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The Lunch Bunch: An Intervention Program
For At-Risk Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to develop an intervention program for at-risk students in the fifth and sixth grade at DeForest Area Middle School. The program, called the Lunch Bunch, was designed with the purpose of promoting academic and behavioral success among these students. The group, led by the researcher and a school guidance counselor, filled a void of opportunities for students identified as at-risk to receive extra support and attention from an adult within the school. While it was difficult to prove the success of the program through quantitative evidence, survey and qualitative data indicate that the program was very well-received and appreciated. Reception of the program among staff received mixed reviews primarily because of the short duration and abundance of contributing factors. The program filled a need within the school in terms of promoting a common language among staff as to the definition and identification of an at-risk student, but could benefit greatly from being implemented continuously in the future.
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Introduction

The idea for this project came out of my current teaching position and a sense of urgency in delivering more attention to a growing problem. I teach fifth grade at the DeForest Area Middle School (DAMS) in DeForest, Wisconsin. We are a growing suburban school located outside of Madison, Wisconsin. The actual DAMS building hosts almost 1,000 students in fifth through eighth grades with a staff of about 80 academic teachers. Our staff works together to ensure the academic and social development of each student.

Like many suburban school districts across the country, DeForest is seeing an increase in the diversity of the student body. The Deforest Area School District serves a growing rural and suburban student population of 3,248 students. District-wide we have approximately 88% Caucasian, .6% Native American, 3.5% Hispanic, 4.3% African American, and 3.6% Asian with 17.7% of students receiving free or reduced lunch. We have 14.5% of students receiving special education services and 3.0% are English language learners. The district is committed to providing a quality education to all students and supports the efforts of programs that ensure an equal education for all minority populations.

One of the fastest growing populations of students in our district is the population labeled “at-risk.” While there are many qualifiers that can lead to a child being identified as at-risk, many teachers at DAMS recognize that these students are most at-risk for academic failure and behavioral problems within the classroom. There are several different interpretations of what makes a student “at-risk,” some of the more common definitions today include students who “can be classified by many variables: (low) socio-economic status, single parent, abused, alcohol/drug involved, and experiencing a crisis… (they may) be acting out or withdrawn.”
(Brooks & Coll, 1994, p. 3). The process of defining students as at-risk will be explained in more depth during the literature review portion of this project.

In order to promote academic success and prevent behavioral problems, DAMS has adopted a very proactive approach to working with at-risk students. We currently have a program called Connections that is designed to meet the needs of our at-risk seventh and eighth grade students. In Connections, one full time teacher and educational aide work with students identified as at-risk in a community building class and a guided study class. The community building class focuses on building effective and appropriate relationship and social skills, while the guided study class provides academic support for general education classes. Students in the guided study class often have assistance completing homework, extra support in note-taking, and extra support in building organizational skills.

The Connections program is proving very successful in helping the seventh and eighth grade students who are identified as at-risk build positive relationships and a stronger connection to school. The literature review section of this project will contain quantitative data regarding behavioral and academic successes of students in the Connections program. However, the fifth and sixth grade teachers at our school don’t have any form of support to help younger at-risk students. While some of the behavior problems of fifth and sixth graders may be less severe than their older peers, we still see many at-risk students struggling to be successful in school. Some of the common problems with fifth grade at-risk students include failing classes, not completing homework, lacking organizational skills, being disrespectful in class, struggling to build relationships with peers, and having a lack of support at home. As a regular education teacher, I have a very limited amount of time to help at-risk students overcome these problems during a 45
minute class. Therefore, I will develop an academic and behavioral intervention program to address the needs of fifth and sixth grade at-risk students.

Part of my task will include evaluating the current system of support for at-risk students and modifying it to meet the needs of younger students. As teachers, we see a noticeable difference in the maturity level of students ranging from ages 10 to 13. While I will be using some of the same resources and ideas as the Connections program, my intervention program will be suited to meet the needs of 10 and 11 year olds and therefore will be developmentally appropriate for that age group. I will also be looking at the current system of identification and placement in Connections and using that process to develop a similar plan for my program. I’m hoping that I can help develop more consistency throughout the district in identifying students as at-risk so that I can help more teachers understand the needs of at-risk students.

My motivation in completing this project is student-centered and derives partially from my own educational experience and also from a professional interest. Like many of my colleagues who work with at-risk students, I have considerable empathy for at-risk students because I didn’t always fit the mold in a traditional school. I was fortunate while growing up to have more family support and stability than some of the at-risk students that I see today, and eventually I learned to function within the traditional school model. However, when I think about the anguish that I experienced because I needed some educational alternatives, it makes me even more motivated to make sure that my program can meet the needs of my current at-risk students. I’ve also attended a number of professional conferences on alternative education and have found myself incredibly compelled to join the movement of educators looking out for these students.

In addition to attending professional conferences, I have been fortunate to gain experience working with at-risk students through a pilot intervention program during the 2010-2011 school
year. The fifth grade guidance counselor and I led weekly meetings with two groups of students identified as at-risk for half of the school year. During that time, I was able to implement some team building activities and offer additional academic support to those students. This process helped me develop stronger relationships with the at-risk students involved in the group. I saw the positive effect of connecting with each student in opening up communication and experiencing fewer behavior interruptions throughout the year. It was an excellent learning experience, but a very rough pilot of a program that could really benefit more students. The guidance counselor and I only worked with the at-risk students on our 78 student team, while there are closer to 250 fifth graders in total. I’d like to expand the program to meet the needs of more students and develop a more formal plan for intervention.

The pilot program was dubbed the “Lunch Bunch” as a result of developing a program based around the current school schedule. There was no time during the school day to work with a small group of students and we recognized that a large percentage of our at-risk students would not be able to secure transportation if the group was held before or after school. We decided the only way this program would work was to meet over the lunch/recess hour – hence the name Lunch Bunch. Students were given a pass to get their lunch from the cafeteria, walk to the allocated room, and then they participated in the activities through their lunch and recess time. My current plan will build on the ideas of the pilot Lunch Bunch to make the program more formal and more effective.

The Lunch Bunch will be an academic and behavioral intervention program where students who are identified as at-risk will meet weekly in a small group setting with a guidance counselor and myself. Being a classroom teacher, I will be able to develop activities to help students be successful in the classroom. I will teach concrete academic skills such as organizing a student
planner, taking notes, and studying for tests. I will be able to measure the progress of students by monitoring their grades, keeping track of the number of late assignments they turn in, and surveying their teachers for perceived benefits from the program.

I will also use survey information from teachers to measure the effects of the program on promoting school appropriate behaviors with the students. A large focus of Lunch Bunch is teambuilding, and many activities encourage students to build positive relationships with peers and adults. We’ll use these activities, along with some concrete lessons on appropriate behavior, to promote the behavioral success of at-risk students within the classroom. There is evidence, mentioned later in the literature review, to support that at-risk students often lack direct instruction in character education and therefore we’ll use the Lunch Bunch as a way to teach them about concepts like responsibility, respect, empathy, and honesty.

Students will be selected for participation in the lunch bunch based on several criteria. I will first consider students who have been previously identified as at-risk through the Student Teacher Assistance Team (STAT) referral process. I will also look for students who have previously participated in socialization groups led by a guidance counselor. In addition to gaining a clear understanding of the past interventions for previously identified at-risk students, I will also take stock of current situations that may increase the level of risk for a student. For example, I will give all fifth and sixth grade teachers a survey at the beginning of the year asking them to identify students who are struggling academically and socially, using a scale for frequency and severity. I can also use the guidance counselor as a resource for identifying students with previously known and current family crises or struggles.

When students are identified and selected to participate in the group, I will send a letter home to parents explaining the purpose and logistics of the group. I will also be very clear in
communicating to parents and teachers that the goal of the group is to address behavioral and academic concerns of at-risk students as needed. From a behavioral intervention standpoint, I hope to reduce the number of behavioral referrals for fifth and sixth grade compared to the average number of referrals during previous school years. I also hope that the process of building a strong connection with school will help reduce the number of tardies and absences that at-risk students have throughout the school year compared to their previous attendance history. On an individual level, I want students participating in the group to develop a more concrete understanding of appropriate classroom behavior so that teachers have fewer behavioral distractions throughout the day.

From an academic intervention standpoint, I want each student participating in the group to raise their grades and I want to decrease the number of fifth and sixth grade students up for retention at the end of the year. Because we will develop lessons to build organizational strategies, I hope to see a decrease in the number of late assignments among at-risk students. I also hope to build intrinsic motivation to succeed among the participating students by increasing their ability to consider the future implications of their academic progress. Increasing motivation will also be accomplished by promoting building self-confidence and self-worth among the group.

Being that I have several goals to come as a result of this group, measurement of the goals could be complicated. I will measure success of the program by providing pre- and post-participation surveys to be filled out by teachers regarding the perceived benefits of participation in the group, including data regarding homework completion and grades. I will also survey the students involved in the group for feedback related to the perceived benefits of participation.
In addition to potential difficulties in collecting data to measure the progress of the program, I may experience difficulties in the actual logistics of the program. In order to accommodate the intervention groups during the lunch time hour, I need to work around the existing programs and curriculum at that time. For example, band and choir currently meet during the first half of lunch every other day and academic teachers use the second half of lunch to work one-on-one with struggling students. I will need to make the time for Lunch Bunch a priority over some existing practices; this will take a substantial amount of support from the other fifth and sixth grade teachers.

I think I will also struggle to provide substantial and adequate evidence for an effective literature review as part of this project. The Lunch Bunch program is very uniquely adapted to our school, regarding the scheduling and programming. It will be difficult to locate preexisting data from similar programs because of the Lunch Bunch’s unique context. It may also be a struggle to provide a clear and appropriate definition of the term “at-risk” because the term varies based on the context of usage. For example, an “at-risk” student in downtown Los Angeles may be in a completely different situation with very different characteristics than an “at-risk” student in a small suburb in Wisconsin. In order to provide consistency throughout my project, I’ll need to determine a functional definition of the term at-risk (see Connections Program information on pg. 31) and use the qualifying criteria as guidelines for the implementation of the group.

Overall, I view my project as an experiment that hopes to meet the needs of at-risk students in our school. I think that I will have the support of my colleagues and administrators because we are currently lacking a program to address the needs of fifth and sixth grade at-risk students. My goal will be to administer a behavioral and academic intervention that helps these students
stay invested in their education at DAMS. It may be a difficult process to initiate the program, but I strongly believe in keeping schools focused and centered around students. The Lunch Bunch will be one way that I can show that I care deeply about the success of students, and I am excited to use my energy and knowledge towards working with the at-risk population.
Literature Review

The literature review for this project will consist of three areas of research. I will first examine the current practices of defining and labeling students as at-risk. This portion will also contain some current, widely-accepted recommendations for working with at-risk students. The second area of research will revolve around specific academic interventions that other researchers have tried and their perceived successes or shortcomings. The final area of research will provide evidence of success of the current intervention program for at-risk students at DAMS. Each portion of the literature review will aid in the development of the Lunch Bunch program.

Part One: Understanding At-Risk Students

More than any other point in history, students today are entering the American educational system from very diverse backgrounds. While in the past we’ve recognized that students are unique and distinctive, we’re now seeing a need to reevaluate the methods that we use to attend to these differences and help all students receive an equal education. The term “at-risk” has been used to describe students in several different contexts, but the definition of the term has really developed as a way of describing students whose needs aren’t being met by the traditional programs of education. In order to help these students, we need to understand what makes a student “at-risk” and be willing to change our current mindsets regarding effective education.

The idea of students being “at-risk” of failure is not new to our educational vocabulary. In fact, back in 1938, John Dewey was already recognizing that some students would need special accommodations to succeed in the classroom. Dewey commented that
There are likely to be some (students) who, when they come to school, are already victims of injurious conditions outside of the school and who have become so passive and unduly docile that they fail to contribute (to the educational community). It is also true that no general rule can be laid down for dealing with such cases. The teacher has to deal with them individually (p. 56).

While Dewey’s ideas may have been considered very progressive for their time, they indicated an alarming national trend that is shaping American education today. According to the National At-Risk Education Network,

Over 3,000,000 children are reported for child abuse and neglect to CPS agencies in the U.S. each year… Approximately 1,000,000 children are verified as victims of child maltreatment…13,500,000 children live in poverty… (and) an estimated 200,000 children in this country have an imprisoned mother and more than 1.6 million have an imprisoned father (2010).

These statistics indicate the magnitude of negative factors influencing the success of these children in the classroom. Children can’t learn when they come from home environments where their basic needs aren’t being met. Their “broken homes” (meaning dysfunctional home environments) are failing to provide them with nutrition, shelter, health care, and physical and emotional safety (Milliken, 2007, p. 40).

These family trends illustrate the importance of properly defining a population of students as “at-risk.” There are several different interpretations of what makes a student “at-risk.” Some of the more common definitions today include students who “can be classified by many variables: (low) socio-economic status, single parent, abused, alcohol/drug involved, and experiencing a crisis… (they may) be acting out or withdrawn.” (Brooks & Coll, 1994, p. 3).
Some may also interpret the definition to be “any child who is unlikely to graduate, on schedule, with both the skills and self-esteem necessary to exercise meaningful options in the areas of work, leisure, culture, civic affairs, and inter/intra personal relationships” (Cox & Sagor, 2004, p. 1). And while it is difficult to make assumptions or generalizations about all students in this population, research has shown that children who grow up in dysfunctional family environments are far more at-risk of developing dysfunctional social and emotional skills (Brooks & Coll, 1994, p. 4).

Understanding the background and home life of a student is very important in the quest to provide them with an effective education. It may also explain their connection or lack of connection to the school community. Because many students come from a low socio-economic status, they tend to follow specific trends of that population. According to Annette Lareau (2003), children from families who are considered poor or working class grow up with an ample amount of time to develop social skills on their own. They are left to “free play” more, so they spend more time unsupervised by adults. In terms of school, these children can feel less connected to their adult teachers and struggle to develop a sense of classroom community. Adding to this struggle is the fact that a large percentage of these parents have grown to distrust and resent school officials. They see teachers as superiors instead of constructive partners (Lareau, 2003). The result of these faulty areas of trust and communication often manifests into a student who is withdrawn from the school community.

The breakdown of communication and distrust between schools and the parents of at-risk students has created unfavorable conditions for helping these students. Teachers see more success with students when ideas from the classroom are reinforced at home, both with homework and with lessons in character. Not only have some poor/working-class parents shown
fear and intimidation of schools, but some teachers have grown afraid and intimidated by working with at-risk students. These students are usually some of the most difficult to teach, most disruptive in class, and least likely to succeed, which makes many teachers feel overwhelmed by the process.

The educational definition of an at-risk student has become one that is often based on fear and intimidation. “In its original meaning, the term ‘at-risk’ was meant to focus attention on the hazards in the environment, not characteristics of youth… (but) the language of risk was twisted to communicate that these young people are not like us. Conservatives used risk as a rationale for isolating these youth, while liberals saw risk as a means of displaying them. Both operated from fear” (Brentro, Ness & Mitchell, 2005, p. 52). By placing the at-risk labels on the students and not the environments that created them, we place an incredible amount of accountability on the individual rather than looking at the conditions that shaped the individual. Perhaps it’s much easier to see the person acting in an at-risk manner than considering the power of circumstances that lead up to each decision we make.

Students who come from at-risk environments may be thought of by teachers as having “the deck stacked against them.” This means that these students need to work much harder to succeed in their life than their peers who come from more stable environments. Unfortunately, schools and teachers are not always as supportive for these students as they could be. At-risk students tend to either fall into the category of “disruptive” or “disassociated” in the classroom. They either stick out like a sore thumb or blend in with the walls (Brentro et al., 2005). Because these students are more problematic in creating an effective classroom environment, they require more attention and support than their peers. However, rather than providing the extra support to these students in a proactive, positive manner, sometimes school personnel react in a more
negative way. In fact, “ever since the passage of compulsory school attendance laws, schools have found loopholes to permit discarding disruptive students... rather than change the nature of education, schools remove those students who disrupt classroom order” (Brentro et al., 2005, p. 52).

At-risk children must not be cast aside by schools. They are much more likely to experience failure for the rest of their lives if we let them fail in school. We must consider the following alarming facts; every day, 7,000 students drop out of school and this costs the nation $319 billion a year in potential earnings, students who drop out of school are 3.5 times more likely to end up in prison than students who graduate, and obtaining a high school diploma results in an average $6500 extra income each year (National At-Risk Education Network, 2010). When national educational leaders talk about bridging the achievement gap, at-risk students need to be at the forefront of the discussion. Helping more of these students succeed in school would go a long way toward providing and executing an equal education for all students.

After considering all of the research that motivates us to help at-risk students succeed, the question of how we help these students arises. The first step lies in changing mindsets. Before we even begin to educate people on the characteristics and learning styles of at-risk students, we have to create an open-minded atmosphere that is willing to accept change in our curriculum and school environment (Glasser, 2010).

Some of these changes are going to include a rethinking of the “one-size-fits-all” form of education. John Dewey commented on the creating change in education. He said,

The way out of scholastic systems that made the past an end in itself is to make acquaintance with the past as a means of understanding the present (and) until this
In essence, Dewey advocates for evaluating the success of education, and learning from the mistakes of failures. The achievement gap among our students, and the statistics regarding the future success of at-risk students, indicate that our current educational system is failing at-risk students. We must construct an educational system that is more responsive to the needs of our unique learners.

Laurie Frank (2004) comments on some of the new forms of teaching, which accommodate and promote the success of at-risk students. She says they are “based on the foundation that people are whole beings connected to a larger environment and to each other…the benevolent dictator approach to teaching is giving way to participating democracy (and) a sense of community is replacing isolation” (p. 2). These are the type of changes that can make some individuals nervous, because changes foster the intimidation of trying new things. However, changes can go a long way in changing the course of failure for an at-risk student.

We know that at-risk students often come from broken homes, therefore schools must be willing to prioritize meeting the basic needs of their students. While programs such as free and reduced lunch meet the nutritional needs of students, there are far fewer established programs to meet the complicated emotional needs of students. Teachers must assume the role of mentor and advocate for every student, because at-risk students may not be receiving this type of emotional support at home. “Every young person needs and deserves… a one-on-one relationship with a caring adult, a safe place to learn and grow, a healthy start and a healthy future, a marketable skill to use upon graduation, and a chance to give back to peers and community” (Milliken,
2007, p. 40). With consideration of these needs, at-risk students can experience more success at school.

Schools must also consider and foster a strong sense of community that is based on mutual respect. “Even students who act in outrageous ways desperately desire respect, (but) many adults find it difficult to act respectfully toward youth whose behavior invites disrespect.” (Brentro et al., 2005, p. 12). However, in order to reverse the pattern of failure, both teachers and students must work together to create a learning community where all students feel safe and respected. If we work to build stronger emotional bonds with at-risk students, we motivate them to learn and grow.

Laurie Frank (2004) provides an excellent analogy for the importance of identifying and accommodating at-risk students. She quotes,

There is a popular story about the animals of the forest starting a school for their offspring. In order to provide a well-rounded education, they design a program for all the animals that includes running, jumping, swimming, and flying. The school administrators decide that running and jumping are the more important skills because they take place in the areas that make up most of the surrounding habitat.

After the first year, the school counselor sits down with the rabbit to review her grades. He informs her that she is getting excellent grades and should keep up the good work. Later, he calls the turtle into his office. The turtle, it appears, is failing miserably. Although he excels at swimming, he has made absolutely no progress in running and jumping, the core
curriculum. Because of this sorry record, the turtle must drop swimming in order to concentrate on the more “more important” skills.

At graduation time, the rabbit gives the valedictorian speech, while the turtle has dropped out of school. (p. 9)

This tale of forest animals illustrates, on a very simple level, the value of not letting “at-risk” children, or the turtle in this example, fall through the cracks of education. It also speaks to the potential and natural talents of all students. Because our society is producing more students who fit the definition of “at-risk”, we must start accounting for their educational needs. This will start by properly identifying these students’ skills, needs, and interests, and then doing everything in our power to help them succeed in school.

Part Two: The Effects of Interventions with At-Risk Students

There have been many studies to attempt to correlate student success with factors outside of the classroom. Many students are labeled at-risk because they come from families with a low socio-economic status (SES). Current research indicates that home life is the number one predictor of success among students, and that there is a negative correlation between low SES and student academic success. Milne & Plourde (2006) set out to investigate this relationship by looking at the opposite end of the spectrum. They designed a study that clearly identified students as at-risk because of the SES status, but investigated the qualities of students who fit this description and were actually experiencing high level of academic success.

By closely exploring the “outliers” of SES and academic success correlation, meaning the students who don’t follow the patterns that current research would dictate, Milne & Plourde were able to generalize some home life factors that are powerful enough to reverse the trend of low
SES dictating academic failure. They designed their study to answer the questions, “What are the common factors of low-SES homes from which children are able to achieve academic success?” and “Do some low-SES children simply succeed because they are resilient and would succeed no matter what type of home they were in?” (p. 3). They began by explaining that SES can be measured by considering household income, occupation, and parent level. Some researchers also believe that family structure belongs as part of determining SES. The participants in this specific study were all identified as low SES because they qualified for free and reduced lunch from the school district.

The study involved a qualitative method of research in which parents of the identified students were interviewed. The researchers narrowed down their list of students of low SES status to six second-grade students who were at least one trimester above the average second-grade levels of performance. They chose to interview the parents instead of the students because it would give them better insight to the factors at home that are promoting success. In four of the interviews, the mother was interviewed alone because she was identified as the primary caregiver. However, two of the interviews were conducted with both parents because they were identified as sharing parenting responsibilities equally. The interviews were either conducted in the students’ homes, or the classroom. The interviewer was also the teacher. The parents were asked a series of 20 semi-structured questions. The researchers wanted the parents to be open to talking about their home lives, so some questions were rephrased for better understanding or lengthened for further interpretation. The parents were asked to describe their family routines and their relationships with their children.

After the interviews were completed, the researcher transcribed them and then coded the data to look for trends and commonalities. There were four main themes that came out of the
research; educational resources, education level of the mother, quality relationships, and the causes of success. The theme of educational resources was generated because each of the families had made educational resources available to their children. They had books and writing materials at home, and found ways to obtain these through support systems if they could not afford them. They also had supportive family routines such as allotted homework time each night and a limit on how much television the children should watch. Each of the participants’ children had also attended preschool before entering kindergarten.

In the category of relationships, the researcher found that the family structures of the participants varied, but every parent worked very hard to maximize the amount of quality time spent with their children. They made efforts at developing open lines of communication within the household. They also had a clearly defined support system to help them whenever needed. Some of the families relied on support from friends and social circles, while others enlisted the help of their families.

The other conclusions drawn by the researchers included the mother had completed at least the tenth grade and that the parents highly valued education and communicated to their children that their future would benefit from an education. All of these themes in the research seem to support a home life that promotes academic success. This study is important because it could shed light on some of the areas that families with low SES could improve in order to improve their children’s academic success.

The researchers were able to conclude that there are things that families of low SES can do to reverse the trend of academic failure. They note that the results of this study cannot be generalized because of the small, isolated sample. They also cautioned that there could be some researcher bias because the researcher was also the interviewer. It was also possible that the
results of the study could have been slightly biased by the fact that the interviewer was also the teacher. They wondered if this would have intimidated some of the parents who may think the teacher is judging their parenting techniques. Even with the possible research flaws, this was a valuable study in identifying the home life factors that can help at-risk children succeed in school. This study also helps us by identifying factors that schools may have to compensate for if they are not being provided at home.

Sometimes help for at-risk students comes in the form of a school guidance counselor. While these school counselors don’t see the students day to day in every class, they can provide valuable interventions to help at-risk students succeed. Mason and McMahon (2009) set out to design, implement and evaluate a small group intervention with eighth graders who were at risk of being retained. Their goal was to address and provide instruction in the academic skills that these students would need in order to improve their grades and better prepare for statewide testing.

Their action-research project took place in an urban middle school serving nearly 1,400 students. They first identified 52 eighth grade students who were failing at least three classes. Only 33 of those students accepted the invitation to the group and finished the program. There was an almost equal number of male and female students; however, the ethnic makeup of the group was not consistent with that of the school. The percentage of African American students in this study was 73% where as African Americans made up just 42% of the school population. Before the intervention took place, permission was obtained from parents and the researcher explained the motivation and objectives for the project to the students. They met for the second semester of school, once a week (the weeks alternated between small groups and individual
meetings.) What is not noted in the study is when the interventions took place during the day. A concern would be if academic classes were being sacrificed for this intervention.

During the intervention, the researcher (who was also the counselor), had five main goals. Through instruction, students would increase the use of student planners for organization, learn to keep track of and organize their grade point averages, effectively manage their time after school, maintain organized notebooks and lockers, and increase their willingness to ask teachers for help. These goals would be assessed through the bi-weekly small group meetings, and supported by individually meeting with students to talk about progress. Some of the actual strategies used by the researcher included; teaching students to use Microsoft Excel to calculate and chart grade point average, interviewing students to establish academic goals, providing encouragement and motivation, offering after school tutoring by high school students, arranging for guest speakers, organizing a meeting night with students and parents, and increasing communication between teachers, students, and parents.

In order to collect data for this project, the researcher collected three data points for each student; grades from five classes at the end of each grading period, cumulative grade point averages, and standardized testing scores. After the semester long intervention, the grades of the students improved. The breakdown of grades went from 5 A’s, 35 B’s, 27 C’s, 24 D’s, and 74 F’s, to 10 A’s, 45 B’s, 34 C’s, 25 D’s, and 51 F’s. Also, 64% of the students increased their cumulative grade point averages after the intervention. The researcher also noted that their standardized test scores rose an average of eight points (using an 100 point scale). At the end of the year, only 2 of the 33 students were retained.

As the purpose of this study was to increase the academic performance of students at-risk of retention, it appears to have been successful. Grades and grade point averages increased
overall and only a small number of students were actually retained. The authors make sure to point out that they are not making a claim that the academic outcomes were solely related to the intervention, they claim that “it is fair to assume that the intervention played at least *some* role in the complex process of the students’ academic improvement” (Mason & McMahon, 2009, p. 8). They note that even though the results were not statistically significant, they found that the risk of participating in the intervention was minimal, and the potential reward from participating outweighed the risks. Instead of describing results as statistically significant, they referred to results as practically significant.

The researcher also noted that future research on this topic could not only help more at-risk students, but also increase appreciation for school counselors by students and encourage more counselors to actively promote better academics among at-risk students. They recommended that future research studies include more perception data from students to isolate which skills were actually learned as a result of the intervention. They also suggested that a combined effort between counselors and teachers in the actual intervention would have possibly made the experience more effective. Lastly, they addressed the issue of overrepresentation of African Americans within their group and explained the cause to be unclear but they would suggest that future studies examine selection bias more closely. Overall though, the guidance counselor was able to help these at-risk students experience better academic success.

Sometimes schools lack the personnel or budget to offer extracurricular interventions to help at-risk students. In these scenarios, teachers may fill the void and seek to find ways to accommodate these students within their classrooms. This may be seen as adding to a teacher’s workload, but one study suggests that it may also be an effective way to help these students succeed in school. Nancy Rich (2005) researched classroom strategies to motivate at-risk
learners to want to succeed in the classroom. She wanted to help these students become more involved in school by using research supported teaching practices.

Rich began by defining the at-risk population with which she worked. She noted that they are “undergoing or have undergone trauma in their lives” and that “these are students who, no matter how naturally gifted, have become disinterested in school” (Rich, 2005, p. 1). For this study, she worked with a group of seventh grade students in her language arts class, who were grouped together as a result of flexible grouping. She provided some background knowledge about the population, such as the fact that they were in a small town in New Jersey (population 10,500 people) and that their town has a household income average, house value average, and African American population percentage that are all above the state’s average. The study lacks other important data that could have more clearly identified the study participants. In fact, there is no mention of how many participants were in this study except for a caption for one of the illustrated tables in which it states that there were 24 students.

A large portion of the study was research and support for the teaching strategies used in this study. There was also evidence to show that these strategies would be effective in working with students. The researcher narrowed it down to three main ideas. In order to effectively teach these students, she would have to set goals, make it relevant, and offer substantial time to complete tasks. Rich also provided research supporting the strategy of building positive student-teacher relationships, but did not set up any sort of experiment that would measure or test that strategy.

The actual study was implemented during a language arts unit in which the students were reading the book *The Giver*. There were three questions that were being addressed by the unit included:
• How will selecting and communicating clear objectives for each lesson help students achieve them?

• How will increasing the amount of time spent on each objective affect student performance?

• How will making learning experiences relevant to the students’ lives affect their performance?

In order to answer these questions, the researcher had to collect a wide variety of data. Each question was analyzed using a different set of data. The question about objectives would be answered with the use of a student goal checklist, student portfolios, and the teacher’s grade book. The question regarding the time spent on each lesson would be answered using data provided by student lesson rubrics, the teacher’s journal of daily reflections, and quiz grades. Finally, the question about making the lessons more relevant would be analyzed by using a student survey, student interviews, and student journals. The research describes all of the data collected as giving a broad look at what was happening in the class. The analysis of the data also seemed to provide a broad look of the results of the study.

For the first goal, the researcher provided an outline of the objectives she was looking for each student to learn throughout the unit. Each of the data sets indicated growth which would lead one to believe that the strategy was effective in helping students. However, there was no control group to help determine if the growth was directly related to the teaching strategy. The researcher also provided each student with a check list of the unit objectives in which they could clearly see the goals of each part of the unit. The data provided relating to these checklists included student verbal input and a summary of quiz scores. Students overwhelmingly indicated that the use of these checklists was valuable, and more than half of the class scored over 90% on
the quizzes and not one student had a score below a C+. Again, this data was vague and lacked proper documentation to prove that they were as a result of the teaching strategy.

For the second research question, the researcher noted that she “made a conscious effort to increase the time (she) spent on each objective with (her) class” (Rich, 2005, p. 5). She provided each student with an independent reading rubric that related to the identified objectives for question one. Students were evaluated on levels master, superior, apprentice, or beginner. Students were able to redo work so that they could move up the levels. It was not made clear how this rubric related to the initial goal of increasing time so that an impact on student learning could be observed. However, the researcher did make mention of her self-monitored journal of daily activities and noted that progress was seen.

The final category of research question was relating the learning material to the lives of students. She started with a student survey that asked students personal questions so she could gain insight to their interests. In addition to a written survey, the researcher was able to learn more about the students by interviewing each student one-on-one at several points throughout the unit. This seemed to be the most helpful in building positive relationships with the students. She was able to collect direct feedback on the unit as well as provide individualized encouragement for students. She also collected data via student journals in which students were able to write reflections on how the novel related to their own lives. Their reflections supported her efforts in the unit.

The researcher claimed that her project was a great success but lacked sufficient data to draw any valid conclusions. The study would have benefited from using more quantitative data. At one point, the researcher made the comment, “I do not think they would have taken it as seriously as they did without guidance from the rubric,” (Rich, 2005). This statement seems
completely subjective and lacks the reliable data that would have backed up the claim. She makes the overall comments that her students were more motivated and achieved better grades because of her efforts. The project overall sounds like a practical set of teaching strategies that were effective for this study, but lacked any statistical evidence to influence future studies.

Schlicte, Stroud, and Girdley (2006) specifically set out to scientifically test the relationship between academic success and affective relationships between at-risk students and their teachers. They provided several research reports linking the importance of building relationships among teachers and students to the willingness of those students to connect to their education. The researchers in this study used a copyrighted program called “Relationship-Driven Teaching Style” that was actually developed by one of them. The program is “an approach to teaching whereby the teacher, through a formulation of personal relationships with all students, constructs schema that are meaningful and will produce the affective feelings of understanding and knowing,” (Schlicte et al., 2006, p. 1). The idea is that this program is used to direct instruction of at-risk students. The purpose of this study specifically was to study the implementation of this program and make a connection to the resulting academic performance of the students involved in the program.

In this study, the program was implemented in an eighth grade classroom. They involved 44 students from a small, rural school. The students made up 46% of the total eighth grade class, and all of them were labeled “at-risk” due to low reading abilities, low SES levels, and or a diagnosis of a learning disability. Each study participant was enrolled in a remedial English class in which the experiment took place. Each group was taught by the same teacher. The lessons were designed around a language arts teaching model that included word study, self-selected reading, guided reading, and writing. Students in the experimental group were exposed
to both the traditional method of teaching and an extension including the relationship-driven approach to teaching. The control group was also exposed to the traditional method of teaching, but the extension they were given did not have the relationship-driven treatment.

In order to compare the results of the experimental and control group, researchers compared a series of six English tests that were designed to be given at the end of a two-week period of study. Qualitative data was obtained from student interviews and short surveys. These were designed to measure the “affective and attitudinal changes” (p. 4) that occurred during the study (Schlicte et al., 2006). They made sure that the 44 original participants were randomly assigned by computer to the different groups, and that the students all entered the study at approximately the same academic level.

The researchers conducted an independent two-sample T-Test to compare the overall academic progress of the experimental group and the control group. They found that the average test scores of the students in the experimental group were 87.2157% while the control group was only 77.3551% which led them to conclude that the relationship-driven teaching extension had a large, significant impact on the academic performances of at-risk students. The experimental group also had a smaller range of mean scores falling between 85%-92% with just two outlier averages. They also found that the average scores of both the experimental and control groups exceeded the scores from other eighth grade students who received traditional instruction but no extension activities.

For the qualitative data collection portion of the study, the researchers specifically documented the interview process of one student. He began the study with a very negative and self-defeating view of his reading skills. Throughout the study, he began to see that his teacher cared about him as a person and his confidence grew. He became more engaged in class and
showed significant improvement in his grades and motivation. The researchers also evaluated the results of some short questionnaires asking students to identify their attitude about certain academic areas. The results of these surveys showed that the group receiving relationship-driven instruction showed more positive growth in academic attitude changes.

Overall, the researchers linked a strong positive correlation between academic success and relationship-driven instruction. All students who received an academic extension of the English class benefitted, but the students in the experimental group showed more growth than any other group. Both the quantitative and qualitative data supported these conclusions. They recommended that further studies be conducted to see if these results were reproducible. A further addendum noted that these students went on to take a school wide exam to qualify for graduation, and that the group received passing grades that surpassed many of their peers.

Part Three: The Connections Program

The first step in the process of developing any intervention program for at-risk students is to accurately identify students as “at-risk.” Research shows that effective “interventions consist of first identifying the at-risk youth (and that) identification methods include: record keeping of problematic behavior in school, faculty observations and referrals, friend and student referrals, parents, and the legal system” (Brooks & Coll, 1994, p. 7). The DeForest Area School District (DASD) already has set criteria for determining students who are able to participate in alternative programs for at-risk learners available at the high school. Some of these criteria include:

1. Failing several academic classes
2. Some attendance/truancy problems (but not excessive)
3. Repeated referrals from teachers for extra support through the STAT (Student Teacher Assistance Team) process
4. Difficulties forming positive and productive relationships with authority figures such as teachers and administrators
5. Difficulties functioning in a large school setting and could benefit from a smaller educational environment.
6. Lack of motivation or achievement
7. Student displays kinesthetic (hands-on) learning patterns
8. A desire and commitment to participate in the program (DeForest Area School District, 2010)

Another criterion for program participation includes parental support. With any alternative programs, parents must not only give permission for students to participate, but also give some level of commitment to the mission of the program. This engages parental involvement and makes the process more effective.

Using the framework set in place by DASD, the Connections program was established in August 2008 using funds provided by the Alternative Education Program Grant offered by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Connections is a delivery model for meeting the needs of at-risk students within DAMS. Unlike the alternative education program at the high school, Connections is designed to be a leveled intervention program with the goal of helping at-risk student succeed while keeping them in their regular academic schedule as much as possible. Most students participating in Connections remain in six of their eight regular academic classes throughout the day and then participate in two classes led by a teacher who specializes in at-risk education. One of the courses is a guided study hall, while the other is a team-building class focusing on developing connections to the school and others.
The Connections program has been well-received by staff. Many teachers appear to have made a positive correlation between participation in the program and school success. The program, in addition to a school-wide adoption of the SOLAR (Solution Oriented Learning, Accountability, and Resolution) behavior management model, appears to be credited with decreasing the number of behaviors disruptive to learning throughout the school year. The SOLAR model focuses on using solution-based, restorative interventions for behaviors with the goal of decreasing disruptive behaviors and increasing individual accountability. During the 2006-2007 school year, DAMS processed 988 total disciplinary referrals. In the years following, the number of referrals has dropped each year. In the 2007 school year, there were 825 referrals. In the 2008 school year, there were only 595 referrals. And in the 2009 school year, DAMS processed 542 referrals. The number of behavioral referrals appears to have decreased as a result of the interventions put in place. DAMS has experienced the same decreasing trend in the numbers of out-of-school and in-school suspensions. In the 2006-2007 school year, there were a total of 148 out-of-school suspensions and 178 in-school suspensions. The number of suspensions has decreased each year since then. In the 2009-2010 school year, there were 47 out-of-school suspensions reported and 62 in-school suspensions. Again the decreasing trend for this data is thought to be linked to the implementation of the Connections program and adoption of the SOLAR behavioral model.

At the same time that behavioral concerns are decreasing, DAMS is experiencing an increase in the attendance rates. One of the major concerns of the at-risk population at DAMS is that they are more likely to be absent from school due to a lack of connection to the school or family struggles. A goal of the Connections program was to increase the number of days that at-risk students are present in school by creating an engaging, welcoming, and safe school
environment. In the 2007-2008 school year, DAMS had a 93.10% attendance rate for the entire year. In the 2009-2010 school year, DAMS had risen to a 96.17% attendance rate. In particular, the number of days present for students in the Connections program was 4217 in the 2007 school year and rose to 4467 in the 2009 school year. The improvement in attendance overall was partially credited to dedicating efforts to keep at-risk students in school.

From an academic standpoint, the Connections committee developed a goal to reduce the number of failing grades from at-risk students. To increase the chances of at-risk students receiving passing grades, they developed a guided study hall in which two teachers were available to help at-risk students study, complete homework, and maintain organization. It seems that as a result of the guided study hall, the number of failed classes decreased. In the 2007 school year, 20 classes were failed by students identified as at-risk where as only eight classes were failed in the 2009 school year. Academic success remains a top priority for the Connections program, in addition to behavioral success.

Because the Connections program has experienced success in meeting the needs of seventh and eighth grade at-risk students, it would seem appropriate to develop a similar program to meet the needs of the fifth and sixth grade at-risk students. While both the Connections program and the Lunch Bunch will take place in the same school with the same environment and scheduling considerations, the programs are unique in that they cater to the needs of the age group. There is a large discrepancy in the maturity and readiness levels between fifth and eighth grades. Hopefully the Lunch Bunch will help DAMS continue to demonstrate a decrease in behavioral concerns and an increase in academic successes.
Plan of Implementation

Schedule

The Lunch Bunch program will begin in the 2011-2012 school year at DAMS. The fifth grade groups will be directly supervised by the researcher and the fifth grade guidance counselor. The sixth grade groups will be supervised by the sixth grade counselor and the school psychologist. All group meetings will take place during the lunch/recess hour, one time per week for the duration of a nine week schedule. Students will be given a pass to remind them to attend group each week.

During the nine week schedule, students will participate in a variety of activities aimed at promoting academic and behavioral success in school. The sixth grade group will have slightly modified curriculum from the fifth grade curriculum to reflect the age maturity and learning readiness of the group. Included in the appendix are two charts which include an overview of the activities for the fifth grade Lunch Bunch groups and activities listed for the sixth grade group respectively. All activities planned for the groups will be subject to changes as a result of the needs of the groups.

Qualification Process

Participants in the lunch bunch will be chosen by a panel including the guidance counselors and teachers. We will gather input from current teachers and past school records. Current teachers will be asked to submit a survey (see Appendix) for each student they feel would benefit from the program. The panel will use the survey information along with previous school records to determine need. Qualifiers under consideration will include students with attendance problems, discipline problems, low academic performance, and known issues of
family dysfunction based on the definition of “at risk” as identified by the district (see Connections Program information on pg. 31). When the survey and data is collected, students will be ranked based on their perceived level of risk. In total, 12-15 students from each grade who will appear to benefit the most from participation will be selected to participate in the group. Parent permission for using research data will be obtained through a letter sent to each participant’s home (see Appendix).

Data Collection

Collecting data throughout the implementation of this program will be a combination of qualitative and quantitative survey methods. The students who participate in the program will be asked to fill out a survey (see Appendix) indicating their perceived benefits from participation. The survey will ask students to rank the benefits of Lunch Bunch in different categories including organization, studying, social skills, and connection to school. Students will rank each category on a scale of one to five, with the higher numbers indicating that the group helped significantly while the lower numbers indicating that students did not receive any perceived benefits as a result of the group. The target score for each category will be a four; indicating that students received a benefit as a result of participation.

In the future, the Lunch Bunch curriculum may be altered to reflect the results of the student surveys. The categories with lowest average satisfaction scores will need to be adjusted to make the program more successful. These low scoring categories may include skills that require more instruction so that students perceive a greater benefit or they may need to be omitted from the curriculum because students don’t feel that they need any extra intervention with that skill. Survey categories with high ranking satisfaction scores will not only indicate that
those skills should continue to be taught during group, but also that students appreciate the benefits of having an intervention group. If this group is well-received by the student population, teachers and guidance counselors, it will be more likely to continue operating it in the future.

The homeroom teachers of the students participating in the group will also be asked to submit a form indicating the perceived academic and behavioral benefits of participation (see appendix). Much like the results of the student surveys, the results of the teacher surveys will be used to determine the future plans for the group. Teachers will be asked to identify the benefits of student participation based on the following categories; attendance, grades, organization, peer relationships, behavior (in and out of class), and student connection to DAMS. For each category, teachers will be asked to indicate if the student has improved, stayed the same, or worsened. There will also be an option for teachers to report that they did not observe or have no opinion on a specific skill category. The goal will be for each category to receive a rating of “skill has improved.” If teacher surveys indicate that students’ skills have not made improvements or worsened, further analysis will be made to determine if there were outside factors influencing the students’ success or the possibility that Lunch Bunch may need more direct instruction in a specific skill.

Quantitative data will be collected by means of comparing the numbers of absences, tardies, failed classes, and behavioral referrals of each student from the current year to previous years. For each of the categories, there will be data reporting the average number in previous years as well as the exact number for last year. These numbers will be compared to the current number after participation in the group. Data will be recorded (see appendix) and trends will be analyzed using an Analysis of Variance. The goal will be for each student to show improvement
in the categories by showing fewer absences, tardies, failed courses, and behavioral referrals. A decreasing trend in the data will indicate greater connection to the school community and school success for the students.
Results

How the Plan Was Executed

The 2011-2012 school year began on September 1, 2011. The fifth and sixth grade teachers spent the first month of school getting to know their new students and then received Lunch Bunch referral forms in October. Teaching teams were able to refer as many students as they deemed fit the description and benefits of the program. Teams were also asked to indicate whether individual students had any IEP’s because some students have counselor-led group participation as part of their plan accommodations for the school year.

Upon receiving referral forms from all six teaching teams, a meeting was held with the fifth and sixth grade guidance counselor. During the meeting, students were ranked based on their perceived level of need for behavioral and academic intervention. The counselors also made additional referrals at the sixth grade level for students who were not referred by academic teachers but are known to exhibit at-risk behaviors that would be addressed by the Lunch Bunch. The following chart represents the number of students referred as well as the number of spots available for the program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total Number of Students at DAMS</th>
<th>Total Number of Referrals to Lunch Bunch</th>
<th>Additional Counselor Referrals</th>
<th>Number of Students Selected for Lunch Bunch Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Because there were more fifth grade referrals than the number of spots in the Lunch Bunch available, the total number of students referred was narrowed down to 12 participants per group based on several factors. Students were eliminated from consideration if they were unable to attend meetings because of participation in choir, which also takes place during the lunch hour. Academic teachers were also consulted to help rank the students being referred based on the most demonstrated need for intervention. Because there were a significant number of students who were referred for fifth grade Lunch Bunch and did not get in, team teachers were provided alternative options for at-risk student intervention. These alternative options included ideas for classroom activities to benefit all students, the possibility of one-on-one student counseling sessions, support from other teachers as dictated by IEP’s, and the possibility of students being included in a second version of the Lunch Bunch to happen in the Spring.

When the 46 students were finally selected for the four sections of Lunch Bunch, parents were notified via a letter sent home in the mail (see Appendix.) This letter explained that students were selected to participate in the group and emphasized that students would not be missing any academic time while participating (which has been a concern of parents in the past). The letter also explained that the information collected by the group would be used as data as part of a research project and asked parents to contact academic advisors with any concerns or objections. None of the parents who received the letter contacted the school with concerns about their children participating in the group.

Students were notified the week before Lunch Bunch started that they were selected to be part of the group. To build excitement and anticipation, students received “golden tickets” inviting them to be part of a group that would help with middle school issues. The students also personally met with the leaders of the group who were able to answer their questions and explain
that the group would be starting in the following weeks. Most students were apprehensive, often asking why they were selected, but excited to be part of a group and even more excited to receive the pass that allowed them to cut to the front of the lunch line so that they could take their food to the meeting room. It was explained to students that they had been selected for the group because they demonstrated certain traits and their teachers thought they could make excellent student leaders by participating in this group. It was emphasized that attendance was mandatory, but the group would be a positive, fun, and supportive environment.

Lunch Bunch was held each week in an empty classroom on the fifth and sixth grade side of the building. The room is known as the “Lambeau Lounge” because it is part of the Packer Pod section of the building (a sixth grade area marked by the green lockers). Each week, students would receive a lunch pass from one teacher on their team on the day of their Lunch Bunch meeting. Students would then take those passes to the cafeteria to order to bring their lunches to the Lambeau Lounge.

Each of the fifth grade meetings was conducted by the researcher and the fifth grade guidance counselor. The sixth grade meetings were always conducted by the sixth grade counselor and either the school psychologist or the researcher. Usually the material was divided up among the adults to cover. Each meeting began with a group discussion of the opening circle questions as students were eating and finishing their lunch. After the opening circle, the students would participate in one of the planned activities with a predetermined goal and focus.

The following table describes the lessons and activities that were included in group. For each date, specific activities and opening questions listed as well as the general focus of the meeting.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Opening Circle Discussion Questions</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week of Oct. 17th</td>
<td>Introductions</td>
<td>Tell us your name. Which team are you on? What is your favorite thing to do when you're not in school?</td>
<td>Group Juggle: Create a paper-link chain that describes the quality of a good friend – discuss confidentiality contract and how we will support each other in group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Set expectations for group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confidentiality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of Oct. 24th</td>
<td>Goal setting</td>
<td>What has been a high/low of your week? What do you want to be when you grow up?</td>
<td>Art Activity: Every student will illustrate a goal they have for the year, we’ll talk about how we can support each other in those goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of Oct. 31st</td>
<td>Organization: Assignment notebook</td>
<td>What’s your favorite subject? Why? If you could trade places with anyone in the world, who would you choose?</td>
<td>Assignment Notebooks: Give each student an assignment notebook (if they don’t already have them). Bring up the team websites, explain how to fill it out (in depth), offer incentive for completion and parent signature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of Nov. 7th</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>What are 3 words your friends would use to describe you? What’s your favorite sport to play?</td>
<td>Monster Ball: Use giant monster feet to play a throwing/catching game down the hallway – students toss footballs back and forth, while communicating to reach the end zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of Nov. 14th</td>
<td>Organization: Locker</td>
<td>Who is someone in your life you really admire? Why? Tell us a joke.</td>
<td>Locker: Help each student clean out their locker and develop a system for what to keep and what to toss, give each student a schedule of what materials are needed in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of Nov. 28th</td>
<td>Making good choices</td>
<td>Do you have any pets? If yes, describe them. If no, what type of pet would you like to have? What is your favorite holiday? Why?</td>
<td>Tarp Activity: Use tarp from connections program – discuss positive and negative choices and the consequences of our actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of Dec. 5th</td>
<td>Study Skills</td>
<td>Tell us about your family. What is something that you’re really good at doing?</td>
<td>Study Skills: Give students concrete ideas for how to study for tests and maintain attention during class, talk about learning styles and dispositions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of Dec. 12th</td>
<td>Personal Space Hygiene Puberty</td>
<td>Do you wish you were older or younger? Why? Tell us about one time you were really scared.</td>
<td>Personal Space: Students approach each other and say “stop” when someone has invaded their personal space, list on the board hygiene skills needed for 5th grade, answer puberty questions</td>
</tr>
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<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of Dec. 19th</td>
<td>End of group party</td>
<td>What was the best part about being in Lunch Bunch? Worst part? What did you learn in group?</td>
<td>“What’s the best thing about…”: everyone writes the best thing about their peers in a box</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ideas for lessons were mainly generated by perceived need of the students. For example, the lesson on using the assignment notebooks derived from the fact that many of the at-risk students failed to complete lessons on time because they often fail to organize materials in their assignment notebook. Some of the lessons were also taken from the book, “The Revised and Expanded Book of Raccoon Circles: A Facilitator’s Guide to Building Unity, Community, Connection, and Teamwork Through Active Learning” by Dr. Jim Cain and Dr. Tom Smith. The materials needed for lessons were stored in the Lambeau Lounge. Some lesson materials also came from the At-Risk Coordinator for the seventh and eighth graders at the school.

**Group Reactions and Observations**

It became very apparent during the first few weeks of Lunch Bunch that there were noticeable differences in the Girls Lunch Bunch versus the Boys Lunch Bunch. The leaders of the group observed instantly that the girls were far more likely to exhibit negative behaviors such as blurt ing, interrupting, and not listening to others. The boys’ group seemed to have more energy but demonstrated behaviors that indicated they were more appreciative of and invested in the group. When groups were given the opportunity to hold open discussions, some of the girls
exhibited signs that they were overly mature for their age such as initiating frank discussions about dating and puberty.

Because of the observed differences in the groups, some activities were modified based on gender. The behavior management techniques used during the group also varied based on gender. One problem that both groups had was refraining from blurting out responses. To deter and make students more aware of this behavior, both groups had their “blurt outs” recorded on a chart in front of the classroom. In three weeks, the girls’ group had received 15 tallies on their “blurt out” chart, while the boys’ group had 6 tallies. As a consequence for this behavior, the girls were asked to write a reflective piece on how blurting affects the learning of others. Each girl participated in a discussion about blurting and then shared their letters with the other members of the group.

There were also observable differences between the fifth grade groups and the sixth grade groups. As a whole, the sixth grade groups were more reflective and open to discussion. All of the groups had time set into the schedule for opening circle discussion and an activity following the discussion. The fifth grade groups always had time for their activity, while the sixth grade groups held much more in depth conversations and missed their activities on three separate occasions because the counselor decided that continuing with the discussion was more important than transitioning to the activity.

It was also observed that the sixth graders were more resistant to join Lunch Bunch and less willing to continue to participate in the group. Several sixth grade participants commented that they did not like to be “singled out” for joining group. Two boys in the Lunch Bunch attended the first two meetings but then stopped attending the other meetings. When pressured to rejoin the group, each boy tried one additional meeting but displayed off-task and
disrespectful behaviors. Because these boys were apparently acting in rebellion to being pressured to rejoin the group, they were allowed to quit Lunch Bunch so that the experience of others would not be negatively influenced.

Most students in the Lunch Bunch were very honest and vocal about their opinions on the perceived positives and negative outcomes of participating in the group. The most common negative opinion that was reported was that students were upset that they were missing the socialization of lunch and/or recess. A few of the girls in the fifth grade group were involved in some negative interactions outside of class (prior to being selected to join Lunch Bunch). These girls voiced concerns over not being comfortable around the other members of the Lunch Bunch.

For the most part, students were very positive about and appreciative of being selected to join the group. The verbal feedback we received indicated that students enjoyed the personal attention of working with adults in a small group setting. Students also reported satisfaction in knowing that they had an adult and several peers with whom they could communicate the struggles of middle school. One girl said, “I’ve been having problems fighting with my friends, it really helped to talk about that with everyone today.” One parent gave positive feedback as well, commenting that her son was “really enjoying the attention and extra help.” This was the only parent to offer feedback.

The observable attitudes about group stayed mainly positive throughout the experience. It was also observed that groups developed a more comfortable, open approach to sharing information as the weeks progressed. The first week included a discussion about the necessary confidentiality that went into the group and no problems were reported regarding a breach of confidentiality. During the beginning weeks of group, it was noticeable that participants were hesitant to share information. The opening circle discussions were short and without any signs
of deep reflection. However, as the weeks progressed, the opening circle discussion became longer and topics were shared more in depth. Groups seemed more comfortable with each other as evidenced by participants initiating conversations with other participants who were previously unknown to them.

Data

Upon completion of participation in the Lunch Bunch, the students were asked to complete a survey indicating their perceptions of group participation. The following chart indicates the percentage of student participants who either strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, strongly disagreed, or were neutral with the provided statements about the Lunch Bunch. The most common response for each statement is provided in bold and Lunch Bunch is abbreviated “LB” in the statements. Calculations were made by finding the percentage of responses in a given category and rounded to the nearest whole number. Blank responses were not calculated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I enjoyed participating in LB</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LB helped me learn to use my assignment notebook</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LB helped me learn to study for tests</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LB helped me make new friends</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LB helped me make good choices</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LB helped me set goals for myself</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students were also asked to complete three short answer questions at the bottom of their survey. The first question asked students, “What was the best thing about being in Lunch Bunch?” All responses for this question were recorded on a chart and the most common response was found to be “Making new friends and spending time with friends”. The second and third most common responses were, “Talking about and helping with issues,” and “The games and activities,” respectively. Students were also asked, “What was the worst thing about being in Lunch Bunch?” The most common responses in order of frequency (from most common to least) were, “Nothing,” “Missing recess/lunch as a time to socialize,” and “Boring activities.” Finally, students were asked to identify any suggestions they had for improving Lunch Bunch in the future. Responses were highly varied, but some of the themes that emerged among the suggestions were including more games in the schedule, ensuring participants had adequate recess time, and making the group last for more weeks.

Surveys were also collected from academic teachers about the perceived benefits of their students participating in the Lunch Bunch. Teachers were asked to complete surveys for each of their students who participated in the group, since the benefits were evaluated on an individual level. These surveys provided teachers with a list of categories of behaviors that promote
academic and behavioral success among students. Teachers were asked to identify if, as a result of the lunch bunch, student success had improved, stayed the same, or worsened. There was also an area for teachers to respond if they had no opinion or not enough information to respond to a specific category. The following chart represents the percentage of responses that fell within any given indicator. The most common response within any category is provided in bold. Percentages were calculated by totaling the number of responses for each category and were rounded to the nearest whole number.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Has improved</th>
<th>Has stayed the same</th>
<th>Has worsened</th>
<th>No opinion or observation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absences/Tardies</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer relationships</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior during class</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior outside of class</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to DAMS</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers were also asked to identify if they considered this to be an effective academic and behavioral intervention for individual students. In response to the question about the effectiveness of the academic intervention, teachers responded “Yes” in 31% of responses and “No” in 66% of responses. There were also some teachers that chose to leave that question unanswered. In response to the question of the effectiveness of the behavioral intervention, teachers responded that it was an effective intervention in 44% of the responses and that it was
not an effective intervention in 50% of the responses. Again there were some teachers that chose to leave that question unanswered.

Overall the results of the survey data appear contradictory. The student survey data indicates that the group was well-received by the majority of student participants and that the students found the group to be effective in accomplishing most of the previously established goals. The teacher survey data seems to suggest that most teachers had the opposite opinion, indicating that the group was unsuccessful in meeting the majority of the goals. Using the verbal feedback in addition to the survey data, it can be determined that there were some strengths and weaknesses in the Lunch Bunch program. More inferences will be discussed in the following Conclusions and Implications section.
Conclusions and Implications

Significance of Student Selection and Participation

The process of selecting students to participate in Lunch Bunch started many conversations among fifth and sixth grade staff members at DAMS regarding the definition and implications of at-risk students. Many teachers were previously unclear about a consistent way to identify and help students who are considered at-risk. The referral process revealed that there are some consistent behaviors and tendencies among at-risk students at DAMS, including difficulty completing homework, negative or apathetic attitude towards school, difficulty organizing daily materials, difficulty maintaining attention during class, complicated peer relationships, and poor quality of classroom work. While not all students identified as at-risk demonstrated these traits, the traits were exhibited more frequently by these students than their peers who are not identified as at-risk.

Based on verbal feedback and informal conversations, it appears that teachers in the fifth and sixth grade referred students to Lunch Bunch because they demonstrated the behaviors that were listed on the referral form and the teachers were looking for the Lunch Bunch to help with those issues. It is unclear whether teachers held the perception that Lunch Bunch would completely solve the difficulties of working with at-risk students, but the intent of the program was more to provide students with extra support in some areas that aren’t typically covered in the classroom.

The cooperation of teachers was especially frustrating for the leaders of the group. While many individual teachers were supportive of the Lunch Bunch, there were indicators that led the researcher to believe that the teachers overall viewed Lunch Bunch as another burden to add to their already busy days. One piece of evidence to support this theory was that several teams of
teachers did not return referrals and surveys within the requested timeline. Another piece of evidence was the difference between the number of referrals for fifth and sixth grade. It appeared as though the sixth grade teachers were less supportive of the program by being less willing to refer students who needed help. In fact, the difference between the number of sixth grade students referred by the teachers (15) and the number of sixth grade students referred by the counselor (35) suggested a serious lack of commitment to the program by the sixth grade teachers.

However, another possible explanation for the difference between sixth grade referrals by teachers and the counselor was a lack of education or awareness. It was inferred that the sixth grade teachers may have been less aware of what behaviors indicate a student may be “at-risk” of behavioral or academic failure. Many fifth grade teachers seemed to be very aware of the needs of their at-risk students, including providing information on dysfunctional home lives on their referral forms or providing very specific information on classroom deficits via verbal feedback. However, sixth grade teachers provided very little detail about what made their students at-risk. This led to some discussions with administrators about the need for a “common language” of what makes students at-risk among the fifth and sixth grade teachers. The administrators involved in those discussions have agreed to keep this issue in mind when planning for future teacher in-service opportunities and possibly provide some continuing education to teachers regarding working with at-risk students.

Another disappointment with the program was the lack of participation from parents. All parents were notified of the group and their child’s involvement. Parents were asked to contact the researcher or supervisor if there were any questions or concerns. Even though there were 47 different students involved in the Lunch Bunch, none of the parents contacted the researcher and
expressed any interest in what was happening in the group. One parent, as part of parent teacher conferences, mentioned that her son was enjoying group. However, there was an overall lack of interest and engagement from the majority of parents. Because a dysfunctional home life is one of the traits of an at-risk student, it was not surprising to the researcher or counselor that the parents were uninvolved with the process. Many of the students in group have parents who are difficult to contact on a regular basis or who lack any connection to the school. In the future, it may be helpful to make personal phone calls home to discuss the Lunch Bunch with parents and encourage them to take an active role in promoting the group. Not only would the parents benefit from hearing positive information from school, but it would help promote a stronger connection between DAMS and parents.

On a positive note, the students who participated in group seemed to have really enjoyed their experience in Lunch Bunch. The students were visibly excited to attend the meetings and expressed verbal appreciation for their selection for group. The groups seemed to develop a sense of camaraderie by doing things like reminding each other to attend group each week, giving compliments to each other, and expressing pride in their established team. These behaviors indicated that students were successful in developing a stronger connection to DAMS and building some positive motivation in their lives. Also, the fact that students were more willing to share their opinions and experiences during discussion as the weeks progressed indicated that they felt they had built a positive connection with others in the group.

While Lunch Bunch wasn’t intended to “solve” all of the problems that these students face in school on a regular basis, it was disappointing to see that some of the discussions in group didn’t always translate to changing behaviors outside of group. One example of this issue was some of the fifth grade girls that had previously had difficulties working together (in
elementary school and earlier in the current school year) continued to have difficulties working together despite the teamwork directed activities. This would suggest that not all of the interventions in group were effective in changing student behavior.

Significance of the Data

By observing trends in the student data, it appears that most students found the Lunch Bunch to be successful in accomplishing its objectives. Students were asked to respond to statements correlating to the group goals with responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. By answering strongly agree or agree, students indicated that they found the goals to have been accomplished. In eight out of the nine categories, the majority of students responded with strongly agree or agree. The most significant percentage of students answering strongly agree occurred in correlation with the statement “Lunch Bunch helped me make good choices” and the second most significant percentage correlated with the statement “Lunch Bunch helped me have someone to talk to.” These statements would indicate that students strongly believed that Lunch Bunch was effective in promoting good choices and providing support and guidance through discussion. It is possible that students felt well supported in these areas because they appreciated the small group attention with two staff members. Students may feel like they were able to make better choices because they were provided with activities that made them more aware of the implications of their choices. They may also have felt like they were able to communicate with others more effectively because they participated in teacher-facilitated discussion with proper discussion guidelines taught and reinforced.

The only statement about Lunch Bunch that did not receive a majority of satisfactory responses was “Lunch Bunch helped me learn to use my assignment notebook.” This was
interesting because many at-risk students at DAMS fail to use their assignment notebooks on a regular basis and it was hypothesized that they would benefit from direct instruction in using the assignment notebook effectively. It is possible that the responses for this question were unfavorable because these students are usually very resistant to using their assignment notebooks and may still hesitate to use them on a regular basis even after instruction on how to use them correctly.

Unfortunately, much of the teacher survey data collected indicated that the students participating in group did not meet the goals of the group based on the perception of the teachers. Teachers were asked to respond to student growth in seven specific areas with answers indicating that student achievement has improved, stayed the same, or worsened in any given category. There was also a category provided for teachers to respond that they did not have enough information to classify a student as having changed in that area. It was hoped that teachers would indicate that most of the areas had improved as a result of the Lunch Bunch intervention. However, when the percentage of responses was calculated, the majority of teachers indicated that students had improved in only two categories. The category that appeared to have the most significant growth among students was that the students built a “Connection to DAMS.” This makes sense because students were able to participate in a small group with a lot of individual attention and built a sense of community that would help them feel more connected to school.

Another category that the majority of teachers indicated had improved was “Peer Relationships.” This would indicate that students who participated in the group were able to transfer the friendship and social skills learned in group to their peer relationships outside of group. There were mixed reactions to this question though because the guidance counselors have noted that several of the students continue to have severe problems with developing healthy
peer relationships. In fact, several of the students involved in the group were involved in altercations that required office intervention while participating in the group or slightly thereafter. The difference in peer relationships could be attributed to the fact that social groups become more established as the school year progresses and students could be choosing to interact with more positive peer influences.

The majority of teacher responses fell into the behavior “has stayed the same” category. This would indicate that the Lunch Bunch was not effective in helping students improve in the specific goal areas. One goal, improving behavior outside of class, received a majority of responses in the “no opinion or observation” category which was understandable because teachers often do not observe student behavior at home or in the community. Because the majority of responses indicated that students had not shown any made progress in the goal areas, it could be determined that teachers did not feel that Lunch Bunch was effective in intervening with at-risk students.

However, there is another possible reason for why teacher data indicated that the group was unsuccessful. It is the belief of the researcher that the survey used to collect data was ineffective and misleading. Because of the wording, teachers were asked to evaluate student growth only as a result of the nine week Lunch Bunch program which simply was not enough time to completely transform student behavior. The other problem was that not all students previously displayed problems in the goal areas and therefore did not show growth as a result of the Lunch Bunch. It was suggested that instead of asking teachers to indicate that there was or was not growth, it would have been more effective to collect data by providing a pre-evaluation and post-evaluation of students that could have included numbers representing the frequency and severity of actions. Using this system, teachers would have been able to rank students on
specific behaviors before and after group to indicate if at least partial growth was achieved. It also was suggested that teachers should have been able to report what other interventions may have been attributed to growth within a specific area. Because both of these suggestions were derived from teacher input, it is believed that they would be more willing to complete the survey materials than what was provided to them this year.

Correcting the survey flaws may better reflect the success of the program, if there indeed is. However, the problem still existed that most teachers responded that the group was ineffective in helping students succeed academically and behaviorally. It is possible that teachers had unrealistic expectations about what could be accomplished during a nine week program. It is also possible that teachers were unable to see enough significant, observable growth in students because some students made slight gains that were less noticeable. The biggest concern of the researcher though was that the lack of support from teachers came as a result of the program being viewed as a burden. Teachers have many responsibilities and commitments throughout their day, and Lunch Bunch may have been viewed as unimportant and insignificant when compared to many other things to focus on throughout the day. It would be interesting to implement further research that would shed light on the opinions of teachers about at-risk intervention groups and offer suggestions for how to get more teachers on board with the program.

Originally, the researcher had intended to use one additional form of data collection. It was planned that student attendance data, comparing the previous year to the current year, would reflect any trends in increasing student attendance and engagement in school. However, based on the difficulty of obtaining that data it was decided to not conduct that area of data research. Because students in the fifth grade lunch bunch came to the middle school from four different
elementary schools, and knowing that each school had different procedures and policies regarding attendance, it was determined that results comparing previous school attendance with current attendance would be invalid. The concern was that trends were not measured against a control group and that the numbers would misrepresent overall attendance concerns. In the future, it would be interesting to study the effectiveness of academic and behavioral interventions of at-risk students in terms of influencing attendance by comparing long term trends.

**Perceived Strengths and Weakness of the Program and Future Implications**

It can be concluded that the Lunch Bunch was a success in the eyes of the students and the facilitators. Students displayed many signs that they enjoyed their time in group and were appreciative of the opportunity. The facilitators observed substantial positive feedback and observed indicators that would deem this program a success. The students were by far the most important benefactor from the program, so their opinions of the group were thought to be the most valuable in determining if the Lunch Bunch was a solid program. However, it’s difficult to say if the Lunch Bunch could ever be considered a true success without the consistent support of staff. Unfortunately, the Lunch Bunch does not appear to be a sustainable program because it requires the time commitment of at least two dedicated staff members to give up their lunch hour to work with students.

If the program does continue to be offered, much of the programming will probably stay the same. The activities proved to be very well-received among the students and future participants would benefit from them as well. The format of using opening circle questions to facilitate discussion was especially beneficial for the students. They displayed substantial growth in terms of their abilities to take turns sharing information, listen to others, and open up
about the issues affecting their experiences in school. If the group continues in the future, it would also be recommended to use art projects as a way to build community within the group. Students participated in making posters that were displayed around the meeting room, which is rather dull, and were very excited and proud to create the artwork.

In the future, it would also be beneficial to continue to offer the group with the supervision of both a classroom teacher and a guidance counselor. Classroom teachers see students on a daily basis and gather significant information about their academic skills. Counselors are specially trained on how to intervene with behavior concerns and problems. The combination of the two professionals means that the counselor driven activities can be adapted and modified to also fit the academic needs of the students. The researcher used academic knowledge to provide such modifications as writing directions on the dry erase board for visual students to process and giving direct instruction in skills that are needed for classroom success. The counselor was able to use special training and knowledge to develop activities to challenge and improve student behavior. Overall, the collaboration between both staff members was an important part of the program’s success.

Perhaps the biggest challenge of the Lunch Bunch group was the scheduling aspect. Because there is currently no time during the school day that can be dedicated to interventions for at-risk students, it was necessary that the group met over the lunch hour. While it was nice to facilitate a discussion over food, it also proved to be a large distraction. Students were often late for group because the meeting room was a substantial distance from the lunch room and it took a certain amount of time to line up and receive lunch. Also, the lunch hour is constantly bombarded with other distractions that interrupt the schedule of Lunch Bunch including choir class, band class, special meetings, and teacher duties and obligations. If the program continues
in the future, it would be ideal to work the time in during the day. It was already known that many of the at-risk students would be unable to participate if the program took place before or after school, so it would be ideal to accommodate their needs with a set time in the schedule. This would require the support of administration and possible sacrifice of other programming.

In the future, the program would also benefit greatly from increased support from teachers. Because the survey system was flawed, it is possible that more teachers saw the program more beneficial than indicated. However, it is unclear as to how more teachers could become invested and involved in the implementation of the program and dedicated to achieving better results. It is possible that in the future the focus will need to move to training staff how to meet the needs of at-risk students within their classrooms instead of providing a separate intervention program for those students.

If the researcher was able to further study the success of the Lunch Bunch program, the methodology would be very similar with a few adjustments. It is possible that more benefits could have been observed as a result of the program if it was offered for a longer amount of time. It is also possible that the program could have been more effective if teachers were provided with complimentary materials to use in their classrooms that would have reinforced activities. These adjustments, in addition to rethinking the survey design and data collection process, could go a long way in legitimatizing the effectiveness of this programming.

Overall, it was very clear that the Lunch Bunch was offered and established with the best interest of the students in mind. This is a program that if offered in the future would continue to improve with every implementation. Because there was a serious lack of interventions available for fifth and sixth grade at-risk students, it played an important role in meeting the needs of students who have previously fallen through the cracks. Implementing Lunch Bunch was also
important in initiating discussions throughout DAMS about defining at-risk students consistently and accurately and the implications of doing so. It exposed some potential areas for growth among our staff. The Lunch Bunch proved the value of committing extra time and resources to at-risk students and showed that it is possible to improve the chances of success for these students at DAMS.
Resources


Appendix
Lunch Bunch 2011

Lunch bunch is an intervention group for 5th and 6th grade at-risk students. Angela will be using the group as part of her capstone research project in obtaining her masters. Her research question revolves around developing an effective behavioral and academic intervention for at-risk students of this age group. This group will hopefully meet the need of the boys/girls groups that the counselors conduct each year, as well as provide support for at-risk students on our side of the building.

There are two goals of Lunch Bunch:

1. Promote academic success of at-risk students
2. Promote behavioral success of at-risk students

Topics of discussion each week in the group will relate to the goals of the group. Some academic skills covered will include using the assignment notebook, organizing lockers, and taking notes. Behavior skills will include communication and the CHARACTER traits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>5th grade</th>
<th>6th grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>Angela Poster</td>
<td>Liza Hahn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jackie Broom</td>
<td>Angela Poster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Lambeau Lounge (601)</td>
<td>Lambeau Lounge (601)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls Schedule</td>
<td>Tuesdays during Lunch and Recess</td>
<td>Thursdays during Lunch and Recess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys Schedule</td>
<td>Wednesdays during Lunch and Recess</td>
<td>Mondays during Lunch and Recess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>9 weeks</td>
<td>9 weeks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Referral process will include:

1. Teacher referrals filled out in early October
2. Lunch Bunch leaders will meet to filter referrals and offer group participation to students demonstrating greatest need (apx. 12 kids per group will be selected)
3. Parents of selected students will receive a letter explaining the program, offering the option to opt out of the research portion
4. Students will be notified of their selection for the group

Academic teachers will be asked to help in a couple of ways...

1. During the 1st 2 weeks of October, fill out a referral form for any student you think may benefit from this program
2. Have one contact person from your team be willing to hand out lunch passes each Tuesday and Wednesday
3. After completion of the program (in December), fill out a "perceived benefits" form for any student in your homeroom who participated in the program
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Opening Circle Discussion Questions</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week of Oct. 17th</td>
<td>Introductions</td>
<td>Tell us your name. Which team are you on? What is your favorite thing to do when you’re not in school?</td>
<td>Group Juggle: Create a paper-link chain that describes the quality of a good friend – discuss confidentiality contract and how we will support each other in group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Set expectations for group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confidentiality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week of Oct. 24th</td>
<td>Goal setting</td>
<td>What has been a high/low of your week? What do you want to be when you grow up?</td>
<td>Art Activity: Every student will illustrate a goal they have for the year, we’ll talk about how we can support each other in those goals</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of Oct. 31st</td>
<td>Organization: Assignment</td>
<td>What’s your favorite subject? Why? If you could trade places with anyone in the world, who would you choose?</td>
<td>Assignment Notebooks: Give each student an assignment notebook (if they don’t already have them). Bring up the team websites, explain how to fill it out (in depth), offer incentive for completion and parent signature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>notebook</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week of Nov. 7th</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>What are 3 words your friends would use to describe you? What’s your favorite sport to play?</td>
<td>Monster Ball: Use giant monster feet to play a throwing/catching game down the hallway – students toss footballs back and forth, while communicating to reach the end zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week of Nov. 14th</td>
<td>Organization: Locker</td>
<td>Who is someone in your life you really admire? Why? Tell us a joke.</td>
<td>Locker: Help each student clean out their locker and develop a system for what to keep and what to toss, give each student a schedule of what materials are needed in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week of Nov. 28&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Making good choices</td>
<td>Do you have any pets? If yes, describe them. If no, what type of pet would you like to have? What is your favorite holiday? Why?</td>
<td>Tarp Activity: Use tarp from connections program – discuss positive and negative choices and the consequences of our actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of Dec. 5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Study Skills Attention</td>
<td>Tell us about your family. What is something that you’re really good at doing?</td>
<td>Study Skills: Give students concrete ideas for how to study for tests and maintain attention during class, talk about learning styles and dispositions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of Dec. 12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Personal Space Hygiene Puberty</td>
<td>Do you wish you were older or younger? Why? Tell us about one time you were really scared.</td>
<td>Personal Space: Students approach each other and say “stop” when someone has invaded their personal space, list on the board hygiene skills needed for 5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; grade, answer puberty questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of Dec. 19&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>End of group party</td>
<td>What was the best part about being in Lunch Bunch? Worst part? What did you learn about being in this group?</td>
<td>“What’s the best thing about…”: everyone writes the best thing about their peers in a box</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Opening Circle Discussion Questions</td>
<td>Activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week of Oct. 17&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Introductions Set expectations for group Confidentiality</td>
<td>Tell us your name. Which team are you on? What is your favorite thing to do when you're not in school?</td>
<td>Full Value Contract: Create a puzzle piece that describes the quality of a good friend – discuss confidentiality contract and how we will support each other in group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of Oct. 24&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Organization: Assignment notebook</td>
<td>What has been a high/low of your week? What do you want to be when you grow up?</td>
<td>Assignment Notebooks: Give each student an assignment notebook (if they don’t already have them). Bring up the team websites, explain how to fill it out (in depth), offer incentive for completion and parent signature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of Oct. 31&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Goal Setting</td>
<td>What’s your favorite subject? Why? If you could trade places with anyone in the world, who would you choose?</td>
<td>Art project: Goal Collage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of Nov. 7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Making good choices</td>
<td>What are 3 words your friends would use to describe you? What’s your favorite sport to play?</td>
<td>Tarp Activity: Use tarp from connections program – discuss positive and negative choices and the consequences of our actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of Nov. 14&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Academic success: stress management</td>
<td>Who is someone in your life you really admire? Why? Tell us a joke.</td>
<td>Stress Ball: Discuss and demonstrate healthy ways to deal with stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of Nov. 28&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Behavioral Success: dealing with conflict</td>
<td>Do you have any pets? If yes, describe them. If no, what type of pet would you like to have? What is your favorite holiday? Why?</td>
<td>Conflict Animals: Each student picks an animal (small toy) to describe how they deal with conflict, discuss the implications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of Dec. 5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Healthy self-image</td>
<td>Tell us about your family. What is something that</td>
<td>Face Activity: Students draw their face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of Dec. 12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Personal Space</td>
<td>Do you wish you were older or younger? Why? Tell us about one time you were really scared.</td>
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<td>Hygiene</td>
<td>Personal Space: Students approach each other and say “stop” when someone has invaded their personal space, list on the board hygiene skills needed for 6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; grade, answer puberty questions</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Puberty</td>
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<tr>
<th>Week of Dec. 19&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
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<th>What was the best part about being in Lunch Bunch? Worst part? What did you learn about being in this group?</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“What’s the best thing about…”: everyone writes the best thing about their peers in a box</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Super Studying Suggestions!

Have you ever...

- Been afraid to take a test because you didn't know the material?
- Forgotten to do your homework?
- Gotten a lower grade on a test than you expected?
- Felt confused in class?
- Wished you could be more prepared before tests?

How does it make a person feel when those things happen?

What do you think you could do to prevent those things from happening?

The top ten best ideas for success!

10. Use your ________________ every day to keep track of what needs to be done for homework! Check it at night to make sure you have everything done.
9. When you’re assigned reading material, stop after every _______ and ask yourself… “Do I understand what I’m reading?” If the answer is no, you may need to reread it.
8. When you first get to class, look at the board in the front to see if the teacher has written anything on it. This will give you a heads up for what you’ll be learning and working on that day.
7. When doing homework at home, turn off all ________________! You’ll get done faster and understand what you’re doing more.
6. Keep your ______________ clean and organized. Throw away materials you don’t need. Take home stuff you don’t need.
5. Know what kind of learner you are. If you are a ______________ person, draw pictures to help you understand. If you are auditory, have someone read it to you out loud. If you are kinesthetic, move while you’re learning.
4. Get ______________! Find someone who would be willing to be a “study buddy” whether it’s a parent, older sibling, or someone the school can help you find.
3. Use ______________! These work AWESOME for helping you learn vocab words or quizzing yourself on questions. You can use them alone, or with someone else.
2. Ask for ______________ if you need it! Remember, teachers are here to help. They want you to do your best and there’s always someone in school who will be there for you if you need it!
1. Be ______________ that you can do your best! Remember to keep a positive attitude and don’t let the big picture out of your mind…
October 1, 2011

To the parent(s)/guardian(s) of ____________________________:

Your child has been invited to join the DAMS Lunch Bunch! This is an exciting opportunity to help improve the academic and behavioral success of students in the 5th and 6th grades in a supportive, small group setting. The groups are part of a research project for graduate studies conducted by Angela Poster, 5th grade teacher on the Sapphire team. Here are some details on the Lunch Bunch:

- 5th grade girls will meet on Tuesdays, 6th grade girls will meet on Thursdays
- 5th grade boys will meet on Wednesdays, 6th grade boys will meet on Mondays
- All groups will meet in room 601 in the Packer Pod
- Students will not miss any academic courses to participate in group
- The group will meet for the span of 9 weeks, starting in October and ending in December
- Weekly topics will include things like locker organization, friendships, assignment notebooks, studying, stress management, communication skills, and team building
- Groups will be led and supervised by:
  - 6th grade: Mrs. Hahn (Guidance Counselor) and Mrs. Poster (5th Grade Teacher)
  - 5th grade: Mrs. Broom (Guidance Counselor) and Mrs. Poster (5th Grade Teacher)

After participation in the Lunch Bunch, students will be asked to fill out a simple survey rating their experience and the effectiveness of the programming. Homeroom teachers of students will also fill out a survey giving feedback on the program. The data collected from these surveys will only be used for a research paper written by Mrs. Poster as part of her graduate studies obtaining a Masters of Education through the University of Wisconsin - Whitewater and to improve the school experience of 5th and 6th graders at DAMS. All participants will be kept completely anonymous.

Please let us know if you do not want your child’s information to be part of the study. Questions or concerns can be directed to Mrs. Poster or:

Melissa Freiberg
Capstone Project Advisor
(262) 472-1190

Denise Ehlen
Director of Research, University of Wisconsin – Whitewater
(262) 472-5212

Thank you for your support!

Sincerely,

Angela Poster
5th Grade Teacher – Sapphire Team
(608) 842-6105
Aposter@deforestschools.org
**Student Referral for Lunch Bunch**

**Student’s Name:** __________________________

**Date:** __________________________

**Referred by:** __________________________

☐ 5th grade  ☐ 6th grade

**Please keep this material confidential**

**Areas of Concern:** Please check all that apply

**ACADEMIC**
- ☐ Has late or missing work despite capability
- ☐ Does not make up work after absences
- ☐ Has difficulty with transitions
- ☐ Does not work well without one on one help and monitoring
- ☐ Has difficulty on tests
- ☐ Poor quality of classroom work
- ☐ Literacy deficits
- ☐ Numeracy deficits
- ☐ Has trouble meeting long term project deadlines
- ☐ Absences hinder academic progress
- ☐ Brought up at STAT
- ☐ Lacking organization in daily materials and/or locker
- ☐ Does not use planner
- ☐ Does not come prepared to class

**BEHAVIORAL**
- ☐ Lacks motivation, apathetic
- ☐ Negative attitude toward school
- ☐ Immature compared to peers
- ☐ Has difficulty making and keeping friends
- ☐ Has difficulty cooperating and communicating with peers
- ☐ Struggles to control inappropriate behaviors and/or language
- ☐ Shows signs of anger, loneliness, and/or depression
- ☐ Exhibits signs of low self-esteem
- ☐ Seeks out attention during inappropriate times
- ☐ Struggles to maintain attention during class
- ☐ Does not accept responsibility for actions
- ☐ Has been referred to the office for behavioral concerns

**In your opinion, what seems to be interfering with this student’s learning?**

**Do you think this student would benefit from positive mentoring? Why?**
Lunch Bunch Survey!

Did you enjoy participating in the Lunch Bunch?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I loved it!</th>
<th>It was ok</th>
<th>I didn't like it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How much do you think the lunch bunch helped with the following things...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>It helped a lot...</th>
<th>It helped some...</th>
<th>It didn't help at all...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using my assignment notebook</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping my locker clean</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying for tests</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making new friends</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making good choices</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting goals for myself</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling part of DAMS</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having someone to talk to</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What was the best thing about being in lunch bunch?

What was the worst thing about being in lunch bunch?

What could make lunch bunch better?
Lunch Bunch Student Benefit Survey

Student’s Name: ___________________________

Date: ___________________________ Referred by: ___________________________

☐ 5th grade ☐ 6th grade

Please give us your feedback as to any perceived benefits from this student’s participation in the Lunch Bunch intervention group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As a result of the Lunch Bunch, I feel this student’s: (please check category that applies)</th>
<th>Have improved</th>
<th>Have stayed the same</th>
<th>Have worsened</th>
<th>No opinion or observation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absences/Tardies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grades</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Peer relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Behavior during class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Behavior outside of class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connection to DAMS</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Do you think the Lunch Bunch was effective in helping this student become more successful academically?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Please explain your answer:

Do you think the Lunch Bunch was effective in helping this student become more successful behaviorally?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Please explain your answer: