

Background

- Exposure to social-emotional learning (SEL) provides students with the opportunity to practice meaningful life skills such as prosocial behaviors.⁹
- In expanding the accessibility of SEL, kindness programming provides schools with a shared understanding and meaning of practicing such behaviors.³
- Kindness is linked with students' sense of belonging and positive mental health outcomes.⁵
- Relatedly, students' who experience high quality relationships with their teachers see improvements in their sense of belonging at school.¹
- Teachers are also instrumental in modeling kind behaviors to students and teachers identify students as key enactors of kindness on campus.⁴

Goals

Guided by a positive youth development⁸ perspective, which posits that when youth have access to developmentally appropriate opportunities and supportive figures their capacity to thrive increases, the current study examines whether students' participation in one locally-developed, evidence-informed, grassroots, school-wide kindness program is positively associated with their school-related outcomes. Specifically, the current study has **three research aims**:

- 1) Examine whether students' exposure to kindness programming is related to their sense of belonging on campus.
- 2) Examine whether students' exposure to kindness programming is related to their intent to perform kind behaviors on campus.
- 3) Examine whether either association is mediated through the positive behaviors (i.e., care and praise) teachers enact toward students.

Methods

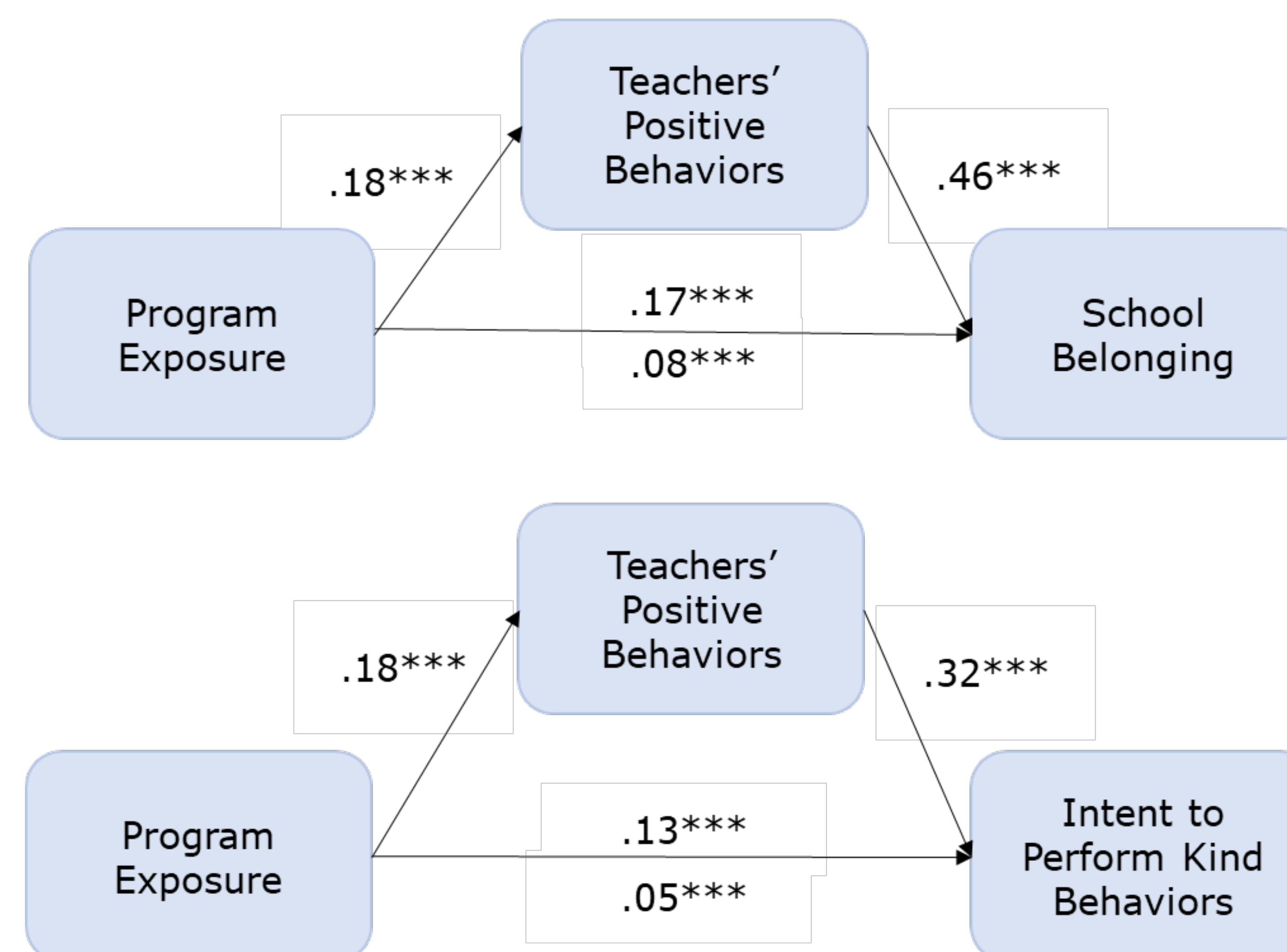
Participants. Middle school students (N=399) from 4 schools in one Southwestern school district; 221 girls and 173 boys, 5 students did not self-identify their gender, with a mean age of 12.93 (SD = 0.50).

Procedures. Students were eligible to participate if their homeroom teacher opted into data collection. Students self-reported on all items.

Measures. School belonging (4 items), $\alpha = .78$.^{6,7} Intent to perform kind behaviors (4 items), $\alpha = .76$; created for program evaluation purposes. Teachers' positive behaviors (2 items), $\alpha = .70$.^{2,10} Program exposure (8 dichotomous items); created for program evaluation purposes.

Analyses. Two mediation models were performed in R Studio (version 4.2.1) to examine whether teachers' positive behaviors toward students mediated the effect of program exposure on students (1) sense of belonging, and (2) intent to perform kind behaviors. Significance was tested using bootstrapping with 10,000 samples.

Results



Note. Bootstrapped mediation models. *** $p < .001$.

Conclusions and Future Work

Strengths

- Students' exposure to kindness programming was positively associated with both their sense of belonging and intent to perform kind behaviors.
- Students reports of teachers' positive behaviors mediated both associations.
- In the context of scarcely-resourced schools, the Kind Campus program provides an opportunity for students to have exposure to important lessons without high implementation costs.

Limitations

- Data are cross-sectional therefore we cannot determine temporal precedence.
- Data originate from one school district in the Southwest.
- Students are the only reporters included in the current study.

Future directions

Areas of opportunity include 1) longitudinal work, measuring exposure and surveying the same cohort of students at multiple timepoints, and 2) including teachers' perceptions of belonging and kindness on campus.

References

- [1] Allen, K., Kern, M. L., Vella-Brodrick, D., Hattie, J., & Waters, L. (2018). What schools need to know about fostering school belonging: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 30(1), 1-34. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-016-9389-8>
- [2] Arizona Criminal Justice Commission. (2012). Arizona Youth Survey. <https://www.azcjc.gov/Programs/Statistical-Analysis-Center/Arizona-Youth-Survey>
- [3] Ben's Bells. (2023). Kind campus introduction and foundations. <https://bensbells.org/kindcampusintro/>
- [4] Binfet, J. T., & Passmore, H. A. (2017). Teachers' perceptions of kindness at school. *The International Journal of Emotional Education*, 9(1), 37.
- [5] Datu, J. A. D., Mateo, N. J., & Natale, S. (2021). The mental health benefits of kindness-oriented schools: School kindness is associated with increased belongingness and well-being in Filipino high school students. *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*, 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10578-021-01299-z>
- [6] Ding, C., Liu, Y., & Berkowitz, M. (2011). The study of factor structure and reliability of an abbreviated school climate survey. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*, 26(3) 241-256. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0829573511414005>
- [7] Kaplan, D. M., deBlois, M., Dominguez, V., & Walsh, M. E. (2016). Studying the teaching of kindness: A conceptual model for evaluating kindness education programs in schools. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 58, 160-170. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2016.06.001>
- [8] Lerner, R. M., Lerner, J. V., Bowers, E. P., & Geldhof, G. J. (2015). Positive youth development and relational-developmental-systems. In W. F. Overton, P. C. M. Molenaar, & R. M. Lerner (Eds.), *Handbook of Child Psychology and Developmental Science: Theory and Method* (pp. 607-651). John Wiley & Sons, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118963418.childpsy116>
- [9] Mahoney, J. L., Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2018). An update on social and emotional learning outcome research. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 100(4), 18-23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721718815668>
- [10] Malecki, C. K., & Demary, M. K. (2002). Measuring perceived social support: Development of the child and adolescent social support scale (CASSS). *Psychology in the Schools*, 39(1), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.10004>

Acknowledgements

We thank our partners, Ben's Bells Project and Sunnyside Unified School District. We also thank the Frances McClelland Institute for Children, Youth, and Families in the dissemination of this work.

