their prevention programming will be funded once the grant funds end. At the time of their interview, most grantees were planning to apply for the *Prevention Matters* grant extension to support Year 4 implementation.²⁰

Some grantees plan to use funding from other sources in Year 4 to complement their *Prevention Matters* funding. These additional funds will sustain key staff positions such as coaches and building-level leaders who receive stipends to keep *Prevention Matters* program implementation on track within schools. Some grantees plan to make changes to their training model and regular meeting schedule. For example, one grantee reported that meetings currently take place during the school day. Other available times will be explored in the future to prevent continuous disruption to the daily academic schedule. With a lack of substitute teachers or other available coverage strategies, teachers are unable to take the time to leave students for a meeting during the day.

At least one grantee plans to expand their evidence-based programming to provide additional SEL opportunities to its students, including more targeted substance use prevention education. Some grantees also plan to expand staffing to lessen their burden and increase programming capacity. At least one grantee anticipates using the additional funds to transition to the new digital version of Second Step. The grant director noted that, “*to be able to move to that platform and have one consistent scope and sequence will be important,*” particularly as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect schools.

²⁰ On March 12, 2021, the Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation announced that it would offer grantees the opportunity to apply for an additional year of funding to help them to solidify program implementation and strengthen sustainability planning. Sixteen grantees applied for an extension, and because of the timing of grant payments, there will ultimately be 24 active grantees in the 2020–2021 school year. This includes 21 Round 1 grantees and three Round 2 grantees. In Year 4, in addition to requiring continued participation in the initiative-level evaluation, the Foundation strongly encourages grantees to offer booster training for program implementers.



Learning about Impact

The *Prevention Matters* evaluation uses three sources of impact data: administrative data from the IDOE, information from monitoring and evaluation instruments that grantees collect for their own purposes, and INYS results. Given the timing of data collection and processing, this report focuses on data from Year 2. This section examines changes in IDOE data from 2013 through June 2020, differences in grantees' Year 2 pre- and posttest information, and differences in annual measures, including INYS measures, collected in 2018 and 2020.

1 Grantee-Collected Outcomes Data

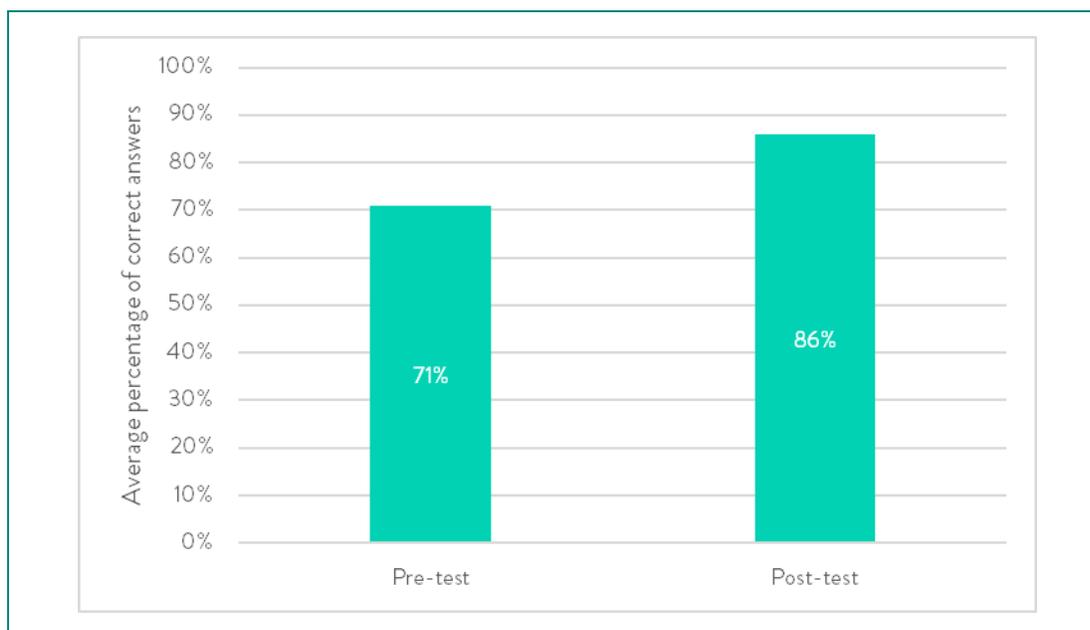
To begin to measure the impact of *Prevention Matters* programming, RTI examined pretest and posttest data collected by grantees during Year 2 of the *Prevention Matters* initiative and data collected annually during Year 1 and Year 2. While monitoring these short-term changes may provide useful information, it is important to keep in mind that many programs take 3-5 years of consistent implementation before resulting in measurable student impact.

As noted in the Methodology section, six grantees submitted pre- and posttest summary statistics for student curriculum knowledge for 15 schools. For social-emotional competence, eight grantees submitted pre- and posttest summary statistics for 17 schools.

On average, students answered 71% of curriculum knowledge questions correctly at pretest (Figure 7). This increased to 86% at posttest.

For student curriculum knowledge and social-emotional competence, scores increased significantly from pretest to posttest in Year 2.

Figure 7. In Year 2, Student Curriculum Knowledge Increased from Pretest to Posttest



Note. Difference between pretest and posttest is statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Students' Year 2 social-emotional competence scores also showed significant change from pretest to posttest. Multiple schools submitted data from Botvin LifeSkills Training pre- and posttests that showed students' responses to seven items related to social-emotional competence improved during Year 2. The average pretest value was 3.13 (1 being the lowest value for social-emotional competence and 5 being the highest), and the average posttest value was 3.26. This increase is significant ($p < .05$).

RTI was also able to examine changes between Years 1 and 2 for student disciplinary referrals and implementer curriculum adherence. Curriculum adherence declined from 76.6 percent in Year 1 to 71.1 percent in Year 2, while the rate of disciplinary referrals increased from 3.3 per student to 3.6 per student between Years 1 and 2. However, the difference in these outcomes was not significant from Year 1 to Year 2.

As described in the Methodology section, a third source of data provided by grantees, the INYS, is conducted every other spring by the Institute for Research on Addictive Behavior at Indiana University-Bloomington. The INYS assesses the mental health and risky behaviors, such as substance use, of students in grades 6–12 across Indiana. The survey also measures correlates of those behaviors (e.g., students' perceived risk of harm from substance use). All eligible schools in Indiana are invited but not required to participate. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, data collection was shortened. A total of 281 schools participated in the 2020 INYS. This is a decrease of 31% from 2018, during which 407 schools participated.

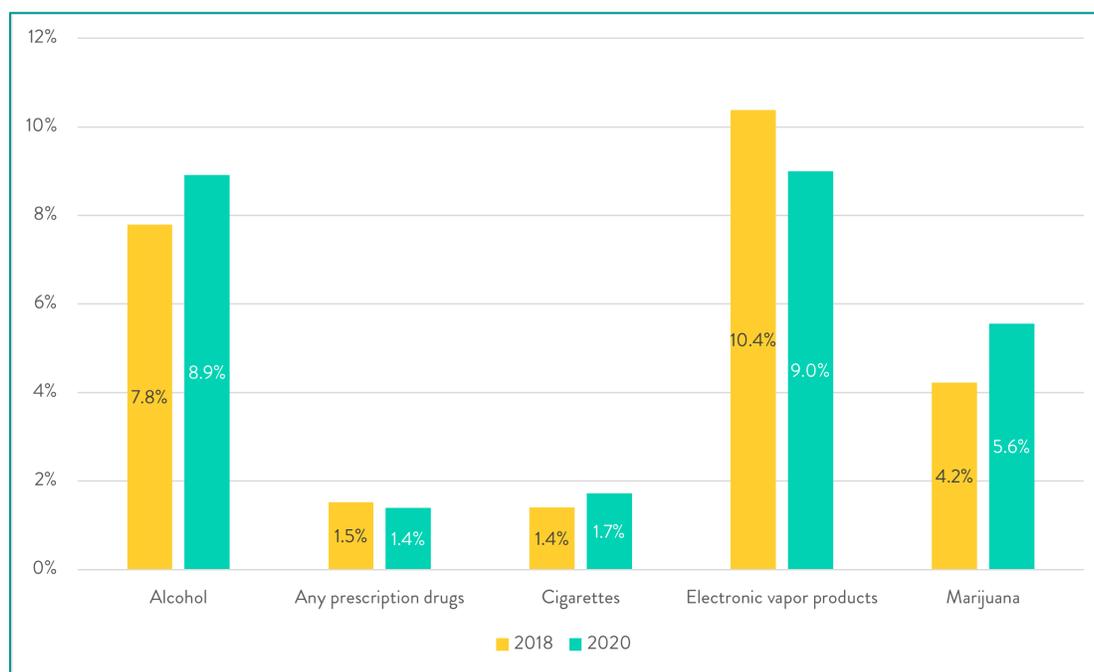
Four *Prevention Matters* grantees, totaling 25 participating schools, provided results from the 2018 and 2020 administrations of the INYS. To measure change over time, only schools that provided data from 2018 and 2020 were included in the analysis. Schools that submitted data from only 2018 or 2020 may be included in future reports if they participate in the survey in 2022.

The 2018 INYS was administered in the spring prior to the *Prevention Matters* kick-off. These data may be considered a baseline measure of student substance use, mental well-being, and risk and protective factors. It is important to note, however, that not all students who are included in these INYS data received *Prevention Matters* programming. Many schools sharing their INYS data only offered *Prevention Matters*-funded lessons to certain grade levels or classrooms, though INYS results are presented for all eligible (i.e., grade 6–12) students in a school. Furthermore, with only four grantees (15%) participating in both the 2018

and 2020 INYS, results should not necessarily be considered representative of all *Prevention Matters* grantees, nor should they be interpreted as reflecting the efficacy of the initiative.

Substance use. The focus of the *Prevention Matters* initiative is preventing substance use among Marion County students. To try to understand student substance use trends over time, the evaluation compiles grantee-provided data on students' use of alcohol, marijuana, electronic vapor products, cigarettes, and prescription drugs not prescribed to the student. The measure of substance use used in the evaluation is a student's self-report on the INYS of past-30-day use of each of these substances.

Figure 8 shows the change from 2018 to 2020 in the percentage of students who reported using each of these substances in the 30 days prior to completing the INYS; these percentages reflect all students who attend these 25 *Prevention Matters* grantee schools, and not just those receiving a *Prevention Matters*-funded program. Fewer students at these schools reported using prescription drugs and electronic vapor products in 2020 than in 2018, though neither of these decreases is statistically significant. The larger of the two decreases was in past-30-day use of electronic vapor products (10.4% in 2018 to 9.0% in 2020). More students reported alcohol use (7.8% in 2018 to 8.9% in 2020), cigarette use (1.4% in 2018 and 1.7% in 2020), and marijuana use (4.2% in 2018 to 5.6% in 2020) in 2020 than in 2018, though these increases are also not statistically significant.

Figure 8. Percentage of Students in Grades 6–12 Reporting Past-30-Day Substance Use

Note. The INYS does not ask students in grade 6 about past-30-day vaping.

According to Jun and colleagues,²¹ across Indiana, as measured by the INYS, students in grade 6 saw increases in monthly use of alcohol and marijuana from 2018 to 2020, with the increase in the percentage of students reporting past-month alcohol use rising to statistical significance ($p < .05$). Cigarettes and prescription drug use among sixth-grade students remained steady. Among students in grade 7 alcohol use also increased, though not significantly. Use of the other substances measured by the evaluation declined but not significantly. Statewide, the percentages of students in grades 8–12 reporting past-month use of all substances measured by the evaluation decreased—except marijuana use by students in grade 12, which remained steady. Several of these declines are statistically significant. Statewide INYS data are shared to provide additional context within which to view results from the 25 *Prevention Matters* schools. Direct comparisons of the data from these *Prevention Matters* schools and from all participating schools in the state are beyond the scope of this report.

²¹ Jun, M., Gassman, R., Agle, J. D., King, R., Samuel, S., & Lee, J. (2020). *Indiana Youth Survey—2020*. Institute for Research on Addictive Behavior. https://inys.indiana.edu/docs/survey/indianaYouthSurvey_2020.pdf

Correlates of substance use. The evaluation also used INYS data to measure two correlates of substance use: perceived risk of harm from substance use and personal norms related to substance use. Perceived risk of harm measures factors like how likely a student thinks they or others are to experience negative outcomes if they engage in substance use or how much people risk harming themselves. Research has shown that the percentages of people perceiving great risk of harm from substance use historically have coincided with decreases in use. Conversely, decreases in the percentage of people perceiving great risk of harm have historically coincided with increases in use.²² Personal substance use norms measure the extent to which a student feels it is wrong to use substances. Theories of social influence^{23,24} have examined the links between types of social norms and perceptions, expectations, values, consequences, and outcomes of specific behaviors, including substance use. Based on these theoretical constructs, researchers expect that a higher prevalence of young people engaging in a specific behavior sends a subtle message that such behavior is accepted and expected, which may encourage adoption of that behavior in a social setting.²⁵

To measure perceived risk of harm, the INYS asks students, “How much do you think people risk harming themselves (physically or in other ways) if they...? *Smoke one or more packs of cigarettes per day, Try marijuana once or twice, Smoke marijuana once or twice per week, Take one or two drinks of an alcoholic beverage (beer, wine, or liquor) nearly every day, Have five or more drinks of an alcoholic beverage once or twice a week, and Use prescription drugs not prescribed to them.*” For the purposes of this evaluation, students’ responses to these items were combined to create a single, perceived risk of harm measure (0 = no risk, 3 = great risk). Among students at schools where *Prevention Matters* programming was offered, perceived risk of harm from substance use decreased significantly from 2018 (mean of 1.62) to 2020 (mean of 1.43). This finding indicates that students found the use of these substances less risky in 2020 than in 2018. On average, students in

²² Center for Behavioral Statistics and Quality. (2015). *Risk and protective factors and initiation of substance use: Results from the 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health*. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/>

²³ Rimal, R. N., & Real, K. (2005). How behaviors are influenced by perceived norms: A test of the theory of normative social behavior. *Communication Research*, 32(3), 389–414.

²⁴ Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Prentice Hall.

²⁵ Eisenberg, M. E., Toumbourou, J. W., Catalano, R. F., & Hemphill, S. A. (2014). Social norms in the development of adolescent substance use: A longitudinal analysis of the International Youth Development Study. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 43, 1486–1497. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-014-0111-1>

2020 perceived the risk of harm across all items to fall just below the midpoint between “slight risk” and “moderate risk.”

To measure personal substance use norms, the INYS asks students, “How wrong do you think it is for SOMEONE YOUR AGE to ... ? *Drink beer, wine, or hard liquor (for example, vodka, whisky, or gin) regularly, that is, at least once or twice a month, Smoke cigarettes, and Smoke marijuana.*” For the purposes of this evaluation, students’ responses to these items were combined to create a single, personal norms measure (0 = not at all wrong, 3 = very wrong). Among students at schools where *Prevention Matters* programming was offered, there was no significant change to students’ personal substance use norms from 2018 (mean of 2.52) to 2020 (mean of 2.51). The INYS does not ask students in grade 6 about personal substance use norms.

Depressive symptoms. The final *Prevention Matters* evaluation domain measured by the INYS is student depressive symptoms. Students at the 25 participating *Prevention Matters* schools were asked, “During the past 12 months, did you ever feel so sad and hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities?” From 2018 to 2020 the percentage of students who answered “yes” increased from 31% to 32%. The results provide support for the observation that depressive symptoms were more common in 2020, but the change is not statistically significant.

2 School-Level Administrative Data

The most recent IDOE administrative data available are from Year 2 of the *Prevention Matters* initiative (2019–2020). Therefore, for this report, analyses are limited to exploring changes from 2018–2019 to 2019–2020 and identifying whether these were different for *Prevention Matters* schools and Allen County and Lake County schools (i.e., comparison group). Those analyses are summarized in Table 32.

Table 32. Change in Student Academic, Attendance, and Disciplinary Outcomes, 2013–2020

Outcome	Change from 2018–2019 to 2019–2020 ^a	Mini Graph: 2013–2014 to 2019–2020 ^b
Achievement		
Grade retention	Retention rates increased for both groups from 2018–2019 to 2019–2020.	
Dropouts	Annual dropout rates were statistically similar for both groups from 2018–2019 to 2019–2020.	
Behavior		
Excused absences	Excused absences increased for comparison schools from 2018–2019 to 2019–2020.	
Unexcused absences	Unexcused absences increased for both groups from 2018–2019 to 2019–2020. Unexcused absences increased more in comparison schools.	
In-school suspension	In-school suspensions decreased for both groups from 2018–2019 to 2019–2020. In-school suspensions decreased more in <i>Prevention Matters</i> schools.	
Out-of-school suspension	Out-of-school suspensions statistically similar for both groups from 2018–2019 to 2019–2020.	
Expulsion	Expulsions increased for both groups from 2018–2019 to 2019–2020.	

Note. ACT and SAT data are currently available only through 2017–2018, the last administration of ISTEP+ in grades 3–8 was in 2018, and the first administration of ILEARN was in 2019. Therefore, those outcomes do not appear in this table.

^a Any changes described in this table are statistically significant at $p < .05$.

^b Solid lines represent *Prevention Matters* schools. Dashed lines represent Allen County and Lake County schools. Red line segments represent the change from 2018–2019 to 2019–2020 (after the grant period began).

For each IDOE outcome, the table describes any *statistically significant* change between the two years. It also shows small line graphs of trends from the 2013–

2014 to 2019–2020 school years. Schools served by *Prevention Matters* are represented by a solid line; Lake County and Allen County schools are represented by a dashed line. The red portion of each line represents the change from 2018–2019 to 2019–2020 that was tested for this report.

For almost all outcomes, *Prevention Matters* and comparison schools either did not change from 2018–2019 to 2019–2020 or changed in comparable ways. While there are decreases in in-school suspensions for both groups, in-school suspensions decreased more in *Prevention Matters* schools. Attendance differed significantly for *Prevention Matters* schools as well, with comparison schools having more excused absences in 2019–2020 compared to 2018–2019. Comparison schools also reported a larger increase in unexcused absences than *Prevention Matters* schools over that time frame.

Similar to last year, the general lack of evidence for program impact in IDOE data is not surprising. Given grantees' predominant focus on elementary and middle school students, one would not expect to see impact on outcomes like high school dropout until more program participants have aged into those grades. Also, many grantees are serving students in multiple grades, and signs of impact may emerge as students have been exposed to program messages across multiple years. Furthermore, the effect of COVID-19 is still being studied and would potentially affect discipline, attendance, and absences in significant ways.



Lessons Learned

The data presented in this report yielded a number of insights that can be applied by schools engaging in substance use prevention efforts (including *Prevention Matters* grantees) and funders of such efforts (including the Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation).

1 Summary of Lessons Learned across Data Sources

1.1 Strengths and Growth

- Most implementers surveyed were either on track to finish or had finished implementation of their *Prevention Matters* programming lessons for Year 3. Compared to Year 2, there is a significant increase in the percentage of implementers who reported completing their *Prevention Matters* lessons in Year 3 (65% in Year 3 vs. 57% in Year 2). This increase is likely due in part to schools resuming in-person learning for much of the school year.
- Sustainability planning among Round 1 grantees increased from Year 2 to Year 3 across all areas of sustainability planning examined in the evaluation. Discussing with local leaders how the program relates to the community's overall prevention needs was the most significant area of sustainability planning that contributed to the increase. Sustainability planning among Round 2 grantees in Year 3 either increased or remained stable among five of the nine areas examined. Round 2 grantees showed declines in their sustainability planning in Year 3 compared to Year 2 in four planning areas that focused on securing external funding and support from local leaders and other key stakeholders. This may represent an area of potential growth.
- Grantees remained strong in their curriculum adherence in Year 3. Similar to Year 2, just over 90% of implementers reported following their curriculum guide either somewhat closely or very closely. In the grant director survey, at least one grant director observed increased implementation fidelity in Year 3, which is a key grant accomplishment in Year 3.
- Despite the many challenges of the last year, there were significant gains in two student outcomes. Students'

knowledge about the *Prevention Matters* curriculum increased in Year 3 compared to Year 2. Students' knowledge increased from 71% correct at pretest to 86% correct at posttest. Students' scores on measures of social-emotional competence also improved. Social-emotional competence refers to skills such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Both changes are significant at the $p < .05$ level.

1.2 Areas for Improvement

- Fewer implementers surveyed indicated that they received training in Year 3 compared to Year 2 (41% in Year 3 versus 70% in Year 2). The decline was consistent among first-time and returning implementers; however, for returning implementers the training decline was more pronounced. While many of these returning implementers had previously been trained, booster training for returning implementers is a best practice. Accordingly, the Foundation is encouraging all grantees to offer booster training in Year 4.
- Fewer grant directors required all or some implementers to report on their implementation progress (69%) in Year 3 than in Year 2 (89%). Despite the large decrease in grantees requiring implementer reporting, the decline in this type of monitoring requirement is not statistically significant. That said, fewer implementers reported being asked to share implementation progress information in Year 3 (57%) compared to Year 2 (68%). RTI also understands that grant directors and staff were unable to conduct observations as frequently or universally as they had in Year 2 because of the pandemic. In Year 3, only half of the grant directors who planned to conduct observations indicated that they planned to observe all implementers compared to 89% of grant directors indicating the same in Year 2.

1.3 COVID-19 Pandemic

- COVID-19 caused a variety of challenges for grantees. Some were in a better position than others to maintain and complete implementation of their program lessons. The transitions to virtual learning from in-person learning and back to virtual learning caused some disruptions and required creative approaches to continue implementation of *Prevention Matters* programming.
- Although COVID-19 delayed the start of implementation for about one-third of grantees, many of them still managed to deliver either all their required lessons or almost all their required lessons.
- During periods when schools were closed, or when they otherwise offered virtual instruction, students were still engaged in lessons. Findings show that more virtual instruction provided led to a higher the level of student engagement and participation in the virtual setting. However, when less virtual instruction was provided, reported virtual student engagement was lower.

2 Additional Lessons Learned from Grant Directors

All grant directors who were interviewed offered detailed advice to future grant directors. This year, advice fell into two main categories: program planning and implementation strategies.

Grant directors provided suggestions for program planning, which included the following:

- Get insight on program needs from teachers, counselors, and even students and parents about experiences and issues students are facing that should be addressed through prevention programming.
- Set clear implementation goals: *“You should know what you want before you get into [implementing your*

prevention programming]. Clear understanding of your goals. Have people who are passionate and onboard.”

- Ensure the administrator uses clear communication throughout the implementation process: *“I think that [a] clear understanding of why you are doing it and what's the purpose and getting that purpose out to people, out to the parents, figuring out how to get it to the kids, to the teachers.... And that's why we think that this goal was important, I think is pretty basic, but maybe overlooked important factor.”*

Grant directors suggested implementation strategies include the following:

- Work to obtain buy-in among school administrators and staff early in the implementation process.
- Work collaboratively to create a committee or task force to diffuse the responsibility of prevention programming implementation to other community members and school staff: *“I think I would say that you can't plan and prepare for program implementation like this in a silo, that it really does need to be a collective group of people across a lot of experiences, so an administrator, teachers, counselors, students and parents even coming together to make a commitment.”*
- Break implementation down into individual steps and encourage implementers to take a step-by-step implementation approach: *“And then making sure that you are doing things in steps and stages, to make sure that you're doing it with the best fidelity. Because as teachers, we get so many things thrown at us that it's easy to just say, forget this, I'm not doing that. So, just to make sure it's just not overwhelming, because it's a big lift.”*
- Start small by possibly implementing as a pilot program and then scale up implementation.