

EVALUATION OF THE INCREDIBLE YEARS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



SUBMITTED TO INVEST IN KIDS
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Introduction and Background.

The mission of Invest in Kids (IIK) is to partner with communities in Colorado to improve the health and well-being of young children, especially those from low-income families, through effective, research-based programs. To date, IIK has adopted two such programs, first the Nurse Family Partnership, and later The Incredible Years, which is the focus of this report.

IIK adopted The Incredible Years (IY) as its second major initiative because of “the outstanding outcomes IY has produced in over 10 years of rigorous research.” IIK works with communities to provide the support needed (including up to \$5000 in matching funds during the initial stages of implementation) to implement the program with fidelity to the proven model and to achieve similar positive outcomes for children and families in Colorado.

The Incredible Years is divided into three distinct training programs that are designed to enhance social competence and reduce aggression in young children aged three to eight years. The three developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive programs are the child social skills program known as Dinosaur School, the teacher skill-building program, and the BASIC Parent Training Program.

Research has shown that these training programs are effective in promoting positive parent and teacher interactions with children, strengthening children’s social and emotional competence and self-regulation, and reducing behavior problems. Each uses real life video vignettes of children interacting with other children, teachers and parents. The vignettes help to promote group discussion and problem solving and to serve as a stimulus for role-play activities. Together, the programs provide a cost-effective, comprehensive approach that supports the healthy development of young children, engages parents in their children’s education, and strengthens teachers’ skills.

In July 2006, IIK contracted with OMNI Institute, a nonprofit, social science research firm in Denver, to evaluate The Incredible Years program in Colorado. The goals of the evaluation were to assess: (1) the overall effectiveness of The Incredible Years in early childhood care and education settings in Colorado, and (2) the critical factors associated with program success in these settings.

Method.

The evaluation specifically addressed the following questions:

Dinosaur School Program.

1. To what extent did children’s social competence change during The Incredible Years Dinosaur School Program?
2. To what extent did outcomes for children differ depending on their level of social competence when they entered the program?
3. To what extent did teachers’ and paraprofessionals’ classroom management strategies change during their implementation of The Incredible Years Dinosaur School Program?
4. To what degree did teachers deliver The Incredible Years Dinosaur School Program with fidelity?
5. How satisfied were teachers with The Incredible Years Dinosaur School Program?

BASIC Parent Training Program.

6. To what extent did children’s social competence change during parent participation in The Incredible Years BASIC Parent Training Program?
7. To what extent did parents’ skills in promoting their children’s social competence change during the BASIC Parent Training Program?
8. To what degree did parent group leaders deliver the BASIC Parent Training Program with fidelity?
9. How satisfied were parents with The Incredible Years BASIC Parent Training Program?

The evaluation design included pretest and posttest measurement, based on surveys completed by teachers and parents, to assess change in child, parent, and teacher skills during the time they were involved in The Incredible Years programs. Fidelity of program implementation was assessed throughout the programs, based on data collected from surveys completed by teachers, parents and parent group leaders, and from observations of teachers and parent group leaders completed by IIK staff. Lastly, parent satisfaction and teacher satisfaction with the programs were assessed at the end from parent and teacher surveys.

Dinosaur School Program. The Dinosaur School is typically taught by one classroom teacher and one paraprofessional over the course of the academic year. *Pre-evaluation packets* were mailed to participating sites in late September 2006; teachers and paraprofessionals were asked to complete the forms and return them to OMNI before the end of October. *Post-evaluation packets* were mailed in early April 2007; teachers and paraprofessionals were asked to complete the forms and return them before the end of May.

BASIC Parent Training Program. Parent groups began at different times throughout the year. *Pre-evaluation packets* were sent to the participating site prior to the first class. Parent group leaders were asked that they and the parents in their group complete the forms during the first session and then return them to OMNI. *Post-evaluation packets* were sent by the seventh session and returned at the end of the program.

Results.

The overall number of participants for each of the measures differs slightly depending on the pattern of missing data for a particular measure.

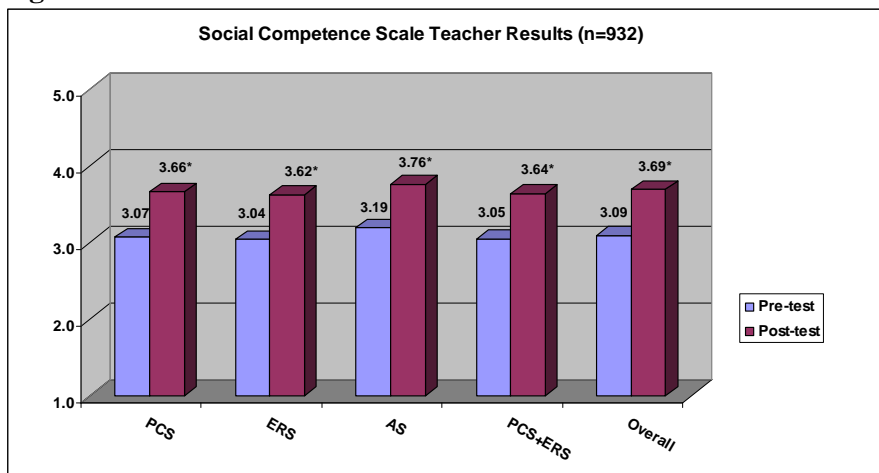
Dinosaur School Program.

1. *To what extent did children’s social competence change during The Incredible Years Dinosaur School Program?*

The *Social Competence Scale/Teacher* assesses each child’s: (1) Prosocial and Communication Skills (PCS), e.g., “resolves peer problems on his/her own,” (2) Emotion Regulation Skills (ERS), e.g., “accepts legitimate imposed limits,” and (3) Academic Skills (AS), e.g., “follows teacher’s verbal directions,” based on a teacher’s experience with that child. Teachers rate each child on a scale from 1-5 with 1 = not at all; 5 = very well.

As is shown in Figure 1, overall, there was a statistically significant increase in the mean ratings of student skills from pretest to posttest for each of the five scores reported for this measure: PCS, ERS, and AS, as well as a PCS + ERS combined score and a PCS + ERS + AS overall score. For each score, the mean rating increased from “moderately well” towards “well” from the beginning to the end of the Dinosaur School.

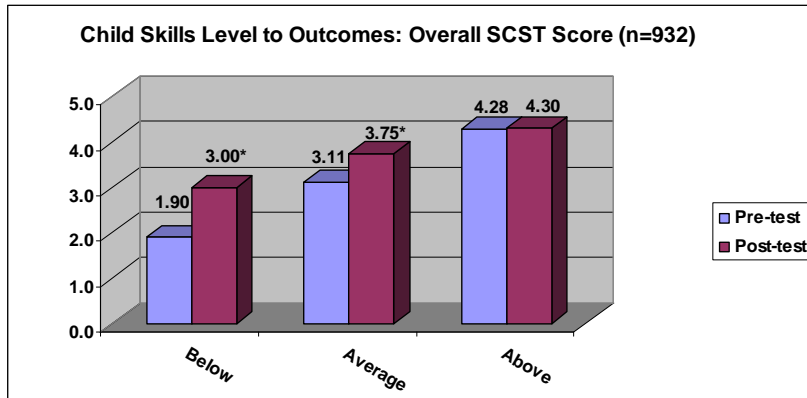
Figure 1



2. To what extent did outcomes for children differ depending on their level of social competence when they entered the program?

Children were divided into three groups based on their pretest scores on the *Social Competence Scale*. As is shown in Figure 2, there was a statistically significant increase from pretest to posttest in overall social competence for those children who were rated either “below average (n = 235)” or “average (n = 468)” on the pretest. Overall, these findings demonstrate that those children who were most in need of program services (reflected by low pretest scores) showed the most improvement after participating in the Dinosaur School.

Figure 2



3. To what extent did teachers’ and paraprofessionals’ classroom management strategies change during their implementation of *The Incredible Years Dinosaur School Program*?

The *Teacher Strategies* measure is composed of five subscales: (1) Managing Classroom Behavior, e.g., “how confident are you in managing current behavior problems in your classroom?”, (2) Working with Parents, e.g., “collaborate with parents on a home-school behavior program,” (3) Total Positive Strategies, e.g., “comment on good behavior,” (4) Inappropriate Strategies, e.g., “single out a child or a group of children for misbehavior,” and (5) Positive Approaches with Parents, “call parents to report good behavior.” There were no statistically significant changes in mean scores on any of these five subscales from pretest to posttest for teachers (n = 51) or paraprofessionals (n = 14).

4. To what degree did teachers deliver *The Incredible Years Dinosaur School Program* with fidelity?

Fidelity of implementation was measured by teacher report and by IIK staff observations. Of particular interest was adherence to implementation markers such as “dosage” or the percent of activities conducted by teachers such as reviewing the rules poster or reading books. Overall, teachers (n = 39) reported delivering high “dosage” of activities, conducting, on average, a minimum of 85% of the available choices of activities.

Another key marker of implementation fidelity included percent of teachers attending the standard training in *The Incredible Years* program which was reported to be 69.5%.

IIK staff observed 58 teachers included in this evaluation at least once during the school year, rating them on: (1) how well they engaged in promoting skills such as acting playful with children and preparing for transitions effectively, (2) how well they involved parents, (3) children’s responses to the teacher, and (4) overall implementation which included preparation, knowledge of the curriculum content and key concepts, and fidelity to presentation methods. Overall, teachers were rated as doing between “well” to “very well” with regard to implementation quality.

5. *How satisfied were teachers with The Incredible Years Dinosaur School Program?*

Sixty-nine teachers completed the *Teacher Satisfaction Survey*. When asked, “How easy was it to integrate the Dinosaur School Program into your regular classroom curriculum, 66.6% of teachers responded either “easy” or “very easy.” When asked about how well the program met their goals for social and emotional development, almost 80% responded either “well” or “very well.” Approximately 75% of teachers responded either “mostly” or “definitely” when asked if “the content and activities of the program were developmentally appropriate and individualized as needed.”

With regard to training, over 80% responded that they were either “prepared” or “very well prepared” to implement the program on their own next year, and slightly less than half (45.7%) responded that they would either “definitely” or “most definitely” like ongoing training. Almost half (47.5%) of the teachers responded that the workload involved in implementing the curriculum was either “realistic” or “very realistic.”

With regard to parent involvement and homework activities, only 33% of teachers responded that students’ parents were either “involved” or “very involved” in the Dinosaur School Program. Only 31.8% indicated that homework activities were either “important” or “definitely important” for the students.

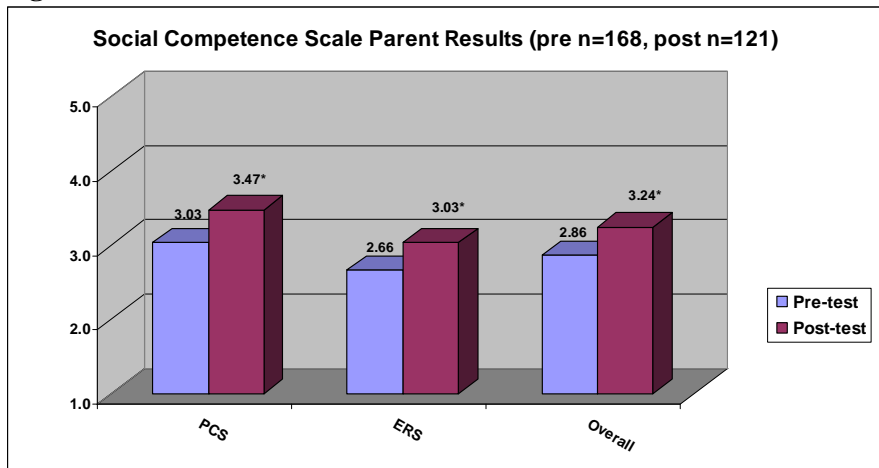
BASIC Parent Training Program.

6. *To what extent did children’s social competence change during parent participation in The Incredible Years BASIC Parent Training Program?*

The Social Competence Scale/Parent is composed of two subscales: (1) Prosocial and Communication Skills (PCS), e.g., “My child works out problems with friends or brothers and sisters on his/her own,” (2) Emotion Regulation Skills (ERS), e.g., “My child can calm down by himself/herself when excited or all wound up.” Parents rate their child from 1 to 5 with 1 = not at all; 5 = very well.

As is shown in Figure 3, there was a statistically significant increase in the mean ratings from pretest to posttest for Prosocial and Communication Skills, Emotion Regulation Skills, as well as overall.

Figure 3



7. *To what extent did parents’ skills in promoting their children’s social competence change during The Incredible Years Parent Skill Building Program?*

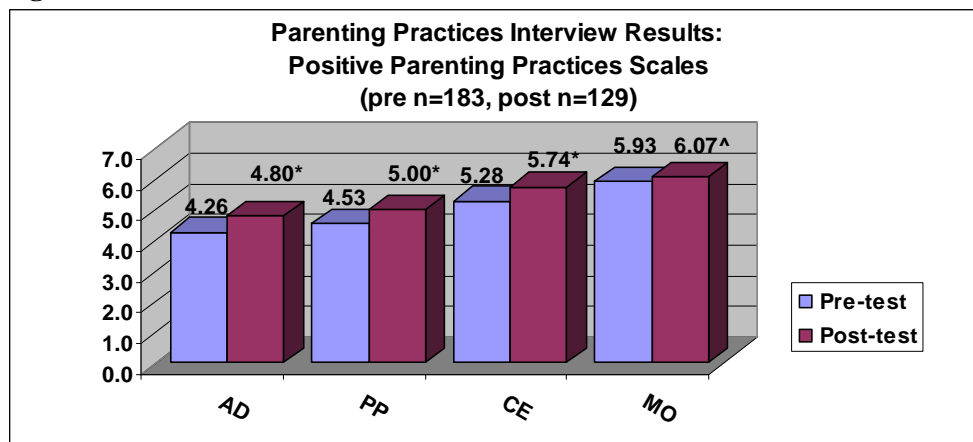
The *Parenting Practices* measure is composed of two scales, Positive Parenting and Negative Parenting. Each scale is further divided into a number of subscales.

For Positive Parenting Practices, the four subscales are: (1) Appropriate Discipline (AD), e.g., when your child misbehaves, how often do you give your child a brief time out away from family?, (2) Positive

Parenting (PP), e.g., when your child behaves well, how often do you praise or complement your child?, (3) Clear Expectations (CE), e.g., when your child goes to bed or gets up on time, how likely are you to praise or reward your child?, and (4) Monitoring (MO), e.g., what percentage of your child's friends do you know well? All items are rated on a 7-point scale. For each subscale, an increase in the mean from pretest to posttest indicates that parents are using more positive parenting techniques with their children.

As is shown in Figure 4, the mean increase from pretest to posttest for three of the positive parenting subscales was statistically significant, and the fourth approached significance.

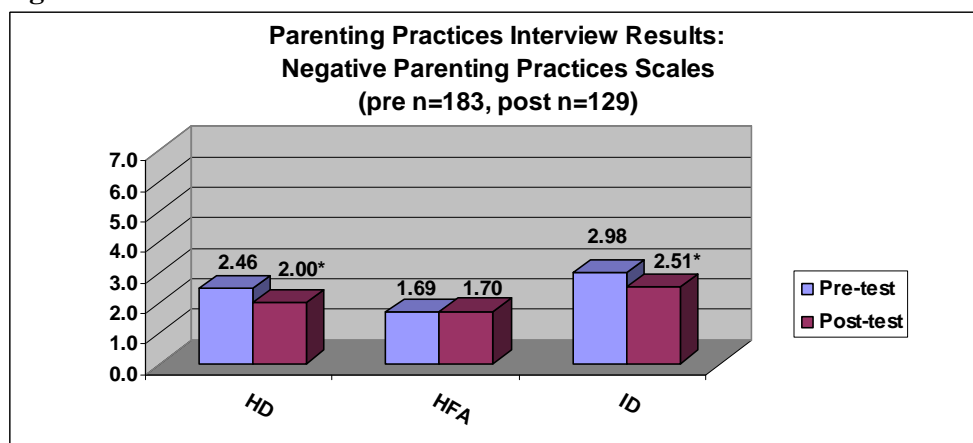
Figure 4



For Negative Parenting Practices, the three subscales are: (1) Harsh Discipline (HD), e.g., when your child misbehaves, how often do you give your child a spanking, (2) Harsh for Age (HFA), e.g., when your child misbehaves, how often do you send child to room for at least 60 minutes, and (3) Inconsistent Discipline (ID), e.g., if you ask your child to do something and she does not do it, how often do you give up trying to get him/her to do it? All items are rated on a 7-point scale. For each subscale, a decrease in the mean from pretest to posttest indicates that parents are using less negative parenting techniques with their children.

Results indicated that there was a significant decrease in Harsh Discipline and in Inconsistent Discipline from pretest to posttest. There was essentially no change in the use of discipline that was harsh for age.

Figure 5



8. *To what degree did parent group leaders deliver The Incredible Years Parent Training with fidelity?*

Fidelity of implementation was measured by parent group leaders and by IIK staff observations.

Overall, group leaders (n = 22) completed an average of 74.2% of the vignettes and 89.3% of the session agenda items per session, indicating a high level of fidelity of implementation of the Parent Group Training.

IIK staff observed and rated group leaders (n = 24) on: (1) the quality of their leader and group process skills, leadership skills, relationship building skills, knowledge, and methods and promotion skills, (2) parent's responses to the group leader, and (3) overall implementation which included knowledge of the curriculum content and key concepts and fidelity to presentation methods. Group leaders were rated on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 = not well; 5 = extremely well. Overall, parent group leaders were rated as doing between "well" to "very well" with regard to implementation quality.

9. *How satisfied were parents with The Incredible Years Parent Training?*

Parents were asked to rate their satisfaction with the (1) overall program, (2) teaching format, (3) specific parenting techniques, (4) parent group leaders, and (5) other parent group members/their parent group itself.

The following description highlights responses to selected questions from each of the subscales. For the Overall Program subscale, when asked if the problem(s) that originally prompted the parent to take this program had improved for their child, over 90% responded "improved" or "greatly improved." Moreover, almost all (97.1%) responded that they would either "recommend" or "strongly recommend" the program to a friend or relative.

With regard to Teaching Format, almost all (97.1%) reported that the content of information was "useful" or "extremely useful." Almost all parents (95.7%) responded that they found the overall group of specific parenting techniques to be "useful" or "extremely useful." Almost all parents (94.1%; average for two leaders) found their leader's teaching to be "high" or "superior" and responded that their leader was either "helpful" or "extremely helpful" (96.4%; average for two leaders). When asked about their parent group, almost 90% found their group to be "supportive" or "very supportive."

Discussion.

The Incredible Years is designed to enhance social competence and reduce aggression in young children aged three to eight years. The goals of this evaluation were to assess (1) the overall effectiveness of the Incredible Years in early childhood care and education settings in Colorado, and (2) the critical factors associated with program success in these settings.

Dinosaur School Program.

- Results indicate a significant increase from pretest to posttest in the social competence of young children who are taking part in the Dinosaur School Program.
- Children who were rated as below average or average in social competence at the beginning of the Dinosaur School Program showed significant gains in social competence over the school year.
- Perhaps surprisingly, despite the change in child social competence, there was no corresponding change on any aspect of teacher strategies from pretest to posttest. This included managing classroom behavior, working with parents, total positive strategies, inappropriate strategies, and positive approaches with parents.
- Although there was no significant change in reported teacher strategies, the majority of teachers report satisfaction with the Dinosaur School Program. Most indicated that it was easy to integrate the program into their regular curriculum and that the program met their goals for social and emotional development.

- Most teachers also reported that they were prepared to deliver the program on their own in the future.
- Overall, teachers reported covering 85% of the activities.
- IK staff ratings of teachers observed in the classroom were favorable. Overall, teachers were rated as doing between “well” and “very well” with regard to implementation quality.

BASIC Parent Training Program.

- Parents who were participating in the BASIC Parent Training Program report a significant increase in their child’s social competence mirroring the positive change reported by teachers for children in their classes.
- Parents also report positive changes in their parenting practices as measured by an increase in their use of appropriate discipline, positive parenting, and clear expectations and a decrease in harsh discipline and inconsistent discipline.
- Parent satisfaction with all aspects of the program was high. Over 90% reported that the problem(s) that originally prompted them to take the program had improved or greatly improved.
- On average, group leaders covered almost 75% of the vignettes and completed almost 90% of the session agenda items each week.
- IIK staff ratings of parent leaders observed in their groups were favorable. Overall, group leaders were rated as doing between “well” and “very well” with regard to implementation quality.