

Clinton Community
School District
Elementary Counseling Program

*Focus Groups with Students,
Parents and Teachers*

May 2005

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CLINTON COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT FOCUS GROUPS WITH STUDENTS, PARENTS AND TEACHERS

This report of the results of focus groups conducted with students, parents and teachers is part of the Evaluation of the Clinton Community School District Elementary School Counselor Program funded by the U.S. Department of Education. This three-year project supports a *Systems of Care Network* approach to prevention/intervention activities that meets the needs of all elementary students and their families along a risk continuum. With increased numbers of qualified counseling personnel, four targeted elementary schools have offered developmentally-appropriate and culturally-sensitive services through a solution-focused counseling program as well as teacher training and involvement. The University of Iowa School of Social Work, National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice serves to provide the program evaluation.

Focus groups were conducted to address three areas of interest in the evaluation of the program. These areas are related to goals and objective stated in the grant application. The application states that 80 percent of students, parents and staff will rate the quality of the Systems of Care Network at good or above on a 5-point scale; counseling effectiveness and impact on behavioral and academic problems will be assessed; and program coordination will be assessed through focus groups and surveys. Although other data have been collected to address these questions (e.g., ITBS, Systems Inventory, Intervention Activities, Discipline Data), through the focus groups and a separate community survey, we sought to answer these questions in more depth to not only assess the performance measure but to also provide an increased level of understanding for the purposes of ongoing program improvement. All three groups expressed very high degrees of satisfaction with the counseling services. Teachers were concerned that the program could suffer de-funding and reported that this would be a very serious setback to the quality of instruction and the progress made this year.

Method

This section describes the approach to the collection of the data. Three focus groups were conducted on May 20, 2005: Students, parents and teachers. Each group followed the same general format described below.

Setting the Tone

Before the groups began, we spent time talking to create an environment that would help everyone feel welcome and not just as “research subjects.” Discussion included talking about their classes and work (especially what they’re missing to be there), supportive comments to parents, introducing each to others, topics that they are interested in (e.g., music, community events). The school counselor provided the initial introduction to the process to show support and relationship with the evaluator and

focus group facilitator. Setting the tone is essential to the success of the group and demonstrates that this is a process in which their insight will be valued and welcomed. We did not have parents or students for whom English was their second language, however, if this does happen we suggest showing support and respect for the interpreter and respect for their first language by offering a welcoming greeting in Spanish (e.g., “Mucho gusto, Sra. García. Me llama Lori Smith.”) Or, the interpreter could serve the role to personally introduce the co-facilitators and interpret social comments in advance of the role plays. We did have one student who used some sign language, and we were able to reciprocate with signs to make that student feel welcome to the process.

The instrument that was used as the basis for the focus groups is presented below. It serves as a model for facilitation so adaptation to the immediate conditions under which focus groups are conducted is assumed. For example, one parent arrived two hours earlier than the parent focus group so that parent was allowed to be interviewed using the focus group questions rather than wait until the official start time for the parent group.

Instrument

INTRODUCTION

Hi, my name is _____ and this is _____. [Facilitator #2 greets group] And we want to begin by thanking you all for being here. ___ and I work for the University of Iowa as [insert roles: e.g., a social worker and social psychologist] and we are here because the leaders of the school district have asked us to talk personally with students, families and teachers about their experiences in the schools and, specifically, about experiences with the school counseling program. The school district wants to know how things are working from students and families involved because they are the best experts on what’s going on and how to keep improving. We’re here to listen to your experiences and get your ideas for ways the school district works with students to really succeed. So, thank you for giving your time today to help the district understand what it needs to do. For now, let’s just start with sharing our names and the school that you represent. [Process point: *It is important to acknowledge each individual in the introduction process. Giving some kind of supportive feedback when each person says their name (e.g., saying “Thanks, La Tonya.”)*]. Thanks everyone.

We want to create an environment today that everyone feels able to talk and give their opinion.

So, we would like to share what we have planned for today and ask you to let us know if there is anything you need to feel able to share your opinions as openly and honestly as possible.

First, we have a set of questions that families, students and teachers in the school district are discussing in groups like this. Our hope is that you will feel that they are important questions and that you will answer them according to your experience. I will be the main facilitator and _____ will be taking notes so that we can write a report to give to the superintendent using all of the ideas that come out of the group – no names will be included in anything we write and if there’s something you don’t want us to include, you can say that, too. We will hold everything said here in confidence except, as staff at the school and mandatory reporters, we of course have to report anything we hear about child abuse.

GROUND RULES

We want this to be a place you feel able to talk honestly – are there questions you have about the process before we begin? Do you have certain ground rules you hope we all follow in the conversation? For example, some groups have asked that everyone respects that each families' experience is different, that all families deserve support, and that no family or student be judged? [Process Point: *Use newsprint, and first write confidentiality on the top. As parents offer different ideas, write them up, too. If no one has suggestions say: "How about sharing the time so that everyone gets a chance to talk?"*.] Also, if you have a particular question or want to talk one-on-one after the group, just let me know and we'll be glad to hang around afterward.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

As I said, we are here today to talk about the **Clinton (IA) Community School District Elementary School Counselor Program** funded by the U.S. Department of Education. This is a three-year project supporting a *Systems of Care Network* approach to prevention/intervention activities that meets the needs of all elementary students and their families along a risk continuum. With increased numbers of qualified counseling personnel, four targeted elementary schools are offering developmentally-appropriate and culturally-sensitive services through solution-focused counseling and teacher training and involvement. The University of Iowa School of Social Work, National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice is the outside evaluator for the schools.

Primary Questions (use probes to gather in-depth information)

- 1. On a scale of 1 to 5 where would you rate the quality of services received through the school this year?**
 - 2. Would you say that services are more coordinated than in years past?**
 - 3. In what ways?**
 - 4. Have Counselor's been more helpful this year in terms of impact on behavior and academic problems?**
 - 5. Do you see more of an emphasis on student and family strengths than on their problems?**
 - 6. How do they communicate to students and families about students strengths?**
 - 7. How do they communicate to students and families about problems?**
-

Findings

On a scale of 1 to 5 where would you rate the quality of services received through the school this year?

Students and teachers rated the services very highly with most rating the services at “5.” The parents who participated rated services slightly lower although their ratings were in the “good” to “very good” range. The program exceeded the goal of 80% of students, parents and staff rating the quality of the Systems of Care Network at good or above on a 5-point scale. Teachers reported overwhelmingly glowing reports about the program. Students reported that the services were very helpful when they needed services during school, and the general counseling education program provided them with useful skills throughout their day (e.g., successful encounters with bullies through techniques learned).

Would you say that services are more coordinated than in years past?

Services were reported to be more coordinated with other agencies and teachers reported that coordination was much better providing them with the supports they need to effectively do their jobs. Students had little to say about interagency coordination of services though they did speak to coordination of services in the sense that some services were individual and those were available individually as needed, while other services were provided in the classroom for everyone. Students reported both approaches were useful. While students provided limited response to questions about coordination, parents and teachers both indicated that services seemed much more coordinated than in the past including both within school services and coordination between schools and outside resources and other agencies.

Have Counselor’s been more helpful this year in terms of impact on behavior and academic problems?

Students reported that it was very helpful to know that, if they needed it, they could visit the counselor and get help with any issue that might arise throughout the day. Students who participated in the focus groups generally only used the individual services “once or twice,” though one student reported 15 visits. Students concluded that their grades were also helped by this.

Teachers and parents also reported that counseling services helped students deal with their feelings. When students needed help in calming down they could go back to the classroom and get along with others. Both groups reported that the students were aware that counselors were available to help them. Teachers and especially parents reported that they believed the counseling program helped students to achieve higher grades than last year. One parent described difficulties his student had in the past and tearfully described the success of his student by saying that “... and this year, he got an A.”

5. Do you see more of an emphasis on student and family strengths than on their problems?

Students had some awareness that strengths were being identified although the question was difficult for them to answer. Parents reported that their general perceptions were that the schools were doing very positive things with their children and there was evidence that children's strengths were being identified. Teachers were more clear that a strength focus was being used and that a solution focused approach was in use within the district.

6. How do they communicate to students and families about student's strengths and about problems?

Parents reported that they wanted more communication from the school about how their child was doing at school. There were general perceptions that the schools were doing very positive things with their children, and there was evidence that children's strengths were being identified; however, parents did not feel this was sufficiently communicated to them. In the analysis their criticism seemed more one of wanting to hear more of the good things that were going on than that there were any problems.

Data (transcript of focus group discussion)

Students

... we'll go over this again when other students come in so we'll go ahead and get started. My name is Brad and I'm a sociologist at The University of Iowa. The Clinton Community Schools wants me to talk with some people about their opinions about their experience with what's been going on this year at school but let's start with getting to know each other. Do any of you know each other already. You two do, ok? And what school do you go to?

B: Can someone tell me what they know about the school counseling program?
Yes? What?

S: I know that it helps kids with their problems. Anybody you can help with eye contact
-You tell them how you feel and stuff. That's one thing that they helped my class do.

B: So they come into your class and taught you some things?

B: To one of the boys – Have you had anyone come into your classroom?

Response: Yeah.

B: What did you learn?

Response: Um ways you can solve problems.

B: These are ways you didn't know before?

Response: UM _____ (silence on tape because student is using signs)

B: Can you explain what you learned? How'd that work?

Response: Good.

B: Good. Can you tell me what happened?

Response: Um, Um. They have _____. They try to ___ my head_____? (A lot of background noise with adults laughing in the background and the sounds of doors opening/closing, another student joins the group)

B: And did they leave you alone then?

Response: Silence on tape

B: Did they?

Response: Silence on tape

B: Did you have an experience with something like that?

Response: Yeah, but I think I remembered from months before.

B: Is there a time you used something you learned?

Response: Very quiet response.

B: Have you had a chance to use any of the things you learned, [NAME]?

S: I had a problem and I, um, had eye contact and just walked away. That's one thing that Mr. Fate taught us to use.

B: So if someone is calling you names what do you do? How did you handle it?

S: I just made I contact and told them stop there and I walked away

B: Did it work?

Response: (nods head yes)

B: Great! So some of the stuff you are learning is pretty useful?

Response: (everyone nodding)

B: Other than classroom stuff, have you had any contact with the counselors other than that? Individual sessions, one on one, anything like that?

Response: (heads nodding)

B: Ok, so you haven't? And you haven't? And you have, and you have and you have. What did you learn individually with the counselor.

Response: Um, "I can't remember".

B: How many times have you seen the counselor just by yourself?

Response: I think once.

B: Is that helpful?

Response: (nods)

Response from S: 15 times

B: Has anyone seen the counselor more than you?

Response: Yeah one.

B: In those 15 times what did you find out?

Response: I had a problem with my Step Dad and I can't live with him anymore though. He (counselor) helps me to say that I didn't cause that and I can't fix it but I can handle it. That really helps me.

B: Um, Hm. One of the things that's helpful is to have you rate how things are going on a 1-5 scale. Have you ever done a rating from 1-5 about how happy you are about this or that?

Response: Yeah (boys voice)

B: Anything like very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, a little satisfied, not satisfied – so if satisfied or very satisfied is 5 up here (using hands) and this is bad and this is down here and it's a one – where would you say you are as far as this new counseling program? Where on this scale would you rate it?

Response: Um - High.

Response: (holds hand up with 5 fingers)

B: Pretty high you think. 5 is the highest. 5 is the best. You can't get any better than that.

Response: I'd say about 3.

B: So some things could be better?

B: Do you have any ideas what that some things could be better?

Response: Nothing

B: So maybe there just starting out and they'll learn better ways to do things next year?

Response: Yeah.

B: And what about you?

Response: S: About a four.

B: Pretty good? A little improvement could be made? Anything in particular?

Response: They could talk to each person individually to see what their problems are and talk about important stuff like how to handle stuff in the classroom other than learning about what you wanted to do like a job and stuff like that. I really had some individual problems that they probably fixed but that means that other people have other problems that they can work on.

B: Oh, you mean like in the classroom, teaching to the whole class, something like that?

Response: Yeah.

B: What do you think?

Response: Um, 5.

B: You like it when they come into your class and talk about stuff.

Response: Um, hm

B: Is that the most interesting thing that goes on?

Response: No, no, no. I think math is.

B: You like math?

Response: Every time we do copies of our math or something I always get them right.

(Someone comes in.) We went ahead but we'll have you just go ahead and join in. Did Mr. Fate bring you down.

Response: His secretary.

B: Ok, well, he went off to get students and I haven't seen him since. So I don't know if he's bringing more students but we'll just keep going.

Response: He said that he has a meeting.

B: Well my name is Brad. And I'm with The University of Iowa of we are just talking about students experiences with this new counseling program that got started this year. My job is to give some feedback from talking with students and then I'll talk with Parents, and some of the teachers give Mr. Fate and the school administration some feedback on how things are going. What they are doing the best at, and what they might need to improve in the future. So - do you know anyone else here?

Response: I've seen her before but, the rest I don't know.

B: Let see if I get this right this time. This is S____, this is R____, this is A____ and this is A____. I had them backwards last time. And you are:

Response: C____

B: C____. Let me write that down because I didn't do so well the first time getting everybody's name right. I got 50%, I got 2 out of 4. This is the math wizard over here. So, first we started talking and then we went around and talked about experiences with the counseling program. They told me that people came to their class and gave them some idea's about – some things they could do.

Response: No answer

B: Ok. Um, have you – and we were talking, I think S____ said that she had met with a counselor about 15 times or something and was very proud of it. And R____ had just once. And they haven't met with anyone individually. Have you met with anyone individually? Any of the counselors?

Response: (nodding)

B: Do you remember who it was?

Response: (shakes head)

B: No? Which school are you at?

Responses: Whittier, Buell, Jefferson.

B: Was it Mr. Fate? No.

Response: No - it was a lady.

B: Did you meet with Mr. Fate?

Response: Yes, I talked to Mr. Fate.

B: Who's your counselor?

Response: Mrs. L____.

B: L____?

Response: Yeah

B: I asked everyone to give a score from on a scale from 1-5. With 1 being not being good and 5 being really good. Like a 5 would be an A. 4 would be a B. 3 would be a C. And I don't know if we want to go to D & F.

Reponses: Laughter

B: What would you give the counseling; do you think the school counseling program should get an A, B or C, or D or F?

Response: lot of talking from each

B: You would give them a 5? You'd give them an A?

Response: (nodding)

B: Is there any special reason you give them an A?

B: Or you just think they're good and you like them so you just give them an A.

Response: He doesn't talk a lot.

B: That's ok. I've been learning. I have a 4 year old. I know some signs.

Response: I know a bunch of signs.

B: I get this one all the time. You know what that is?

Response: Yeah, it's a tape from S____ & R_____.

B: It's a ?

Response: A toilet

B: He's got to go to the bathroom.

Response: Toilet.

B: That's it.

Response: Potty

B: Exactly. We've established that one. Do you remember last year – this is going to take you way back to the year before. Do you remember any of this kind of thing going on last year? School counseling programs?

Response: Many answering No.

S: I wasn't here last year, but I came back.

Response: Hey, do you have a sister named A_____.

S: I don't have a sister.

Response: I can't remember what it was like a few years ago; I can't remember Head Start or kindergarten or 1st grade doing counseling; our counselor comes to the room now. But I know that 3rd, 4th and 5th grades have them.

Response: 2nd Mrs. J_____ .

B: So, what I'm wondering is if you can remember back then and now, do you think what they are doing here is better than before.

Response: Yeah, now its better.

B: You think this is better?

Response: Um, hm and another said "much better"

B: And what is it that there doing that it's so much better?

Response: Silence

B: Can you think of anything? Anything that ?

Response: Various comments

B: It just feels better?

Response: Yeah.

Response: It just feels better.

Response: It does feels better

Response: It feels better, I can't think of a reason.

B: Do you think they are paying more attention to what your needs look like?

Response: Yeah.

B: And they're doing something about? They're helping you figure things out? Ok. Did they ever talk about - one of the things they are trying to focus on is more on your strengths – what positive things you have. Do you ever hear them talking about your strengths or how to focus on strengths or anything like that? Is that something that you heard?

Response: um, hum

B: You heard that – you heard that. Some have.

Response: No

B: Ok, 1 has. Ok. Is there anything that – no one is going to know who told me this or anything like that because I'm going to play this back in my mind of what you tell me, what the teachers tell me and what the parents tell me. Trying to make take all this together. What can I tell the schools. Is there anything that you would think that I should let them know that they should do or what they're doing that is going very well?

Response: Silence

B: Keep it up? Keep doing what you're doing?

Response: Yeah, Yeah.

B: Ok

Some one enters: Hello I have D_____ and D_____ .

B: Maybe I should take D_____ and D_____ and we'll do their own. I think we're done and we can have them start from the beginning here.

B: Hi guys.

Boys: Hi

Mr. – This is Dr. Richardson he's doing a little project to see how the counselors do their jobs. I'll let him explain to you. He's from The University of Iowa. Do you know where that is?

B: Have you ever heard of the Hawkeyes?

M: There you go.

B: That's where I work but I don't play football. D_____ and D_____?

Response: Yeah.

B: Ok, so Mr. Fate told you a little about what we would be talking about here right? And how we won't be telling anyone who told us what? There is a project that's called the systems of care network that school counselors are doing and it started this year. This school year and it going to go – they're kind of trying out some new things. And what they want me to do is talk to some students and parents and teachers to see how things are going, where they are doing the best and what things they might be able to do for next year. So, I'm just talking to some students. At the end I'll just take everyone's information and put it together and give them a summary of what I heard people tell me. I'll give them – you're doing these things well and these things can be improved. Kind of like you get a report card and they won't get an A, B, or C or anything like that they are just going to get people said you are doing this well, and this well, and this well and you could improve in these areas. So I'll just use what we did in the last group. It is kind of a starting point because everybody went around and told me what their experience was with the school counseling program. So maybe you can tell me what you know about the school counseling program. Do you know what the school counselors do? Have you seen them?

Response: Yeah. They talk to kids about their problems.

B: And – Ok, have they ever come to your classroom and done a presentation or anything?

Response: Quietness

B: Have they ever come and talked to your class?

Response: No. Not mine

Response: No, but we have a person that helps Mr. _____?

Response: We have a helper that helps us read and that in the morning.

B: But he doesn't talk to the whole class, he just talks to us individually.

Response: He works with people one at a time

B: ok. Have you had – have you seen the counselor by yourself anytime this year?

Response: I did

B: Mr B – No -- different teacher - different counselor - Which school do you go to?

Response: Horace Mann

B: Do you go to Horace Mann too?

Response: No, I go to Whittier

B: Ok, – I don't know where Whittier is? Which grade are you in?

Response: 4th - next answered 7th no I mean 5th

B: You wish you were in 7th?

Response: Yeah

B: So how are things going this year?

Response: Good

Response: Good

B: Better than last year?

Response: Yeah

B: Why is that?

Response: Because last year I didn't have a counselor. This year I have a counselor – it's a girl but I don't know her name.

B: Not Mrs. L____?

Response: No

B: What school did R_____ go to?

Response: Was he sitting right here?

B: He was sitting right here.

R: How many kids?

B: There was S____, R_____, A_____ and A_____ and this was C_____.

R: He goes to Horace Mann

B: Ok, so he does go to your school. He said that you see Mrs. L_____.

Response: I use to see her.

B: How did that go?

Response: Great

B: Did she help?

Response: Yeah

B: Do you see somebody?

Response: Mrs. H____. She works with us.

B: In your classroom?

Response: Yes, sometimes when we have snacks she goes and probably takes a break.

B: I forgot to get which grades the other people are in.

Response: Oh, he's in 4th - R____

B: R____'s in 4th

Response: A____ is in 3rd

B: So A____'s in 3rd too

Response: Um, hm

B: S_____ ?

Response: Do not know

B: So 3rd or 4th . So you're the old guys? Next year where do you go?

Response: Washington High School

B: Is there anything you think the counselors could do better than what they've been doing?

Response: No

Response: He likes to talk to me like what I did and helps me if I wait and sometimes he comes to help me calm down

B: So how are things going in school this year?

Response: Good

B: How are your grades?

Response: Good.

B: B's

Response: Sometimes I get A's

B: A's and B's

Response: When I was in Bluff I had A's and B's.

B: And now? Probably A's and B's

Response: hm

B: Anything else you want to tell me about the counselors that you can think of – that's really good or really needs to be improved.

Response: I think that she does really good.

B: Ok. Thanks you guys for coming in and sharing your experiences. Are you going back to class now. Thanks again guys.

Parents

[Setting the Tone, Introduction and statement of purpose to here]

Response: With me I have two A_____ and D_____ and they were both are going to Bluff . It's a good program. You can go almost anytime they know to seek out. They usually are always available. The one at Whittier, I don't know much about it as my son has been going there only a couple weeks and so I'm kind of new at the school. But I think the one at Bluff is neat for me and the kids. I've had my kids there at Bluff school for years and they try to improve just a little each year as far as helping the child or seeing what they can do to assist the family or whatever needs to be addressed or something like that.

B: What kind of contact have you had with the school counselor?

Response: My son is in 4th grade over at Whittier and he was at Prince of Peace last year. He had a hard time adjusting from Prince of Peace to here as the Harding School closed and we chose to go to Whittier this year.

[Another mother came in late and Brad explained that they were just getting started talking about peoples experience about the counseling programs here and that they had just started talking about the first child.]

Response: Mother continues--- He adjusted over at Whittier and we talked with counseling and he has some anger management problems that he has been working with a counselor once each week. It has been a good outlet for him to be able to express his feelings. He doesn't feel like he can speak with us at home; it's another adult that he can speak to who and it has been very good for him to do that. The one thing I would like to see is a little more feedback from them. Unless I call I don't get feedback from them on what he's been talking about. Or maybe they don't want me to know?

B: You were saying they don't give you much feedback?

Response: Unless I call to find out what's been taking place. Once a month, or every couple of weeks she met with them for 15 minutes, sometimes longer, and I would like to have contact once a month or so to say, "look I see he is having problems here" or maybe "you can look for other things" or give me some more advice on how to deal with certain behaviors.

B: And which school does he go too?

Response: Whittier. And my son seems to really enjoy talking to her and very good for him. My husband went through cancer last year and he really didn't want to talk to mom. And what's her name?? not the pregnant one. Couldn't remember her name.

B: What's been your contact with the program here?

Response: It's been great. They have been really good with my kids. My little daughter – my middle child is in 4th grade and she had an incident last year where she was confrontational – she has ADD and she was on medication and less impulsive. It was something that just really backfired and she had a lot of problems with this girl and this girl's father called me up and screamed at me on the phone and he was just irrational and everything. But the counselor talked with the kids and quickly contained and she did exactly what she should have and called the parents and stuff like that. She talked with the kids and made it clear that this was nothing we need to share with everybody, that this was something that happened and has passed. She dealt with it very, very effectively and I really appreciated that because that teacher had told some other kids in the room and it's very hard to take a bunch off to the side without the other kids seeing what's going on so she did that.

Response: This year my 2nd grader who has some anger issues had some problems. When he feels angry it just like the gate opens all the way open; it's not just a little bit open it's just like, "ok, if I'm going to be angry about anything it's going to be full bore" and there really no big thing going on at home to have a problem with. I think it's a genetic behavior because I see boys on my husband's side that act the same way. The counselor has been working with him and I kept in contact with her and I do call her up

too. The things that we've talk about are pretty effective and whenever I've called and asked for help they are right on the ball and right on the money with what they're doing and how they're handling the situation. My oldest daughter is 16 ½ she went to parochial school. I'm a religious person and from that aspect that the parochial school would be more likely to deal with some of the emotional concerns, but here the counselors have been very helpful and it has really enhanced my children's school experience.

B: Sounds like everybody has had individual contact with them. You mentioned improving the school experience. How have the grades been? Have you seen any connection between what's going on with the counseling program and how their grades are? Do we have any grades going up?

Response: (nodding)

B: We did have that.

Response: We've had some grades go up. We did some other things at home in addition to what counseling started too. I would say it was effective and it did help with the parenting and other things that we did. The extra counseling to give them advice and to make them feel better about themselves which helped them want to do their schoolwork. I have a son who had 27 incomplete assignments the first trimester and then once he started getting counseling and talking about things and they encouraged him, and they did, more of those grades came up to A's and B's.

Response: My youngest son had that right when he started. It was a slow start at first but once he got into it I noticed a big difference in his attitude and the grades and his whole outlook and everything.

Response: I think it makes a big difference. They can't separate – it is hard for a kid when they are thinking all the things that are troubling them and to just sit there and do the homework and the schoolwork – when they can separate and get a little relief and have an outlet they're much better. I don't know that's strictly counseling I think that he's a late bloomer. His ITBS scores doubled from last year.

Response: My younger one doubled his last year and even the year before and he surprised everyone.

Response: My son hadn't gotten an A all through school until this year. That's pretty remarkable.

B: When did you become aware that there was a new counseling program in place in Clinton? Did you know it was happening or did you find out day before yesterday or whenever they called you?

Response: I heard something somewhere but I don't know where and that was just recently. You didn't know that it was the beginning of the school year that was something in place? No - I knew something because I've seen the school counselor

and so I took advantage of it and we had a reading night here and then I met Mr. Fate and he gave me examples of the 1-2-3 program and then I heard more about the counseling program and also reading in the paper about the request from parents and concerned parties to write letters to their legislators.

B: But the beginning of the school year looked like every other school year?

Response: Yes, for me.

Response: Yes - For me it was because we had been over at Prince of Peace which is private and when we moved over to Whittier it was like a new school to us I didn't – I assumed it was a part of it and it wasn't anything new for us.

B: So there was no big announcement through the media? I asked some of the kids, kind of funny, if a 5 is the same as an A and you gave the counselors a grade on their school counseling program, and I had it down here as a 1-5 but I gave them grades to use like A, B, C, D or F - if you would give them A, B, or C. Maybe I would just continue on with that because when I asked another parent on a 1-5 he told me an 8 ½ so I better stick with an A-B-C. - Where would you rate the counseling program here?

Response: I definitely would give them an A. I give them a B. Also a B.

B: Why is that?

Response: For me it's effective, very effective for the needs. With my son, I don't know what his problem is. He does well in school and he's a good kid and he is just angry and he has fits and every thing else since 8 years old. There is no reason – we have a 2 parent home, we don't have substance abuse, divorce, we're not screamers and yellers – he's just got that problem but the counselor took me a step passed that and said that there was funding available through Cornerstone and he's going to be evaluated to see if this is an ADHD issue, which I suspect it might be or maybe ADD or whatever it is. She explained all the resources to me, she has acted on everything that I have called her about and she has provided me with feedback. The things they have done have been very effective. I asked my son what do you talk about with her and I look in this book for things and stuff like that – he never dreads going to talk with her – never feels embarrassed or shame. And both my kids also participate in friendship groups too. As far as we've gone it has been pretty effective.

B: I know you didn't get enough feedback - that would be the one thing you might want improved. Otherwise?

Response: My son is very excited to go see everybody. He looks forward to going in to talk to her. The only downfall, for me, is that I would like to see more feedback. My son did threaten to commit suicide also, this year. When I called her she said she really couldn't give me information but gave me some outside references. "Here you can call this person." She did not give me any personal information, what can I do? She just said, "I would suggest you call this person or this person" and just washed her hands of it. That kind of bothered me in the fact that they didn't follow-up, "what are we doing" or

“what can we do to help.” It was almost pushed aside that aspect I was kind of upset in that respect and we have gone to outside counseling in addition.

Response: For us – I have to separate the two because they are real good and always there. I have to agree with her. My son just starting there and I don’t get anything like “he is having a good day” or “he is having problems.” More feedback or notes in the book bag. I work third shift I come home and I sleep and it’s kind of hard but I do wake-up before the end of the day and I do have an answering machine. So if there are problems or whatever there is a contact number and instead of going to conferences and saying, “hey there is a problem here.” it probably would be better for feedback on the one, and the other school is close to the A. They have always been there when I’ve needed a hand. The family has experienced some real tough times at the first of the year and the end of the year and help was right there for us so they knew what to do and that.

B: Does school size have anything to do it? Is Whittier a smaller school.

Response: Not much. About same size. Jefferson may be a little smaller.

B: I just know the names and one of them is a bigger school. Is it Buell?

Response: Whittier is probably bigger because it is a newer school and spread out.

B: Part of this project was to be more strengths oriented and positively focused. I’m just wondering if you as parents, I know that the kids see teachers and counselors trying to focus a little bit more on their strengths, what they do to encourage kids. I’m wondering if you are seeing any of that, as parents, coming back to you either as evidenced by what your kid does or what you’re seeing in general in your experience?

Response: Teacher wise I guess I see them working on the positive. Again my son doesn’t tell me a lot about the counseling. I ask him “so how is it going,” “fine,” he says and so I have to seek out the counselors and I have never been given notes in the book bag except when I ask for others names. I have never gotten notes from any of the counselors or phone calls unless I make that phone call. She does, I think she helps him feel positive about himself. I know that helps. Sometimes I have talked to her about it, that seems to help him and he also feels good about looking forward - he gives up his free time on Friday to go see her and he looks forward to that.

B: Are you getting more feedback than what they’re saying or are your experience about the same about what they’re talking about.

Response: As far as something that is getting taken care of immediately or an issue is taken care of; they’re on to the next thing and it’s up to you? I pretty much seek it out. I call up after something has gone on and I don’t know that she’s called me very often.

B: So there is follow-up, as long as you do the follow-up?

Response: It's hard to say because I made it a little harder; she might have told me, but I want to know what happened. I'm always like that.

B: So you wait longer and when they haven't called...?

Response: I'm looking to them to tell me they are seeing this problem rather than me having problems at home and turning around and these have already been initiated with them that they're saying how are things improving, and how are things not; I have never been asked that. Are things improving or what my opinion is even and that is how things have worked. That where I see lack of, I guess.

My son has only been at Whittier a short time; he's only been there since spring.

B: So what is there about Bluff that's not at Whittier?

Response: I don't know. It might be because they have been there for three years, we know the staff and we are comfortable enough because before the counselor left on a leave of absence there was a problem she would call me. There was some acting out or something the principal would call and say there is a problem and you need to come in or see what we can do about it.

B: In summary, is there is anything that really stands or something you think ought to be recognized to really do this well. Or a follow-up piece, something they need to improve on as far as you doing the grading. This program really does well at – blank, or they really need to blank – how do you fill that in?

Response: Being available for the kids, that are there. When my son is having a bad day he's allowed to see her and she's available to go to. That a big thing for the kids. If somebody is having a bad day and they do something with his anger he knows that he can go do that; just being available is a big thing.

Response: I've done looking for evidence of just helping and found or saw that within a week after I've called her about working with him about getting his anger under control we were at the table and he always wants to be the first one to say grace and always says "God please help me get my anger under control, I don't want to mess up in school and don't want to mess up at home." So obviously he is thinking about it. My kids used to go to Whittier and they went there – my daughter was there for two years and the other one was there a year and was younger. When we bought our house and came to this neighborhood I was a little worried about Jefferson because of the diverse population, and a lot of kids that don't have parents that are together and just a lot of things and I just heard there are a lot more kids with issues and problems here. I'm really happy with the teachers. They have been really positive and I don't know if the counselors deal with the teachers on that level or whatever but like my daughter had Mrs. _____ last year. Mrs. _____ was so just so reinforcing and so encouraging and she makes things interesting and I don't know if that's just her teaching style or if that is something that the counseling program has had an effect on. I have been delightfully surprised on how nice of a school this is and how well things have gone here.

B: Are there any recommendations that you would make?

B: I was a little surprised that the kids knew that there was a kid's school counseling program. They are aware of it.

Response: I know they get into the classrooms other than individual counseling and that counselors go in once a week or every couple of weeks. I've had younger kids - and they are 3 levels and A,B & C level, they call it. They even had what were basically new kids when we first started at Whittier this year – they had a new kid program for the first 6-8 weeks of school in a group so they didn't feel alone and made them feel welcome and so they felt more adjusted to the school. That was a good thing for them.

B: Is there anything else?

Response: The things I've noticed here is that I'm older – much younger mothers have kids my age. When I went to school and my husband too and my husband is in recovery – he came from a very dreary dysfunctional messed up home. The counselors had no time for him when he was a kid and he really would have benefited from it. I think there was ADD there too. When I went to school you didn't hear of counselors unless something really bizarre was going on. And here I've come to these parent/teacher functions and all these kids that have been naughty in the class and everything else like that – I mean it just seems like those problems are separated from the child themselves. That child seems to be just as valuable as any child there. They're not like "that's the one we're not going to pay any attention to" or "give a turn to one and treat them like they're anything because they give us a lot of trouble." It's so much better than it use to be. In my fourth graders they're very empathetic, sympathetic child has been with a lot of wild kids in her class and she's tried to work with them. I ask her constantly and she tells me what is said at school and she tells me about things that have happened and how the kids backed it up. I have asked her sometimes how is this person doing or that person doing and you know since the beginning of the year, things have improved so much in what she can see, it seems like these kids and their terrible issues at the beginning of the year are moving forward and feel like they are getting benefits from their education and coming to school, and they are learning. She has seen a couple of them at recess and things have improved so much since the beginning of the year. I'm just so glad to hear with limited contact that they are not left behind and just pushed off to the side. I grew up with a lot of kids that I still see their name in the paper 35 years later and they are still having trouble and still getting arrested and I have smart kids and those kids were just not treated like that.

B: Ok, anything else? Well, thanks for coming in and sharing this. I'll be putting this together and writing it up in one voice and getting your ideas back to the school.

FATHER INTERVIEW

[Because this parent was very early he was interviewed using the focus group questions rather than having him wait to participate in the focus group. He was waiting for his child

and it was decided the child would wait in the room next door while we finished the interview with the father.]

B: I feel a little like Art Linkletter asking all the kids questions here. I'm just an outside person coming in to give them some feedback on how they are doing, what they are doing well, what they're doing not so well, what they can improve on, what do they need to keep doing. I talked to the kids about their experiences. They don't know that this is the elementary school counseling program funded by the federal government and all that. But they did say, "they seem to be paying more attention to us about some of our problems this year." And that's good. So I want to get from parents what they see. Because the parents are kind of out here, outside the everyday school experience and the kids are involved everyday. They know counselors come into the classroom and teach them things. What have you seen?

F: I can honestly say that counseling is very different. We've been watching _____ for 3 years now trying to find out if he's ADHD, Dyslexic. He has a bad eye which causes vision problems which affect his school work, also his mother and me have gone through a divorce and the counselor has been there – at times too much there like an old mother. Sometimes that's how you need to get things done which is a good thing, really, because it shows an interest in the students. Very attentive to the needs. I was thinking that _____ might need professional counseling. I called to discuss with Mrs. R_____ and she was already on another line trying to call me to say I think you need to get _____ in with a regular counselor. So I can honestly say it's a good program. I've seen this year a 180 degree turnaround in his attitude, attention and just his self worth through this program.

B: All due to the counseling or is there some other stuff going on too?

F: Mrs. _____ has him involved in conflict management. Part of that is you learn how to talk out your problems. Students talk out their problems, which it helped _____ because he would keep everything in until he'd just start crying.

B: He said that he has learned from the program how to deal with other kids sometimes.

F: _____ is very, very vocal now; if something bothers him or if he thinks something is not right he will let you know, he will talk it out and it's not "you're wrong!" because it's "hey, this is how I feel, this is what I see, can you help me." Which is all the steps they have been taught through the in-school counselors. Don't say the person's wrong tell them this is what you see and how you feel. This is how you feel, nobody can tell you you're wrong. Through that approach, through the counseling at school he's very good at voicing his problems plus he has a 5 year old brother and a 5 year old niece and he's always working with them at home too.

B: He said there is stuff in the classroom as well as individual counseling that seems to work.

F: Yes, at the beginning of the year they sent a thing asking us what we thought our kids needed help on. Which was good choices, association, verbalization, peer and we signed him up for all these groups and through the year he is getting one-on-one with the counselors at school and it helps. Because if an adult tries to help – we're old people – just picking on them. But when they can sit and see that they are not the only ones feeling the way that they do – my son is the tallest one in the class, he wear's glasses and is the typical geek and he gets picked on and through the counseling and one-on-one group in class and out of class has helped him feel that he belongs in school. His grades from straight F's – I mean D's to he got his first A this year, which is a big, big improvement. He went from not wanting to go to school, for every little sniffing sound – oh, I think I have sniffles to having diarrhea and wanting to go to school.

B: That's remarkable, that really huge.

F: Not only has it helped the counseling for the kids but also say the Mrs. R___ has helped me too. I'm 34 years old and from the old school, man makes the money, he don't raise kids. I'm a single father now, I just through a divorce and have a 14 year old girl and things a guy never wants to deal with, a straight A student and I have R_____ who has some problems and he has to work harder and she's helped to understand the changes going on. I think it's money well spent. I would like to see it pushed harder than the football programs or something.

B: What was your experience like – What's the difference between this year and last year?

F: Last year it was like you talk with a counselor and saying we're trying – we're watching him, we're watching him. This year they are like literally one-on-one with him. Nobody has a problem and they working to help him feel more adapt at school and more interest. And quite honestly it's kind of like – I don't know if there was more funding for it this year but it's like they are more active this year than they were last year.

B: So then things in preparation are anticipating stuff and doing it rather than waiting until something gets out of hand.

F: Since it was we're watching and see. Now they are actually – we watched for a year we know where he is strong at and where he's short at. Now like this year, ok, he needs to have a slanted board. The counselors watch him doing tests, they realize with his eye problem that he needs to have a slant board to make his handwriting better because he has depth perception. He also needs, if he's writing on a non-lined piece of paper he needs to have a straight edge – they make the accommodations. The counselors realize this, they tell the principal, the principal tells the teacher and then the teacher and the counselor get a hold of the parent and there's more feedback. The counselors, teachers and the school system are working.

B: I take it you didn't have a slant board last year.

F: No, he's lazy and he's got lazy handwriting, that was what they said last year. Now they are doing the slant board and they are watching – do you need to sit closer to the board. What's the last time you had your eye glasses. Mrs. R__ asked isn't R_____ due for an eye exam. We know his problem is his eyesight. The counselor knows it, the counselor onto the parent – not hounding, but if you want your kids to learn and you expect your kid to do a good job you better do your job. Some parents might not like it, I think it good. I went through school and was put in class detention booth, because I was dyslexic. I was 24 years old before I was diagnosed dyslexic. Sign were all there back when I went to school there was a problem. Teach them if you can teach them if not pass them onto the next teacher. Now they are actually trying to teach the child to see if there is a problem and to see what they can do. If this child is not doing as well as most of the class, the counselors get involved to see what's needed to get done.

B: That was one of my questions on here – you mentioned about looking at some of the strengths and some of the problems, that's one of the things they are doing is looking more at strengths, and I was wondering how they communicated about strengths to you and if that's different than what you were seeing in the past?

F: Actually, the communication is the big strength. Since he was in kindergarten, I've said hey look, I'm dyslexic, I'm seeing him invert numbers, blah, blah, blah – we're working on it. 4 months – hey ok what's going – have you done any testing? We're working on it. Well now – hey look we noticed that R_____ 's handwriting is a little shaky so we did a couple of tests and we found out that if he had an inverted board, it help's him. Going through a divorce – my family. He doesn't want to hurt me, he doesn't want to hurt his mom and he's caught in the middle and he feels that if he pays attention to the other – the other one is going to be upset. A call from the counselor that R_____ seems to be a little distracted what's going on? You explain what's going on – maybe you might want to try this or might want to say this. They are there to help. If you see a problem you are able to call the counselor – she's always there. The longest I've had to wait for Mrs. R__ to call me back is two hours on something. She has come to the house unexpectedly to say I just wanted to let you know I know it's been a little bit but we are working on this, this is what we're doing. By the way you need to get a hold of the eye doctor, he's wants to do a dyslexic test? Have you gotten with the eye doctor? Have you gotten with the school board about this that and the other thing? Where they make suggestions in previous years and if you took it you took it and if you didn't you didn't. Now if they make suggestions this year, they back track and following it through.

B: Is there any thing you think they need to do in addition to what they're doing – is there anything you would step up on?

F: I honestly think the additional funding, having more teachers in the schools in each school when they are going to bigger classrooms and bigger schools I don't think it going to be efficiently. I think somehow they will need to find more counselors and keep this available at the quality it is now when we go to the bigger schools so we can make sure we have a counselor constantly available for students. One teacher doing 500 students – they are not going to have the time.

B: Anything else?

F: Other than that – I think they are doing good. I really do. I think community wise we need to find out more vocalizations (?) testing for various disabilities, because some the testing that is available isn't recognized. Like R_____ to be testing for dyslexia – it took us a year to figure out who does the testing.

B: More identification of resources that are out there.

F: Better resource listing not only for the counselors at schools to know who they would suggest but for parents to know.

B: I do ask the kids and I'll ask you too on a scale from 1-5 what would rate the quality of services?

F: The quality of service right now I would say right now is about an 8 ½ . You can never be 100% good as there is always room for improvement. The service that we have is great. What's available for the services for these people ? is horrible. Yes, its kind of a new system to the school but if you are going to put something new into the school you need to take and have the resources or the people you are hiring to do the job– do their job.

B: It is always an issue. Alright, well thanks a lot for coming in, I appreciate it. I appreciate R_____ talking about his experience too, it's not always easy to do that kind of thing.

F: For him to open up and especially for him to be looking forward to coming to this to talk to somebody strange. Last year he would have wet his pants or faked puking to keep from coming.

Teachers

[Introduction]

B: Ok, so now we can get started with what you've seen this year. I've framed things around three themes - awareness, effectiveness and recommendations. These are the three major areas to look at - so I'd like to get started with what you see that seems different this year than last year.

Well, I really believe that this year especially, now with Mr. Fate being here too, that the students really get to see their counselor sooner than later because you know I mean we have so many students and one counselor, it's difficult for a student who has some problems sometimes to get it taken care of as soon as they would. Of course you know, when the student has a problem they of course think that's their number one priority and what, with Mr. Fate, it's really helped out where a student can come down talk—might only be for five or minutes. At least they get to see him. And then they come back and they're more successful in the classroom and ready to go.

B: And what would have happened, say, in the previous year.

Well, you know it's just sometimes you know when with the one counselor, you know they might not get in as soon. They will eventually, of course, they always do see the student.

B: So they have more immediate access.

They have immediate access which makes a lot of difference.

B: And what do you teach?

I teach fifth grade.

B: How do you go about utilizing the services?

That's a good question. I have to get better at it myself because you know sometimes students like to manipulate that service a little bit and so I have to get better at knowing if there definitely is a true problem for them to need to go down and see the counselor. Of course, a lot of times they think any problem is huge for them, but I have to work on that myself.

B: Yes, I see. There was one student I talked to, not in fifth grade, who was quite proud that she had been to the counselor about fifteen times.

That's exactly what I'm talking about. I have to work at that a little better myself. I don't like sending students, you know, just every little bit because they get into that habit then too and they like to (pause)

B: abuse it?

I don't know abuse it, but a just use it too much. And it's not getting anything accomplished really, it's just more like a social time.

B: When did you become aware of, I mean when did you hear that this project was funded—it started at the beginning of this school year; maybe as you got into the school year, when did you become aware of it?

At the beginning of the school year.

B: So was there was an announcement?

When Mr. Fate was going to be here to help with counseling; we knew ahead of time, which was good.

[Another teacher enters]

B: Alright. We just started going and there may be someone else come in; we're talking about, at this point, about when did you find out and how did you find out about this new counseling program for this year and I kind of framed that we're talking about awareness, which is kind of what we're talking about now; effectiveness and then the last thing are recommendations—things that either you want to see continued or are working really well, or things that need to be fine tuned. And maybe we should have you introduce yourself first; I didn't get your name?

J_____.

B: J____. And which grade to you teach?

Third grade. And do you know S_____?

S: We've seen each other.

J: What building are you at?

S: Right here at Jefferson

B: So when did you become aware of the new program?

J: Just you mean this year?

B: Right

J: I think when we brought our second counselor on board at our school.

B: Do you know when that was?

S: Well ours was at the beginning of the year, so...

J: Yeah, August.

B: I know it wasn't, when the school year started it wasn't like ready to go. It took a little while to get things started up.

J: You have to define the difference between the program versus what we had in place before. This was my first time in the full-time classroom as opposed to Title I. So I don't know if I'm going to be able to distinguish a whole lot between the two. Does that make sense?

B: Yes, that's what we're talking about; I was hoping you could fill me in too. From your school its ok so you have this new counseling program; there are counselors that are available that weren't as available before; how is that compared to the previous year. So maybe you don't know directly, but maybe you've heard other people say things about it.

J: You know, one of the reasons I volunteered to be on this is because the group in which is in third grade this year is an extremely needy group. And without the help that I had, I think I would have quit; they could easily have justified their job by March. I can only count two people that haven't utilized a counselor in one way or another and I don't think if we had, if we didn't have two, it would have been really, really tough this year. And if I didn't have the support I had from the counselors, I don't know what I would have done.

B: How many students do you have?

J: 24

B: And what about in your class? How many do you have and how many are utilizing this?

S: I have 22 and the majority of the students I would say utilize it.

B: So something similar.

S: Exactly. That's right.

J: We've had anything from groups; I started out having a group of - my first contact I think was six. Six girls in this group that just kept bringing their problems into school. By the time that I set up the first meeting we were down to four. Because two of them had figured it out; and it was during their recess; I had to make sure it was during their recess time so they wouldn't feel it was more new variety. And you know that lasted about four weeks and then little by little we're down to one or two. Just one that was identified really with the problems. Anything from bullying to one that I have that just recently got diabetes and became afraid of everything; student who are borderline depressed—never wanted to come to school, but very, very bright. You know just a huge gamut. So just to be able to go and say, "hey, who can take, who can help." A student who had just spilled his tray in the middle of lunch, you know that's another thing even beyond what they're doing. We started teaching, a counselor came into my classroom and together we taught, I don't remember what it is, um, or who it was, but it was one of the program's that she had that we came in and taught them how to deal with teasing and taunting and put-downs and leveling. We did three or four weeks just on that.

S____: Mr. Fate does the same thing—comes into the classroom and then I try to reinforce what he teaches. So that works out pretty well it seems. So.

J____: And I don't think there's a lesson that they've taught that I haven't gone...yeah, they need that. There are week days, I'm going....(laughing) that was one that we really needed. So, I'm a, you know, like I said I volunteered to come because I'm a huge proponent of how much they've helped just this year alone.

B: Yeah, we were talking a little about, you know, some kids will run down you know a little more than maybe they need to. Do you see that?

J____: I do a little bit. And you know, C____ is who I mostly work with and she's really good at weaning them and then filtering some of that. But most of mine haven't figured out yet, um, you know they come in so discreetly and out so discreetly that, you know, mine haven't really always figured out that really it's a cool place to go. For the most part it was just those who really, or you know my giving her a call and going, look, you know something just happened, or dad's in the hospital. I think we're one step away from a meltdown;

B: Hi, I'm Brad

Michelle: Hi Brad, I'm Michelle Pearson, Principal here at Jefferson.

B: University of Iowa. We're just talking about the usefulness of the counseling program from the teacher's points of view. This last point we're just talking about utilization. Students' use--over-use, under-use. And I'd be interested to get your perspective on kind of how things are different this year with this program in place compared to last year.

Michelle: I think, and S____ could probably vouch for this too, with two counselors it's more ?? tremendous, just because one voice just had one and we have a lot of kids who need help. And so this just kind of divided that role in half so they could actually spend some time with kids.

S____: You know we did talk about ya know, one counselor, he would eventually be seen, but when you have so many

Michelle: They have to prioritize sometimes and

S____: Right.

J____: And for me it kept the problem out of the classroom; you know that was my big thing, the bullying or the circular girls friends fighting things started coming in the classroom, you know, we couldn't learn. And so it kept a lot of that out of the classroom cause they could either deal with it more quickly or deal with it you know as needed.

B: Alright. I'm Brad. I'm from the University of Iowa. I'm getting some input. I've talked to the kids. I've talked to parents. I'm just getting a little perspective from teachers and principals about how things are different compared to last year. If you were here last year.

Yeah—I'd agree with you; a lot of the girls and all this stuff and they seem like they have more time and they can take them out and you know help them more. Another one of my students that I know came today, we did..., I can't even think off the top of my head what it was called when we met with the counselors and the teachers and all the outside support. And that was wonderful. That was so great, to you know find all the resources to help this family and I think it really helped in the long run you know throughout the year to see how that has progressed. That's been really nice.

They've met a lot of parents of kids.

Yeah and that was really nice.

But getting everyone to be down here at once to sit one at a time... we need to take a little pride in telling you and then you tell somebody else.

S____: But the follow-up with the parents has really made a big difference though too. They have a lot more time to do that and that really helps out.

Yes—also more time for small groups. Whereas before, small groups get worked in and around the crises here; where now they really kind of tag team the crisis.

I have a lot more kids this year who need help that they could do that; you know talk in a small group and then direct the specific problem with the other kids that have that. I don't know about your kids, but you know our kids just like to be in small groups. They love that adult attention for some reason.

And that's one thing you do find with abuse that at all. Hang on to it more than...

Yeah—I didn't think so either. I didn't think, I mean I had a few that; but she's you know C____'s really good at weaning them, you know.

They know, they know.

S____: I do have to get better.... Sometimes I figure out if that problem's really a problem or it is just I want go down and see the counselor; but I think I'm getting better at it, I just have to keep working at it. But at least I still have that resource there which is great. Before I wouldn't have had that all the time.

B: One of the things that you mentioned is the coordination. I think it has to do some with the skill but also this seems to me that there's something about what's going on that seems to be coordinated the better around the kids. I don't really have a handle on how that works.

I think part of it is that it brings the parent into the loop earlier. So they're not on the outside so it becomes kind of a whole effort; the parents are involved with whoever the counselor's doing. And it might be our counselor plus an outside counselor or it could be the another agency.

We have a lot of outside people at ours. Their families' ministers—they are big in church and the minister is such a big part of their life and really does a lot with kids so they came and here from the Gannon Center - that had worked with a group of them and just counseling; so we had a big group of just outside help that could come in just besides the school that could help.

It saves time all the way around for all those people.

B: You're really saying the school is becoming more connected with these other community providers.

Um hum.

B: As well as within the school. It sounds like teachers, counselors are the communication is a little more regular, not intense with particular students.

S____: I agree with that (lots of background talking from other people—indistinguishable).

B: How many counselors do you really need?

How many kids do we have (laughing).

B: I mean you have two, right?

We have two, well actually we use a third one half the week.

B: And you have 300 students?

360 highly needy kids.

We have two counselors and 600 kids; so, and those counselors are busy all the time; I have tried to set up an appointment for myself (laughter). There are time you know when you just need it.

B: Yes, I think it's kind of humorous and yet you know I'm wondering are the counselors doing anything with more availability. Are they doing something different now that makes them more effective than they were before? That tells me there's something good there. Was it always good and now you just have more availability or is there some kind of a change in the way things are being done as well as more availability?

Well I think with the classroom things it really isn't the upper grades as much; the lower grades are the second step. Everybody's kind of getting the same vocabulary built up about how to treat other people and stuff like that.

Next year it will be K-5 so that will be kind of new and funny thing across the board.

There's always [Lots of background noise here—very hard to hear.....]

B: Does everybody know each other? Where are you from ?

Horace Mann.

B: Horace Mann. Ok-you are?

H____. And D____ was here this afternoon.

B: We're just kind of going; we're about 2/3 or 3/4 of the way through, so we'll come back and catch up, we'll go ahead do the end part and then come back to the beginning. Um, one of the things that they were supposed to be doing with this project is a solution-focused approach. A little bit different than what had been in place in the past. Have you seen any of that? Do you know what it is?

Sure we're doing that because that's kind of come through the AEA too, the use of solution focused approach is not always convenient; sometimes other teachers would like them placed in special education or get the help; very quickly and it doesn't move real quick, we have to go through more of a teacher analyzing what's going on and the teacher's trying to do to make some changes first. And I know here they can tell too, it's pretty close.

I have an MRDD classroom so already there's identified special ed students and I would say you know that my students have behavior plans and so we use that model to look for "what can we do to help the student" you know to avoid the situations that are difficult for them. So I think we use that in our IEP process and in trying to help them.

B: Was that already in place before this year?

Yes.

B: Was that something you were doing?

Yes, yes, yes.

B: And are you seeing that in [lots of talking]. I see the SCITs are pretty solution focused too.

[Somebody leaving and lots of noise].

B: We're just going to keep going and we'll get back to the front end of this. I asked the kids this; we put it in a,b,c,d, well we didn't really get to d and f, just a, b and c's. You know I always like to deal with a 1-5 kind of thing. How would you rate the quality of services with 5 being best and 1 being lowest on the scale. The quality of services that have been received from the counseling this year.

This is the first year I've had a counselor and it was wonderful. It really, she was able to get to the bottom of some things that I don't think we would have ever been you know as just the classroom teacher I don't think I would have ever found out a lot of the stuff that I found out and we were able to help them in a much better way because the information we got I think.

For me it was a new outlet a student I have whose been in my room for two years now and things were kind of escalating and we weren't getting—he needed some individual time and this was a great way to get that for him. And I really can see he's starting to think through things. He still makes mistakes, but he is learning the language now. He knows that he'll own up to his mistakes—not immediately, but after you know after we

give him some time he can say I shouldn't have done that. You need to mark this on that score sheet. Where last, the last two years he would have not been able to do that. Maybe it was anger and you know he was out the door and that was it. He's able to think things through after an incident. Give some apologies on his own—self-initiated—which he never did and I think it's given him a framework to think about how his behavior impacts others and what he can do about it. So I've seen some you know very positive things out of it for the students that I have had.

B: Sounds like availability has improved, increased. The effectiveness may have gone up some. Partly as a result of availability. It sounds like some other things are in place. Some other practices. Are there recommendations that you might make to make it even better. Are there things that are being missed that need to be addressed?

In my situation it was coordinating the outside counseling and inside counseling and I don't think we could have done that without having the setup that we have this year. I found that sometimes the communications with the outside resources weren't quite as good, but that the school's counselors I would say were able to work through some of that and it became better. So that would be where I could see that some improvement could be made. Maybe is the coordination of the two services together and the two people communicating and also communicating with me or the classroom teachers. Whatever they were trying to work on with the child.

B: So that you know what's going on with the inter-agency piece.

Right.

I just sat in awe all year as everything that was presented and how directly related it was to the classroom and just thought I would have ate up every second that was available to come in and help with this group. And you know my group was probably nothing like yours. You know? I mean I'm sure in my building I don't deal with half the issues as that were in other areas. I'm just in awe that every single thing that came into that classroom was effective. We started class meetings which were down, we didn't have them for a week and a half—haven't needed one. But that just everything that was in place just really allowed these students to be able to learn which is what they're, hopefully there for first of all. So if I have to give it a 5, I'm going to give it a 5, but I'd give it a 6 or 7.

B: I got an 8 ½ from a parent, so I guess

[Lots of talking at the same time.]

I would agree that it was a 5 from the things that were discussed in our room too. Without even bringing up issues that were going on, they just seemed to know exactly what was done and what to work out and give the students solutions and then practice them and act them out and then follow through. The following times they were in my room, this is what we talked about in the past. You know I thought that was excellent. I don't have much experience with it because in the special ed students that I had previously, I didn't have any of those services.

Yes—our students aren't integrated into the guidance lessons, but we were thinking of doing that at Mann for next year. With this new program that was probably very appropriate for my students to come in and rate it then, back into the guidance time. However, now I'm being moved here to Jefferson, so I hopefully can do this with Jefferson.

B: I'm just wondering if, you know we're talking about communities—community resources being brought in. Another piece of this was to be more family inclusive. Do you see more connectedness of the school to the family with these kids that you're working with?

Yes—and I would say that the community person that worked with this one specific student that I had—she really did try to work on that—trying to get that connectedness with the school and the parent mostly. Because there were things that the parent needed to follow through on. And she did call and repeatedly contact them. She came to all the conferences that we had and then would repeat the things that she really needed that family to bring to the table and say “we'll, have you done this and how is that working.” So I thought that really did bring that part together much better than I probably would have thought that it would have happened before that.

B: Well, we've already kind of been through the how did you find out about questions. How did you hear about and receive information about this new program that was going to start in the Clinton schools?

B: So when did you first hear that there was going to be these level a, b, and c services?

We had an in-service, so we've been using a, b, and c through our AEA. This is my second year. I knew about that last year when we started. It was the SCIT portion that was new for us this year. What we did is we went to a TOT which could be learning or behavior, but then if we diagnosed it as like a behavior then we took it to our SCIT team and that's where I got in contact with Kathy.

B: Ok—so you all found out about this as you were starting the school year? And you were all like great—no one has reservations going in this is like business as usual or anything like that?

No—cause in my case for this student we've been trying to get some services for a couple years and finally we had somewhere someone that could meet individually with him that wasn't going to cost the family you know financially it wasn't going to be a burden and so this was a wonderful opportunity and we've seen some nice growth. And it's not solved, but it's certainly taking steps forward. And I think I have some other students that I would like to bring into it. I have two students being served in my class today and I would like to.....I think the need's there.

B: Can you tell me about what you think the counseling program has done. Can you connect the dots for me between the counseling program and academic performance.

S____: Well I think you hit it pretty close you know. Students bring their problems into the classroom and we have less time for teaching because we're trying to take care of these problems. But when they take these problems outside the classroom and they can be solved or given alternatives on how to solve the problem, when they come back in their classroom, they're ready to succeed academically and that's helped a lot, especially in my classroom.

Mine also. I would never have gotten to where I am. Why I got through, plus you know, the majority of the individuals who did utilize the help. I mean some may have total shutdown and would stay there you know I'd want him to stay in shutdown you know until he was able to cool himself off or get an intervention. I mean it could be days and not an aggressive shutdown. And some of the girls that would come in through their sessions. You know it was literally, you know just last week they had an issue—we dealt with it, fine we're in time, but if you want to use recess for your time? I'll let you use the tools that you gain through the counseling to solve this problem, I'm thinking, win, win, we got it. So they go in the hall to plan. But they're solving it. So I bring them back in because they're done and we go on with the day. But, they're in for recess to make them do it again.

B: You said "deer time?"

And it dropped everything underneath, I'm sorry. So they're supposed to be just reading at recess and they got into another snip-it. But, that's the roller coaster of it. So the more I can keep out of the classroom the more they can get the tools to deal with each other, it would stay out there so we could...otherwise it came in whether you wanted it or not.

They didn't know how to solve it; they didn't know how to work on it, you were working on it.

Right, they made it my problem.

S____: Then the follow-up too, it has helped quite a bit. I mean cause mine have a problem and then like Mr. Fate will come in the next day, just might be a few minutes just to follow-up on what's going on and that just helps tremendously.

Right. We know somebody is watching out for....

I was going to say in my class who gets to go out every week with them; he just wants to know that somebody cares and there's somebody else. And so academically, that has helped him because when he reads a book and takes an AR test, it's somebody else to go say now look at this and be proud of me and I mean it just gives him such a good feeling inside, that academically he does better because he wants to be able to share that with more people. You know, so it's really helped one student for sure.

I was going to say in my case a student had changed; it took so many times that she didn't know anybody that would really listen and talk to her. So these were a few

concrete people that were involved in her life that she felt that frustration at home and she'd even say I need some time. And we'd arrange to make sure that she'd have that time to talk with either the outside agency or the inside school agency so that they knew and could help her work through that on her own. And then she was ready to learn. She wasn't ready to learn until she got those issues gone. And if she couldn't get them resolved, she made them everybody issues. And so this prevented some of that in the classroom. It certainly diminished it some.

B: When a student goes out and goes with a counselor, what's the re-entry process? Assuming other kids are doing their work, this kid goes out, these kids keep doing their stuff. What do you have to do in order for the counselors take care of school work, or what's that piece like?

Well you know it's usually 10-15 minutes—they come and get them, they come drop them off and most of it's scheduled.

B: So they're not really missing blocks of time.

Cause they weren't going to attend anyway. You know for the most part—if they needed out they...

S____: The benefit of what they get with that supersedes what they might miss for five or ten minutes.

Because they weren't going to be doing anything during that time anyhow. They were too wrapped up in their own situation.

I think the situation—the time frame that it took to solve for them to resolve and maybe sometimes, I mean last year we weren't returning to the classroom—we were having to go home and that's lessened and also that the lengthened the episodes. You know, they're shorter, he's able to get himself calmed down faster. They don't go on and on and on. We've also been able to ignore him in the classroom; what he's doing. The rest of the kids have been great and gone on and then when he realizes he's not getting any attention, he has come back to us and joined us and you know. So I think those are things that never happened in the last two years and it's just being able to work with somebody to give him some tools no matter how hard I talked to him and tried to tell him the same thing, it's somebody totally independent from me you know. And I said to people that he's worked with, I think it's just a new phase that helps too, somebody that doesn't have all that history in a way that you've worked with him for three years. Somebody that's new to listen to him. And I think that's helped too. And what's nice is the student's transitioning to the middle school so I can give them a heads up. They're going to be looking for him. I've already talked to Mr. H. over at Washington so that when he transitions there that will help him be successful when he moves to middle school. And I think that's going to be wonderful too. We've got somebody to take him under his wing right away and not let him get himself into trouble. Somebody that's going to check in with him. He said I'll call him before schools starts and we'll check in and get to know each other and you know. I think I feel very comfortable about that.

B: I've talked to parents but I only have their individual stories. What are you hearing or what do you know from parents as far as their appreciation or understanding of this counseling program? Are you getting any feedback from parents?

Well the one parent that we do the SCIT with is just so grateful you know that just for any extra help and the outside help and for everybody to come together and focus on the family as a whole and just to help them. She's just you know, loves the extra support and help.

S____: We have a situation where a family had to go live with the grandmother and the grandmother is just so appreciative that she can get this extra help here at school for the outside agencies that we can refer her to that it's helped her quite a bit because I know at first she was struggling and wondering how she was going to balance all of this with having three kids again in her house and it's helped her out quite a bit and she's very appreciative of what's going on here.

For my students, the parents were non-existent. We could not get them to come in for anything. I mean contact attempts would be made and finally the counselors got together and we went to the house and finally got her involved. And it took us a couple years, but we have him in a great place now and now the parents are involved. And it was something I couldn't do. I mean as much, I tried so many times to get hold of her and she just wouldn't come. There was nothing I could do it seemed like to get her to come. And so it was so wonderful. I mean the outside agency that did it, I think she felt very threatened coming to school, but with a counselor she didn't feel threatened and she finally came in we were finally able to work it out and now she's great - I don't think it ever would have happened without the counselor.

S____: That's a good point. I really feel a lot of parents are threatened about coming to school. And that really makes a difference.

I am sometimes.

And they know that their child is disruptive and there's some negativity there. So being brought into that, you know, they're not comfortable. But in my situation too, they went to the home and mine was where a grandmother had custody for a while and she didn't know where to begin. And a dad that had custody for a while and he never had seen this child really for a very long time, so he really didn't know where to begin either. And so that agency at least helped them get in touch with all the needs to the best that they could and at least get started and know what direction to go.

And then the follow-up was key, you know if mom didn't make it to one of our meetings, our counselor always went to her and told her everything and had a nice rapport with her and you know these are the things you need to do. These are things I just couldn't ...

B: So the parents may not have had the most positive school experience in the

And so that's where it takes bringing them in when they haven't had a good experience, you already got some barriers there.

B: and now your kid's having trouble.

Yes.

And now you probably have a few people sitting around the table with them. You know here they've gotten in touch with their self and they know that person. As a matter of fact my situation, she asked for her to be there.. She you know the counselor said do you want me to be there and she said sure. You know you were very helpful to me and that would be great. So here she's got a friendly face to be in touch with right away even coming into that conflict. That's got to be helpful.

B: Well, we've pretty well covered the waterfront. When you were thinking about coming in you probably had some thoughts about some things that you wanted to say. So, I'm just going to sit back for a minute and let you tell me whatever we might have missed or emphasize anything you think is really important.

Well I know we're worried that the grant might be taken away. And that we're going to lose these services once we got them. We're seeing how well they're working and we're going oh no, you know. Hopefully it wasn't going to happen.

You know we have, even within the last ten years the clientele is changing drastically. You have kids raising kids. Kids who didn't have good experiences in school; didn't have good parenting skills and now they're raising kids. And it's that's trickling down farther and farther and if we do something about it by getting more people involved we're going to see positive things happening. And I think this is a step towards doing that. In tying schools, homes, everything together to help these kids get a better start and maybe be better role models for the kids they'll be raising some day.

The question that keeps coming to my mind is the level coming from the parents is the expectation. Mine would expect the counselor to help their child out. You know that level of expectation that we're here not just to educate them, but to fill in all the holes. And that is just absolutely overwhelming. You know if I didn't have the help that I had this year, like I said I'd have been, I probably would have raised the white flag and said I give. But then to have people walk in your room that are so highly qualified, I just sat back and hopefully took everything in that she said. I just watched and observed. You know something that to me, doesn't come natural. So their training must have really put them in the right place to deal with the issues in a way that they need to be dealt with. You know like I said I'm just in awe the whole year - don't think I would have done that. You know—that was great—it was perfect. You know?

I think too, for some parents, counseling, I mean just the thought of my child in counseling is very threatening—not only are they having trouble with school, but just dealing with that. And I think they approached it in a way that made the parents very comfortable. I had her talk to three who chose to participate. That was not the comfort level, however, they were getting some outside counseling and they could do that

because they had the means to do that. You know, but I think that this gave another way to help get some children and help parents that might not have, on their own, taken them to a counselor because that would have been a step that either they were too threatened by or couldn't afford to do. And so it just opens more possibilities for students to receive what they need.

In these issues, I mean I've dealt with sexual abuse this year, and that, and more and in more than one case there's possibilities there. Those are issues that ten years ago teachers would not have been able to deal with – now we're pretty much involved. And now it's awakened us to even look for more signs of things that other kids might have, or do, or even watch for things like that in class. You know we couldn't have gotten that without having the counseling services that we do. I do think if it's taken away, it will be a loss and I think you will see it if that change happens in the classroom.

B: This is off the playbook, but one of the things that we see in other kinds of programs sometimes people get involved with professional services because they're mandatory reporters that some things go up. We get reports of maltreatment may go up. Have you seen any of that where there's an increase in where somebody had to call DHS more as a result or any kind of unattended consequences?

I guess I reported more than I needed to, but fortunately this year I didn't need to and that was a good thing. And I don't think that the counseling grant had, I know that they had nothing to do with it because the incidents were you know, wouldn't have been influenced by that at all.

S____: well you know the ones I've been involved in this year they were ongoing before we had the counseling program anyway, so I don't think they coincided with each other at all. I mean they definitely were involved in it once you know they found out about the situation, but like I said it was already ongoing and so it just, did get involved which I think was really for the better.

B: Alright. Anything else? Who did we miss? Ok, well thanks. I know school's over, you want to get going so I don't want to keep you too long. Thanks so much for coming in and sharing this information.