Students Taking Action and Reaching Success (STARS)

Improving Academic and Social Success Among Forsyth County Youth

August 2013

A CCS Publications White Paper

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About the Center for Community Safety

The Center for Community Safety (CCS) is a multidisciplinary, research and public service center at Winston-Salem State University (WSSU) that has been nationally recognized as a model for the mutual beneficial exchange of college and university knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity to address critical societal issues and contribute to the public.  
(www.centerforcommunitysafety.org).

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Center for Community Safety, the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County school system, and all of the families of the youth for their support.
Forward

The inaugural CCS Publications White Paper was commissioned to follow the path that was identified as a priority for our Center in 2011 when the following statement was shared with our community partners and supporters:

“We (the CCS) need to provide the types of interventions that get at the root causes of problems if we are to stop the cycle of issues that continue to keep our adolescents from realizing their full potential. Too often, well-intended programs have been implemented without having any reliable proof of what contributions they can make towards the outcomes that are being sought. As resources are becoming increasingly more difficult to obtain, it is imperative that we begin to rely upon data-driven collaborative research and analysis to ensure that we have the problem-solving actions in place that address the issues we have and the outcomes we desire.”

Later that year, the STARS strategy emerged as an innovative approach that “shifted the paradigm away from a single program focus to a broader city, state and national strategy. The STARS strategy was predicated on participation from multiple sectors to cultivate a systems approach for implementing evidenced-based prevention initiatives that would precede the need for criminal justice intervention. Nearly two years later, we are able to deliver promising results and evidence of what we believed the STARS strategy could achieve. At that time, our belief in STARS we described this way:

“We believe (STARS) is an effective strategy and practice for enabling youth, schools, parents and communities to work collaboratively to improve academic performance, higher self-esteem and greater application of pro-social leadership skills by middle school youth. This will be a particularly effective practice for poor and minority youth at risk of being lost to low academic achievement or increased delinquent or unhealthy behaviors due to high risk factors brought on by the lack of family and community support.”

As additional schools choose to implement STARS, it is my hope that the promising results presented in this white paper will generate participation and support from the entire community. Achieving this will ensure that the results at the end of this year will again demonstrate that with STARS, our students, schools, and community future is bright.

Alvin Atkinson
Executive Director
The Center for Community Safety
Executive Summary

Low academic achievement among North Carolina’s youth is a crisis that must be addressed. It inhibits a youth’s ability to complete high school, access higher education, and contribute to an advancing workforce. Youth who are not academically and socially engaged in the school context are more likely to be retained, engage in truant behavior, drop out, and become involved in the criminal justice system (Cameron, 2006; Carpenter & Ramirez, 2007; Hatt, 2011; Hemphill et al., 2006; Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006). During the 2011–2012 academic term, the percentage of youth (in the third through eighth grades) in Forsyth County schools meeting state standards in math and reading was 63.3% lower than the state average, 67.5%. Unfortunately, the issue of low academic achievement is more prevalent among minority and economically disadvantaged youth. Lower rates of proficiency on statewide end-of-grade (EOG) tests are common among Black (45.9%), Hispanic (45.8%), and Pacific Island (33.3%) youth in comparison to White youth (82.5%); proficiency rates for economically disadvantage youth (46.8%) are markedly lower than the district and state averages. Clearly, these figures highlight the need to develop interventions that improve academic achievement.

Schools play an important role in youth development and promoting positive psychosocial adjustment and resilience (Morrison & Allen, 2007; Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2000). Therefore, identifying ways for youth to remain engaged in school promotes positive relationships among youth, their peers, and adults and improves academic achievement. Schools can serve as conduits that engage community organizations, families, and other institutions in addressing the needs of youth. Consequently, STARS emerged as a partnership between the Center for Community Safety (CCS) at Winston-Salem State University and the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County school system. The partnership reflects the Center’s vision to build “communities where all people are safe to live, learn, work and play.” The main mission of STARS is to engage youth and schools in promoting academic success, school engagement, and high school completion.

CCS collected preliminary data from youth participants during the 2012–2013 academic term. Report cards, attendance records, and student surveys were collected and analyzed to understand how STARS benefits youth. The aim of this paper is to present findings from data collected during the 2012–2013 STARS program. Preliminary findings suggest that:

- STARS benefits youth who are most at risk for academic failure.
- STARS improves achievement motivation in school among youth.
- STARS shifts youth values to focus on improving grades in school.
- STARS promotes leadership and conflict and anger management among youth.
- STARS improves youth perceptions of themselves, esteem, and confidence.
Youth in Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools

The state of North Carolina evaluates K–8 student performance through the EOG test. Recent data suggest that the percentage of Winston-Salem/Forsyth County youth meeting state standards in reading and math is 63.3%, lower than the state average, 67.5%. Of the five largest counties (via population size) in North Carolina, Forsyth County had the lowest percent of youth who met state standards during the 2011–2012 term. Of the 12,467 youth attending middle school in Winston-Salem/Forsyth County schools, racial/ethnic minority youth comprise about 56% of the total student population (Center for Community Safety, 2012). The top three ethnic groups attending middle school were Black (29%), Hispanic (21%), and White (44%). Performance data from the statewide EOG indicate clear disparities between youth across these three racial/ethnic groups (Figure 1). There are also clear disparities between youth who are economically disadvantaged and those who are not. On average, youth who are identified as economically disadvantaged score significantly lower on the EOG (46.7%) in comparison to youth who are not (84.6%).

Youth who experience academic failure may begin to exhibit other kinds of negative behavior (e.g., substance abuse, disruption, negative self-esteem) and disengage from school (Cameron, 2006; Carpenter & Ramirez, 2007; Hatt, 2011; Hemphill et al., 2006; Krezmien et al., 2006). Research continues to demonstrate that youth who experience academic failure are more likely to engage in truant behavior, drop out, and enter the juvenile justice system (Brown, 2007; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Hatt, 2011; Kim, 2009). Consequently, one can hypothesize that in Forsyth County, there is a relationship between academic failure and other negative school outcomes. Black and Hispanic youth comprise about 61% of students who drop out in Forsyth County (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2012). There is a need to identify interventions that address the academic needs of all youth; more importantly, interventions that address both academic and

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1 NC Department of Public Instruction, ABCs of Public Education, 2011–2012 Report
psychosocial skills promote positive youth outcomes and successful trajectories from school to the workforce.

**STARS Program Framework**

Students Taking Action and Reaching Success (STARS) was developed as a school-based crime and delinquency prevention program supported by funding from the North Carolina Governor’s Crime Commission. The program specifically targets youth at the middle school level (between 11 and 14 years old) and is based on a positive youth development framework. Positive youth development focuses on protective factors that promote competence and well-being and frames intervention and prevention across multiple settings.

STARS is an intentional school-based intervention designed to build upon the *assets* and *strengths* of youth and assist with defining goals, completing school, and developing a plan for the future. STARS promotes positive connections and relationships among youth, their peers, and adults. Furthermore, STARS represents collaboration between community partners (e.g., mentors and parents) and schools to promote the success of all youth in Forsyth County. Success is achieved by promoting the value of education, positive self-esteem, social competency, and conflict resolution strategies among youth. STARS employs the Pittman et al. (2003) 5Cs model to emphasize the strength and capacity of youth to thrive in their family and communities (Figure 2). The STARS approach is outlined in Table 1, and the objectives are as follows:

- **To increase academic achievement, as measured by GPA**
- **To increase school attendance and involvement**
- **To improve citizenship and accountability among youth participants**
- **To identify and develop post–high school pathways for youth participants**
- **To provide a structured support system that integrates schools, community partners, and parents**

STARS brings parents and teachers together to assist in completing a risk assessment and collecting baseline academic data on youth. The risk assessment survey provides insight into
youth behavior at home, at school, in the community, and among peers. Additionally, youth complete a measure to assess psychosocial domains (e.g., self-esteem, emotional regulation, and efficacy), 21st-century learning, and academic skills (e.g., career planning and readiness, study habits, time management, and public speaking). The program meets during the school day (as an elective) for 40-minute sessions once a week. Each session is designed to address the 5Cs and facilitate student-driven activities, such as identifying individual strengths, values, and career planning.

Table 1.
STARS Framework for Positive Youth Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asset</th>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>STARS Approach</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competence</strong></td>
<td>Social Competence • Improve interpersonal skills, communication, and conflict resolution skills.</td>
<td><strong>Behavioral Modification</strong> • Work with parents to improve parental/guardian relationships.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cognitive Competence • Improve problem-solving, decision-making and goal-setting skills.</td>
<td>• Work with guidance counselors to improve behavior in school.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic Competence • Improve school grades, attendance, test scores, and graduation rates.</td>
<td>• Employ youth-driven and modeled activities that focus on anger management and conflict resolution.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Vocational Competence • Improve work habits and career choice exploration.</td>
<td>• Identify student strengths through affirming and positive language.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Confidence</strong></td>
<td>• Improve self-efficacy, identity, and belief in attaining future goals.</td>
<td><strong>Social/Emotional Development</strong> • Employ youth-driven activities (i.e., description wheel, my values) that focus on esteem-building, efficacy, and helping others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connections</strong></td>
<td>• Improve youth relationships with peers, adults, and institutions.</td>
<td><strong>Academic Achievement</strong> • Provide structured activities that emphasize improved study habits and relationships with teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Character</strong></td>
<td>• Improve respect for self and others. • Improve youth accountability. • Increase youth citizenship.</td>
<td><strong>Empowerment in 21st-Century Skills</strong> • Provide structured activities that increase entrepreneurship awareness, college, and vocational school planning.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Caring</strong></td>
<td>• Improve youth empathy and support of others.</td>
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</table>
Target Youth Population

It is the intentions of STARS to serve all youth in Forsyth County; however, targeted efforts among racially/ethnically diverse middle school youth have positioned the program at the transition point between childhood and older adolescence. STARS is designed to serve youth from diverse academic profiles, such that youth who are the most at risk for academic failure have the opportunity to interact with those who are not. CCS implemented STARS in 3 of the 16 middle schools in the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County school system: Flat Rock Middle School, Hanes Middle School, and Philo Hill Magnet Academy. The school profiles are provided in Figures 4–6. Two of the schools, Flat Rock and Philo Hill, are designated as Title 1 schools and have over 50% minority enrollment (non-White students). Hanes Middle School is the only school that had a higher number of students who scored above the county’s average on the EOG in math and reading across all three ethnic groups, White (>95%), Black (49.3%), and Hispanic (56.1%).

Flat Rock Middle School

Total Student Population = 879
% Free/Reduced Lunch = 72.0%

% Enrollment, Race/Ethnicity

% At or Above Grade Level (Math & Reading), By Ethnicity & Socioeconomic Status

*ED = Economically Disadvantaged; NED = Not Economically Disadvantaged

Figure 4. Flat Rock Middle School profile (student population and performance on EOG)
**Figure 5.** Hanes Middle School profile (student population and performance on EOG)

**Figure 6.** Philo Hill Magnet Academy profile (student population and performance on EOG)
Data Collection and Analysis

To align data collection with program outcomes, CCS identified measures and activities used during the 2012 – 2013 academic term to support the logic model outlined in Figure 7.

![Logic Model Diagram]

**Figure 7. STARS outcome assessment logic model**

**Youth Participants.** The program began in October 2012 and ended in June 2013. STARS staff worked closely with school administrators to identify youth participants and solicit parental involvement. A total of 240 youth attended the first orientation: 48% Black, 32% Hispanic, 18% White, and 2% Asian or Native American/Pacific Islander. Of these participants, 68% were female and 32% male; 36% were in sixth grade, 29% percent were in seventh grade, and 35% were in eighth grade. At the end of the second quarter, a total of 206 youth had been served. The program had 185 youth participants who completed the entire year, about 10% of the youth did not remain in the program. All youth participants were administered a risk assessment survey and completed consent forms.

**Description of Measures**

- **Academic Achievement.** To assess academic achievement, report cards were collected on youth participants at baseline (October 2012) and across the remaining three marking periods. A GPA (4.0 scale) was calculated using participant performance in core classes (language arts, math, science, and social studies). Elective courses such as physical education and art were not included.

- **Attendance.** To assess attendance, cumulative absences were recorded from the second to the fourth quarter, using youth participant report cards. Second-quarter attendance was
subtracted from fourth-quarter attendance to assess changes across grade level and school.

- **Description Wheel.** The description wheel is an instrument developed by staff in STARS. The instrument requires youth to write the words “I am . . .” in the middle and identify eight characteristics that describe them. The instrument was administered in the beginning and end of the program.

- **Rank Your Values.** The Rank Your Values instrument was developed by STARS staff. The instrument requires youth to rank their values on a scale from 1–10 (lowest to highest), from *getting along with parents* to *knowing about my culture*. The instrument was administered at the beginning and at the end of the program.

- **STARS Student Survey.** The survey was developed to assess how the program helped youth and youth perceptions of the overall program. Participants were asked questions ranging from *In what ways has this class/program most helped you?* to *In what ways have you changed for the better?*

- **School Achievement Motivation Scale (SAMS).** This scale (Chiu, 1997) is designed to assess the achievement motivation of students in their classroom. The scale consists of 15 items that describe behavioral characteristic believed to be related to academic achievement and motivation. The characteristics include persistence, overcoming obstacles, maintaining high standards, accomplishing something difficult, responding positively to competition, and being able to take the risk of failure. Statements on the scale range from *This student brings materials related to classroom activities* to *This student does something over and over again to get it right*, using a five-point Likert scale, from 1 = Never to 5 = Always. The scale reports a Cronbach’s alpha of .82 and has been used in elementary and middle schools. The scale was administered to a subsample of core teachers (math and language arts) from Philo Hill Magnet Academy. A retrospective design allowed CCS to assess achievement motivation of youth in their classrooms before and after participation in STARS. A total of 51 (out of 136) were returned, a response rate of 38%. The profile of the teachers was as follows: 71% were White, 29% Black; 61% were female, 39% male; 89% taught math and 11% taught language arts.

**Analysis**

Data were analyzed using quantitative and qualitative methods. Descriptive statistics assessed the demographics of youth participants, average GPA, change in GPAs across three academic quarters, and teacher ratings of student achievement motivation. Inferential statistics were employed to assess mean differences in GPAs and teacher ratings of student achievement motivation and how that varied across school sites. Rank Your Values, the description wheel, and student surveys were collected from individual participants, which allowed CCS to convert some of the qualitative responses into quantitative responses. For example, the CCS team could assess how often youth described the program as *assisting them in anger and conflict*.
management. Participants’ responses to open-ended questions and the description wheel were coded and organized into themes.

### STARS Is Making a Difference

Although our results are preliminary, STARS is making significant strides in meeting its objectives and the needs of youth. Highlights are presented from our findings associated with academic achievement, school involvement and engagement, accountability and citizenship, and psychosocial development.

**Academic Achievement.** A total of 173 youth participants (94% of the total number of youth who completed the program) had GPA data from the first to the fourth quarter. There were several inconsistencies in the data; for example, grades fluctuated up and down across all remaining three quarters. There was a gradual decline in GPAs among all youth who entered the program (from 2.53 to 2.45). However, the GPAs of youth who entered the program with GPAs of less than 2.0 actually increased (Figure 8). Findings suggest that youth who entered the program with a GPA of less than 2.0 significantly increased their GPA from the first (1.24) to the fourth quarter (1.83); youth in this group increased their GPA by about .6 points. This increase in GPA held true across all three sites (Figure 9); however, there was a significant increase in GPA in two schools, Flat Rock and Philo Hill. Flat Rock had the highest increase in GPA from the first (1.37) to the fourth (2.38) quarter.

![GPA comparison from first and fourth quarters between all youth and youth with less than a 2.0](image)
Attendance and School Involvement. To assess attendance among youth participants, CCS relied on cumulative attendance reported from the second to the fourth quarter. A total of 171 youth participants (92% of the total number of youth who completed the program) had attendance data from this time period. To assess improvement in attendance, second-quarter attendance was subtracted from fourth-quarter attendance. For example, the second-quarter report card for student A might list 10 absences and the fourth-quarter report card 15 absences, which would indicate that between the end of the second quarter and the end of the fourth quarter, student A missed five additional days of school. After subtracting attendance, students were placed into four groups: 1 = 0–4 days absent, 2 = 5–10 days absent, 3 = 11–15 days absent, 4 = more than 15 days. From midyear to the fourth quarter, 14% of youth participants had 0 absences; 52% had between 1 and 5 absences; 15% had between 6 and 10 absences; and 15% were absent for more than 10 days (4% did not have fourth-quarter attendance data).

A critical group would be participants who had missed more than 10 days at midyear. According to the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County school system, students who have 10 unexcused absences a year violate the Compulsory Attendance Law; our assumption is that these students may be
more at risk for academic failure. At midyear 33% of youth participants had missed more than 10 days of school; 50% of those youth had missed more than 15 days. By the end of the year (fourth quarter), almost half of the youth (40%) who missed more than 10 days at midyear had less than 5 additional days absent. This suggests that almost half of the youth who may have exhibited attendance issues at midyear either missed no additional days or fewer than 5 by the end of the year. The data indicate that youth with a GPA of less than 2.0 had the greatest number of absences at the end of the school year; of those, 56% were absent more than 10 days. Although additional information is needed to accurately assess improvements in attendance, the results suggest the need for targeted efforts to address attendance among youth participants.

School involvement can be defined and measured by the level at which youth are “actively engaged in school activities and perceive a sense of belonging or commitment to school” (Daly, Buchanan, Dasch, Elchen, & Lenhard, 2010). School involvement was assessed in two ways: items from the SAMS and coded open-ended responses from Rank Your Values and the student survey. Findings suggest that there was a significant increase in achievement motivation from before (47.4) to after (50.7) involvement in STARS (Figure 10). More specifically, teachers at Philo Hill indicated that youth participants were more motivated to achieve in school after participating in STARS.

To further assess the school involvement outcome, CCS examined four items from the SAMS that uniquely measured teacher perception of student motivation in the classroom and on tasks; Table 2 outlines results from the scale at the pre (before STARS) to post (after STARS) level across the four items.

![Figure 10. Pre and post ratings on the Student Achievement Motivation Scale (SAMS; Daly et al., 2010)](image-url)
### Table 2.
Student Achievement Motivation Scale, Selected Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SAMS Item</th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th></th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Item 1. This student chooses to work above and beyond what is expected.</strong></td>
<td>Pre-STARS</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-STARS</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>p &lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Item 7. This student asks questions to better understand materials being studied to aid in problem solving.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-STARS</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-STARS</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>p &lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Item 10. This student participates in class discussion or activities.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-STARS</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-STARS</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>p &lt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Item 14. This student shows enthusiasm toward class.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-STARS</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-STARS</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>p &lt; .05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Youth participants were administered the Rank Your Values assessment midyear and at the conclusion of the academic year. A total of 99 youth participants (54% of total number of youth participants) completed the midterm and end-of-year assessments; the midterm assessment indicated that youth across all three schools ranked *getting along with parents* as the highest value (mean = 53%). However, at the end of the year there was a shift in what participants ranked as the most valuable in two schools. Flat Rock Middle School and Philo Hill Magnet Academy students ranked *getting good grades* as the highest value (mean = 29%), followed by *getting along with parents* (mean = 25%).

Responses were coded from the STARS student survey question, *In what way has the STARS program most helped you?* Although 6% of participants specifically mentioned “school” in their response, a number of participants did indicate how the program improved their decision making and goal setting (6%), getting along with peers (11%), and behavior (25%). Given that the program exists within the school setting, it is possible that many of these behaviors manifested back in the classroom and interactions with peers and teachers. Highlighted responses are given below:

“*[STARS] helped in being good in school, [and] don’t fight...hang around the wrong friends*” (seventh grader, Hanes Middle School)

“*[STARS] helped in trying harder in my school work and with my self-esteem*” (eighth grader, Hanes Middle School)

“*[STARS] helped me make my goals for myself and push myself to work harder in school*” (seventh grader, Flat Rock Middle School)
Accountability and Citizenship. There are a number of ways to approach the assessment of citizenship and accountability; however, within this paper, concepts are framed within the context of how youth participants described their shift in values, perceptions of themselves, and relationship with their community. Accountability is primarily concerned with youth’s taking responsibility for their actions and maintaining ties to support and help their peers, family, and other adults. Citizenship can be assessed in two ways: civic participation and engagement. Civic participation and engagement can be defined as the relationships youth have in their community and how these relationships manifest in meaningful connections and commitment toward improving the community (Zaff et al., 2011). Although there were no direct measures of these concepts, CCS used data from the STARS student survey to explore changes in youth perceptions of themselves, values, and relationships with peers, family, and community. Table 3 lists the emergent concepts and associated response.

Table 3.
Emergent Themes Associated with Accountability and Citizenship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helping People</td>
<td>This was defined as how participants described their desire to assist others (i.e., adults or peers) when faced with challenges or problems.</td>
<td>“Not being a bystander [and] argue against bullying” (sixth grader, Flat Rock Middle School)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for Elders</td>
<td>This was defined as how participants described having respect for adults and honoring their elders in the community.</td>
<td>“Helped me be more nice to people and respect my elders” (sixth grader, Philo Hill Magnet Academy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving as a Leader</td>
<td>This was defined as how participants described the influence of the program in improving their perceptions of themselves as leaders or taking action within their community.</td>
<td>“To be more responsible and become a better leader” (seventh grader, Hanes Middle School)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Psychosocial Development. Psychosocial development is defined as individual assets (e.g., efficacy, confidence, self-esteem, and anger management) youth need to transition from adolescence into adulthood. In the description wheel and STARS student survey, a number of patterns emerged, such as improvements in self-esteem and confidence. Table 4 identifies four emergent themes associated with psychosocial development.
Table 4.
Emergent Themes Associated with Psychosocial Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>This was defined as how the program helped youth in improving their self-worth and value.</td>
<td>“Helped in trying harder in my school work and with my self-esteem” (eighth grader, Hanes Middle School)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger/Conflict Management</td>
<td>This was defined as how the program helped youth in reducing their participation in fights and control anger. This was the most frequent response (42%). A ratio of 11:26 (including all grades).</td>
<td>“It helped me to calm down my temper, helped me think before I start yelling and screaming . . .” (eighth grader, Philo Hill Magnet Academy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>This was defined as how the program improved youth perceptions of their abilities and confidence.</td>
<td>“It has helped me be more confident and more outgoing when I meet new people” (eighth grader, Flat Rock Middle School)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved Communication</td>
<td>This was defined as how the program improved youth’s ability to articulate their strengths, ideas, and beliefs to others.</td>
<td>“It has helped me speak up for what I believe in and learn to think before I speak” (seventh grader, Flat Rock Middle School)</td>
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Next Step for STARS

Given the performance rates on the statewide EOG, suspension rates, and dropout rates in North Carolina, there remains a need to identify programs and school-based services that promote academic achievement and positive development among youth. STARS is making strides toward meeting those needs and serving youth in Winston-Salem/Forsyth County schools. Of the 99 students surveyed at the end of the year, 94% indicated they would recommend the program to others. Additionally, school administrators and teachers value the program and its significance in the lives of youth. As one teacher stated:
“I definitely see an impact not just in my classroom but in the halls and when I have a moment to observe [the youth] and see what they are doing. . . . It is a fantastic program, and I am happy to have them in my classroom.”

Although these findings are preliminary, they highlight the possible impact of STARS on academic achievement, school engagement, and psychosocial development among Forsyth County youth. From the perspective of youth participants, STARS is making a difference in how they view themselves, their school, and their community. As one youth stated, “I now know what I am capable of becoming.” If youth are able to believe in their potential and improve the needed skills associated with confidence, competence, and character, they develop the capacity to take charge of their lives and become more engaged in problem solving in their school and community. Moreover, achievement, engagement, and improving the psychosocial skills youth need to navigate through a critical period of life—adolescence—are essential in promoting a successful trajectory into adulthood, higher education, and the workforce.

The success of STARS relies on youth and partnerships that bring parents and schools together. STARS has emerged as a community–school intervention model and will continue its efforts in addressing the mission of CCS and promoting the well-being of all citizens—most importantly youth. CCS has received funding from the K. B. Reynolds Foundation to implement STARS in two additional middle schools in the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County school system. CCS understands that if STARS is to be established as a best practice model, more rigorous steps are needed to accurately assess the program’s framework, theory, and outcomes. As the program moves into its second year, CCS is revamping its efforts to include more intensive academic assistance (tutoring) for youth, collaborate with Community in Schools, and expand its data collection efforts.
Works Cited


