



All Kinds of Minds®

A NON-PROFIT INSTITUTE FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF DIFFERENCES IN LEARNING



Evaluation of Schools Attuned and Mentor Applications of Schools Attuned

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In March 2003, the All Kinds of Minds Institute commissioned an independent panel of eight education research experts. The charge of the panel was to evaluate the quality of 12 proposed research studies of the Schools Attuned program submitted by independent researchers from universities and research organizations nationwide. Based on the expert panel's evaluations and recommendations, All Kinds of Minds contracted with WestEd, a non-profit research, development, and service agency serving the education community for more than 40 years. Research began in March 2004. The independent study examined the effects of the Schools Attuned program on schools, teachers, and students and identified the essential elements and potential added benefits of mentoring programs. The WestEd research team was led by Co-Principal Investigators Dr. Naida C. Tushnet and Treseen McCormick.

Research Questions and Methodology

WestEd divided their study into three stages. The first stage was broad in scope and examined Schools Attuned in multiple school settings. Participating in the broad study were 21 schools from both northern and southern California. Public, private and charter schools were represented encompassing grades K-12. The second stage included an in-depth examination of a subset of seven schools from the broad study. The final stage was an exploratory investigation of the characteristics and potential benefits of mentoring for Schools Attuned implementation. >

Across the study, data were collected through classroom observations; interviews with teachers, school administrators, parents, and mentors; focus groups; and teacher surveys. Researchers examined the effect of Schools Attuned on students, both at the individual student and the classroom levels; and on teachers' knowledge, instructional practices, and attitudes.

Results and Conclusions

• Teacher Instructional Practice

Researchers concluded that participation in Schools Attuned positively impacted teachers' instructional practices. Intensive classroom observations by researchers found statistically significant differences between Schools Attuned teachers and matched comparison teachers: Schools Attuned teachers more often initiated assistance or help to students, provided clear expectations to students, encouraged active participation from all, and better managed disruptions in the classroom that could have resulted in discipline referrals. Schools Attuned provided teachers with new classroom strategies, and increased teachers' confidence and willingness to work with students before prematurely referring them for special education services. The addition of mentoring services was also beneficial to both the schools and teachers, providing additional support for implementing Schools Attuned in their classrooms, including attuning individual students and adopting classroom strategies to help all students learn. School administrators reported observable differences in instructional practices after a

teacher returned from Schools Attuned training, and between trained and non-trained teachers; Schools Attuned teachers were more strategic about their teaching and more purposeful in their lesson planning and instruction than prior to the training.

• Student Outcomes

Students whose teachers used Schools Attuned showed increases in their abilities to cope with their learning difficulties, levels of self-confidence, and active engagement during class. Students were more knowledgeable about their strengths and weaknesses, and had a better understanding of their needs. Whole classroom outcomes associated with Schools Attuned included improved classroom climate, fewer interruptions and disruptive behaviors, and increased class participation.

• School-level Climate and Culture

Schools Attuned provided staff with a common language and a way to describe children that all staff members understood; and improved teachers' communication and collaboration around student learning. Schools Attuned teachers had statistically significantly higher ratings than comparison teachers for parent and community involvement, and for positive school culture. Researchers found that successful school-level implementation was facilitated when schools developed a strategic implementation plan, tailored Schools Attuned to meet the needs of the school, teachers, and students, had a supportive administration and advocate/support person, trained a core group of teachers, and integrated Schools Attuned into existing school policies and initiatives.

Key Recommendations

Based on the findings from the WestEd study, researchers identified several opportunities for program improvement, including:

- Streamline the amount of paperwork involved in the formal Attuning A Student process to allow more teachers to implement the formal attuning process as intended;
- Develop a web-based system for teachers to identify accommodations and interventions linked to student data;
- Provide teachers and administrators with models of how Schools Attuned can be implemented in their classrooms and at the whole-school level; and
- Create a system for follow-up for teachers and administrators to provide the necessary support needed to implement and sustain Schools Attuned in their classrooms and at the whole-school level.

How This Study Informs All Kinds of Minds Programs

A key outcome of a rigorous research agenda is to respond to what is learned in order to provide the best programs possible. Since the launch of the multi-year WestEd study, All Kinds of Minds has been engaged in continuous improvement informed by cumulative results of this, as well as many other research activities. Results of these studies point to positive outcomes for students and teachers in areas associated with learning and school success, as well as ways in which our programs may be modified to increase usability and effectiveness. WestEd findings, for example, reinforced internal evaluation data identifying the barriers of the paper-driven process for *Attuning A Student*, a Schools Attuned process in which teachers look deeply at an individual students' learning profiles. A digital version was released in the fall of 2007. In conjunction with this work, a digital management tool

which will allow educators to match research based intervention strategies with a specific student profile is also in development, slated for a 2008 release. WestEd results also provide support for the growing recognition at All Kinds of Minds of the crucial role of implementation support. A conceptual model for implementation has been created in alignment with key research on sustaining changes in educational practice in order to have maximum impact on student learning. This model of implementation, delineated in an Implementation Matrix, has guided the development of an array of tools and services launched in 2007 called *Schools Attuned in Practice*. This comprehensive set of activities and resources provides teachers and schools with the tools they need to enhance student success, while having ongoing access to the support of the Schools Attuned community via an online *Community for Learning*. Beginning in 2008, Schools Attuned educators will have access to an innovative online networking tool, in which they will communicate with one another regarding Schools Attuned, have access to resources and experts, and participate in e-learning activities unique to All Kinds of Minds. This online tool will serve as the first step into the virtual community that will engage and support adult learners as they use the Schools Attuned approach as a means to support student learning.

For more information about All Kinds of Minds or the Schools Attuned Program:

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