The Ivymount Strategies Room:
Evaluating its Impact on School within a School Students and Classrooms 2013-14

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10/1/2014
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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes program evaluation outcomes for 2013-14, the first year the Ivymount Strategies Room provided support services for six target students with autism spectrum disorders at the School Within a School (SWS), a DCPS school. Several forms of data were collected, including interviews with SWS and Strategies Room staff, and DCPS standardized testing scores.

SWS staff were very positive about the impact of the Strategies Room on target students, other students, and overall classroom climate. Almost all mentioned the beneficial impact of the Unstuck and On Target curriculum, and stressed the importance of integrating this curriculum into classroom practices as early in the year as possible. SWS for the most part agreed that the Strategies Room had been responsive, done a good job balancing push-in with pull-out services, and communicating/collaborating with SWS staff. They agreed that Strategies Room had helped build capacity for the future, but were concerned that without ongoing commitment from DCPS, the impact of the Strategies Room would be short lived.

Strategies Room staff agreed that the program had a positive impact on target students' academic and social skills, as well as on the social skills of other, non-target students, but admitted that the impact of the Strategies Room was uneven, and highly dependent on the degree to which general education classroom teachers adopted Strategies Room strategies – especially Unstuck and On Target vocabulary, and principles of positive behavioral supports. The biggest challenges to success were scheduling and lack of SWS staff buy-in, but overall, Strategies Room staff felt confident that they had had a very positive impact at SWS.

In terms of student progress in response to Strategies Room interventions, all six target students made dramatic progress in social skills as measured by the ISRS, and all six demonstrated modest to significant growth in academic skills as measured by DCPS standardized tests (i.e., the iREADY, DIBELS and/or PIA). A few target students really stood out in terms of their social and/or academic progress.
PART 1: INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes program evaluation outcomes for 2013-14, the first year the Ivymount Strategies Room (SR) provided support services for six target students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) at the School Within a School (SWS), a DCPS school. SWS is a Reggio Emilia-inspired school that also uses Responsive Classroom™ as core philosophies for organizing their community. The overall environment is dynamic and child centered, and promotes joyful learning for students ranging from 3 years old to 3rd grade. Strong leadership and clarity of mission results in a highly functional, goal-oriented community.

PART 2: METHODOLOGY

Participants

Target students included the six students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) who were identified to part of the Ivymount program called the “Strategies Room” (SR). Two were in first grade (Jaguna and Marcus), four were in second grade (Michael, Jacob, Harrison, and Calvin), and all were male. Students were spread out over four separate general education classrooms. Over the course of the school year, SR staff provided support for other students as well, but this report only provides specific, student-level data for the six target students.

Data Collection and Analysis

SWS and SR Staff Interviews – In order to gauge the overall impact of the SR on target students, other students, and classroom climate, structured interviews were conducted with each of the four first and second grade general education classroom teachers, as well as with the school’s director of special education, social worker, and principal. Similar interviews were also conducted with each of the SR staff, including teachers, 1:1s, and administrators, although these interviews also included Likert-type scales (2=significant, 1=moderate, 0=minimal) to evaluate the impact of the SR on several domains. Interview data were analyzed for common themes across interviewees, and findings are reported separately for SWS and SR staff.

Student Specific Data – In order to measure academic progress for the six target students, we reviewed DCPS test scores at the beginning of the 2013-14 academic year, and again at the end of the year. Test scores included the DIBELS (a measure of language arts skills administered to both first and second graders), the PIA (a measure of language arts skills administered only to second graders), and the iReady (a measure of math skills administered to both first and second graders).

In order to measure social/emotional and behavioral progress for the six target students, we reviewed Ivymount Social Readiness Scale (ISRS) scores administered at the beginning of the year and again at the end of the year, and behavior data for the two students for whom these data were collected. Qualitative data were also gathered for each target student via structured interviews with SR staff about student progress and least restrictive environment (LRE) placements. Excel was used to calculate improvements over time in terms of both academic, and social/emotional and behavioral domains. Both quantitative and qualitative data are reported in the form of short summaries for each target student.
PART 3: FINDINGS

Impact of Strategies Room: Perceptions of School within a School Staff

Based on interviews with SWS staff, the following outcomes were noted:

Overall Impact of Strategies Room

SWS staff were outspoken in their support for the contribution made by SR staff, and stressed what a difference it made to have Ivymount staff providing support to students and classrooms, and what a good job SR staff had done integrating themselves into the SWS school culture. Typical comments included the following:

- “The year before Ivymount came to our school, we had a number of kids identified with ASD, but we didn’t have Ivymount. The difference between that year and this year is like day and night. Not only do we have the resources kids in the classrooms need, but [Ivymount staff] have this expertise that they are generous with ... and they’re modeling for me and for other kids some really strong ideas.”
- “They’ve [SR staff] just been a big bonus. If I didn’t have them, my classroom would not be what it is – particularly with [target students], but other students they’re working with have also benefited from what they’re doing.”
- “Obviously, [SR staff] don’t just want to help identified kids – they want to change the culture in the school that affects the whole school, all kids, all teachers.”
- “It’s been great. I think we’ve created something new together. It’s been extremely exciting to watch these kids – both identified and with no [disability] identifications – all run these strategies together, and help one another, and use language that’s respectful and responsive. It started with Ivymount’s willingness to become part of the school, not just a program within the school.”

Curricular Modifications Based on Support from Strategies Room

All of the general education classroom teachers agreed that curricular modifications based on support from SR staff was highly beneficial. Most commonly, teachers mentioned the Unstuck and On Target (UAOT) curriculum which is designed to help kids develop flexible problem solving skills. Target students as well as other, non-identified students participated in pull-out instruction in UAOT strategies. Throughout the year, SR staff also offered push-in trainings in the four general education classrooms. Typical comments about UAOT included:

- “Kids are bringing some of the vocabulary back and it’s spreading among the kids and myself, and we’re trying to integrate it throughout the day ... it’s really useful for some of our kids to be more flexible – UAOT really helped make it a more positive environment.”
- “UAOT- the language and metaphors have been really helpful. Very catchy for kids, and not just for kids, I use it, too!”
- “Having different teachers come in and do lessons has really helped it become an everyday vocabulary in the classroom – being flexible, Plan A and Plan B, and goal/plan/do/check.”
- “The individual support and the UAOT workshop were invaluable to the students in the classroom ... the whole class workshop provided a common vocabulary and excellent strategies for students to use during the school day.”
In addition to UAOT, other curricular modifications that were mentioned included vocabulary from Visualize and Verbalize (VV), and using checklists of steps for completing assignments.

**Responsiveness of Strategies Room**

Six out of seven SWS staff felt that SR had been responsive to their needs. Typical comments include:

- “Our school has some specific teaching philosophies ... and yet [Ivymount staff] is so flexible with us, and so responsive to what our school finds important ... it’s been a great marriage between our school and their school.”
- “They’ve been immediately responsive and very adaptable. When I come with some kind of concern, I know that they will respond to it immediately.”
- “I think [SR staff] have been very flexible, and really want to accommodate.”
- “I do think they’ve been responsive .... Previously, Ivymount had always operated with self-contained classrooms. This opened a challenge for them, and they really listened and worked on that, and were extremely responsive.”

The remaining SWS staff member felt that while SR had been “pretty responsive,” they would have liked to see better communication (a subject covered at greater length later in this report).

**Impact of Strategies Room on Target Students**

All seven SWS staff reported that the SR had a positive impact on target students. Six noted improvements in academic performance as a result of the SR. Typical comments included:

- “[Target student] has been super, super successful academically. He’s gone from reading way below grade level to grade level in very quick time ... I attribute all of that to Ivymount’s knowledge.”
- “I think [the SR] is improving [target student’s] academic learning, and part of it is having some 1:1 time ... it’s gotten him further than he would have without it.”

Two SWS staff noted that academic progress had been uneven, with students who were more behaviorally challenged receiving higher levels of support throughout the year, and therefore making more progress and being less likely to “fall through the cracks.”

All seven SWS staff also noted improvements in social/emotional and behavioral performance as a result of the SR, including the elimination of eloping behaviors and the ability to spend more time in the general education classroom. Typical comments included:

- “[Target student] is an amazing success story ... he’s so much happier, able to enter into more play, spends most of the day getting what he wants to do.”
- “[Target student] is able to stay with the group, is spending more time in class, more time with the group in general ... he’s with us more often.”
- “[Target student’s] ability to get his behavior and emotional states under control has enabled him to be successful across the board, and so much happier and less stressed out.”

Several SWS staff emphasized how much they had learned about positive reinforcement as a result of working with SR staff, and also appreciated the high quality and positive attitudes of 1:1 aides trained by SR staff. For example:
“[The two 1:1s] are now both very proactive, naturally jumping in to help all students in the class, not just those on their load, and are much more skillful at working with children when they get stuck. They both take a positive approach to behavior, acknowledging [students’] efforts and good behavior.”

**Impact of Strategies Room on Other Students**

All seven SWS staff described a wide range of ways in which the SR positively impacted other students not included on the SR caseload. Several mentioned the UAOT curriculum as having a beneficial effect on students without ASD, in addition to the way in which SR staff “modeled how to Harrisonde other kids,” and the provision of expert behavior analysis.

Another theme mentioned by at least four SWS staff was the impact of the SR on students’ tolerance for and acceptance of those with learning and behavioral challenges. Typical comments included:

- “One great thing I saw last year is how inclusion can be so beneficial to the whole population, for typical kids to experience other kinds of kids and learners, and to see it’s okay to have more empathy.”
- “I think that because [the SR] is here, and able to include children with very different needs, it allows other kids to see, ‘Wow, there are different kinds of people in the world!’”
- “I think it’s been a really positive thing for the way the rest of the kids see … this cohort of mainstreamed kids … They all know these kids are different, but they’ve been socialized all along to understand these kids have different needs.”

**Impact of Strategies Room on Overall Classroom Climate**

All seven SWS staff agreed that the SR had a highly positive impact on classroom climate, enabling general education teachers to meet the needs of all their students as opposed to just a few. Typical comments included:

- “[SR staff] have entirely freed me up, in huge ways. There are so many kids in this class with issues, and they’re consuming enough of my time, but [target students] are exceptionally consuming. If [SR staff] weren’t here, [target students] wouldn’t be doing as well, and my class wouldn’t be doing as well.”
- “I think having [SR staff] in the classroom takes the pressure off, allows me to better serve the other kids, because instruction can keep going … they help with the tone of the room, and make it constructive for everyone else.”
- “When I think back to last year, and managing all four [target] kids in the classroom, we did okay, we had some successes … but Ivymount has been such an important step, because [inclusion] is so much better with the right support and knowledge.”
- “Teachers are able to shift their focus from just a few children to the whole class. We don’t have outbursts and elopement the way we used to … we’re not living in fear anymore. We know that someone’s always on it, someone’s always watching. We didn’t have the staff to do that before.”

Again, one SWS staff member noted that the SR had more of an impact on classroom climate in some classes than others, and that teacher buy-in to SR skills and strategies was uneven, with Mr. Tome most successfully infusing them throughout his classroom, and other teachers doing so to a lesser extent.
Balancing Pull-out/Push-in Services

Six SWS staff felt that the SR did a good job of balancing push-in and pull-out services. Typical comments included:

- “I think the way they’ve done it so far has been perfect ... a great balance and continuous dialogue about what’s best – it’s going really well.”
- “I think they’ve been very thoughtful and sensitive trying to figure that out ... they didn’t come barreling in with an idea of how that was going to work. They realized it was very complicated.”
- “The Ivymount team has done a great job of seeing what areas could really use pull out support, or where push-in, or where kids could do fine on their own ... they’ve done a great job of gauging that and getting teacher feedback.”

One SWS staff member raised concerns about there not being enough presence of SR teachers in classrooms, and suggested that teachers relied too heavily on 1:1s and/or pull-out supports.

Effectiveness of Communication/Coordination

All seven SWS felt that by the end of the year communication/coordination was adequate or good between SR and SWS staff. However, most reported that communication had been rocky earlier in the year, including with parents, and several felt that there was still room for improvement. SWS staff frequently mentioned the importance of the bi-weekly meetings with classroom teachers that were instituted part-way through the year, as well as the benefits of having Mary Hughes represent the SR at SWS staff meetings. Typical comments included:

- “I think we’ve gotten better. It was pretty tough in the beginning, because there were so many pieces to work out ... it’s gotten better now that Mary is on board. She comes to all our staff meetings, and is a great liaison between the SR and what’s going on school-wide.”
- “At the beginning of the year, parents were confused ... I think some parents are supportive, but not all ... This is a new area for [Ivymount staff]. They’re not used to working with parents who don’t have buy-in.”
- “Three’s been a give and take of getting used to each other and how we work, and both sides have definitely grown.”

Suggestions included more formal and more frequent communication on the part of SR staff.

Building Capacity for the Future

When asked how the SR had helped build capacity for the future, feelings were mixed, and a number of themes emerged. Five SWS staff reported that the SR had built capacity, and typical comments included:

- “I think some of the ways they respond to children have sunk in with me ... seeing the way they respond to someone who’s really high energy, or is particularly upset, seeing some of the strategies that would use would help with any child – things like stopping a child, getting down on their level, looking in their eyes, asking them to take a few breaths, and helping them reflect back on what happened to them.”
• “There’s this capacity they’ve provided for all of the kids to experience a positive inclusion experience. That’s a capacity that’s so valuable to everybody.”

In terms of specifics, SWS staff most commonly mentioned UAOT. Typical comments included:

• “I think definitely the language is another tool in the tool box, and that can be carried forever. Those kinds of tools are really useful for us to have ... I think it makes all of us better teachers.”

However, four SWS staff also expressed anxieties about the future, and voiced their concerns that without a commitment from DCPS to provide ongoing services and supports, Ivymount’s contribution would not be a lasting one. Typical comments included:

• “I hope this is something DCPS will have some level of commitment to .... If you’re going to have an inclusion-type program, you need the staffing .... We’re a school with a high number of very dedicated, committed teachers, but to put a burden on the school that’s not properly supported, that starts to eat away and destroy a good community, because everybody begins to feel overwhelmed.”
• “I worry about next year and losing our second teacher. I loved the model we had this year.”
• “I’m worried that this is the beginning of remnants of teachers who were trained, and that as teachers leave, and others come in, we’ll lose [what we have.]”
• “We need [Ivymount] forever! ... Can’t be that you learn in one year and then we’re done .... The way it’s working this year is amazing, and should be how every school works.”

Barriers to Success of the Strategies Room

SWS staff identified several barriers to the success of the SR. These included the following:

• Failure to get the needed supports and cooperation from DCPS (including adequately trained 1:1s)
• Inability to get everyone at SWS to adopt the Ivymount model
• Difficulties of applying the Ivymount model as a result of differences in staffing ratios between Ivymount School and SWS
• Challenges of securing parent buy-in
• Difficulties with scheduling (especially at the beginning of the year)
• Failure to distribute staffing resources in an equitable manner (i.e., some target students received more support than others)
• Lack of clear communication

Impact of Strategies Room: Perceptions of Strategies Room Staff

The following section summarizes outcomes based on interviews with SR staff. In some domains, Likert-type scales were used in addition to open-ended questions, in order evaluate whether interviewees believed that the impact of the SR was “significant” (2.0), “moderate” (1.0), or “minimal” (0).

Overall Impact of Strategies Room

In spite of challenges faced, SR staff was highly positive about the overall impact of the SR, proud of their contribution to SWS, and looked forward to a continued partnership with the school. Typical comments included the following:
• “I think at the beginning of the year, it was stressful. But looking back, I think we came a long way, and we have really done some great things here. I can keep my head high knowing we made a lot of difference here.”
• “The team on the ground needs to feel incredibly proud of what they’ve done – Mary and Lynn – it’s extraordinary what they’ve done.”
• “The principal’s] proud to have us here, and we’ve made a difference and are a big asset to the school.”

Impact of the Strategies Room on Academic Growth of Target Students

When SR staff members were asked to evaluate the academic growth of target students, they gave it an average score of 1.5 (or half way between moderate and significant). This was primarily because they felt that academic growth had been uneven, with some students needing (and benefiting) more than others.

When asked to elaborate on their responses, SR staff cited the work done to improve target students’ math, reading, and writing skills, including the ability to inference (with special mention made of five of the six target students). Typical comments included:

• “Think of [target student], for whom writing was so difficult. Now he loves it and flourishes because we gave him some strategies.”
• “Both [target students] experienced significant academic growth, and that came as a direct result of Mary and Lynn’s interventions in reading and writing.”
• “Interventions have allowed [target students] to catch up with grade level and reenter the classroom.”

SR staff also frequently mentioned the VV curriculum as having had a significant impact on target students’ reading skills.

One SR staff member noted that the SR had an indirect as well as a direct impact on target students’ academic achievement. This was because non-academic interventions such as UAOT and behavior plans had a positive effect on target students’ ability to better access academic curriculum within their general education classrooms.

Impact of Strategies Room on Social/Emotional Growth of Target Students

When SR staff members were asked to evaluate the social/emotional growth of target students, they gave it an average score of 1.92 (or very significant). Again, however, four SR staff noted that the impact of the SR room on target students had been uneven – primarily because of varying degrees of buy-in on the part of SWS teachers, resulting in more generalization opportunities for target students in some classrooms than in others. Typical comments included:

• “[Target students’ social success] had a lot to do with the ability of teachers to support generalization.”
• “With the other second grade classroom, there was less [assimilation of language], and … consequently not as much change for those kids.”

SR staff frequently referenced the UAOT curriculum as having a significant impact on the social/emotional growth of students – both pull-out and push-in lessons.
Another theme mentioned by several SR staff was the positive impact of the SR on target students’ behaviors. SR staff introduced behavior plans to SWS and – with help from DCPS – gathered data, monitored plans, and made changes to plans as needed. Typical comments included:

- “For [target student], most of the gains were behavioral ... the strategies we implemented for [him] in collaboration with Rebecca [social worker] have been monumental for him.”
- “[Target student] is a totally different kid. The behavior systems we put in place for him have enabled him to be in the classroom again, and to make friends instead of scare people.”
- “[Target student] would have torn the classroom apart if we had not had someone intervene behaviorally. [Other target student] would have been kicked out. Classrooms would have been unhinged by those two children alone.”

Another theme was improved self-regulation. Typical comments included:

- “I think there was tremendous growth in kids’ ability to self-monitor and identify resources for help.”
- “I think students are able to take a step back, put some labels on different feelings they’re having ... able to independently navigate social situations using the vocabulary and tools they have. [For target student] they were talking about a private placement. It was a make or break year for him, and we helped.”

Impact of Strategies Room on Other Students

When SR staff members were asked to evaluate the impact of the SR on other students’ academic and social growth, they gave it an average score of 1.5 (or half way between moderate and significant). Some of the things SR staff mentioned included using 1:1s as instructional assistants as opposed to dedicated aides (so that they could help all students – including non-target students – in need of additional assistance), the UAOT curriculum (especially the push-in lessons, but also the pull-out lessons that included non-target students as well as target students), and the use of token boards to support positive behavior of non-target students.

Again, SR staff noted that the impact of the SR on other students depended heavily on how much SWS teachers infused SR skills and language throughout their classes. A typical comment included:

- “It had everything to do with what teachers did with the information we gave them.”

Impact of Strategies Room on Overall Classroom Climate

When SR staff members were asked to evaluate the impact of the SR on overall classroom climate, they gave it an average score of 1.4 (or almost half way between moderate and significant). Some of the things that SR staff mentioned included classrooms becoming more flexible, improvements in crisis management, and greater use of positive reinforcement. Typical comments included:

- “I think classrooms have become more flexible in general ... being more tolerant and flexible and positive. We see a lot more of that than at the beginning of the year.”
- “The way we respond to crisis situations has improved from what I’ve heard happened last year.”
- “The big change in Erika’s room is she’s approaching students in a more positive way than at the beginning of the year.”
Five out of the six SR staff members noted that classroom climate improved more significantly in some classrooms than others, with Mr. Tome’s classroom demonstrating the most change as a result of his full-scale adoption of SR strategies and language, and other classrooms demonstrating less change.

Balancing Pull-out/Push-in Services

When asked which of the following were the most important ways of supporting student learning – pull-out services, push-in services, pull-out UAOT, push-in UAOT, or training general education teachers on UAOT – staff were unanimous in asserting that the combination of all of these was what enabled the SR to be so successful this year. Typical comments included:

- “They’re all important – if you’re going to do real differentiated instruction, you need that range of options, to use them in different ways at different times.”
- “The message is that you need the whole arsenal if you’re going to provide optimal programming for students.”

Significantly, several SR staff noted that even though a lot of target students required almost continual pull-out at the beginning of the year, by the end of the year, all students were spending the majority of the day in their general education classrooms.

Building Capacity for the Future

When asked how significant an impact the SR had on building capacity for the future at SWS, SR staff gave it an average score of 1.67 (or quite significant). Some of the evidence of this that they provided included introducing SWS staff to applied behavior analysis (ABA), other non-involved grades reaching out to the SR for support, and school-wide staff trainings conducted by SR staff. Typical comments included:

- “We’re the people in the building trained to respond to behaviors ... we’re the ‘go to’ people.”
- “We still have a long road to go, but it’s nice that people [from throughout the building] come up and check with us.”
- “I really think the staff trainings that Monica does are extremely important in moving forward, knowing that [the current model for the SR] isn’t going to be here forever.”

Some of the reasons for success mentioned by SR staff included the principal’s openness and leadership in welcoming SR staff to SWS, as well as the importance of early adopters – classroom teachers like Mr. Tome who readily adopted the UAOT vocabulary, and will be responsible for training the rest of his colleagues at SWS in the coming year.

Barriers to Success of the Strategies Room

SR staff identified several barriers to the success of the SR. Most commonly mentioned were scheduling difficulties, lack of staff-buy-in, and the need to establish relationships with SWS staff – problems that were more intense at the beginning of the year, and improved over time. Typical comments included:

- “Schedules: By far this was the greatest and most important problem. There was no unified schedule, you couldn’t be in the right place at the right time, people [SWS staff] didn’t stick to their schedules.”
“Scheduling was the biggest barrier – it got a little better as time went on. The model of SWS is very fluid, not quite as rigid as we’d had at Ivymount – and [SWS staff] wouldn’t necessarily transition at transition times.”

“At the beginning, it was a slow start getting buy-in from staff. Once we had it, and they began to trust us and make sense of what we were doing ... it was much better.”

“The first few months, people didn’t want to surrender their students to our instruction .... They were more resistant at the beginning, [until they] saw that behavior and academics were improving.”

“I strongly recall that relationship and rapport building was one off the most fundamental necessities of the whole merger. Even Mr. Tome was quite resistant at first ... he really softened and became a huge ally.”

Other barriers to the success of the SR included the following:

- Late start date for the SR meant that it was not possible for SR staff to train SWS staff until much later in the year
- Not enough time at the beginning of the year to train 1:1s/teaching assistants in order to ensure that they were effective in providing instruction/support, and gathering/reviewing data
- SWS staff under particular stress at the beginning of the year because they had just moved into a new building
- SR not fully staffed at the beginning of the year because DCPS failed to provide a teacher
- Need for SR staff to figure out DCPS procedures
- Contract assistants (1:1s) hired through DCPS were ineffective
- SR program too spread out (across four classrooms), which made it difficult for SR staff to provide necessary coverage for all target students
- Data not gathered/used as effectively as it could have been
- Lack of planning time for classroom teachers and SR staff other than bi-weekly meeting
- “Dumping” of target students in SR when issues arose in their general education classrooms

Training and Support

When asked if they felt that SR staff had received adequate training and support, all felt that – for the most part – they had. Exceptions to this included the need for more training on DCPS procedures, and support in managing additional workload (e.g., scheduling of IEPs, handling of social skills lessons) that would have been differently distributed at Ivymount.

A few SR staff mentioned that clearer job descriptions at the beginning of the year would have been helpful, as well as a better understanding of how to use 1:1s effectively. Typical comments included:

- “The first challenge was to know what the job was. That wasn’t so clear ... to know what the job and expectations are, and then to think about the kid of training that’s needed. There’s been a lot of catch up all year, defining the job ... [although] that’s not so unusual with a new program.”
- “Like officers and enlisted, you need camaraderie [between teachers and 1:1s], but there needs to be enough hierarchy to tell folks what to do and when.”
Target Student Outcomes

Jaguna (1st Grade)

At the beginning of the year, Jaguna was lacking basic social and academic skills, and his aggressive behaviors made it impossible for him to participate in academic instruction, even one on one. An intensive behavior plan; targeted, individualized instruction to remediate academic gaps; and systematic teaching of problem solving strategies and social skills allowed Jaguna to develop the skills to access mainstream instruction by the end of the year (albeit with a 1:1). SR interventions were incredibly successful for Jaguna. By the end of the year Jaguna was on grade level academically, had substantially reduced disruptive behaviors, and had eliminated aggressive behaviors. Most importantly he was able to develop and maintain positive peer relationships. In the words of one SR staff member, “If we had a poster child, it would be Jaguna.”

Marcus (1st Grade)

Marcus’s progress was less dramatic than most of the other SR target students. The focus with Marcus was on building his self-advocacy skills, and working to develop accommodations to manage his significant language challenges. As a result, he made only modest academic progress over the course of the year. That said, Marcus had the benefit of a master first grade teacher who also taught him the year before in kindergarten. What became evident over the course of the much more academic first grade was the full impact of Marcus’s language difficulties on his academic performance. In terms of behavior, Marcus was much less prompt-dependent by the end of the year, and had mastered his individualized education program (IEP) goal of initiating tasks within 30 seconds. SR staff spent a lot of time building Marcus’s self-confidence, and worked closely with his parents to ensure that social strategies from the Unstuck and On Target (UAOT) curriculum were being reinforced at home. In the words of one SR staff person, Marcus “easily goes under the radar,” and “the biggest contribution [of the SR] was the advocacy piece” which helped Marcus speak up in class, initiate more, and reach out to peers with greater success.

Michael (2nd Grade) –

During the 2012-13 academic year, Michael was extremely aggressive and disruptive (e.g., screaming loudly), and was removed from class for extended periods of time. His difficulty being a member of the group was evident in 2013-14, and from the beginning the SR staff de facto intensively staffed Michael to support his emotional regulation and participation. Throughout the year Michael struggled with self-regulation, and a series of failed or truncated medication trials aggravated Michael’s ability to achieve some stability. Michael was in a classroom with a truly exceptional teacher who noted that support from the SR enabled him to better meet the needs of both Michael and the rest of his class. For Michael to function even part time in class he required intensive support from the SR. Using best practices from applied behavior analysis, SR staff worked to keep his behaviors in check using a sophisticated behavior management system. Michael also required constant supervision, especially during lunch and recess, and skilled staff minimized the amount of his aggression towards peers. Nonetheless, Michael often targeted peers, expressing deep frustration that they were unjustly winning in a game or not allowing him to participate. In spite of his behavioral challenges, Michael made modest progress academically – performing on grade level or slightly below in most subjects. This academic progress can be attributed to a terrific mainstream teacher, intensive support by SR staff during academic periods with periodic pull outs,
and Michael’s natural curiosity that shines when he is not dysregulated. SR staff continued to worry about Michael’s ability to manage in the mainstream. In the words of one staff member, “We are really concerned that if support here fades back, and if [Michael] doesn’t have a 1:1, he will crash and burn.”

**Jacob (2nd Grade)**

At the beginning of the year, Jacob was disruptive, and had difficulty attending to instruction and being in group. He struggled with writing, perseverated on mistakes, and fatigued quickly. Jacob was a student “hungry for strategies” who used UAOT strategies, and benefited from his mainstream teacher’s adoption of those strategies in his primary learning environment. In the words of one staff member, “Jacob is the poster child for UAOT.” In addition, the SR team brought expertise to evaluating areas of need for Jacob, supporting the family in developing their understanding of what behaviors and challenges were associated with his autism, and what was associated with his comorbid diagnosis of ADHD. By teasing these issues apart, the family was able to make some informed pharmacological decisions that significantly impacted Jacob’s functioning and left him more available to learn.

**Harrison (2nd Grade)**

Harrison entered second grade with a teacher new to SWS. In that class his behavior was notable for being both disruptive and off task. In addition, his apparent (but undocumented) language difficulties were having an impact on his ability to write and read at grade level. SR staff identified inferencing skills as a key area of challenge, and worked intensively with Harrison on improving his these skills through daily pull-outs. SR staff also created a behavior intervention plan (BIP) including a token system for Harrison, because data indicated that he had particular difficulty following directions, touching inappropriately, and making disruptive noises. Data collection and implementation of the plan was uneven, however, as much of the staffing for Harrison was from a DCPS-contracted, part-time aide. As a result, the plan was not very effective, illustrating the importance of skilled aides who can consistently implement plans. In addition, Harrison’s placement in a class with many other high needs students allowed him to continue to “practice” his maladaptive behaviors, including wandering, inappropriate touching and leaning, and other off task behaviors. At the end of the year Harrison still struggled with noncompliance and off-task behaviors. At the suggestion of SR staff, Harrison also received a neuropsychological evaluation to determine if there were language issues impacting his performance. Harrison benefited from participating in the SR social skills class (UAOT), but still required prompting and scaffolding to use skills successfully. By the end of the year, Harrison was doing a better job connecting socially with peers during recess, and advocating for himself verbally (rather than inappropriately touching) during class.

**Calvin (2nd Grade)**

Calvin received individualized pull-out support throughout the year for reading, and as a result made significant gains in this area. Behaviorally, Calvin was somewhat of a challenge. Calvin was higher functioning than several of the other SR students, both academically and socially, so received less support than other SR students. In addition, Calvin was very aware of his environment and even when having difficulty in class, preferred to stay in the group with peers as opposed to being pulled out for intensive reading remediation. Nonetheless, the daily pull outs for intensive reading
intervention and social skills had a dramatic impact on both his reading abilities and his ability to flexibly problem solve.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ivymount School wishes to thank all the SWS and SR staff who generously gave of their time and energy in support of this program evaluation project. Their contributions will be used to help Ivymount and DCPS better serve current and future students with ASD.