

The Influence of *The Leader In Me* Program within a Middle School in Virginia

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## ABSTRACT

Character education has increased over the past years to build student character in such a way that students are more successful and teachers spend maximal time for classroom instruction as well as minimal time with behavioral concerns. If a student experiences positive character traits and practices success in earlier grades, then it is logical to assume that the positive habits he or she establishes will transfer into the upper grades. However, very few studies have determined whether positive habits established in early grades will continue to bring success in subsequent grades.

The purpose of this study was to examine the success of students in subsequent years after they were taught character traits and 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills in elementary school using *The Leader in Me* program. Previous research indicates a lack of studies that measure results after students leave the program setting. The main question for this study was the following: Do middle school students who have received instruction in *The Leader in Me* program for two years during elementary school show more improvement on selected measures of student behavior and academics than students who have not received such instruction?

In order to determine the success of the program, the researcher reviewed discipline referrals, attendance records, and cumulative grade point averages (GPA) for reading and math students in grades six and seven. Independent samples *t*-tests were performed on the data sets to find relationships between the treatment population who had received *The Leader In Me* instruction for two or more years during elementary school and the control population who had not received any instruction in *The Leader in Me* during elementary school. Descriptive statistics showed fewer discipline referrals for the treatment group, but the numbers were not statistically significant. The results of the study showed a significant difference in attendance between the two groups. The students who had been instructed in *The Leader in Me* missed *significantly* fewer days than those who had not been instructed. Reading and math GPA did not show a significant difference for either group.

Overall, the program could be useful in helping with attendance and discipline in future grades. Other research possibilities include increasing the grade levels or the number of variables studied.

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## **GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT**

Character education has increased over the past years to build student character in such a way that students are more successful and teachers spend maximal time for classroom instruction as well as minimal time with behavioral concerns. If a student experiences positive character traits and practices success in earlier grades, then it is logical to assume that the positive habits he or she establishes will transfer into the upper grades.

The purpose of this study was to examine the success of students after they were taught character traits in elementary school using *The Leader in Me* program. Previous research indicates a lack of studies that measure results after students leave the program setting. The research sought to understand if students who have received instruction in *The Leader in Me* program for two years during elementary school would show more improvement in behavior, attendance, and academics than students who did not receive the instruction.

In order to determine whether the program was successful, the researcher reviewed discipline referrals, attendance records, and cumulative grade point averages (GPA) for Reading and Math students in grades six and seven. A comparison was made to find relationships between student who had received *The Leader In Me* instruction for two or more years during elementary school and students who had not received any instruction in *The Leader in Me* during elementary school. The results of the study showed a significant difference in attendance between the two groups. The students who had been instructed in *The Leader in Me* missed significantly fewer days than those who had not been instructed. The study did not show significant differences for discipline referrals or grades.

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## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my family. I send thanks to my loving husband, Hayden Newell, who became accustomed to seeing a book or a keyboard in my hand most evenings and weekends, and encouraged me from the moment I voiced the idea to embark this venture. I am very grateful for my children, Beth Ann, Christopher, Elizabeth, George, and Shannon, who constantly echoed positive words and celebrated small accomplishments toward the final goal. My siblings, Wayne, Angie, Donnie, and Susan have always inspired every step of my journey. Lastly, I am humbly grateful to my loving parents, Orville and Phyllis Bower, who have believed in me from birth, encouraged me to do my best in everything, and loved me unconditionally throughout life.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Character education has increased over the past years to build student character in such a way that students are more successful and teachers spend maximal time for classroom instructional and minimal time with behavioral concerns and discipline office referrals. Time spent addressing behavioral and social problems impacts time spent on quality academic learning. Skills that can be taught to build character include initiative, responsibility, organization, teamwork, problem-solving expertise, speaking ability, and respect. Positive character traits promote proper ideas, attitudes, thinking, decision-making, and behaviors toward others (Brackett & Simmons, 2015).

National and state legislators have mandated character education and recognized the importance of building positive character in public education (United States Department of Education [USDOE], 2015; Virginia Department of Education [VDOE], 2015). Legislation passed by the 1999 General Assembly (§22.1-208.01) requires local school boards to establish a character education program in its schools, the aim of which is to improve the learning environment, promote student achievement, reduce disciplinary problems, and develop civic-minded students of high character. The VDOE offers lesson plans, sample programs, and other resources to help schools plan and implement character education (VDOE, 2014). The federal and state departments of education have not appropriated specific funds to help local schools develop comprehensive character education programs. However, federal, state, and local lawmakers, as well as politicians, recognize the importance of character education in schools.

Regardless of specific funding practices or legislation, educators have focused on character education as a way to increase student achievement and success. According to *Education Week's* survey on social and emotional learning, teachers and school administrators reported strongly agreeing that teaching social and emotional skills to students is an effective way to reduce discipline problems while improving school climate and student achievement (Education Week Research Center, 2015). Educators have accepted the responsibility to teach character skills even though national data does not measure them.

The need for a shared common vision, support, and communication is key to success in any educational organization. Individual schools have planned and implemented their own school-wide character-building and discipline programs to help children become more successful. The goal is for the whole school to work together to improve student character and interpersonal skills. When students achieve positive character traits and practice success in earlier grades, then it is logical to assume that the positive habits they establish will continue. However, very few studies have determined whether positive habits established in early grades will transfer to other settings. The purpose of this study was to examine the success of students in subsequent years after they were taught strong character traits and 21st-century skills in elementary school using *The Leader in Me* program.

### **Description of *The Leader in Me* Program**

One program that seeks to build 21st-century skills is *The Leader in Me*, where a ubiquitous leadership theme is infused throughout the school in every aspect of academic lessons, character development, and school climate. In order for schools to measure comprehensive outcomes, many aspects of student responses – including academics, behavior, and attendance – give information that can be analyzed for success. *The Leader in Me* was developed and funded precisely to address problems related to children with weak 21st-century skills often sought by companies and corporations. The program infuses *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* into the daily practices of school life based on the idea that every child can become a leader. It involves a whole-school transformation process that empowers students to develop their own habits of leadership (Covey, Covey, Summers, & Hatch, 2014).

The seven habits are universal and timeless principles that enable both young students and professionals to work effectively and efficiently. The first three habits enable persons to make strong independent choices: *Be Proactive*, *Begin with the End in Mind*, and *Put First Things First* (Covey et al., 2014). These three habits allow students to develop specific 21st-century skills of initiative, responsibility, self-confidence, time management, goal setting, integrity, organization, and planning. The next three habits build skills of interdependence and allow persons to learn and interact with others successfully: *Think Win Win*, *Seek First to Understand and then to be Understood*, and *Synergize* (Covey et al., 2014). When these three habits are practiced, students develop specific 21st-century skills of teamwork, conflict

management, problem solving, creativity, speaking, listening, and analyzing. The seventh habit, *Sharpen the Saw*, enables participants to build habits for physical fitness, hygiene, emotional stability, and meaningful work.

Instead of believing only a few people are gifted, educators that endorse *The Leader in Me* understand everyone has the potential to be a leader. The curriculum serves the whole child and encourages each person to become a leader within his or her school or community. *The Leader in Me* activities allow students to experience leadership responsibilities where their opinions, strengths, and voices are recognized and valued (Covey et al., 2014). A six-year study, funded by the Wallace Foundation, revealed positive outcomes from shared leadership (Covey et al., 2014). As students experience leadership opportunities and a common language is developed, a school's physical and emotional state becomes sharpened into a positive environment where students and teachers work together to meet common goals.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Limited research is available on the effectiveness of ubiquitous school-wide programs and the ability of students to maintain positive outcomes in later years as a result. While studies have previously been conducted on outcomes that measure *The Leader in Me* within various schools, researchers have not measured results after students leave the environment (Anderson, 2011; Ciurus Major, 2008; Hawkins, 2003; Muskett, 2008; Stella, 2013; Velez, 2012; Wilkens, 2013). Pluska (2014) studied possible benefits of a school-wide character program after implementation in elementary years, and measured student outcomes during high school years. She suggested future research designed to measure subsequent results with a smaller time interval between initial implementation and the study. Students in her research experienced a behavior intervention plan in fourth through seventh grades, and she measured possible results when those students were in eleventh and twelfth grades. Initially, an educator's goal focuses on immediate results. Ultimately, expectations include long-term gains for students to be successful in subsequent settings, including future schools and employment.

### **Research Question**

Positive school-wide character education programs that build 21st-century skills in students have shown positive results, including decreased discipline referrals and higher

academic achievement during the time the school implemented the program (Person, Moiduddin, Hague-Angus, & Malone, 2009). Previous research indicates a lack of studies that measure results after students leave the setting where implementation occurred. The main question for this study was the following: Do middle school students who have received instruction in *The Leader in Me* program for two years during elementary school show more improvement on selected measures of student behavior and academics than students who have not received such instruction? The sub-research question for this study was the following: Do middle school students who have received instruction in *The Leader in Me* program for two years in elementary school have fewer disciplinary incidents, higher attendance rates, or higher GPA scores in reading and math than students who have not received such instruction?

### **Significance**

A study that shows positive influence on student ability to transfer positive outcomes into subsequent settings could enable educators and school boards to make informed decisions about whether to invest in specific programs for other elementary schools in their district. Additionally, Fortune 500 companies seek to employ persons that are fully immersed in 21st-century skills of communication, interpersonal relations, time management, critical thinking, decision-making, creative thinking, teamwork, technology, leadership, stress management, problem solving, and customer focus (Stultz, Shumack, & Fulton-Calkins, 2013). Schools educate their students with an ultimate goal of equipping them with skills that will help them succeed in the future.

The researcher analyzed disciplinary referrals, attendance rates, and GPA scores from students who were instructed in *The Leader in Me* program and those who were not. With the findings from the study, school administrators and school boards can determine whether an investment in *The Leader in Me* program may enable educators to teach positive skills that transfer into another setting. As schools continue to become highly accountable for academic gains with less financial support, educators and policymakers seek to ensure their investments – of both time and money – show positive results. This study evaluated the influence of *The Leader in Me* program after students leave the setting where they experienced the habits. However, finding a positive influence does not specifically imply causation due to multiple factors that are present in a student's educational experience.

## Description of Terms

1. *The Leader in Me Program*: For the purposes of this study, *The Leader in Me* referred to the program designed by Covey where a ubiquitous leadership theme infuses into academic lessons and school climate. *The Leader in Me* directly teaches *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* and offers opportunities for every child to become a leader.
2. *21st-Century Skills*: Twenty-first century skills were specifically defined as skills of initiative, responsibility, self-confidence, time management, goal setting, integrity, organization, interdependence, collaboration, conflict management, problem-solving, creativity, speaking, listening, and analyzing.
3. *Discipline Referrals*: For the purposes of this study, discipline referrals were documented as student infractions occurring during the school day that resulted in an official referral form sent to the office for administrative action. The discipline referrals were coded according to Virginia Discipline codes (VDOE, 2016), and subsequent consequences were given to the student for the infraction that occurred. Discipline referrals came from incidents that were violations of the school's conduct code. Discipline referrals included the total number of written incidents sent to the office for each student at the end of the 2015-16 school year.
4. *Attendance Rates*: For the purposes of this study, calculations for attendance rates compared a ratio of first day of school to last day of school, as documented in PowerSchool software for each student at the end of the 2015-16 school year.
5. *Cumulative GPA*: For the purposes of this study, cumulative grade point average included the final reading and math score at the end of the 2015-16 school year.
6. *Character education*: For the purposes of this study, character education is an educational movement that supports the social, emotional, and ethical development of students. The definition includes the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and abilities that enable the learner to make informed and responsible choices. Character development provides a foundation upon which we can build respect for human dignity and create 21st-century schools that empower students to achieve excellence (VDOE, 2014).

## **Delimitation**

A delimitation of the study was the choice to analyze one specific program from one school division in rural Virginia. The results cannot be generalized to other locations since other programs, counties, states, or countries were not studied. Specific data reviewed included number of discipline referrals, absences, and cumulative reading and math GPA scores in middle school years. With data obtained from the only middle school in Virginia, the results were limited to this geographic region.

## **Limitations**

In this study, several limitations occurred based on showing a relationship between the students who have experienced *The Leader in Me* program in one elementary school and students who have not experienced *The Leader in Me* program in other elementary schools. The first limitation was the demographic differences in the student population. Students were chosen with similar demographics, yet they still varied based on previous school enrollment size and number of students who receive free or reduced-price lunch. The second limitation was the age and maturity level of the students. As students enter middle school, development and social changes naturally occur. Middle school students may change their behavior patterns regardless of their involvement in a program. The third limitation involved the collection of data from only one academic year (2015-2016); data collected over multiple years may establish varied results. Further, the methodology included a random sample of students in the control group, yet used all eligible students in the treatment group. The random sample created two groups equal in size. However, if the research included attendance, behaviors, and grades from every eligible student in the control group, results could have varied. Lastly, the opinions of teachers, administrators, parents, and students were not involved; additional qualitative information could add new ideas and useful information to the study. These factors limited the generalizability of this study.

## **Organization of the Study**

Chapter One consists of an introduction, including a description of *The Leader in Me* program, followed by statement of the problem, purpose, main research question and sub questions, significance, definitions, limitations and delimitations, and concludes with an organization of the study. Chapter Two includes a sequential review of previous *The Leader in*



*Me* studies that describe the development of the program, as well as other studies that address leadership skills and character education in students. Chapter Three explains the methodology that was used, including a description of the population that was examined, how data were obtained, and proposed data analysis procedures. Chapter Four includes research findings and data analysis for discipline, attendance and math and reading GPA scores. Chapter 5 concludes the study with the results, summary of major findings, conclusions, discussions, recommendations for further studies, and implications for practice.

## CHAPTER 2

### A SEQUENTIAL REVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF *THE LEADER IN ME* PROGRAM

#### **Introduction**

This review of studies provides a sequential look at how the TLIM was developed. *The Leader in Me* program evolved over time. The first three studies reported research from three schools before it became an official program (Ciurus Major, 2008; Hawkins, 2003; Muskett, 2008). The following four studies included data from over 100 schools; they were conducted after the program was official (Anderson, 2011; Stella, 2013; Velez, 2012; Wilkens, 2013). Other studies that did not use TLIM were included for specific reasons. One study analyzed the success of leadership skills introduced during a college class and subsequently measured outcomes after students practiced the concepts (Marcketti & Arendt, 2010). Another researcher took a longitudinal approach to analyze student outcomes after educators implemented a program in elementary school and the students moved to high school (Pluska, 2014). This approach was included because previous TLIM studies did not include any analysis of effectiveness after students leave the school where they experienced the leadership principles. Lastly, a meta-analysis was included that reviewed outcomes from over 60 character education programs (Person, Moiduddin, Hague-Angus, and Malone, 2009).

#### **The Inception of *The Leader in Me* Program**

*The Leader in Me* (TLIM) unofficially started in the academic year 1999-2000 when one principal and a small group of teachers wanted to instill life skills including leadership, responsibility, accountability, problem solving, and effective communication in their students. Initially, the leadership of the A. B. Combs Magnet Elementary School in Raleigh, North Carolina, identified *leadership* as their new theme based on teacher and community feedback gathered in an effort to save their failing magnet school (Covey et al., 2014). This school used Steven Covey's book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, and other educational best practices to design and implement a leadership model for their school. Within a few years, A. B. Combs experienced significant and sustainable turnaround. In 2006, and again in 2014, A. B. Combs won the #1 Magnet School in America award. The school experienced international

attention for improved academic achievement, parent and teacher satisfaction, and high levels of student self-confidence. Numerous other schools around the world visited A. B. Combs, replicated their leadership model, and achieved positive improvements.

In 2009, the Franklin Covey Foundation officially launched the TLIM program so that other schools could replicate their successes by creating and sustaining a ubiquitous leadership culture (Fonzi & Ritchie, 2011). The TLIM program provides detailed training for a whole staff on the *7 Habits*, creating positive school culture, aligning academics, and empowering instruction. In addition to the whole-staff training, a small group, called a Lighthouse team, works together to create a vision, develop an annual plan, and train new staff members as they are hired. Lighthouse team members are also taught to conduct *7 Habits of Highly Effective Families* workshops to families of students that attend their school. A coach provides community coaching days where multiple schools collaborate, as well as on-site guidance where each TLIM school receives feedback. Resources are available for the TLIM schools, including classroom posters, student books, teacher guides, and access to multiple online lesson plans and videos. Annual faculty and parent surveys provide information that guides continual updates to TLIM resources and services. Over 3,000 schools across 50 countries adopted the TLIM program since its official launch in 2009. The specific goals of the TLIM program are to teach the *7 Habits* and infuse leadership in every aspect of school life in order to raise student academic achievement, promote racial and socioeconomic diversity, and provide integrated curricula and instruction that align with the leadership vision and mission of each school.

### **Earliest Research Prior to Official Launch of *The Leader In Me* Program: Hawkins**

Since *The Leader in Me* is a relatively new program, current research is still in an early stage. However, multiple studies have been published that measure and evaluate the impact of teaching the *7 Habits* before and after the program's official launch in 2009. Very early in the inception of the TLIM, the first research was a case study that involved a large urban elementary school in the Midwest using a leadership theme for character education instruction (Hawkins, 2003). The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of a school's character education program on the student management system and culture of the school. A premise of the program was the strong belief that children need instruction in the basic values of cooperation, mutual respect, responsibility, and problem-solving skills. The researcher intended to provide new

insights related to character education and its effect on school management and culture. The case study examined a site that had received regional recognition as an exemplary program and had served as a model for other schools. At this stage in development, the title was *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Students* program. In the early stages of the program, the leadership theme infiltrated the classroom instructional practices and sought to infiltrate the culture of the school.

Demographics of the study were a K-5 elementary school located in the large suburb of a major city in the Midwest where the total population was 142,990 in the year 2000. This city experienced rapid growth, affordable housing, and a robust economy. Ten elementary schools, three middle schools, and one high school were represented in the school district, and enrollment was 10,445 students with 48.3% Caucasian, 29.4% Hispanic, 20.3% African American, and 1.8% Asian/Pacific Islander. Population trends revealed a steady increase in the Hispanic population. Student performance in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies for the previous three years was slightly below the state average. Nelson School, one of the ten elementary schools, developed and implemented this character program due to a high number of office referrals and aggressive student behavior.

The two research questions in this qualitative study were, “What are the influences of the character education program on the culture of the school?” and “What are the influences of the character education program on the student management system of the school?” The case study hypothesis stated the character education program of the school would define specific details that identify ways a group of people can design a solution to a particular problem. Initially, the study began as a criterion-based selection where the researcher established in advance a set of criteria or a list of attributes that the units of study must possess.

In order to study the goal of the program to infuse a leadership theme throughout varied facets of the school, the researcher studied various publications, interviews, and observations that took place throughout the school. Data included primary sources, including school publications, field notes from site observations and focus group interviews, as well as formal and informal observations. Three formal observations lasted one hour. Thirty informal observations took place in classrooms, hallways, and the cafeteria; at bus stops; and on the playground. Additionally, observations of school-wide celebrations and student assemblies added to the information. The researcher conducted focus group interviews with parents and teachers who volunteered to participate, randomly selected students, and two building principals. The sixty-minute focus

group interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Concepts and emergent themes created categories that included physical characteristics of the building, school culture, student behavior, values, and language. Values identified included mutual respect, the importance of relationships, and responsibility for one's own actions. Basic assumptions included a belief in the goodness of children, habits that empower students and teachers, and a supportive environment for children.

The new school culture derived from *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Students* program was described in detail. Analysis of the data revealed that after the students in the study were taught the *7 Habits*, they were more truthful, cooperative, and empowered to solve problems. The common language used in the program influenced the overall culture in many ways: students in the school were more kind to each other, did not lose their temper, and refrained from put-downs and sarcasm.

This research contributed to the knowledge base of character education and provided a checklist for subsequent leadership schools. Specific findings in this study created a guide that led to further development of the TLIM program. Many schools used the findings in this study to develop school-wide leadership themes and design specific practices to improve character development and school culture. Future researchers included a component of school-wide culture as they measured the success of the TLIM program in other schools (Anderson, 2011; Ciurus Major, 2008; Muskett, 2008; Velez, 2012).

### **Comparison and Contrast of Two Early Studies: Ciurus Major and Muskett**

One year before the TLIM program was officially launched, two research studies recorded growth with the practice of teaching the *7 Habits* to young children (Ciurus Major, 2008; Muskett, 2008). Both studies included a mixed-methods approach involving data from students, teachers, and parents that sought to measure social skills and use of the *7 Habits*. Both studies indicated that student feedback demonstrated a high level of application, while teacher and parent data indicated a lack of observable evidence for all habits. The researchers both supported continued use of TLIM, and suggested increased hands-on instruction of the deeper principles related to TLIM. Ciurus Major (2008) completed a mixed-method study that focused on a K-8 independent school in the Midwest, while Muskett (2008) completed a study that included only a middle school special education population. However, both researchers outlined specific information and data for developing the program in more detail. The following year,

when the program launched officially, it included specific instructions for integrating the themes in the *7 Habits* during classroom instruction (Covey et al., 2014).

The research questions in both studies were similar. Ciurus Major (2008) identified his main question:

To what extent does Armitage Academy, a K-8 elementary school, incorporate Covey's *7 Habits* as defined by the program evaluation goals? The school articulated four specific questions related to their goals: Do the students understand the *7 Habits*? To what extent are the *7 Habits* used? What are the perceptions of teachers, students, and parents regarding the *7 Habits*? What are suggestions for improvement for the implementation of the *7 Habits*? (p. 33)

In Muskett's (2008) research, he identified one main question:

Will students with emotional and behavioral disorders increase their use of social skills after they receive instruction of the *7 Habits*? (p. 67)

The hypothesis was that given social skills training incorporating a cognitive and behavioral approach within a framework of the *7 Habits*, elementary students with emotional and behavioral disorders would show an increase in positive social skills. The goal for students with emotional and behavioral disorders was self-control of behavior so that individuals could accurately interpret social cues, manage emotions and external stimuli, manage their own social and academic problems, and reach personal goals (Muskett, 2008).

Located in southeastern Wisconsin, the school in the Ciurus Major study (2008) included kindergarten through eighth grade enrollment with 127 students, including 59 boys and 68 girls. The core subjects provided in their education program were language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, and French. Students also took classes in art, music, drama, creative movement, swim, and physical education. Full-time faculty included both the head and the assistant head of school, a business manager, an admissions officer, 14 teachers, and a teacher's aide. Part-time positions were a curriculum coordinator, an after-school care coordinator, and a marketing manager. Eighty-four families participated. The employees and students integrated the *7 Habits* into the curriculum as included in the admission's literature where the character education program of the school was outlined.

The mixed-method research used surveys from students, parents, and faculty; observations from students; focus group data from students and faculty; and document analyses. The survey instrument specifically addressed the following question: “Do the students have knowledge of the *7 Habits*?” The evaluator developed the survey at focus group meetings attended by four teachers that represented different grade levels. It used an open-ended question design because the students were used to writing and did not typically take multiple-choice tests. Researchers converted open-ended responses to a 4-point Likert scale that reflected their level of understanding for each habit. Two teachers and the evaluator rated each answer separately. If a discrepancy occurred, the evaluator recorded the lower number. A second survey was used to determine the level of students’ application of the *7 Habits*. The final survey used an open-ended format to ask parents two questions regarding their perceptions about specific use of the *7 Habits* and general impressions of the program. Students and teachers created five randomly chosen focus groups. The agenda included an overview of the topic, ground rules for participation, five specific discussion questions, and final comments. The researcher recorded and transcribed all focus group discussions. A total of 55 non-interactive observations were completed by the evaluator in first through seventh grades. Raw data from the observations were organized, coded, and synthesized. The fourth category of data collection was document content analyses that included a detailed systematic examination of the contents for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes, or biases.

Students completed a knowledge survey, with all students answering every question. Reports included results for each habit and each grade level. The seventh-grade students understood five of the seven habits best. The first grade students always scored the lowest mean for understanding on the knowledge survey for each of the *7 Habits*. Third grade had a higher mean than any grade except seventh for the habit *Be Proactive* and the highest mean score schoolwide for an understanding of the habit *Synergize*. Fourth, fifth, and sixth graders best understood the concepts of the habits *Put First Things First* and *Think Win Win*. As a school, students showed that they understood the concept of *Put First Things First* the best with a mean score of 3.36. The next habits best understood were *Synergize* and *Think Win Win* with means of 2.99 and 2.93 respectively.

The concept least understood school wide was *Sharpen the Saw*. In the document review, one significant piece of qualitative data was the importance of the school using common

language throughout the organization. Lesson integration of the *7 Habits* happened most often in social studies classrooms. Based on student surveys designed to measure students' application of the *7 Habits* in their own lives, the habit that scored the highest was *Synergize*. The next highest reported application was *Sharpen the Saw*. The habit *Begin with the End in Mind* scored the lowest reported mean on the application survey. During classroom observations, the highest mean data observed was in the habit *Sharpen the Saw*. The evaluator noted times when students were reading for pleasure, playing games with others, and socializing, which were all coded as renewing one's physical, mental, and social states of mind. Parents perceived their children used the habits *Be Proactive* and *Think Win Win* more than the other habits. The focus groups generally concentrated on how students treat each other, referring to *Seek First to Understand* as being the habit used the most. Students also discussed their ability to *Put First Things First* by doing homework before going outside to play or using video games. Social skills showed great improvement across multiple grade levels.

Results overall showed that students' understanding of the habits depended on their grade level; however, student application of the habits demonstrated a high level of use from the student survey. Parent surveys, observations, and focus group discussions revealed that not all the habits are observable, but for the most part, students were using them. One of the most frequent suggestions for improvement at this school included learning the *7 Habits* through more engaging activities such as drama. Parents suggested getting the students involved in the teaching of the *Habits*, and the seventh-grade focus group mentioned that the principles were more important than the catchy phrases. The school could have used the findings to design more hands-on instruction of the deeper principles related to living the *7 Habits*. The results supported the continued use of the *7 Habits* instruction.

The strong character associated with the *7 Habits* may provide students with skills needed later in either the workplace or community. The qualities employers seek most often are taught in the *7 Habits* instruction. There was anecdotal evidence that teaching of the *7 Habits* is a factor that helped parents choose the school. One implication of the study for school leaders was to provide support and regular staff development for teaching the *7 Habits* beyond the initial stages. It was recommended that the teachers develop a stronger understanding of the *7 Habits* during family liaison opportunities such as newsletter development and in-person opportunities.



An additional recommendation from the study was for the school educators to keep students actively involved in an ongoing program evaluation process. Student-led conferences and academic goals were integral parts of helping the students accept personal responsibility for their learning. With increased student input, the program would be more likely to develop successfully. The study was limited because it took place for a short period in one specific region during the third year the school was in operation. Since the data were specific to one rural school in Wisconsin, generalization cannot include other schools. Additionally, the data were collected in the third year of implementation of the *7 Habits*, so the findings in the study may not be applicable to schools who have incorporated the *7 Habits* for longer or shorter periods of time. The data, collected in a six-month period, used a longitudinal design that may produce varied results. Lastly, lack of responses on the parent survey limited parent input, which could have led to bias and inaccuracy (Ciurus Major, 2008). These first two TLIM studies noted that parental feedback was not congruent with schoolteacher and administrator responses, showing that parent involvement lacks consistency (Ciurus Major, 2008; Muskett, 2008). The official launch of the TLIM program in 2009 included parent training materials and a requirement for each school to teach the *7 Habits* of highly effective families at parent meetings (Covey et al., 2014).

Muskett's (2008) study added a unique component to the body of research because it involved students with disabilities. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of social skills training incorporating the *7 Habits* on elementary students with disabilities. Specifically, the study was designed to determine whether incorporating cognitive behavioral training with the framework of the *7 Habits* into an existing social skills curriculum would increase social skills for students with identified emotional and behavioral disorders. The population involved students who lived in a small town in eastern Wisconsin with a population of 34,000 people. The sample included four specific groups of students with disabilities, based on their grade level and daily schedule, with two to five students each. Enrollment in the school district was 5,397 students among six elementary schools. The specific school for this study had 430 students; 60% of the students were eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. Seventeen percent qualified for special education. Students identified as emotionally and behaviorally disabled provided the convenience sample because they were available to the researcher. This group represented three percent of the students in the school.

Parents, teachers, and students rated their social skills by at the beginning and end of the study. Pretests and posttests were taken by students, parents, and teachers to determine the effectiveness of teaching social skills using the framework of the *7 Habits*. Single-subject research design is common in both behavioral analysis studies and with special education students, and this method is useful when a researcher wants to know the effects of manipulating an independent variable such as social skills instruction on the behavior of students. Initially, there was a baseline period of two months before the six-month intervention period, and the single variable was social skills instruction. The multiple baseline design incorporated single subject research because of the small sample size of ten students. After the two-month baseline period, the pretests were completed and group one began the intervention. After four more weeks, group two began the intervention. After another four weeks, groups three and four began the intervention. Each group completed the posttests when the intervention was finished. The study included all of the students in the emotional and behavioral program receiving the social skills intervention while controlling for variables over time.

Students,' teachers,' and parents' rating scale results were incongruent. Student scores indicated they had increased their social skills both at home and school. Additionally, students with the larger social skill deficits showed better progress. In contrast, parents rated their children as having decreased their social skills in only one area. Teacher ratings varied, but showed an overall decrease in social skills. Teachers noted that although their students were more able to work with groups, they were not showing increased personal social skills on an individual basis. Parents in this study rated their children as having acquired an average of 1.78 more social skills than were initially listed as acquisition deficits. Teachers rated the students in the study as having decreased an average of 2.82 social skills over what they had originally listed. While students, teachers, and parents noted some increases for specific habits, student scores showed the highest gain.

Specific methodology and intervention times enabled the data to be measured and analyzed with a small group size. The Social Skills Rating Scale, designed by Gresham and Elliott in 1990, was the specific instrument implemented in the study. The multiple baseline design allowed for the elimination of a control group. This was important due to the small subject size. In the multiple baseline design, data were collected for all subjects prior to the intervention, which was then applied at a different time for each group. The method of

intervention was cognitive behavioral within the framework of the *7 Habits* (Covey, 2004) combined with the behavioral approach of social skills. The students rated themselves as having increased in their use of habits 1, 2, 5, and 6, which are *Be Proactive*, *Begin with the End in Mind*, *Seek First to Understand*, and *Synergize* respectively. Parents rated the students as having increased in their use of habit 2, *Begin with the End in Mind*. Teachers rated the students as having increased in their use of habit 6, *Synergize*. While student, teacher, and parent ratings varied, students noticed the most growth in multiple areas, and parents and teachers scored growth in only one specific area.

Limitations in this study included the possibility that since the students, parents, and teachers all took the pretests and posttests, there was a chance the pretests could have affected the behavior of the students by informing them of expected behaviors prior to the intervention. Additionally, the specific instrument was meant for overall social skills and did not include explicit aspects of the *7 Habits*. This study was limited to one school with a very small population. Further, one person was the sole instructor, and this person wrote the curriculum, so researcher bias could be a factor. It is possible that the students had a tendency to perform better after the pretests since they knew they were participants in an experiment that involved their instructor.

While these initial studies have focused mostly on teaching the *7 Habits* to children, they built a foundation for the official launch of the TLIM. The comprehensive program includes more than simply teaching the habits within the classroom. Added components allow the leadership theme to become a school-wide culture. For example, TLIM schools establish official leadership roles and guide students to write mission statements that outline their main beliefs. Further, classrooms work together to create a mission statement that sets the objective of the class culture and classroom interactions. *The Leader in Me* schools organize students' opportunities to evaluate their academic performance. Students write individualized academic and personal goals, plan action steps, and track them routinely to measure the acquisition of the goal. These schools infuse the language and practices of the *7 Habits* in academic lessons. For example, a social studies teacher who is discussing the Civil War may ask students to identify leadership characteristics of Lee, Grant, or Lincoln. Reading teachers may analyze the way characters practice the habits of *Think Win Win* or *Synergize* in the story plot. The official TLIM

program carries the practices beyond teaching the *7 Habits*; instead, it gives students varied opportunities throughout the day to practice and infuse them into daily life.

These two studies contributed to the development of the program by concluding that direct classroom instruction during the day regarding the *7 Habits*, as well as parent trainings in both written form and after school venues, is important. These outcomes guided other schools to more success in the future. These studies included pre- and post-tests taken by teachers and parents that included factors about classroom instruction and parent involvement.

#### **Four Unique Studies after the Program is Official: Anderson, Stella, Velez, and Wilkens**

These four studies, while conducted by different researchers from four different states, all include aspects of student social and emotional development. In addition to school-wide culture, classroom instruction, and parent education highlighted by the previous researchers, these studies delve deeper into character development of students to include communication, collaboration, and personal goal setting. These four researchers all discuss the importance of professional development and teaching the program with fidelity. The instruments used to gather data in these studies are not specifically designed for TLIM instruction and do not include language to measure the *7 habits* specifically, so such an instrument could be developed in future research. Two of the four researchers measured academic success by examining grades, and both found statistically significant improvement in grades while the students were still in attendance where the leadership instruction occurred (Stella, 2013; Wilkens, 2013). The findings of all four researchers substantiated that *The Leader in Me* program recognized success in various areas, and conclusions included recommendations to continue the use of the program (Anderson, 2011; Stella, 2013; Velez, 2012; Wilkens, 2013).

In the first study after the official launch of the TLIM program, a study of 36 pre-kindergarten students in an urban public school evaluated the effectiveness of the TLIM process (Anderson, 2011). The purpose of the research was to contribute additional knowledge about preschool children's social leadership skills. The study analyzed whether the implementation of formal leadership lessons strengthened positive social leadership skills in preschool-age children. Additional findings revealed relationships among formal leadership lessons, gender, and age. The study included four research questions:

Will the implementation of formal leadership lessons in a pre-kindergarten classroom strengthen the emergence of positive social-leadership skills of pre-kindergarten children compared to students who do not receive formal leadership lessons? Will certain lessons have more of an impact, if any, on the emergence of specific positive social leadership skills? Will the leadership skills of boys be greater compared with those of the girls? Will the leadership skills of students be greater based on age? (Anderson, 2011, p. 4)

The researcher compared social leadership skills with regard to gender and age for students enrolled in the full-day NYC Department of Education pre-kindergarten program. Each classroom, with 18 randomly assigned students of mixed gender, in a school that was using the TLIM participated. The program enrollment included 44.5% males and 55.5% females. Student demographics were 30.4% White, 1.0% American Indian/Alaskan Native, 26.1% Black/African American, 26.4% Latino, and 6.0% Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. The poverty rate at this school was 40%. Numeric codes assigned to classrooms and students throughout the study protected the identity of all participants.

Teachers rated students for positive social-leadership skills using the Social/Emotional subsection of The Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum before and after formal lessons about leadership. One classroom served as a control group and did not receive any formal leadership lessons. The other classroom acted as an experimental group and received seven weeks of formal leadership lessons, focused on the TLIM principles. Formal leadership classes consisted of five different lessons related to each habit; each lesson included 15-20 minutes of direct instruction followed by an age-appropriate activity about the corresponding leadership habit. Data were analyzed using a one-way ANOVA to determine whether the observed difference on the mean standardized gains from pre-assessment to post assessment were significantly larger than any difference that would be expected by chance. A one-way analysis of variance determined whether a significant difference existed between the mean scores of the class that received formal lessons and the class that did not. An ANOVA test examined the effects of gender and age on the leadership skills of the students.

Significantly higher scores for social-leadership skills were obtained for *The Leader in Me* group than for those students who had not received such lessons. Students exposed to formal leadership lessons exhibited an overall average of 35% increase in all positive social-leadership skills, while the students who did not receive formal lessons had an overall average increase of

8%. The experimental class had a greater percentage of gains in scores than the control class. The researcher found no significant differences due to gender or age.

This study did not address any possible cultural differences in interdependent skills. Cultural background checks may have been helpful while the researcher interpreted results. Teachers collected data; this method may have introduced bias. Further, this study was conducted on a TLIM school; results could be different if the same study were conducted on a school that does not use the *7 Habits* in their daily culture. The instrument, not specifically designed to measure leadership skills, may lead to inaccurate data. In order to collect clear and purposeful data, researchers need an instrument designed for this purpose.

Additional studies included a sample population from only one school. Velez (2012) continued to research the use of the TLIM program, designed to build leadership and 21st-century skills at one charter middle school. In this study, *21st-century skills*, defined as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, innovation, and advanced technology skills, guided the research question:

What are the programs and practices at the school, and how are they aligned to 21st-century skills? What is the professional community at the school, and how does it support these practices? What is the perceived impact of 21st-century skills on the culture of the school? (Velez, 2012, p. 8)

This study included a sample population from a private charter middle school in southern California: Saint Andrews Charter Middle School. The school was in its third year of operation. A mixed-method approach for data gathering and analysis yielded information. Initially, one quantitative tool, a survey instrument, guided the researchers as to whom and what to observe. The survey questions were generated using 21st-century themes that most commonly appeared in the TLIM literature. The entire staff completed the survey during a staff meeting without the presence of the administrators. It included 28 questions, rated on a four-point Likert scale, regarding instruction and pedagogy, the professional community, and school culture. Subsequently, the qualitative descriptive research methodology included document reviews, direct observations in the school, and open-ended interviews. The documents provided both qualitative and quantitative information that can allow other educational institutions to help students thrive in school and be successful in both school and work environments. This study

measured, analyzed, and determined the manner in which the school implemented 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills to prepare students to become global citizens.

A nine-person dissertation team created all the research tools. A variety of observations occurred during the school day, including those focused on common spaces, hallways, classroom instruction, professional development, and staff meetings. The vision and mission statements, accreditation reports, professional development plans, curriculum plans, instructional strategies in lesson plans, extracurricular activities, and academic tests were reviewed in the areas of leadership, collaboration, culture, and climate. Lastly, the researcher conducted ten interviews, lasting 45-60 minutes each, with teachers who volunteered to participate.

According to research findings, the major themes that led to successful acquisition of 21st-century skills were clear articulation of the vision; strong teacher development; a curriculum that presents collaboration, communication, leadership, innovation, and accountability; a firm belief in using data to improve school culture and pedagogy; and a culture that is reflective and works toward the school mission. The research confirmed the faculty and administration at Saint Andrew's School embedded 21st-century programs and practices in core instruction. The observations documented that posters of the *7 Habits* were visible in every classroom. Further, during the interviews, evidence documented that stakeholders used the common language on a regular basis. Students used scholarly language as they substantiated their opinions, used specific evidence from texts, and referred to previous knowledge.

Parents of students in varied academic levels discussed their satisfaction with the school and noticed their child's ability to embed the language, including the *7 Habits*, in conversations. Researchers reviewed results and recognized the skills mastered included the ability to improve areas where students identified specific goals. The school provided teachers with strong professional development that prepared and supported their yearly growth. However, the school culture did not exemplify 21st-century skills 100% of the time. Even though scholarly behavior was expected at all times, the students experienced some discipline problems that hindered learning. Researchers noted an incongruence between the ability of students to use the 21st-century language and their ability to understand what the language means related to how they are supposed to act. Even though the school implemented positive research-based practices, the results indicated that administration solely implemented decision-making. This suggests that even though the school placed great effort on improving the culture, the stakeholders, including

students, were not involved in making decisions regarding school practices. This conflicted with the basic principle that leaders make decisions that lead to their own success. While multiple positive outcomes involved successes that aligned to the vision for stakeholders, administrators, teachers, and students, a shared leadership could have improved behavior outcomes in students.

This study gave insight into the successful practices of a charter school where the programs support the acquisition of 21st-century skills. Strong structures include a clear articulation of the vision, a strong teacher development program, and a positive culture. These programs and practices were effective at improving student achievement. A compelling conclusion highlighted the importance of continually training teachers for practices of collaboration, communication, higher order thinking skills, and cross-curricular knowledge. Strong professional development, teacher collaboration, and reflective practices outlined important practices for all schools. Increased academic achievement and collaboration among administrators, teachers, students, and parents were strengths noted in the study.

Geography, time, and quantity limited this study because it encompassed only one southern California charter school. The time of study was limited to three months. Interviews were limited to one hour, and this was not sufficient to listen fully to each thought and concern of every staff member. Only staff members who volunteered participated in the initial survey. Only parents and other community members who volunteered were involved. More time would have allowed a greater sample size or more input from stakeholders outside the school (Velez, 2012).

Other researchers followed Velez' study, and they also included a detailed analysis of one school using the TLIM program. Stella (2013) identified an elementary school in rural western North Carolina with issues regarding student motivation, homework completion, inappropriate language, and classroom focus. Prior to beginning *The Leader in Me* training and school-wide initiatives, staff members and students responded to a five-point Likert survey instrument. The program concentrated on changing culture and teaching leadership skills to young people. After implementation, the researcher reviewed and compared responses from a state-generated Working Conditions Survey.

The purpose of the study was to analyze the effect of the TLIM program in one school in North Carolina. The school goal was to produce positive outcomes in school atmosphere and student performance. The research questions included:



What internal issues influenced the adoption of TLIM at this school? Were program procedures presented with validity when implementing the program? What were barriers to implementation? How has achievement changed for fourth- and fifth-grade students in math and reading since the implementation of *The Leader In Me*? What was the impact of the school culture for students and staff? (Stella, 2013, p. 20)

The population included one school in a district with 26 schools in North Carolina. The demographics included 81% White, 6% African American, 4% Hispanic, and 9% Other (chosen by family to identify their race). Sixty-two percent of the student population received free and reduced-price lunches, and eleven percent were special education students. The school served 740 preschool through fifth grade students. The principal had worked with the school for eight years. Prior to TLIM implementation, the school improvement team was unsure how to increase student participation, motivation, completion of homework, and classroom focus. Participants in the study included fourth- and fifth-grade teachers and students who had been using TLIM since its publication in 2009, totaling ten teachers: five in fourth grade and five in fifth grade.

A combination of qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed using various instruments including survey responses from teachers and students, focus group discussions, and test data from the North Carolina School Report Card and Annual Yearly Progress data. One instrument used was the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, an anonymous online survey that provided data specifically stating that teachers believed their students struggled in the areas of responsibility, time management, self-discipline, conflict management, and communication.

The study began with observations of the school using the school improvement plan, after-school clubs, classroom participation, demographic data, staff development logs, School Report Cards, school website, district web site, and the district policy manual. The researcher developed two Likert survey instruments, one for teachers and one for students. This study was limited because it took place over a brief period in one location; therefore, it would be hard to generalize the results to other schools. Further, the researcher was the principal of the school, which could affect information given during interviews. Although limitations were present, a plethora of data analyzed the outcome of fourth- and fifth-grade students.

The following themes emerged during data analysis: responsibility, empathetic listening, personal goals, communication, team solutions, and mutual understanding. The surveys given

before and after two years of implementation showed an increase in students' self-management, resulting in less student conflict. For example, for the statement "Students at this school follow rules of conduct" (p. 92), 84% agreed in 2010 and 94% agreed in 2012. Barriers that hindered implementation were communication, staff buy-in, and the need to involve parents more (Stella, 2013). Fourth-grade scores in both reading and math improved from 2010 to 2012; a 10% growth occurred in reading, and a 3% increase occurred in math. Teachers reported a gain from 86% to 92% when asked if the school was a good place to work and learn. The researcher stated additional themes that emerged to show growth during focus group interviews were climate, relationships, and common language. The primary strengths mentioned by teachers in the focus groups included improvements in morale, problem solving, leadership qualities, and student behaviors. In conclusion, themes that emerged from the interviews were improvements in reading and math, problem solving, communication, responsibility, and self-awareness (Stella, 2013).

Wilkins' (2013) study is significant in the review of literature because it encompasses multiple TLIM schools to investigate patterns and outcomes that are common in leadership-themed character education. This study in Texas included 120 public schools and compared fifth-grade students who received training in TLIM schools to students who did not receive training in TLIM schools. The study found importance in implementing the program with fidelity. The purpose of Wilkins' research was to compare the impact of TLIM from multiple schools in a learning community and its correlation to academic and behavioral outcomes. Specifically, Wilkins examined *The Leader in Me* and its relationship to academic achievement and disciplinary placements in fifth-grade students. Wilkins stated three specific research questions:

Is there a statistically significant difference between schools that use TLIM and those that do not in English Language Arts (ELA)? Is there a statistically significant difference between schools that use TLIM and those that do not in math? Is there a statistically significant difference between schools that use TLIM and those that do not in disciplinary placements? (Wilkins, 2013, p. 53)

A state standardized test measured academic standards. The research sought to determine whether students in TLIM schools would have higher scores in reading and math and a lower number of disciplinary placements than students in schools not using the TLIM program.

At the time of the study there were 1,200 schools in the United States that used *The Leader in Me* model. Data were collected from a random sample of 112 Texas schools that had used the TLIM model for one or more years. The schools in this study included both elementary and middle public and charter schools that served fifth-grade students. The researcher chose a random sample of Texas public and charter schools with matching demographics that serve fifth-grade students and did not use TLIM for character development. The quantitative data were analyzed in a comparative design model to explain cause-and-effect relationships. The quantitative method used data from academics and discipline that had already occurred and did not manipulate variables.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) compared the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) data. A one-way, between-groups ANOVA provided data to analyze whether there was a significant difference between schools that used TLIM and schools that did not use TLIM for character development. A separate one-way ANOVA provided data on each dependent variable (discipline referrals, achievement scores in English/language arts and math). The reports and data analysis included whole-school data instead of data representing individual teachers or students. Descriptive statistics gave information for each dependent variable: student achievement in English/ language arts, math, and student discipline referrals. Means and standard deviation data were calculated for each dependent variable. The independent variable was one of the two-implementation types (schools that used TLIM and schools that did not use TLIM). A one-way, between-groups ANOVA tested whether a significant difference existed between the groups; a separate ANOVA was conducted for each dependent variable. Wilkens did not find a significant difference in fifth-grade scores for English/language arts, math, or discipline referrals between TLIM schools and schools that did not use TLIM.

The researcher decided to do further analysis and revise the research questions to identify TLIM schools in Texas that attained Lighthouse status, meaning the schools implemented all components of TLIM according to guidelines and documented effective evidence of full and accurate implementation. Based on these statistics, there were statistically significant differences

in both English/language arts and math achievement scores for fifth-grade students at TLIM Lighthouse schools compared to students in schools that did not use TLIM. This study provided results that suggested TLIM alone does not influence student achievement scores and discipline referrals; however, effective implementation of the program with fidelity can affect academic outcomes. These findings provided insight into the importance of implementation with fidelity. Proper implementation is the key to the success of any academic or character program in schools.

School location, age of students, and curriculum implementation strategies limited the study. Limitations occurred when the researcher chose to review data from only fifth-grade students; the study could have included other grade levels. Further, since individual student achievement was not included in the study, it was not possible to correlate individual results with participation in TLIM. This study included several campuses, so discussion regarding the specific curriculum in each school did not occur. Curriculum variances could also explain differences in student achievement among several schools. At the beginning of TLIM implementation, training for all staff occurred every three months; however, after the first year, seasoned faculty trained new hires. This could have hindered fidelity to the program (Wilkins, 2013).

### **A Study about Teaching Leadership Skills to College-Age Students: Marcketti and Arendt**

Various TLIM programs noted a significant increase in both problem solving and social skills among children (Anderson, 2011; Cirus Major, 2008; Hawkins, 2003; Muskett, 2008; Stella, 2013; Velez, 2012). However, in addition to analyzing the impact of the TLIM schools, it is helpful to investigate other programs designed to build leadership skills in students. Marcketti and Arendt (2010) examined leadership practice scores and leadership behaviors of college-level students before and after participation in a leadership management course. The study showed leadership scores significantly increased after the leadership instruction. Reflections from students demonstrated a significant understanding of effective leadership behaviors and learning. While this study did not use TLIM materials, it did implement direct instruction of leadership skills with the purpose of measuring the outcome for students. The purpose of the study was to examine leadership practice scores and leadership behaviors of students before and after participation in an event management course.

The research question investigated whether college students enrolled in an event management course increased leadership practices. The study used an instrument that was originally developed by Kouzes and Posner (2002) when they completed over 2,500 manager case studies and stated the instrument was a good predictor of leadership behavior and effectiveness. The tool, *Leadership Practices Inventory*, targeted student behaviors in five categories: modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, encouraging the heart, challenging the process, and enabling others to act (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). The study assessed the leadership practices of 184 students enrolled in three semesters of an event management course at a university in the Midwestern USA. All students enrolled in three semesters of the course participated in the survey, with no extra credit or compensation provided. All participants were college students aged from 18-23 years with 94% between the ages of 19 and 23. The majority of the students were female. Grade point averages of the students ranged from 1.6 to 4.0, with the average GPA being 3.28.

The students took the same survey as a pre-test and a post-test. Additionally, they created a reflective report that detailed their own assessment of themselves during the event management course. The researchers worked together to compare, discuss, and finalize the placement of the themes that emerged from the survey into five leadership practice areas. The class met for two hours weekly with an additional two to five hours on a specific committee to plan and implement an annual fashion show that routinely filled a 2,200-seat university auditorium. Teachers guided students in a discussion of the hallmarks of effective collaboration as they worked to plan and lead a real event.

Quantitative results on paired *t* tests showed the mean scores increased significantly for all practice areas between pretests and posttests. The largest increase was noted in the *enabling others to act* category. There were statistically significant differences across all practice areas. Using the qualitative results from the student reflections, the researchers were able to make notations from concrete examples. Students mentioned the importance of modeling positive behavior and keeping focused on priorities. Quantitative and qualitative results showed increases in leadership skills for the college students. Marcketti and Arendt (2010) noted one specific student comment that evolved into an important theme of acquired leadership skills:

I tried to stay positive even if I was not feeling it so the class would stay motivated to complete the goals. I also tried to stay motivated when talking to people outside of the

class. I did not want to give anybody the impression that it would be anything but the best. By treating each other with utmost respect and by constantly encouraging each other, we were able to work together successfully. (p.183)

These students expressed leadership skills in their commitment to maintaining personal enthusiasm, having an optimistic outlook, and treating others well because they realized their behaviors influenced others. Results from this study suggested that leadership development increased because of participation in the event management course. In the study, scores increased in all areas: modeling the way, inspiring a vision, encouraging the heart, challenging the process, and enabling others to act.

This study only included college students enrolled in an event management course at one university; therefore, results are not generalizable to all students. Because the reflective comments were not anonymous, students may have completed written statements that were all positive reflections rather than an objective analysis of their learning and their actual behaviors. While this study did not implement TLIM curriculum, results suggested that event management courses positively influenced leadership behaviors. In the future, offering a larger selection of event venues with a variety of academic disciplines may provide more students with specific experiences needed for future success (Marcketti & Arendt, 2010). While many studies have been completed using TLIM, previous researchers have not followed students after they leave the TLIM setting to measure success in subsequent years. One TLIM study suggested the possibility for future longitudinal studies (Anderson, 2011).

### **A Longitudinal Study of Character Development: Pluska**

Pluska (2014) completed a longitudinal study to measure the success of a behavioral support program implemented in a rural school in Southwest Virginia. The purpose was to track student data and compare the experimental group to a random sample from the control group who attended the same high school. The main research question was whether high school students who had received the behavior support program for four years showed more improvement on attendance, discipline incidents, and dropout status than students who had not received the specialized instruction. This study adds several unique ideas to the previous body of literature since it analyzes outcomes over time and specifically measures attendance and dropout rates, two components not previously considered while analyzing TLIM programs.

The population consisted of 619 students from grades nine through twelve enrolled during the academic year 2012-2013 at one school serving an entire rural county. The students attended one of four elementary schools that contained pre-kindergarten through seventh grades. One elementary school implemented a behavioral program designed to help their students improve their behavior. The school division's free and reduced-price lunch population increased from 33.82% to 45.94% between 2004-2005 and 2012-2013, showing an increased economic need for students in the research. Seventy-two students were eligible to be included in the study because they received four years of instruction in the program from School A and completed their education with the same school system. The control group consisted of a random selection of students who attended Schools B, C, and D. Students who received the behavioral intervention in elementary school and stayed in the same district until high school were eligible to be included in the experimental group.

The software SPSS was used to analyze the independent samples *t*-tests to compare discipline incidents, attendance records, and drop-out status for students who had instruction in a behavior intervention program and those who did not have exposure to the program. The *t*-test results determined whether there was a statistically significant difference in the means of two groups. There was not a significant difference in attendance for ninth-, tenth-, and eleventh-grade students who were instructed in the program and students who were not; however, there was a significant difference in attendance for twelfth-grade students who were instructed in the program and students who were not. There was not a significant difference in discipline for ninth-, tenth-, eleventh- and twelfth-grade students and students who were not. Likewise, there was not a significant difference in dropout rates for students who received the instruction and students who did not.

Conclusions of this study indicated that, statistically, the program did not show greater success with students in attendance, discipline, or dropout rates. However, descriptive statistics did show fewer days missed and fewer discipline referrals for students in the program. It is possible that attendance, discipline, and drop-out rates were not accurate measures of the results of the instruction; perhaps there are more intangible influences of the program that were difficult to measure.

Limitations in this study included differences in the faculty and staff within schools because only one in four schools used the intervention program and the schools varied in size.

Schools with smaller numbers often helped relationships develop among faculty, staff, and students. Since the study focused on long-term effects measured in students attending the same school, both distance and parental involvement could be factors that affected the outcomes. Since there were several years between behavioral instruction and measuring outcomes, students in eighth and ninth grade could show more success from the program than students in the eleventh and twelfth grades. Further, in the years between elementary and high school, students had more time to mature, and this could have increased the onset of other factors that may have affected attendance, discipline, and dropout rates. A delimitation of the study was the choice to study only one specific county; results may not generalize to other locales or other programs. Additional studies could include variables such as academics to measure success. Pluska (2014) suggested researching one to two years subsequent from the behavior intervention rather than measuring success after four or more years.

### **A Meta-Analysis of Character Education Programs: Person, Moiduddin, Hague-Angus, and Malone**

Person, Moiduddin, Hague-Angus, and Malone (2009) analyzed 36 unique school-based programs in a meta-analysis that reported on multiple character education studies. This research provided a framework for reviewing the measures of individual researchers for use in assessing the effects of a particular character education program. Employees of the Mathematica Policy Research Center for the Institute of Education Sciences working for the U.S. Department of Education completed this research. *Character education programs* include school-based programs whose objective is to improve the character development of students. The purpose of the research was to help researchers identify and select measures for assessing the outcomes of behavior education programs. This report created a resource that can inform measure selection for conducting rigorous and cost-effective studies of character education programs. Research questions included categories for student outcomes, as well as those for teachers, schools, parents, and community. Additionally, 34 of 36 programs measured student affective, behavioral, and cognitive outcomes, including 25 of the 36 programs that addressed cognitive outcomes, and 31 of the 36 that addressed behavioral outcomes. The outcomes measured most often were academic content, prosocial dispositions, and interpersonal competencies. Seven of the 36 programs addressed teacher outcomes, 16 addressed school-level outcomes, and 14 addressed



parent and community-level outcomes. Staff morale, school climate, and parent participation in school were measured most often (Person et al., 2009).

The researchers identified a varied population that included 68 character education programs in the United States, and they randomly selected 36 for review. The programs varied by source, grade level, and level of implementation: comprehensive or modular. After the 36-program review, including multiple methods and instruments, a classification system divided outcomes. These included direct and indirect assessments, as well as surveys with reports by teachers, parents, and students. Outcomes reported on scales for stand-alone items as well as non-scaled measures, such as attendance and disciplinary infractions. Among the 95 scales that researchers applied in the studies reviewed here, 46 represented the study under review, 17 were adapted from existing measures, and 32 were available because they were developed and published through previous research.

The researchers used the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) review of character education interventions as a starting point. *Character education* was defined as programs that purposefully attempt to develop students' character by teaching core values and that have most, if not all, of the lesson plans or prescribed activities directly related to instilling specific values. To incorporate a broader concept of character education, the researchers turned to the *What Works in Character Education Project* (WWCEP), a collaborative research effort by scholars of the Center for Character and Citizenship. Partnerships for Character Education Programs (PCEP), provided a third source of programs considered for this study. PCEP, authorized by the U.S. Department of Education, awards character education grants to state and local education agencies around the country. All programs analyzed measured outcomes, were published in the past 20 years, and appeared in peer-reviewed journals.

Measurements and outcomes for the character education programs were affective, behavioral, and cognitive. Twenty-eight of the 36 programs measured affective outcomes, including attitudes toward school, diversity, empathy, justice, and fairness. Thirty-one programs measured behavioral outcomes, including respect, leadership, communication, coping, healthy lifestyle, kindness, trustworthiness, violence, substance abuse, absences, discipline issues, and crime. Twenty-five programs analyzed cognitive outcomes, including interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge, academic content, critical thinking, and decision-making. Seven programs measured teacher outcomes, including teacher support, values, attendance, and staff

morale. Fourteen programs studied parenting and community-level outcomes, including parenting skills, parent participation in school, parental support, and community climate. Sixteen programs measured school-level outcomes, including school climate, social systems, positive leadership, positive physical environment, and positive academic environment.

The items used most often to measure character outcomes included disciplinary infractions and student grades. Sixteen programs analyzed student-level outcomes. Fourteen programs assessed parent or community-level outcomes, and seven programs assessed teacher or administrator outcomes. These studies provide a framework for categorizing measures used in evaluations of character education programs and a resource for identifying potentially useful existing measures as researchers plan for future studies. The report was limited because it did not represent a comprehensive examination of all outcomes measured in research of all character education programs.

This meta-analysis did not include a study using the TLIM character program. However, the characteristics taught in TLIM programs were all addressed in this study. Future studies of any character education program would benefit from the clear articulation of a formal theory of change linking specific program components to potential key outcomes. In this study, only five of the 36 programs assessed knowledge of program content. If a theory of change for a program is not well developed, classification of outcomes may allow future researchers to work backward from categories developed in this study to identify outcomes they believe are most relevant for a particular program. Future researchers could consider which program components might affect each of the identified outcomes. It also provided multiple data sets and components that would be useful to future researchers interested in character education. This study provided a clear definition of character education and an explanation of the differences between comprehensive and modular character programs. The identification of some misalignment between concepts taught and specific measurements would help future researchers align their factors more accurately. Because this study reviewed 95 various scales to measure the effectiveness of character education, a great knowledge base for future studies was recorded (Person et al., 2009).

### **Synthesis and Conclusions of Leadership Education Outcomes**

Seven researchers previously studied the TLIM program, which included data from 126 schools representing Pre-K through middle school grades (Anderson, 2011; Cirus Major, 2008;

Hawkins, 2003; Muskett, 2008; Stella, 2013; Velez, 2012; Wilkens, 2013). Additionally, one college-level study with similar objectives, to teach leadership skills and measure outcomes, was reviewed (Marcketti & Arendt, 2010). A longitudinal study tracked outcomes in high school after behavior interventions took place in elementary school (Pluska, 2014). A meta-analysis analyzed data from 36 different character education programs (Person et al., 2009). Specific outcomes measured most often in all of the studies reviewed were school culture, social behaviors, and academic achievement.

School culture was the theme researched most often in the TLIM character education studies (Ciurus Major, 2008; Hawkins, 2003; Muskett, 2008; Stella, 2013; Velez, 2012). Hawkins' (2003) qualitative study identified influences of culture in a TLIM school. Various documents, interviews, and observations were analyzed to reveal that instruction of the *7 Habits* led to behaviors that were more truthful and cooperative. The common language used in the program influenced the overall culture in positive ways. Students in the school were more kind to each other and did not lose their temper frequently.

Ciurus Major (2008) completed a mixed-method study that examined the extent the *7 Habits* were used among teachers, students, and parents. Muskett (2008) sought to understand if students with emotional and behavioral disorders would increase their use of social skills throughout the school. One researcher's main question sought to measure the impact of teaching 21st-century skills on the culture of the school (Velez, 2012). In this study, the definition of *21st-century skills* specifically included critical thinking, communication, collaboration, innovation, and advanced technology skills. The entire staff completed the survey regarding the professional community and school culture. The impact of the school culture for students and staff was also the main research question in a study that analyzed themes of responsibility, empathetic listening, personal goals, mutual understanding, communication, and team solutions (Stella, 2013). Staff morale and school climate were measured most often in a meta-analysis that included 36 studies (Person et al., 2009).

Behavioral outcomes were measured in 31 of the 36 programs in the meta-analysis, and these included respect, leadership, communication, coping, healthy lifestyle, kindness, trustworthiness, violence, substance abuse, absences, discipline issues, and crime (Person et al., 2009). One TLIM study measured disciplinary incidents and found a statistically significant difference in fifth-grade discipline referrals between TLIM schools and schools that did not use

TLIM (Wilkins, 2013). A longitudinal study analyzed numbers of disciplinary incidents in high school students after elementary intervention, but did not find a statistically significant difference for students who were participants in a behavior intervention plan during elementary instruction (Pluska, 2014).

Academics was a common means for measuring success of character education programs. In the meta-analysis of 36 character education programs, 34 of the 36 measured student-level outcomes. Of those student outcomes, 25 of the 36 programs analyzed cognitive results. These included interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge, academic content, critical thinking, and decision-making. The item used most often to measure character outcomes was student grades (Person et al., 2009). Two of the seven TLIM researchers measured academic success by examining grades. One researcher found statistically significant improvement in grades while the students were still in attendance where the leadership instruction occurred. Fourth-grade scores in both reading and math improved from 2010 to 2012; a 10% growth occurred in reading, and a 3% increase occurred in math (Stella, 2013). Using the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) data, statistics calculated for student achievement in English/language arts, and math was not initially found to be statistically significant. After the researcher narrowed the data selection to include only schools that had received awards for teaching TLIM with fidelity, both English/language arts and math grades were statistically significant when compared to non-TLIM schools. (Wilkins, 2013).

Only one study measured improvement in attendance, which was found to be a statistically significant factor in the longitudinal study for twelfth-grade students who were participants in a behavior intervention plan during elementary instruction (Pluska, 2014). The meta-analysis reported outcomes for scales of stand-alone items such as attendance in only two of 36 programs (Person et al., 2009). Attendance is a research component often overlooked when analyzing character education programs.

Currently, over 3,000 schools throughout the nation and world have implemented TLIM, a program designed to teach 21st-century skills such as initiative, communication, trustworthiness, and interpersonal skills based on the qualities of leadership. The program has developed across the previous decade from classes that teach children the *7 Habits* to a design that includes integration of the leadership theme in academic subjects and multiple opportunities in the school setting where students practice leadership skills. The comprehensive program may

build habits in children correlated to personal and interpersonal success in future years. In recent studies of character education programs, school culture, student discipline referrals, and academic grades were measured most often to determine success. Additionally, classroom observations, teacher and parent surveys, and interviews were commonly used to analyze student strengths and student abilities to make positive choices. Attendance data was researched the least among the possible factors that may show success after character education instruction. Researchers have also reviewed student leadership roles, student interactions with others, and physical environment to more fully understand the effectiveness of varied character education programs. Most studies analyze character education programs while being administered in a school setting. Few studies have analyzed student behaviors after they leave the specific setting where the character education occurred.

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodology and the population for this research. The study's purpose was to determine whether middle school students who received instruction in *The Leader in Me* (TLIM) program for two years in elementary school would demonstrate more improvement on measures of behavior, attendance, and academics than students who did not receive the TLIM instruction. Improvement was determined by reviewing discipline referrals, attendance records, and cumulative grade point average (GPA) in reading and math. The information was gathered from existing reports that compared grade-level data from previous schools in relation to discipline, attendance, and grades. The chapter is separated into the following sections: introduction, research questions, population, research design, needed data, consent to use the data, data collection, data management, and data analysis.

### **Research Questions**

The main question for this study was the following: Do middle school students who have received instruction in *The Leader in Me* program for two years during elementary school show more improvement on selected measures of student behavior and academics than students who have not received such instruction? The sub-research question for this study was the following: Do middle school students who have received instruction in *The Leader in Me* program for two years in elementary school have fewer disciplinary incidents, higher attendance rates, or higher GPA scores in reading and math than students who have not received such instruction?

### **Population**

Selected student records from one public school division in the state of Virginia provided the data. According to the VDOE website, the school division's free and reduced-price lunch rate was 51.29% with an enrollment of 7,413 students in the 2015-2016 academic year. The study specifically used data from selected students who attended the only middle school in the division. The middle school's free and reduced-price lunch rate was 43.28% with an enrollment of 1,346 students in the academic year 2015-2016. The students enrolled in the middle school previously attended one of twelve elementary schools in the county that served pre-kindergarten

through fifth grades. For this study, data from only four of the twelve schools that feed into the one middle school were included. The four elementary schools were chosen for specific reasons. They are the only four schools in the school division that are not Title I schools, so they have similar free and reduced-price lunch rates. They also have similar student demographics, and they are geographically in the same western section of the county. The population consisted of 371 students from grades six and seven enrolled during the 2015-16 academic year.

One elementary school implemented the TLIM program that was designed to help students learn *7 Habits* that lead to 21st-century skills. The elementary school that utilized the TLIM program was identified as school A. The experimental group in this study consisted of students in grades six and seven who attended elementary school A and completed at least two years of TLIM instruction. According to the VDOE, in school A 42.66% of the students received free and reduced-price lunch, with an enrollment of 293 students in 2015-2016.

The control group consisted of a random sample of students in grades six and seven from elementary schools B, C, and D. In these schools, 42.77%, 39.75%, and 43.48% of the students, received free and reduced-price lunch, and enrollments were 339, 322, and 299 respectively (VDOE, 2016). For the purposes of this study, only students in grades six and seven at the middle school in 2015-2016 who previously attended schools A, B, C, or D were eligible to participate in the study. The middle school serves grades six, seven, and eight; however, eighth-grade students did not participate in the study because they had only completed one year of TLIM instruction. Table 1 shows the number of students in each grade that were eligible to participate in the study.

Table 1

*Number of Eligible Students at Benjamin Franklin Middle School in 2015-2016*

	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
School A	31	40	71
School B	50	50	100
School C	47	47	94
School D	47	34	81
Total Students	176	171	347

*Note.* The numbers represent the students in grades six and seven who previously attended schools A, B, C, and D and were also in attendance at Benjamin Franklin Middle School in 2015-16.

The total number of eligible students from school A, the experimental group, was 71. All eligible students from school A were included in the study. The control group consisted of 71 students randomly chosen from schools B, C, and D. The total number of students eligible from Schools B, C, and D was 275. About 26% of the eligible students in each school were randomly selected in order to use the same total number in the experimental and control groups. School B had 100 eligible students, with 26 chosen randomly. School C had 94 eligible students, with 24 chosen randomly. School D had 82 eligible students, with 21 chosen randomly. Therefore, the experimental group consisted of 71 students from School A, and the control group consisted of 71 students randomly chosen from schools B, C, and D.

### **Research Design**

The research analyzed the effectiveness of a character education program used in one county in Virginia. Quantitative data related to student discipline, attendance rates, and reading and math GPA were studied. The independent samples *t*-test measured differences between the means of discipline incidents, attendance rates, and reading and math GPA scores in school A where the students were instructed in the TLIM and a random sample from schools B, C, and D who did not participate in the TLIM program. The study analyzed the scores from the two conditions to determine whether the data were statistically significant.



## **Data Needed**

Data needed to complete the study consisted of the number of discipline referrals, number of days absent, and cumulative GPA scores in reading and math for the students in the academic year 2015-2016 from schools A, B, C, and D. The data reported did not need any student names, so all information remained anonymous. The data were obtained from a report to the school board, and the document was available to the public. The document was titled “BFMS Discipline, Attendance, and Academic Data.”

## **Consent**

The Franklin County Public School Policies and Regulations (2012) stated consent was not necessary when the research is conducted to compare or show effectiveness of instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods if the data are recorded in a manner such that subjects cannot be identified. Still, the researcher obtained, from the division superintendent, a written form that confirmed permission to begin the study (Appendix B). Because the student data were public domain, student and parent consent were not necessary.

## **Data Gathering**

Data were gathered from a report previously made to the school board, titled “BFMS Discipline, Attendance, and Academic Data.” The purpose of the report was to determine whether possible successful interventions were occurring in any of the elementary schools so they could be replicated. Data gathered consisted of number of discipline referrals, number of days absent, and cumulative reading and math GPA scores of the students for the academic year 2015-2016 from schools A, B, C, and D.

## **Data Management**

All data remained secure on the researcher’s personal computer, protected with a password for entry. Backup of the data occurred on a shared drive that required a login and password before access. Therefore, no data was accessible to others.

## Data Analysis

After the existing data were gathered, they were entered into the computer program IBM SPSS Statistics software application for data disaggregation. The experimental group of this study was from identified students in School A. The control group was randomly selected from the other three elementary schools. Discipline data, attendance data, and cumulative reading and math GPA scores were uploaded to the software. Discipline represented the specific number of incidents that occurred during the 2015-2016 academic year. Attendance represented the specific number of days the students missed during the 2015-2016 academic year. Reading and math included the final GPA from the 2015-2016 academic year calculated on a ten-point scale. For example, a *zero* represented a final grade of 0-59; *one* represented a final score of 60-69; *two* represented a final score of 70-79; *three* represented a final score of 80-89, and *four* represented a final score of 90-100. In order to randomize the student population from schools B, C, and D, the data were filtered by school and the *randomize* feature in the software was used to select student data for the control group. An independent samples *t*-test compared the discipline incidents, the attendance data, and cumulative reading and math GPA scores between students who had instruction in the TLIM program and those that did not to determine if there was a significant statistical difference in the means between the two groups of students. This allowed the dependent variables (discipline, attendance, reading and math GPA) to be tested based on the independent variable (whether the school offered the program or not) to determine statistical significance.

The null hypothesis was that no differences would occur between the two groups of students with reference to discipline, attendance, and reading and math GPA scores. If the data analysis showed otherwise, the null hypothesis would be rejected and the alternative hypothesis would be the middle school students who have received instruction in the TLIM program for two years show more improvement on selected measures of student behavior and academic scores than those who have not received the instruction. After running the *t*-test, a two-tailed significance test was used to determine whether the null hypothesis was rejected or accepted. If the significance was less than the probability value of 0.05, then the null hypothesis would be rejected because there would be a statistically significant difference, suggesting the program is effective.

## Summary of the Chapter

The study investigated whether middle school students who received instruction in *The Leader in Me* program for two years in elementary school showed a statistically significant difference regarding improvement in behavior and academics than students who did not receive the instruction. An independent samples *t*-test was completed using data from discipline referrals, attendance records, and reading and math cumulative grade point averages. The population sample of this study attended school in one county in the state of Virginia. School A was instructed in *The Leader in Me* for at least two years. Schools B, C, and D did not have instruction in *The Leader in Me*. The purpose of the report was to determine whether possible successful interventions were occurring in any of the elementary schools so they could be replicated. The purpose of running the *t*-test was to determine if there was a significant statistical difference of the means between the two groups of students. This allowed the dependent variables (discipline, attendance, and reading and math GPA) to be tested based on the independent variable (whether the school offered the program or not) to determine statistical significance. With there being different variables, *t*-tests were completed to show all the dependent variables and the specific outcome of each. The study helps educators and school board members determine the lasting value of *The Leader in Me* character education program.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

#### Introduction

This study focused on the outcomes of middle school students that experienced at least two years of *The Leader In Me* program while in elementary school. Through analysis of discipline referrals, number of days absent, and reading and math GPA scores, it was determined whether there were significant differences in those variables between students who received instruction for two years and students who did not. Schools and school divisions will be able to use the data to make an informed decision as to how *The Leader In Me* program could possibly help students after they leave the setting where instruction took place. The results could also inform the decision making of school leaders regarding whether its results are positive enough to warrant expanding the program to schools that do not have the program.

#### Data Analysis

The main question for this study was the following: Do middle school students who have received instruction in *The Leader in Me* program for two years during elementary school show more improvement on selected measures of student behavior and academics than students who have not received such instruction? Annual data from discipline incidents, attendance, reading and math end-of-year grade point averages were selected to analyze student improvement. These variables led to the following sub-question for this study: Do middle school students who have received instruction in *The Leader in Me* program in elementary school for two years have fewer disciplinary incidents, higher attendance rates, or higher reading and math GPA scores than students who have not received such instruction. Testing the data included running independent samples *t*-tests on each variable to determine whether any statistical significance occurred between students that received the instruction (treatment group) and students that did not (control group).

**Discipline.** Table 2 illustrates the descriptive statistics. The mean number of discipline referrals in the control group was 1.86 with a standard deviation of 4.03. The mean number of discipline referrals in the treatment group was less with .87 and a standard deviation of 1.81.

Table 3 shows the comparison of the treatment group with 71 students to the equal number of randomly selected students in the control group. There was not a statistically significant difference in discipline for students who had at least two years of instruction in *The Leader in Me* (M=1.87, SD=1.86) and the students who did not (M=1.86, SD=1.83);  $t(140)=-1.88, p=0.062$ .

**Attendance.** Table 2 illustrates the descriptive statistics. The mean number of days absent in the control group was 9.27 with a standard deviation of 8.23. The mean number of days absent in the treatment group was less with 6.68 and a standard deviation of 6.46.

Table 3 shows the comparison of the treatment group of 71 students to the equal number of randomly selected students in the control group. There was a statistically significant difference in attendance for students that had at least two years of instruction in *The Leader in Me* (M=6.68, SD=6.46) and the students who did not (M=9.27 SD=8.23);  $t(140)=-2.09, p=0.039$ .

**Reading and math GPA.** Table 2 illustrates the descriptive statistics. The mean number for reading GPA in the control group was 3.24 with a standard deviation of .801. The mean number for reading GPA in the treatment group was less with 3.16 and a standard deviation of 1.10. The mean number for math GPA in the control group was 2.96 with a standard deviation of .963. The mean number for math GPA in the treatment group was less with 2.89 and a standard deviation of 1.14.

Table 3 shows the comparison of the treatment group of 71 students to the equal number of randomly selected students in the control group. There was not a statistically significant difference in reading GPA for students that had at least two years of instruction in *The Leader in Me* (M=3.16, SD=1.10) and the students who did not (M=3.24, SD=.801);  $t(140)=0.522, p=0.602$ . There was not a statistically significant difference in math GPA for students that had at least two years of instruction in *The Leader in Me* (M=2.89, SD=1.14) and the students who did not (M=2.96, SD=.963);  $t(140)=0.398, p=0.692$ .

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics for Differences in Performance Measurements between The Leader in Me Participants and Non-Participants (N=142)*

	N	$\mu$	SD	<i>d</i>
Discipline Referrals				
Treatment Group	71	.87	1.81	-.986
Control Group	71	1.86	4.03	
Days Absent				
Treatment Group	71	6.68	6.46	-2.59
Control Group	71	9.27	8.23	
Reading GPA				
Treatment Group	71	3.16	1.10	-.084
Control Group	71	3.24	.801	
Math GPA				
Treatment Group	71	2.89	1.14	-.070
Control Group	71	2.96	.963	

*Note.* N= Sample size.  $\mu$ =Mean. SD=Standard Deviation. Discipline referrals are measured by the total in one academic year. Days absent are measured by the total in one academic year. Reading and math GPA are measured by the final grade after one academic year of instruction.

Table 3

*Independent Samples t-Test of Differences in Performance Measurements between The Leader in Me Participants and Non-Participants*

	Levene's Test For Equality of Variances				<i>t</i> -tests for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	t	df (2 tailed)	Sig.	Mean Difference	St. Error Difference
Discipline							
Equal variances assumed	12.663	.001	-1.88	140	.062	-.986	.524
Equal variances not assumed			-1.88	97.200	.063	-.986	.524
Attendance							
Equal variances assumed	1.367	.244	-2.09	140	.039*	2.592	1.242
Equal variances not not assumed			-2.09	132.503	.039*	2.592	1.242
Reading GPA							
Equal variances assumed	3.951	.049	-.522	140	.602	-.0845	.1619
Equal variances not assumed			-.522	127.728	.603	-.0845	.1619
Math GPA							
Equal variances assumed	.518	.473	-.398	140	.692	-.0704	.1772
Equal variances not assumed			-.398	136.151	.692	-.0845	.1619

Note. \* Significant at  $p < .05$

## Summary

Performance measurements for students who attended *The Leader in Me* program suggest that participants were less likely to experience a discipline referral. An average of .87 discipline referrals was recorded for participants compared to 1.86 discipline referrals reported for non-participants. This -.986 difference did not reach the level of statistical significance ( $p=.062$ ). (see Figure 1).

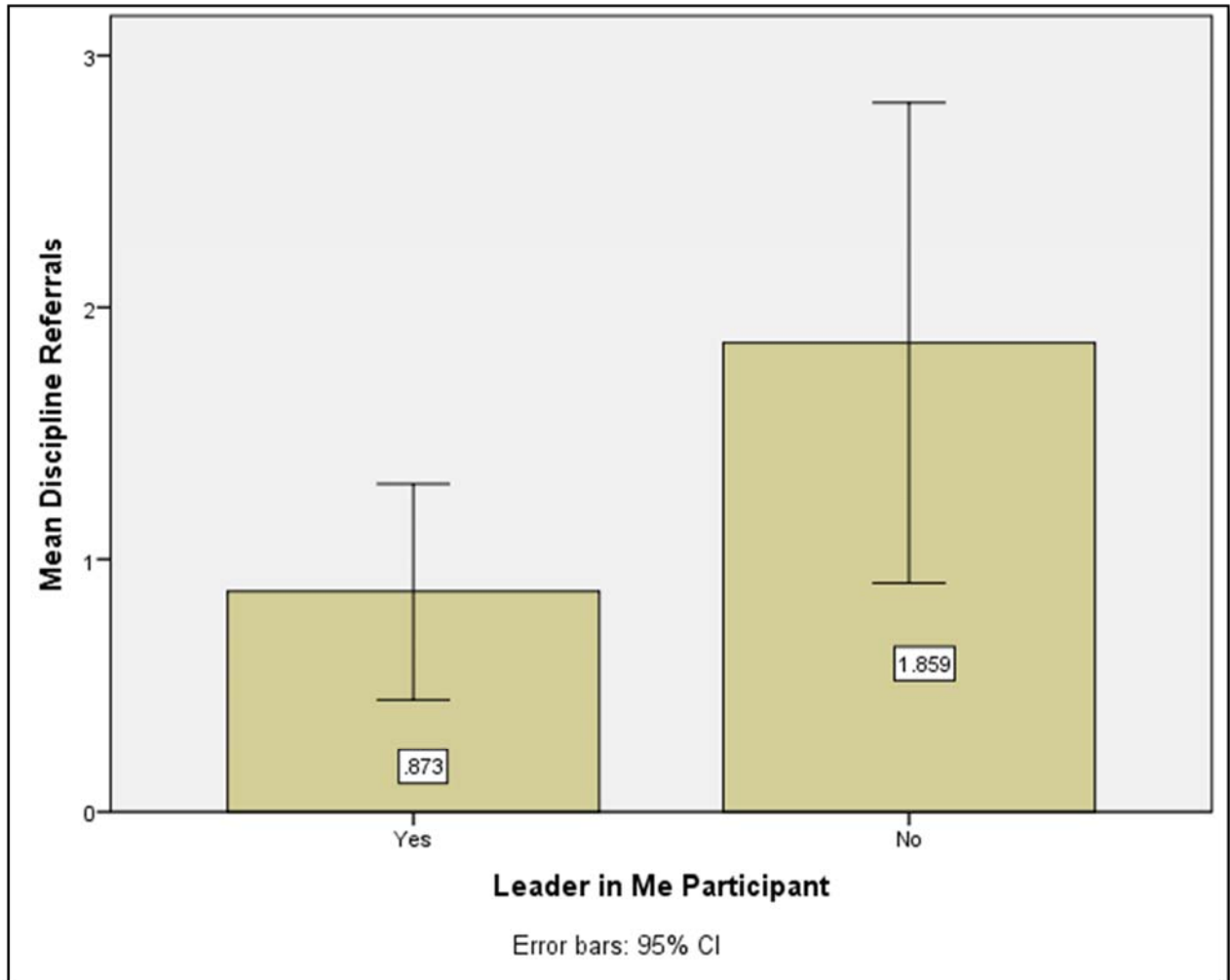


Figure 1. Mean discipline referrals among *The Leader in Me* participants and non-participants.

Performance measurements for students who attended *The Leader in Me* program suggest that participants were less likely to experience a school absence. Program participants were absent an average of 6.46 days compared to 9.27 days for non-participants. The average



difference of 2.59 fewer days absent among participants was statistically significant ( $p=.039$ ). (see Figure 2).

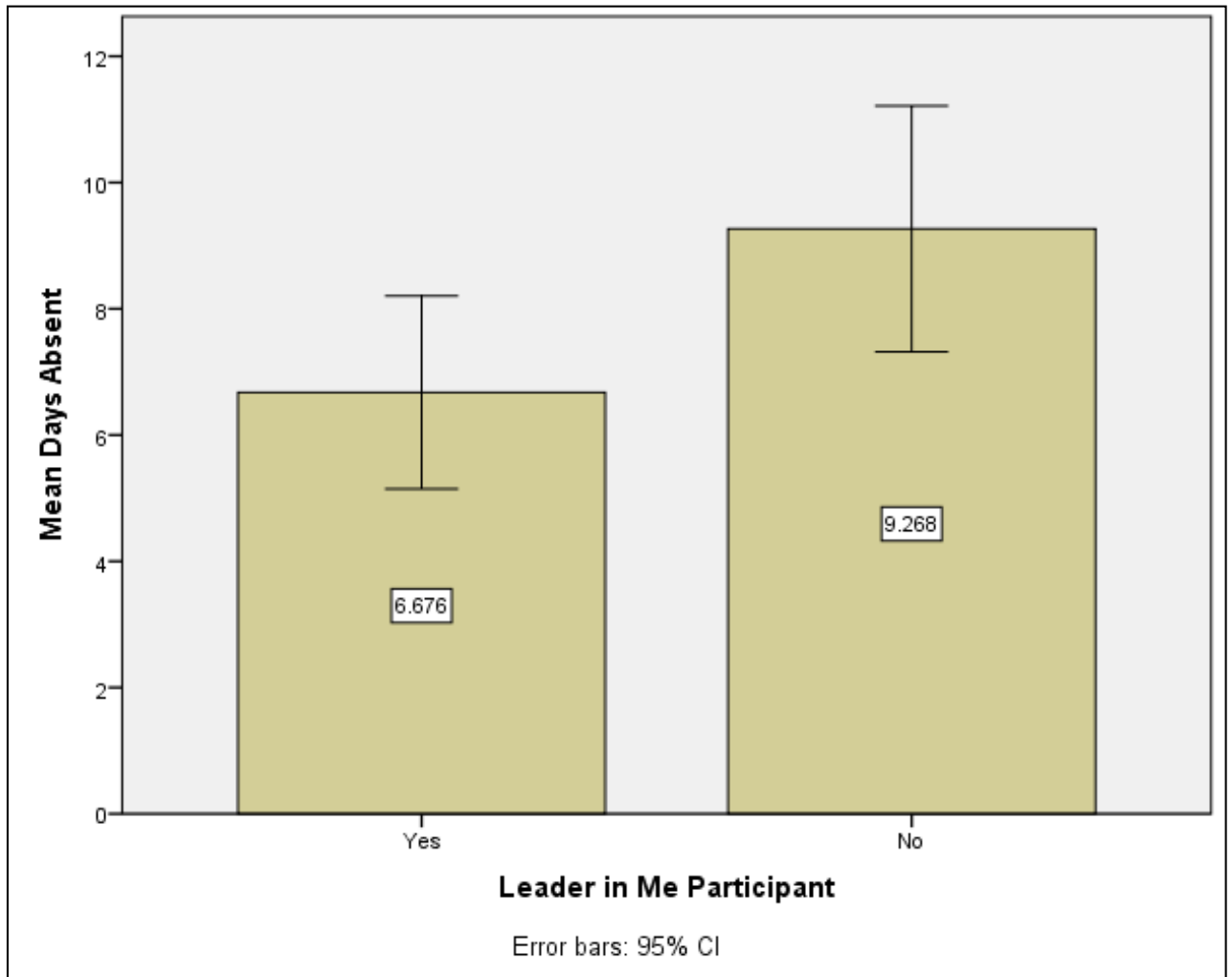


Figure 2. Mean absenteeism among *The Leader in Me* participants and non-participants.

Performance measurements for students who attended *The Leader in Me* program suggest the differences in the student scores for reading and math were not statistically significant. An average of 3.16 in reading GPA scores was recorded for participants compared to 3.34 for non-participants (see Figure 3). An average of 2.89 in math GPA scores was recorded for participants compared to 2.96 for non-participants (see Figure 4). These differences did not reach the level of statistical significance for either subject (see Figure 5).

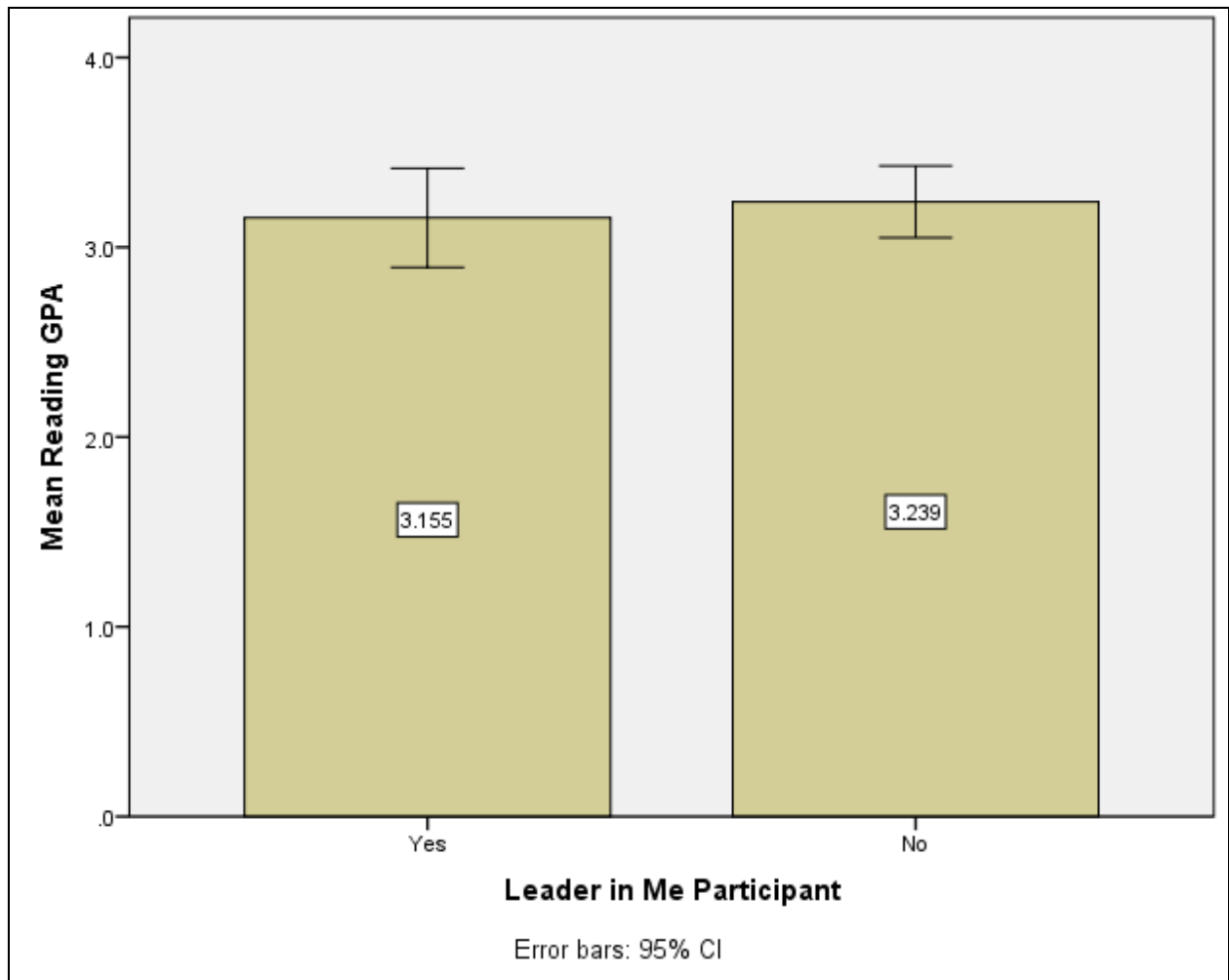


Figure 3. Mean reading GPA among *The Leader in Me* participants and non-participants.

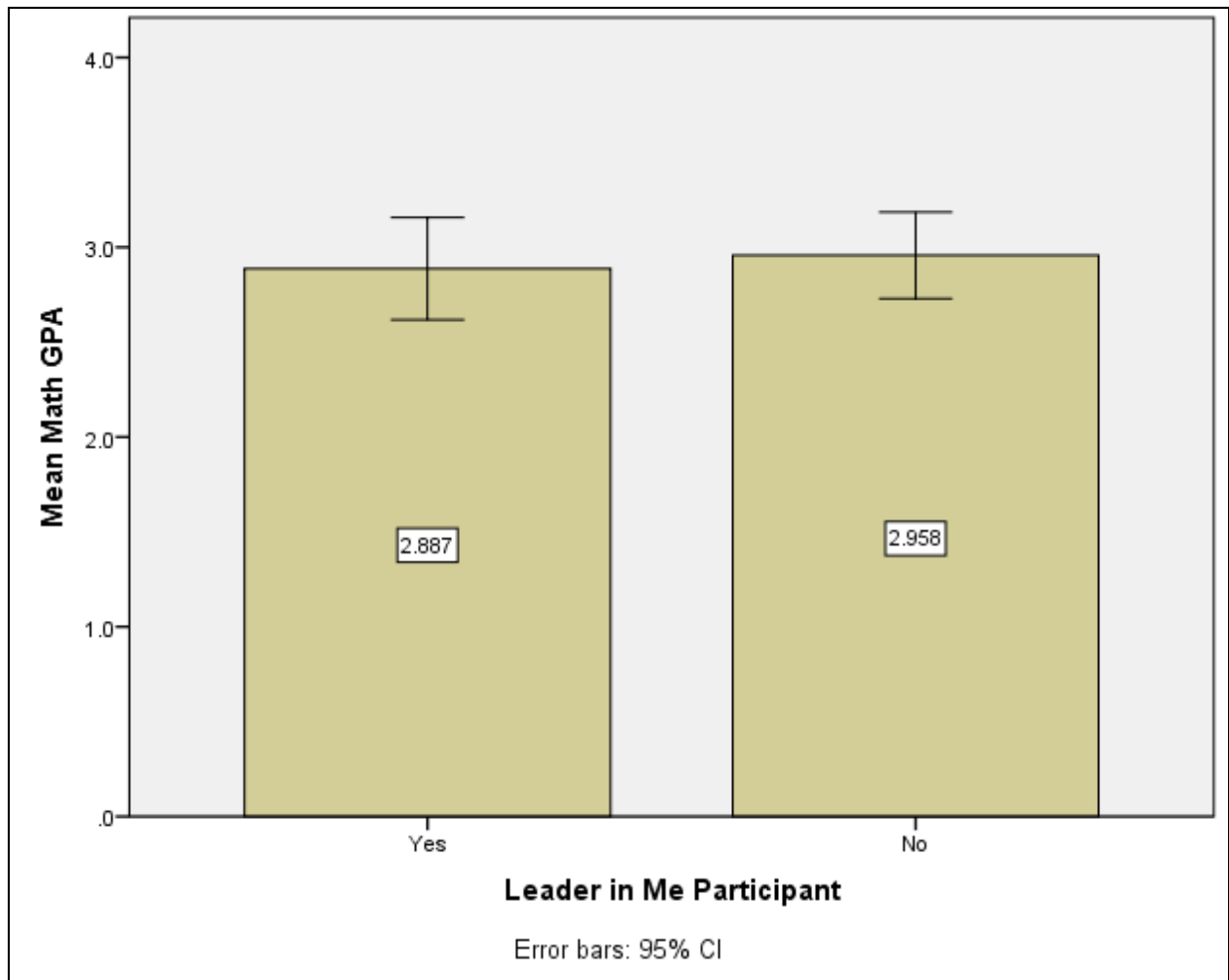


Figure 4. Mean math GPA among *The Leader in Me* participants and non-participants.

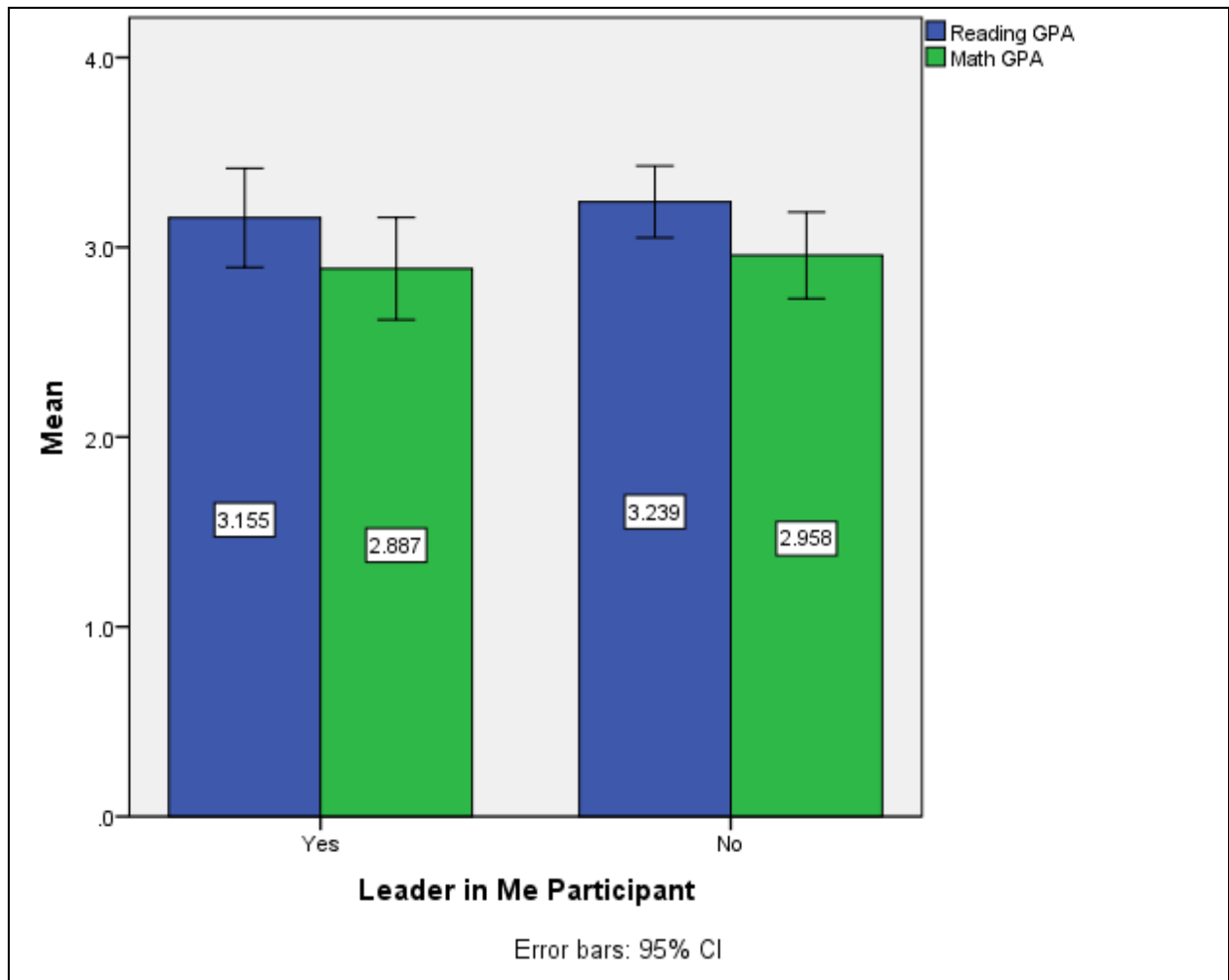


Figure 5. Mean reading and math GPA for *The Leader in Me* participants and non-participants.

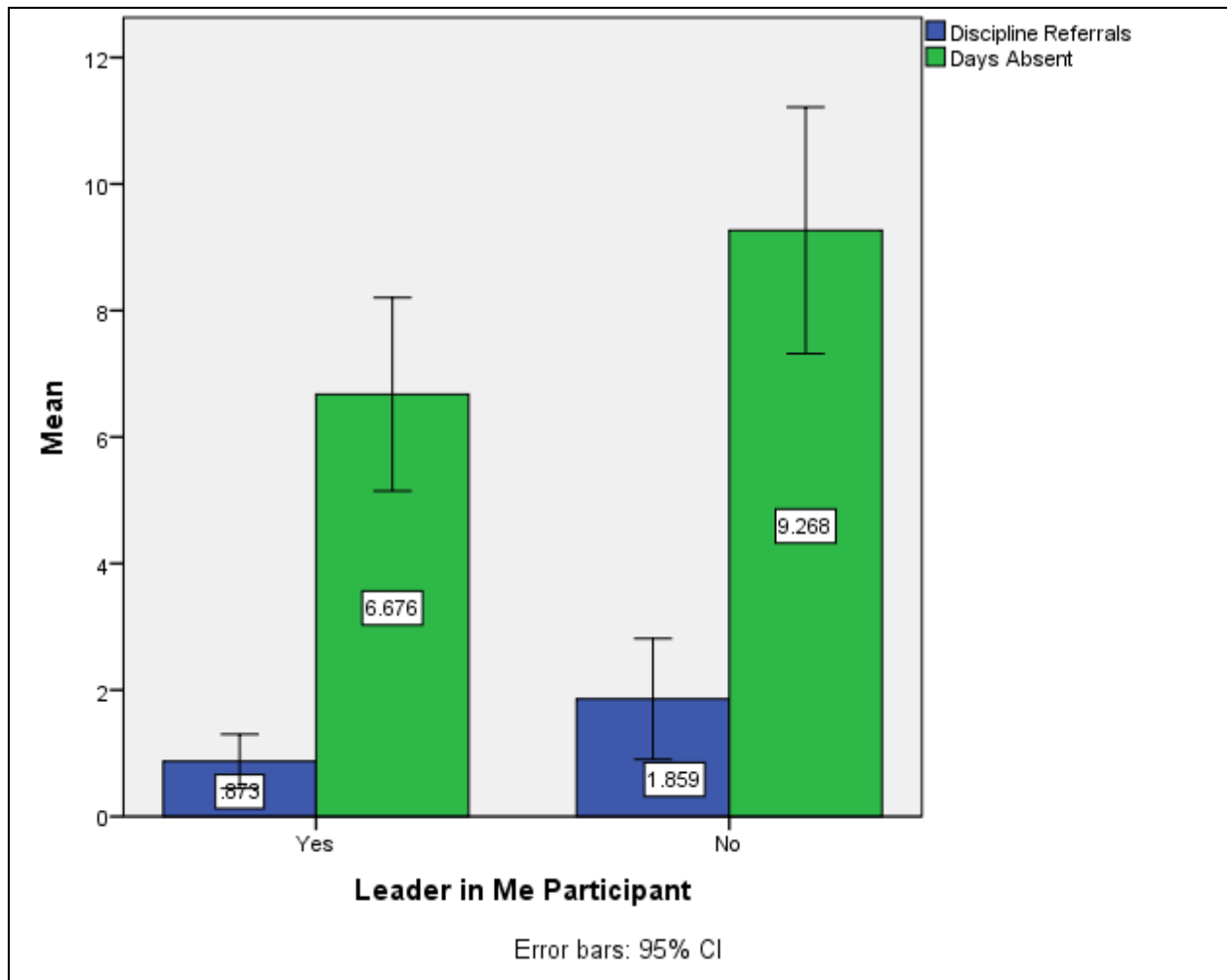


Figure 6. Mean frequency of behavioral issues among *The Leader in Me* participants and non-participants.

Frequency distribution data showed the treatment group had 43 students with perfect attendance, while the control group only had 26 students with perfect attendance. Additionally, 49 students in the control group did not have a discipline referral, and only one student had 10 or more referrals. In the treatment group, 46 students did not have a referral, and four students had 10 or more referrals. In attendance, the range for the control group was 43, while the range for the treatment group was 38. Data for discipline showed a range of 10 for the treatment group, and a range of 20 for the control group. In summary, results suggest that among this sample of students, participation in the program may not have influenced academic performance or discipline referrals, but may have led to significantly improved attendance patterns.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

The purpose of Chapter Five is to discuss the findings from Chapter Four in an effort to address the main research question. Do middle school students who have received instruction in *The Leader in Me* program for two years during elementary school show more improvement on selected measures of student behavior and academics than students who have not received such instruction? This chapter addresses the sub-question, which refers to discipline, attendance and academic scores. After discussion of the findings, the chapter closes with conclusions from the data. Chapter Five will include recommendations for future studies and close with implications for practice.

#### Summary of Major Findings

Means were used to determine whether there was a relationship between discipline, attendance, and academic success in reading and math for students who were instructed using *The Leader in Me* program and students who were not. Statistics included data from six- and seventh-grade students in the 2015-2016 academic year. The specific student data included number of discipline referrals, number of days absent, and final grade point average for reading and math. A public report presented at a school board meeting provided the data for the study. All data from students who were instructed in *The Leader in Me* program for at least two years in elementary school were included in the treatment group. The control group was comprised of a random sample of students from the three schools that did not participate in the TLIM program. The data compares the means of each category between the treatment and control groups using an independent samples *t*-test.

**Finding #1: Discipline.** There were no significant differences noted between the control group and the treatment group with regard to number of discipline referrals. Though previous studies have shown a difference for students in *The Leader in Me* program while they are in the setting where instructed, there were no studies analyzing a carry-over effect after the student left the environment where the instruction took place. It would be interesting to see the impact of TLIM when taught at the middle school. In this study, results were not statistically significant

after students had completed *The Leader in Me* program in previous years and moved to a new school setting. However, the descriptive statistics showed fewer discipline referrals for students who had been in *The Leader in Me* program.

In the program, 7 *Habits* were taught, and opportunities for students to use the habits were practiced. Habits 4, 5, and 6 (*Think Win Win, Seek First to Understand and Then be Understood, and Synergize*) are all habits that teach ways to interact positively with others, solve problems together, listen to others, and work on a team. These habits build problem-solving and social skills that may decrease discipline incidents. In this study, the analysis of student behavior included the total number of discipline incidents that occurred in one academic year. Results may have varied if discipline codes were divided and only discipline incidents that involve infractions with others, such as hitting and fighting, were used while infractions that did not include peers, such as tardiness and late assignments, were omitted.

**Finding #2: Attendance.** Only in the category of attendance was there a statistically significant difference for the students who attended *The Leader in Me* instruction for at least two years and those who did not experience *The Leader in Me* instruction. There were significant differences noted between the control group and the treatment group with regard to number of days absent. School leaders can recognize the importance of the TLIM program when they understand that attendance rates improved significantly for students who participated in the program. *The Leader in Me* program values each child for his or her individual leadership capabilities and recognizes students when they evolve as peer leaders.

Some state governments offer financial attendance incentives. In these states, average daily attendance calculations determine the amount of school funds received from state budgets. If school leaders are in states that use average daily membership, a program like TLIM can bring more monies to the school. In many cases, the increased attendance and the increased funds may be enough to pay for the program. For example, if a school has 1600 students in three grades, the total number of students would be approximately 4800. If the state paid the district based on ADA (average daily attendance) and the students averaged 2.69 more days of attendance each year, then the school could possibly earn a considerable amount more annually. This potential increase may be sufficient to pay for *The Leader in Me* initiatives.

**Finding #3: Reading and math GPA scores.** There were no significant differences noted between the control group and the treatment group with regard to either reading or math

GPA scores. Previous studies have shown a difference in academic scores for students while they were instructed using *The Leader in Me* program (Stella, 2013; Wilkens, 2013). However, this study did not find statistically significant differences after students left *The Leader in Me* setting. Habits 2 and 3 (*Begin with the End in Mind and Put First Things First*) teach students to prioritize schoolwork before playing, review data, and set specific goals to improve future work and grades. While in the TLIM program setting, students graphed their reading and math grades and set quarterly academic goals designed to help them improve specific scores. They also wrote specific action steps to help them reach each academic goal. These data-monitoring and goal-setting actions in the TLIM program are not likely to occur once a child has moved away from the school setting where these practices are used. This lack of student awareness and student goals may contribute to a change in behavior after a student leaves *The Leader in Me* setting. Further, student scores may be influenced by reading and math curriculum and instructional strategies that occurred during the semester when grades were earned. The students in the treatment and control groups were instructed in classrooms together in the 2015-2016 academic year that provided data for this study.

**Finding #4: Discipline and academics.** There are typically high correlations noted between discipline referrals and student achievement (Person et al., 2009; Stella, 2013; Velez, 2012; Wilkens, 2013), yet the data showed no statistical difference. This may be because there are many social and emotional changes influencing students during adolescent stages of development. This study took place after students left the TLIM environment in elementary school and entered into a middle school environment. There may be many other factors – such as physical and chemical changes related to puberty – that affect discipline, attendance, and achievement for middle school students. Movement into a different school setting that includes new classmates from twelve different elementary schools may change student social behaviors and study habits that influence discipline referrals, attendance rates, or achievement.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to determine whether middle school students who had received instruction in *The Leader in Me* program for at least two years in the elementary school demonstrated more improvement on selected measures of discipline, attendance, and academics



than students who were not instructed in *The Leader in Me* program. Of the total students in the study, only one of the factors investigated showed a statistical significance.

The conclusion of the study indicates that attendance can be positively affected when students are instructed in *The Leader In Me* program. Attendance comparisons were statistically significant. Descriptive statistics showed fewer disciplinary incidents for students who were instructed in the program during elementary school. However, there was no statistical difference in discipline incidents between the two groups. Very little difference was noted in reading and math grades between the two groups, indicating that the differences have a greater chance of being explained by other factors than by previous *The Leader in Me* instruction.

## **Discussion**

Data in this study indicated that behavior incident differences in the experimental and control groups were not statistically significant. However, the mean number of discipline referrals did show a difference in the two groups. One factor that can be considered is other behavior support programs that were implemented in previous elementary schools that represented the control group or at the middle school level. For example, one school in the control group also used a school-wide program titled *Getting Along Together*. The other two schools represented in the control group did not have a school-wide discipline program in elementary school. However, based on state laws, all the schools in Virginia implement some character education instruction. It is hard to measure how other forms of character education instruction or possible inspiration that students received from a specific teacher or counselor may change factors like behavior, attendance, and grades.

All middle school students in both the experimental and control groups participated in the school's third year of implementing *Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports* (PBIS), and this more current instruction may have altered student discipline, attendance, or reading and math GPA scores used in this study. In 2015-16, the middle school served approximately 1600 students in a typical grades 6-8 middle school design. More importantly, the data trends for the middle school over a 3-year period indicated that students who had two or more discipline referrals were more likely to score below the achievement rate [identified as a school-wide indicator of 80% or higher] in math and reading than those students who had only one or no referrals.

Consequently, school discipline and its impact on academic achievement was a concern for the middle school staff. In order to become proactive in their attempts to decrease discipline referrals and increase students' academic success, one of middle school's initiatives was to implement a positive behavioral system called PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support). Using the Virginia Department of Education's established model *Effective School-Wide Discipline in Virginia*, the middle school started its own program in 2014-15 implementing PBIS. The work at the school level began with determining the needs of the school and deciding whether the school needed a school-wide system of support. The middle school found that one of the positive effects of PBIS is all staff members sharing a common language and common behaviors. The implementation of a systematic school-wide approach to a positive behavioral framework at the middle school may have been a factor that affected the results for discipline, attendance, or academic achievement.

Data in this study indicated there was not a statistically significant relationship between the students that have been instructed in *The Leader in Me* program and their grades in reading and math. Other factors, such as curriculum materials, instructional strategies, students' aptitudes, and teacher experience, training, and effectiveness may have made differences in reading and math academic scores. GPA scores can also include teacher variety in grading practices. Further, student behaviors toward listening in the classroom and studying outside the classroom are factors that can make a difference in the GPA. Researchers cannot control student maturation, and students have changes in their developmental stages between elementary and middle school years. All students in the study lived in a similar demographic area, and all students were the same age within the study. Teacher variability is also hard to control; however, the teachers in the elementary schools and the middle school were certified in their subject area according to the same statewide criteria for training and licensing.

This research replicated the methodology applied in previous research for one school-wide positive behavior support program in a small rural school district where the researcher measured high school attendance, discipline, and dropout status in students during subsequent years after instruction in elementary school (Pluska, 2014). The study recommended that research could include academics and compare elementary and middle school years since these are closer to instruction than high school years. Both studies showed a significant difference in attendance. It is possible that attendance can be a common factor where observable positive

changes affect students. When schools experience increased attendance, they are able to benefit from a student's intrinsic motivation. Factors that change outcomes as students experience varied stages of development, various exposure to other programs, and various instructional strategies include discipline, academics, and dropout rates.

Additionally, it is possible that successes from *The Leader In Me* instruction may be evident in ways that are hard to measure quantitatively. Students may have better confidence, more problem-solving capabilities, or stronger teamwork skills. These intrinsic factors are hard to measure in a quantitative study.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

This study sought to investigate possible positive outcomes from students who had previously experienced *The Leader in Me* program. Currently, many studies show the success of such a system in the environment where instruction occurred. In an effort to see whether the lessons learned from the program carried through with students into a different environment, this study was undertaken.

Future studies could include students in the eighth grade part of the middle school population. All students in the control group had completed at least two years of *The Leader in Me* instruction and practices. Results may be different if students in the control group had more years of experience in *The Leader in Me* program. Additionally, a study could measure students from other counties, states, or countries who used the program and moved to another school that did not have the same program instruction. Grades six, seven, and eight could be compared to see whether the benefits of the program are stronger if the students are closer to the last grade of the year where they were instructed. The program could be taught in the middle school to measure effectiveness of instruction. Another possibility would be to include all data from the years of the program through graduation per student to see if there are longitudinal trends. Comparisons using an ANOVA test between students from the four different elementary schools would provide more information about unique differences. Future studies could delineate the differences in discipline referrals that involve physical altercations, such as hitting and fighting, and those that do not involve physical altercations, such as tardiness and classroom disruptions. Additional studies could include qualitative data to investigate success from different perspectives using information from teachers and administrators. Finally, obtaining qualitative

data from students may provide in-depth information regarding how students thought the TLIM program affected them. The instruments used to gather data by the researcher was not designed specifically for TLIM instruction and the *7 Habits* are not measured specifically and separately; such an instrument could be developed in future research.

### **Implications for Practice**

School leaders can use the study to determine if the investment in TLIM program is worthwhile for their school. Based on the study, school leaders may expect improvements in attendance related to student motivation. Improved attendance is often a result of intrinsic motivation to be present and learn successfully. With implementation of TLIM, a school may build intrinsic motivation in students. Although this study did not find improvements in discipline or academics after students leave *The Leader In Me* setting, it would be interesting to read similar studies.

When a child is intrinsically motivated to attend school, positive learning can happen. Students who are willing and eager to attend school are in a positive frame of mind where optimum learning can take place. School board members, policy makers, and school leaders can use this research to understand positive school culture and its relationship to intrinsic motivation.

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# APPENDIX A

## IRB LETTER



Office of Research Compliance  
Institutional Review Board  
North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech  
300 Turner Street NW  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959  
email [irb@vt.edu](mailto:irb@vt.edu)  
website <http://www.irb.vt.edu>

### MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** November 15, 2016  
**TO:** Glen I Earthman, Lisa Gayebower Newell  
**FROM:** Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires January 29, 2021)  
**PROTOCOL TITLE:** Evaluating the Influence of "The Leader in Me" Program in Middle School Students  
**IRB NUMBER:** 16-981

Effective November 15, 2016, the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at: <http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

### PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 5  
Protocol Approval Date: November 15, 2016  
Protocol Expiration Date: November 14, 2017  
Continuing Review Due Date\*: October 31, 2017

\*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

### FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

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*An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution*



## APPENDIX B

### INFORMED CONSENT

**Title:** An Evaluation of the Influence *The Leader in Me* Program has on Students in the Middle School

**Principal Investigator:** Glen Earthman

**Co-Investigator:** Lisa Newell

We are asking permission to participate in a research study. Please take time to read the information below and feel free to ask any questions before signing the document.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to track student data and compare one treated population with a random sample from three control populations attending the same middle school. All schools are located in a rural county in Virginia with similar demographics. The main research question of this study is whether middle school students who have received instruction in *The Leader in Me* program for two years during elementary school show more self-regulation on selected measures of student behavior and academics than students who have not received such instruction. The variables are attendance, discipline referrals, and academic data.

**Procedures:** I am requesting permission to use information provided to the Franklin County School Board. The Franklin County School Board Policy states that consent is not necessary in the event the research is to compare or show effectiveness of instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management if subjects cannot be identified. I would still like to formally ask permission. The data obtained will be used for statistical analyses.

**Risks to Participation:** Since no student is identifiable in the study, there are no risks to participation anticipated.

**Benefits to Participation:** You will not directly benefit from the study. However, we hope the information learned from this study may benefit school divisions in our understanding of how behavior can be self-regulated with proper instruction.

**Confidentiality:** There is no identifiable information in this study; therefore, confidentiality is not a problem.

**Questions/Concerns:** If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact Lisa Newell at 540-493-2696 or [lisa1@vt.edu](mailto:lisa1@vt.edu)


#### **Consent**

##### **Subject**

The research project and the procedures have been explained. I agree to participate in the study. My participation is voluntary and I do not have to sign this form if I do not wish to be a part of this research project. I will receive a copy of this consent form for my records.

Signature of Subject: 

Date: 10/19/16

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: 

Date: 10/19/16