
*The A.I.M. initiative
of
Shadow Student Athlete
Development Services, Inc.:
A Mixed Methods Evaluation*

*By Lisa Lederer, M.A.
and Emi Iwatani, M.A., M.Ed.*

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Introduction

The following is a mixed-methods evaluation of the A.I.M. initiative (A.I.M.) by Shadow Student Athlete Development Services, Inc. (S.S.A.D.S.), a character coaching program active in six K-8 or 6-8 Pittsburgh Public Schools. The evaluation is focused on the three schools, Langley, King, and South Hills, where A.I.M. is most firmly established.

The A.I.M. initiative serves 5th-8th graders who either self-refer or selected by administrators, teachers, or A.I.M. staff for their appropriateness. Each student served receives at least one (but typically more than one) of the four program offerings:

Mediations are sessions involving two or more students, where the goal is to settle a conflict through verbal means.

Interventions are sessions involving one or more students who are sent to the A.I.M. office by a teacher, where the goal is to solve an immediate behavioral problem through dialogue with a “character coach,” or A.I.M. staff member.

Mentoring is a regularly scheduled, one-on-one session between a student and his or her assigned character coach, where the student’s behavior and future goals are discussed.

Groups are sessions involving multiple students where a coach presents a lesson of his or her choosing.

Mediations and interventions are available to all students in the school, on an as-needed basis. Mentoring and group sessions are available to only a subset of students—typically the ones who struggle in school with behavioral issues. These latter students are analyzed separately in this report, and are referred to in this report as “the students in the Shadow group,” or “students who received more intense services from A.I.M.”

The main objective of A.I.M. is to effect *transformative* change in students: to change the way students think, feel, and act in a positive way. The goal of this evaluation is to shed light on whether and how the program is achieving this goal and to suggest strategies for improving its effectiveness. The first section (I) includes findings from quantitative analysis, while the second (II) includes interview findings and recommendations.

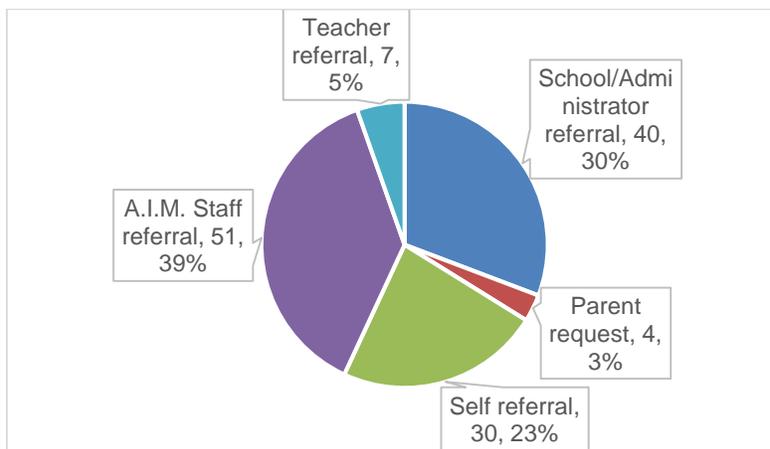
Section I. Findings from Quantitative Analysis

Overview

According to the monthly reports that S.S.A.D.S. provides to the school administration, for the 2014-15 school year, **the A.I.M. initiative conducted a total of 348 mediations** across the three schools. The majority (214) occurred at Langley, the school where is has the most staff, has been present for the longest time, and is most established. 103 mediations were conducted at King, while 31 were conducted at South Hills. **Overall, 98.6% of these mediations were recorded as being “resolved,”** meaning that the parties involved did not engage in further conflict about the matter for which the mediation was conducted. **A total of 603 interventions were conducted** during class time or class changes to minimize behavioral disruptions, including 357 at Langley, 153 at King, and 135 at South Hills. **A total of 451 group sessions were conducted**, including 98 at Langley, 153 at King, and 200 at South Hills.

In addition to serving as mediators for the overall school, A.I.M. provided more intense services, namely **one-on-one mentoring, to 183 students** from the 3 schools (34 from South Hills, 44 from King and 105 from Langley).¹ **A total of 1068 mentoring sessions were conducted** across the three schools, including 455 at Langley, 479 at King, and 134 at South Hills. Most of these students were also involved in many of the group sessions. Sources referring students to the program to become “Shadow students” receiving mentoring services included teachers, administrators, parents, A.I.M. staff, and students themselves (Figure 1). Shadow students were 60% male,² 96% Black or African American, 2% White, 2% multiracial, and 1% Hispanic.

Figure 1. Known referral sources of Shadow students (N, %)



¹ Between semesters 1 and 2, 12 students were added to the A.I.M. list at King, 43 were added at Langley, and none were added at South Hills. At the same time, 2 students left King between semesters 1 and 2. (No Shadow students left South Hills, and an unknown number left Langley.)

² The large proportion of males is due to the program at South Hills, which includes exclusively males.

The following three tables provide the average number of mediations, group sessions, and mentoring sessions students were involved in per quarter by school. The tables show that on average, more group sessions were conducted at King and South Hills than at Langley, while more mentoring sessions were conducted at King and Langley than at South Hills. On average, Shadow students were involved in relatively few mediations.

Langley

Group (N1, N2, N3) *	Q1 Mean (SD)	Q2 Mean (SD)	Q3 Mean (SD)	Q4 Mean (SD)
Mediation involvement per student (35, 33, 42)	1.28 (1.45)	1.10 (1.37)	.79 (0.89)	.78 (.84)
Group sessions attended per student (48, 61, 57)	5.69 (3.40)	5.10 (2.40)	2.31 (2.06)	2.59 (2.27)
Mentoring received per student (57, 46, 42)	9.14 (6.76)	2.72 (2.51)	1.41 (1.62)	1.10 (1.42)

* Indicates the number of Shadow students receiving the service for which data were available. N1 is the number of students for quarter 1, N2 is the number of students for quarter 2, etc.

** Standard deviation.

King

Group (N1, N2, N3, N4) *	Q1 Mean (SD)**	Q2 Mean (SD)	Q3 Mean (SD)	Q4 Mean (SD)
Mediation involvement per student (17, 11, 32, 33)	1.44 (1.78)	0.70 (1.06)	1.78 (1.20)	1.86 (1.00)
Group session attended per student (27, 27, 22, 26)	22.07 (7.51)	19.00 (5.82)	7.81 (7.13)	9.91 (9.15)
Mentoring received per student (27, 26, 28, 23)	8.22 (1.31)	7.96 (1.79)	5.67 (3.97)	2.26 (2.28)

* Indicates the number of Shadow students receiving the service for which data were available. N1 is the number of students for quarter 1, N2 is the number of students for quarter 2, etc.

** Standard deviation.

South Hills

Group (N1, N2, N3, N4) *	Q1 Mean (SD)**	Q2 Mean (SD)	Q3 Mean (SD)	Q4 Mean (SD)
Mediation involvement per student (9, 4, 6, 4)	0.35 (0.69)	0.12 (0.33)	0.21 (0.48)	0.12 (0.33)
Group sessions attended per student (28, 34, 34, 34)	11.88 (6.51)	20.21 (5.59)	7.09 (1.98)	19.94 (6.41)
Mentoring received per student (25, 33, 29, 24)	1.71 (1.59)	2.85 (2.00)	2.18 (1.36)	1.97 (1.85)

* Indicates the number of Shadow students receiving the service for which data were available. N1 is the number of students for quarter 1, N2 is the number of students for quarter 2, etc.

** Standard deviation

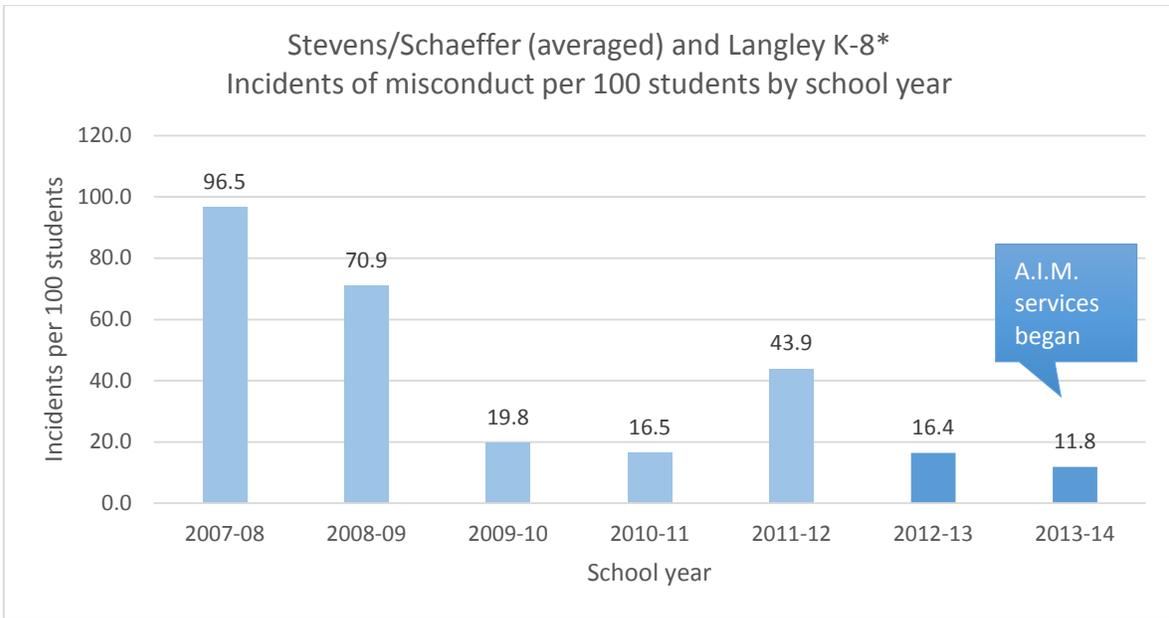
In addition, the A.I.M. initiative kept track of the number of “touches” the character coaches collectively had each month with individual students for each of the service categories. For example, a

group session with 15 students counts as 15 “touches,” while a mediation involving 3 students would count as 3 “touches.” **In the 2014-15 school year, the A.I.M. initiative provided at least 7755 “touches” to students, including 603 through interventions, 745 through mediations, 5339 through group sessions, and 1068 through one-on-one mentoring.**

Effect on School-wide Misconduct

Two primary goals of A.I.M. services are to improve overall school climate and reduce the amount of instruction time lost due to suspensions. Typically, it is very difficult to quantitatively demonstrate program impact for small-scale school-based support programs such as A.I.M., in part, because it is not possible to randomly assign students to the support program. It is also rare for a program to demonstrate impact during the first few years of implementation. That being said, for Langley K-8, where A.I.M. has been providing services since 2013-14 school year, there was some quantitative evidence suggesting positive impact. The following graphs for Langley K-8 are based on data collected for the Safe Schools report by the Pennsylvania Department of Education about the number of incidents of severe misconduct, which has a direct impact on school climate and suspension rate. The graph tracks the number of incidents of severe misconduct³ per year for the two years that the school has been in operation, since after the Pittsburgh Public School school closures and restructuring in 2011-2012. It also provides five years worth of analogous information on the average of Stevens and Schaeffer schools, where the majority of the current Langley students would have attended if it were not for the restructuring. Also tracked for each school over the last 7 years is the percentage of 6th-8th graders (the student population that most often receives A.I.M. services).

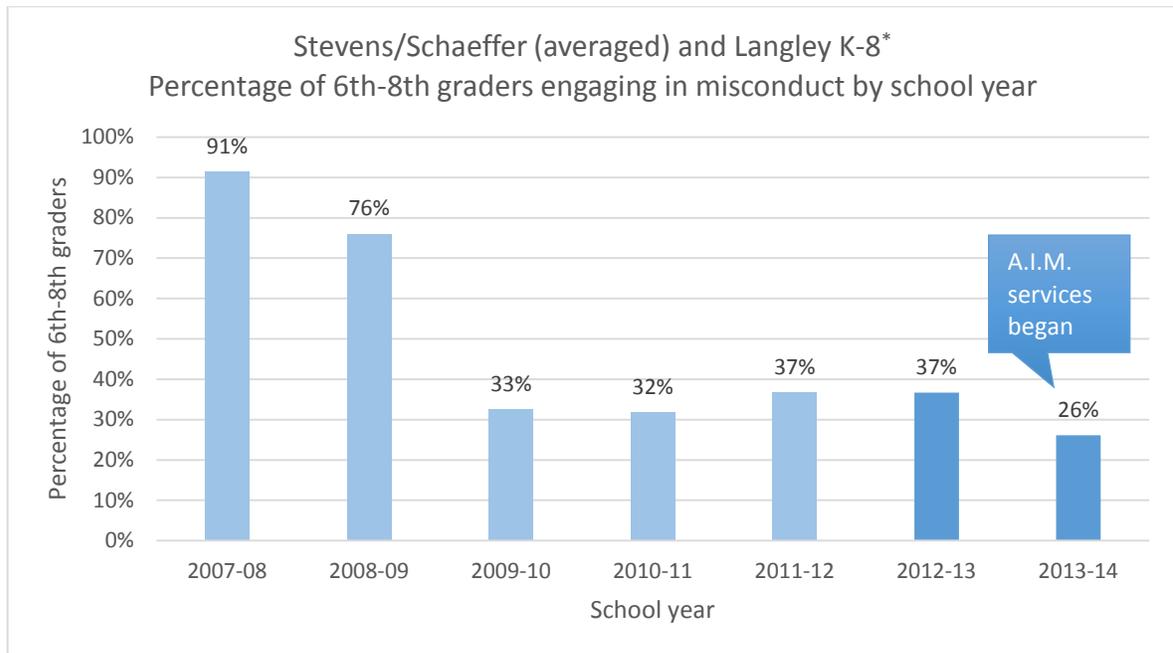
³ “Severe” misconduct only includes incidents noted by the state. All of these incidents led to suspension or expulsion. The possible categories of notable misconduct (which did not necessarily occur at these schools) are: Aggravated Assault on Student, Simple Assault on Student, Aggravated Assault on Staff, Simple Assault on Staff, Racial/Ethnic Intimidation, All Other Forms of Harassment/Intimidation, Fighting, Minor Altercation, Rape, Involuntary Sexual Deviate Intercourse, Statutory Sexual Assault, Sexual Assault, Aggravated Indecent Assault, Indecent Assault, Indecent Exposure, Open Lewdness, Obscene and other sexual materials, Sexual Harassment, Stalking, Kidnapping/Interference with Custody, Unlawful Restraint, Threatening School Official/Student, Reckless Endangering, Robbery, Theft, Attempt/Commit Murder/Manslaughter, Bullying, Suicide – Attempted, Suicide – Committed, Rioting, Bomb Threats, Terroristic Threats (excluding bomb threats), Failure of Disorderly Persons to Disperse, Disorderly Conduct, Possession of Handgun, Possession of Rifle/Shotgun, Possession of Other Firearm, Possession of Knife, Possession of Cutting Instrument, Possession of Explosive, Possession of BB/Pellet Gun, Possession of Other Weapon, Burglary, Arson, Vandalism, Criminal Trespass, Possession/Use of a Controlled Substance, Sale/Distribution of a Controlled Substance, Sale/Possession/Use or Under the Influence, Possession/Use or Sale of Tobacco.



*2012-14 data are for Langley K-8, while 2007-12 data are for the average of Stevens and Schaeffer schools, from where the majority of Langley K-8 students came.

Data source: Pennsylvania Department of Education Safe School Report

(<https://www.safeschools.state.pa.us>). Accessed April 26, 2015



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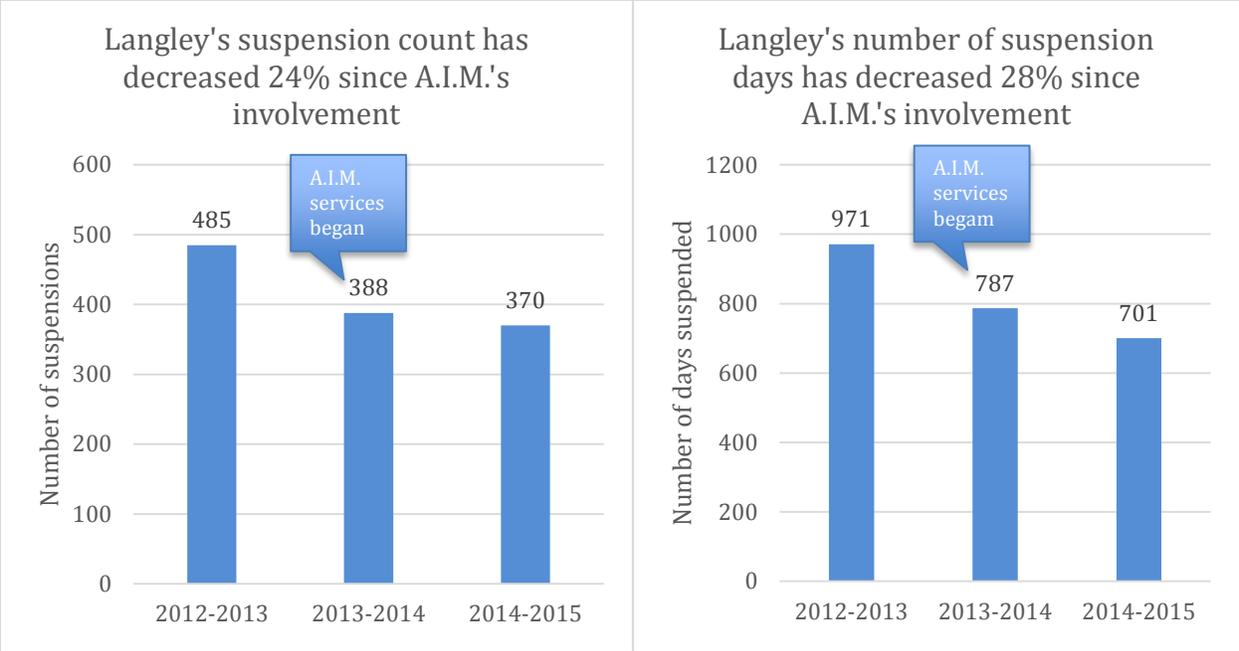
(<https://www.safeschools.state.pa.us>) and Public School Enrollment Reports

(http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/enrollment/7407/public_school_enrollment_reports) Accessed April 26, 2015

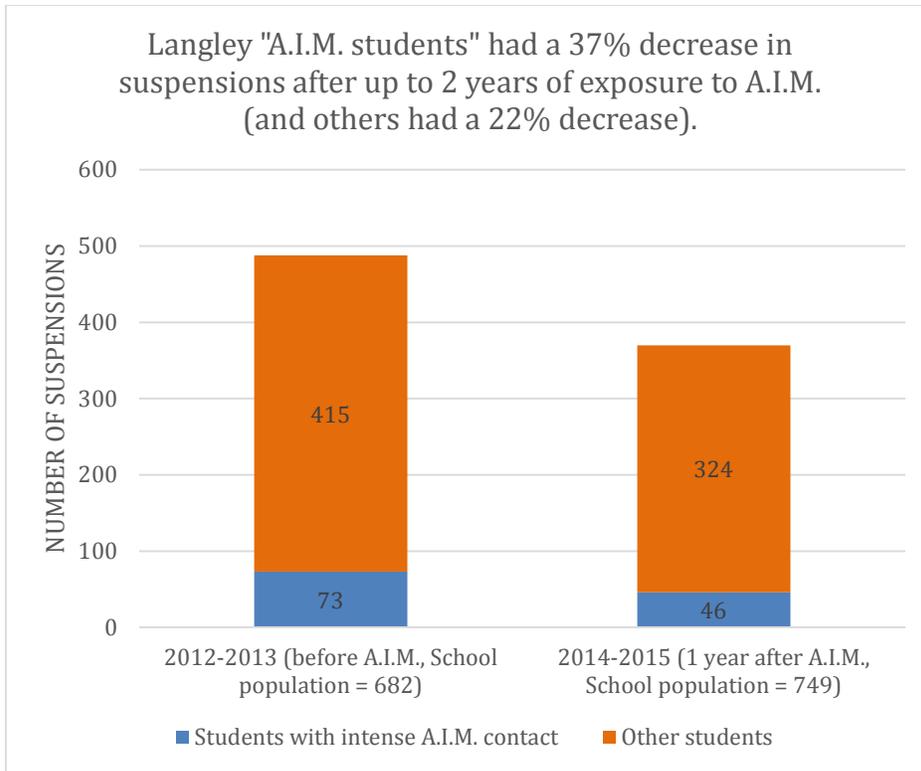
It is evident from the graphs that the involvement of A.I.M. occurred around the same time as a decrease and (arguably) an unprecedented low of incidents of misconduct, as well as a decrease and (arguably) an unprecedented low in the percentage of 6th-8th graders involved in these incidents. The principal at Langley, who confirmed that the former Schaffer and Stevens student populations are representative of the current Langley population, confirmed that this decrease was not simply due to a change in the way they count the suspensions, and judged that the presence of A.I.M. may have helped cause the decrease. The Behavioral Specialist at Langley, who is generally responsible for suspending students, explained how the presence of A.I.M. leads directly to a decrease in suspensions: some of the students sent to his office, who would have been suspended, are diverted to the A.I.M. office. The Behavioral Specialist agreed that A.I.M. is at least partially responsible for the decrease we see in the 2013-14 data, and could not think of any reason not to attribute the decrease to them.

Effect on Suspension Rate for Students Receiving Intensive A.I.M. Services

Suspension data from Langley, the only school for which these data were available for the last three school years, suggests that A.I.M. contributed to the reduction in suspension rate. The blue bar graph below displays the total number of suspensions and number of days suspended each year, first for all Langley students, and then for only those students who have received intensive A.I.M. services (i.e. “Shadow students”). In 2014-2015, when Langley teachers became familiar with the protocol for sending students to A.I.M., there was an appreciable decrease in suspensions. (Also note that some A.I.M. students may not have entered the program until 2014.) The school’s overall suspension count has decreased 24% since A.I.M.’s involvement, while the number of suspension days has decreased 28% since A.I.M.’s involvement. Since the total school population has been *increasing* over time (from 682 to 749, over the three school years), the continual decrease in suspension related metrics is particularly noteworthy.



The blue and orange bar graph below suggests that the decrease in suspensions is even greater for the Shadow students (who, as mentioned above, receive more intensive services such as group sessions and 1:1 mentoring) than the rest of the students at the school. To some extent, this is not surprising since the Shadow students tend to be the ones who need the most support, and the ones who need the most support tend to have more room for improvement than others. However, this clearly supports the hypothesis that A.I.M. is doing exactly what they aim to do—to improve school climate and student behavior, particularly with students who schools tend to regard as “harder to reach.”



Section II. Interview Findings & Recommendations

The following section is based on qualitative interviews with three staff members of the A.I.M. initiative of S.S.A.D.S., principals all three schools where A.I.M. is well established, one parent of a student who has received extensive services from A.I.M., and two teachers from two of these schools. The interviews lasted between thirty minutes and an hour and were audio-recorded with interviewees' permission. Interviews took place in a variety of contexts: most took place at the schools themselves, but two interviews were completed over the phone, one at the interviewees' house, and one in the course of an administrator's meeting with the S.S.A.D.S. Executive Director. The sections below correspond to the themes and topics that came up most often in interviewees' responses to questions composed by the evaluators and approved by the S.S.A.D.S. Executive Director. Recommendations are bolded at the end of each section. The goal of the supporting text is to explain these recommendations.

Summary

- Staff, teachers, and administrators all evidence an overwhelmingly positive attitude toward A.I.M. and particularly toward staff, including the Executive Director. (One assistant principal even requested, and was given, an intervention session himself!)
- A.I.M.'s achievements in each school owe greatly to the full integration of A.I.M. staff and procedures into the school's culture and disciplinary systems.
- This integration depends on maintaining active communication channels between A.I.M. and teachers/administration.
- A.I.M.'s achievements in each school also owe greatly to the full integration of A.I.M. staff and procedures into the neighborhoods/communities.
- Improvements suggested by interviewees were: increasing the number of staff members; increasing consideration of parent feedback; decreasing the amount of paperwork required of staff; ensuring that issues raised by students with the A.I.M. staff are communicated to the appropriate teachers; and eliminating the word "Athlete" from the program name.
- Benefits of having A.I.M. in a school include: the dissemination of information about racial inequities among teachers, administrators, and students; a contribution to the elimination of these inequities through improvements in the self-esteem and behavior of African-American students; and the consistent presence of role models who are genuinely devoted to student well-being.
- The philosophy of A.I.M. is based in the *restorative practices* movement, but the program goes well beyond this movement by adding a strong mentoring component and building connections with the neighborhoods surrounding schools.

The remainder of this section consists of findings and recommendations pertaining to: (1) A.I.M. staff, including training, teaching methods and curriculum; (2) A.I.M.'s integration into the school culture including reception by staff and students, and A.I.M.'s mechanisms of communication and documentation; and (3) ways in which A.I.M. espouses and uniquely builds upon the principles of restorative practices.

1. A.I.M. Staff

1a. Training

All staff interviewees ("character coaches" or simply "coaches") agreed that training was fundamental to their work at A.I.M., whether it took the form of conferences (like the recent session in

Washington, D.C.) modeling, one-on-one instruction, or self-driven information-gathering on YouTube. Training showed staff *how* to perform their job, such as how to work with the school administration and, as one staff member (or “coach”) put it, “how to interact with the youth” of varied backgrounds and strengths.

It also taught them *what* information to impart to students and *why* this information was important for students to know. For example, training stressed that it is important for coaches to tell students that many future career options are available to them, because teachers may not think to remind them of this fact – even when their students come from neighborhoods where it is not obvious. Staff members suggested that some of their most important teachings involved information that they themselves would take for granted. For example, one said, “Making them aware of what’s going on in society is one of my biggest goals, because I feel like a lot of times they’re blind to the fact of what’s actually going on . . . [I introduce them to] what’s out there, what you’re going to face.” Knowing the “why” behind the information given to coaches is crucial because it allows them to explain their work to teachers, administrators, and funders. The coach who talks to students about “what’s going on in society” explained that she does so because, otherwise, the students “don’t know how to adapt” to the world. Gathering ideas from one another and outside sources is clearly of great benefit to A.I.M. staff, so **it is recommended that more regular Professional Development meetings be established that bring together coaches from all schools.**

1b. Teaching Aims, Methods and Curriculum

A.I.M. aims to effect *transformative* change in students: to change the way students think, feel, *and* act. All interviewees agreed that this goal is being achieved. As one coach put it, “it’s a beautiful thing” to see during classroom observations how students had changed behaviorally, or to infer from report cards how they had changed academically. One administrator explained how the cooperation of the entire school staff has made it possible for A.I.M. to identify almost all students who could benefit from the program: “We’ve sort of established a culture of, ‘it’s okay to ask for help, it’s okay to let an adult know that you’re having a problem with a student.’”

The coaches interviewed felt that the vast majority of students in their “caseload” have been influenced positively by A.I.M.. It is the coaches’ openness to working with seemingly *unreachable* students, though, that promises to maintain student participation in the program and, ultimately, to touch as many students as possible. Instead of giving up on unresponsive students, coaches remind themselves that, as one put it, “it takes time:” they continue in their attempts to help students deal with the issues underlying their unresponsiveness.

Although the A.I.M. staff, teacher, administrator, and parent interviewees were all convinced that the A.I.M. curriculum and teaching methods caused many types of changes to occur at once, including behavioral, academic, emotional, and social changes, they all – even the staff – described the changes that A.I.M. aims for in a slightly different way. For example, one coach declared that the primary thing students are taught in A.I.M. is “teamwork, we all need each other . . . our program has taught all these kids to love one another.” Another staff member reported that his teaching emphasized how to behave appropriately in different situations, such as on the Internet, at home, with teachers, and facing conflict. One teacher, asked to summarize the goal of A.I.M., said that “a lot of times our kids have very low self-esteem, so they talk about that . . . and then working on that, and working through that, and giving them responsibilities, and checking on them.” Other teacher and administrator interviewees stated that the aim of A.I.M. is simply teaching students to “make better choices.”

This diversity of feelings about the goal of A.I.M. reflects the diversity of curricula and teaching methods adopted by the coaches. One coach stresses the importance of open, one-on-one discussions with students. S/he explained that s/he has learned how to “get them comfortable . . . with their situation [in A.I.M.]. So that they’re comfortable talking to me about the [home] situation. “ Another coach stresses the delivery of self-esteem-promoting messages to groups of students, instead of individuals. Reflecting on this coach, one teacher judged, “I’ve even seen a change in the way [students in the A.I.M. groups] dress, in the way in which they carry themselves . . . and I attribute that to [the A.I.M. groups].”

A strength of A.I.M., then, is the way the coaches have molded the program’s basic principles into a curriculum and teaching methods that fit their own personal strengths. Of course, there are some curricula and teaching methods, such as “zero tolerance,” that would not be satisfactory given the overall A.I.M. philosophy. At the same time, the Executive Director reports that some coaches’ professional behavior, such as their arrival at work on time, has not been satisfactory. **The S.S.A.D.S. board / A.I.M. staff should work to set boundaries both on conduct and on what/how coaches are allowed to teach so that their personal strengths are best utilized.**

2. Integration into School Culture

From the beginning, A.I.M. has recognized the importance of full integration into each of the schools where it provides services. Full integration depends, first, on positive reception of A.I.M. by students, teachers, and administrators; as one principal put it, “buy-in” is critical. Second, integration depends of the establishment of systems through which the program operates.

2a. Reception by Teachers

Coaches rely on teachers to provide feedback about the behavior of mentees, to allow coaches in their classroom for observations of mentee behavior, and to suggest which additional students might benefit from participating in A.I.M.: in fact, the coaches felt that, because teachers and administrators were constantly suggesting new students for them, A.I.M. had not “missed” any students who would have benefitted from their services at all.

At the same time, teachers rely on coaches to provide information about the sources of student difficulties – information that the students may not have shared with the teachers because of their “teacher” status. One teacher reflected that s/he and colleagues “feel comfortable to go to the [A.I.M.] staff and say, hey, what can we do as a team, how can we draw this kid back in.” Of course, because student trust for the coaches is crucial to the A.I.M. program, negotiating the communication line from student to coach to teacher has been tricky. As one teacher pointed out, the question is “how much do [A.I.M. staff] share to a teacher, and how much do [they] break trust by sharing too much . . . I feel like there are often some things that we [teachers] need to know.” As this teacher sees it, negotiation is still underway: “Building that contract [i.e., relationship of trust and open communication], not just with the student, but with the teacher . . . might need to occur a little bit more.” **In the future, expectations for teacher-A.I.M. staff communication about individual students (e.g., what must always be shared about students versus what will never be shared) should be reflected upon and clarified.**

2b. Reception by Administrators

Teachers also rely on coaches to provide an alternative, in the form of interventions, to harsher (and often ineffective) disciplinary measures. As one coach reported, “Teachers will call me about a student before they even . . . refer them to the [administrators] because they know they’ll react to me.” This means that school administrators are aware of and accept A.I.M. as a disciplinary alternative. At one school, the Behavioral Specialist who deals with disciplinary concerns is located directly across the hallway from the A.I.M. office, and reported that students are regularly sent between offices as appropriate.

At another school, the acceptance of A.I.M. by the administration has not been so straightforward. Last year, a corporation that delivers student discipline, and that runs on principles that seem to conflict with A.I.M.’s principles, operated alongside A.I.M.. Despite this conflict, it is possible that students who were placed in the alternative program could sometimes have benefitted from A.I.M.’s services, and vice-versa, so it is unfortunate that the two programs were seen as separate options instead of working together. At the end of the year, the school administration decided to continue supporting A.I.M. instead

of the other discipline program (possibly due to teachers' and administrators' displeasure with the former). This incident, though, suggests that **A.I.M. could benefit from more complete integration with all of a school's programs (including emotional support and special education classrooms).**

2c. Reception by Students

Coaches know that students look up to them and enjoy spending time with them. As one coach said, when s/he sees student mentees in the halls, "they want to hug me and wave." Crucially, though, A.I.M. staff have managed to maintain protocol such that students do not run up to them and hug them in the halls (for example) or visit their office without teacher permission. As one principal explained, "We have a system where, if kids need to get to [A.I.M.], there's a pass . . . so there's not that looseness that sometimes gets associated with these kinds of programs."

One teacher did admit that "the only thing that becomes a problem [with A.I.M.] is kids feeling like they can go see [A.I.M.] on their own. Sometimes it becomes an escape from the task I don't want to do." Still, s/he added, program staff "have gotten [much] better about [dealing with] that." A coach also felt that students occasionally visit the A.I.M. office simply to "hang out," though such students' motives were easily detected. **It seems important for A.I.M. to develop ways of ensuring there is clear communication and agreement among coaches, administrators and teachers about the referral protocol, including how to minimize and manage inappropriate self-referrals.**

Coaches demand respect, and not simply love, because they are truly role models. Part of their effectiveness as role models is due to their sharing a cultural background with students. One coach reflected that "most of the issues that these kids suffer from, I dealt with the same. So when they see that I'm not really too far from them, they take and listen to what I'm saying to them." One principal said of the Executive Director, "When they look at him and he looks at them, they're able to have a different level of connection, because not only is he an African-American male that comes from Pittsburgh, but he's an African-American male that turned his life around and is giving back to the community." Seeing the coaches as role models also enables students to pick up essential life skills: as one coach said, "they see us let things roll off our backs, so they do it, too." Seeing how the students see the coaches as role models causes teachers, in turn, to respect the coaches: one teacher declared that the coach she works with "definitely is a role model, and [we] teachers, we really respect that."

2d. Mechanisms of Communication

Fluid communication between teachers/administrators and A.I.M. staff is essential to the successful operation of the program. Interviewees indicated that, thanks to the variety of communication methods

currently available, this has been achieved. Teachers and administrators reported communicating with A.I.M. staff using phone, e-mail, texting, or face-to-face conversation, depending on which method is most practical for the context.

Not only do A.I.M. staff have multiple communication channels available to them, though: their voices are fully integrated into the conversation at the schools where they work. The presence of A.I.M. coaches in the halls during class changes, for example, familiarizes them with the rest of the school community (and vice-versa). Coaches regularly attend meetings with school staff and administrators to stay “in tune” with the rest of the school community.

The procedure through which students secure mediation or mentoring from A.I.M. is the same at all three schools surveyed. Folders are hung on the A.I.M. door, and in prominent hallway spots, where students can obtain and return simple forms requesting mediation or mentoring sessions. This system empowers students, inviting them to reflect on their own well-being, to determine for themselves whether they would benefit from A.I.M.’s help. It fits well with the program philosophy of, as one coach put it, “giving kids [a] voice.”

A.I.M. staff also fill out a report about each mediation, mentoring, or intervention session and deliver a copy to the teacher of the student(s) involved. As a teacher interviewee pointed out, however, these reports do not always get to the teacher most involved in the issue, leaving a gap in the communication line. **A.I.M. staff should work with teachers and administrators at each school to develop strategies for closing the student-A.I.M.-teacher communication loop.**

2e. Mechanisms of Documentation

The A.I.M. staff goes to great lengths to document each encounter. In fact, in their interviews, multiple staff members recommended decreasing documentation requirements. Because all of the documented information is useful, however, especially in discussing the progress of individual students with their teachers, **it is not recommended that A.I.M. change the documentation amount, but that A.I.M. change the documentation method and the information recorded to improve efficiency.** (A sample computerized form where coaches would note each encounter is included as Appendix A.)

3. Restorative Practices

The mentoring and mediation methods fostered by A.I.M. are based on the *restorative practices* movement. According to The Advancement Project, a non-profit civil rights organization, such practices are “processes that proactively build healthy relationships and a sense of community to prevent and address conflict and wrongdoing” (“Restorative practices: Fostering healthy relationships and promoting

positive discipline in schools: A guide for educators,” March 2014). Last April, 23 Pittsburgh Public Schools, including Langley and South Hills, but not including King, accepted a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice to support a three-year program involving the implementation of restorative practices and the measurement of their impact on school safety and climate. Administrators and teachers at participating schools predict that A.I.M. and the new restorative practices program will be mutually enhancing, that A.I.M. will “complement” the new program and “fold right into” it.

Importantly, though, the impact of A.I.M. goes beyond promoting restorative practices. First, mentoring is a crucial component of A.I.M., but not necessarily of restorative practices in schools. Second, while restorative practices focus on the school community itself, A.I.M. makes a point of integrating itself into the outside communities and neighborhoods that feed into its schools as much as possible. **As differentiating A.I.M. from other restorative practice programs becomes more important, A.I.M. should maintain and emphasize its competencies in mentoring students and forming neighborhood connections.**

3a. Mentoring

As one principal described A.I.M., “If there’s not a mediation to be done, then they’re going door to door mentoring.” A.I.M. staff are more than role models, because they do not simply model appropriate behavior, they actively teach life skills. One teacher suggested that pairing students with mentors is essential to A.I.M.’s effectiveness: “I think that they’ve gained self-esteem . . . they have gained some coping skills . . . [but] a lot of times, with our kids, it’s really about them knowing that somebody really cares about what’s going on in their world.” A principal agreed that it was the attention that coaches devoted to individual students that led to the program’s success. S/he described A.I.M. as “the glue of what we do” at the school, and went on, “It’s the glue in that it’s another layer in there . . . to have people [whose] time is dedicated to checking in on some of our more challenging kids . . . the teachers don’t have time . . . they don’t have a dedicated hour, if that’s what it takes.”

3b. Integration with Neighborhoods/Communities

Typically, community involvement outside the school plays only a supportive role in establishing restorative practices in schools (“Restorative practices,” *Fostering healthy relationships and promoting positive discipline in schools: A guide for educators*, March 2014). A.I.M. staff, in contrast, both remain aware of happenings in the neighborhoods where their schools are situated and are fixtures in those neighborhoods. As one teacher said, “They’re very in tune with [our school’s neighborhood], with what’s going on in [here], which is a really nice piece because teachers may not be from [here], may not know

the culture and what's going on." Another praised A.I.M. staff for their extracurricular work, for "really trying to get into the kids' lives, into their families' lives." In addition, as a principal observed, these community connections help coaches perform their job: "There's [already] an atmosphere of trust [between students and the mentor] . . . because they know the mentor from the community here . . . a lot of my students already have a relationship with [the coach] from summer camps, football, rec centers, he's very active in the community and sits on the community board." In fact, when this principal guided the teachers on a tour through the neighborhood from which most their students came, it was the character coach who literally led the way.

Conclusion and Future Directions

A.I.M. has achieved phenomenal success in the schools where it is well established. Such a successful program would ideally be scaled, which would mean taking it to new schools and even to new school districts. The enthusiasm and devotion of the current A.I.M. staff (including the Executive Director), while they have driven the program's success thus far, create difficult questions when it comes to scalability. How can A.I.M. recreate its achievements in other schools, cities, and states, without recreating the staff members themselves?

One possibility would be to identify the qualities that make a prospective employee a good A.I.M. character coach and hire people who have those qualities. Another possibility would be to figure out how to instill the qualities of a good A.I.M. character coach in future character coaches through training. These methods are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the best overall method is probably one that combines them, with a process that attracts and hires talented and good-hearted individuals *and* a mechanism through which all staff (including leadership) continue to grow the capacities of themselves and their organization through on-going professional development. **For this reason, we strongly recommend that A.I.M. begin to consider ways to increase the internal leadership capacity of the organization.** The groundwork has been laid, but expanding beyond the capacities of the current A.I.M. board and staff means entering a new phase of development.

