



A Research Study to Measure the Impact of Schools Attuned on Special Education

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 Westat, an employee-owned research corporation serving agencies of the U.S. Government, as well as businesses, foundations, and state and local governments. Research began in October 2003. The primary purpose of Westat's study was to examine whether Schools Attuned training affected the nature and extent of special education services required in schools. In addition, researchers examined the effects of the Schools Attuned program on teacher efficacy and student academic skills. The Westat research team was led by Principal Investigator Dr. Thomas A. Fiore.

Research Questions and Methodology

The Westat study was carried out in four consecutive phases. In Phase 1, researchers used qualitative inquiry to identify the most important factors related to special education to be affected by the Schools Attuned program. This phase of the study involved 76 participants from seven schools across the country. Participants included general and special education teachers, school administrators, and parents. >



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In Phase 2, researchers conducted a comparison study and piloted qualitative and quantitative data collection instruments and methods. Fourteen public elementary schools participated in this phase of the study. Seven of these schools had been implementing Schools Attuned for at least two years. The remaining seven schools were non-Schools Attuned schools, matched in terms of size and demographic characteristics.

Phase 3 examined various paths of implementation of Schools Attuned across 11 public elementary schools in the Northeast, Midwest, and Southwest regions of the country. Administrator, teacher, and parent surveys were collected as pre-post measures, before and after teachers participated in Schools Attuned. Follow-up interviews and classroom observations were also conducted at five of the schools.

The final phase of the study included an in-depth investigation of five schools with a history of Schools Attuned implementation. Questionnaires and standardized rating scales were collected as pre-post measures to study the impact of Schools Attuned on teachers' attitudes and behaviors and on students' learning and behavior. Interviews and observations were used to further explore the causal connections between Schools Attuned and the outcomes found through quantitative investigation.

Results and Conclusions

Throughout all four phases of the study researchers found many potentially positive results related to Schools Attuned, including:

- **Greater teacher efficacy to work with diverse learners and overcome barriers to student learning**

Teachers in Phase 1 who participated in Schools Attuned reported increased confidence in dealing with struggling learners, and believed communication with special education teachers and parents had improved.

Teachers from schools using Schools Attuned in Phase 2 rated their abilities equal to or above ratings by comparison teachers on five out of eleven instructional behaviors, including planning effective lessons, using appropriate instructional techniques, adapting instruction for children with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), accommodating the instructional needs culturally and linguistically diverse students, and collaborating with special education teachers. Due to the small number of teachers in the samples, no tests of statistical significance were done. During Phase 4, many teachers reported increased awareness of and ability to deal with diverse students and struggling learners due to Schools Attuned. Results from the Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale documented that teachers who had participated in Schools Attuned scored above comparison teachers on self-efficacy for instructional strategies (+.18) and classroom management (+.10). Schools Attuned teachers also gained an average of .17 in overall self-efficacy from fall to spring (before and after program participation) as compared to no gain among comparison teachers (average change of .00). While these results were promising, the differences were not statistically significant.

- **Increased success for students**

Teachers in Phase 1 who participated in Schools Attuned reported improvements in students' attitude toward school and ability to understand their learning strengths and weaknesses, and predicted these would be long-term positive outcomes for students. In Phase 2, teachers from schools using Schools Attuned consistently rated students with IEPs as more self-aware and more capable of self-advocating than did teachers from schools not using Schools Attuned. Due to the small number of teachers in the samples, no tests of statistical significance were done. During Phase 4, academic gains for students with IEPs were

examined using the teacher-reported Academic Competence Evaluation Scales. Academic gains reported for students of Schools Attuned teachers were equal to or larger than those reported for comparison students across six of the seven scales: Reading/Language Arts, Critical Thinking, Interpersonal Skills, Engagement, Motivation and Study Skills, though differences between the groups were not statistically significant. Gains reported from fall to spring were statistically significant for both students of Schools Attuned teachers as well as comparison students in three of the seven scales: Reading/Language Arts (+.26, $p=.000$), Mathematics (+.12, $p=.003$), Critical Thinking (+.18, $p=.000$). In addition, statistically significant gains were reported on the Engagement scale (+.26, $p=.000$) for students of Schools Attuned teachers only.

- **Importance of high implementation and school-wide support**

During this study, researchers found that implementation of the Schools Attuned program across study schools varied. Researchers concluded that a general appreciation and enthusiasm for Schools Attuned were not sufficient to ensure consistent and full implementation within a school. Support and buy-in must exist on multiple levels (teachers, principals, district administrators) combined with a strong commitment and the dedication of adequate resources to ensure implementation.

- **Impact on special education**

In Phase 3, researchers found the existence of two promising trends within schools implementing Schools Attuned: increase in the percentage of time students with IEPs spend in the regular classroom setting, as well as increased participation and proficiency among students with IEPs in reading and math achievement tests. Many educators in

Phase 4 reported that Schools Attuned provided a common language between regular classroom teachers and special education teachers, as well as between teachers and parents, and led to a greater mutual understanding that helped regular classroom teachers be more supportive of special education teachers. Throughout various phases of the study, school administrators reported that Schools Attuned was resulting in or could result in decreases in the number of special education referrals, increases in the accuracy of the referral process, and reductions in the need for some special education services, all of which could lead to cost savings. In part due to small sample sizes, none of these differences were confirmed through statistical analysis, however, and researchers could not independently verify that Schools Attuned had affected the nature or extent of special education services in the study schools.

Key Recommendations

Based on the findings from this study, Westat researchers made the following recommendations for future studies:

- Future research should focus on schools where implementation is school-wide and where administrative support for the Schools Attuned program is strong.
- Future evaluation should seek to understand the school and district contexts and circumstances that lead to successful Schools Attuned implementation, and what sustains Schools Attuned within a school once it is adopted.
- All Kinds of Minds should develop a system of data collection procedures and instruments that may be used across Schools Attuned schools and provide data on both level of implementation and impact on students.

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 Westat 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. One important advance in the Schools Attuned Program has been the 2007 refinement of the *Management by Profile* protocol, expanding the options for Schools Attuned implementation beyond application with an individual student. Using Management by Profile as a foundational thought process, educators can apply the Schools Attuned approach to their daily work at the individual student and small group levels through Student Learning Partnership and Attuning a Student, at the classroom level through Lesson and Subject Analysis, and across the school through the Understanding All Kinds of Minds Parent Program. This expanded framework for implementation options affirms our goal of changing the lives of students who struggle with learning by focusing on the needs of *all* students who are falling through the cracks of the current educational system. Results of the Westat study 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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