

**PERSPECTIVES ON
EARLY CHILDHOOD PSYCHOLOGY
AND EDUCATION**

SPECIAL FOCUS

**Prevention of Behavioral and
Emotional Disorders in Early Childhood**

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PERSPECTIVES on EARLY CHILDHOOD PSYCHOLOGY and EDUCATION

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First Step Next: An Updated Version of the First Step to Success Early Intervention Program

Hill Walker, Edward G. Feil, Andy Frey, Jason Small, John Seeley, Annemieke Golly, Shantel Crosby, Jon Lee, Steve Forness, Marilyn Sprick, Cristy Coughlin, and Brianna Stiller

Abstract

This manuscript describes a major revision and update of the First Step to Success Early Intervention Program, now called First Step Next. The original First Step Program was published in 1997 and the revised, updated version was published in 2015 (Walker et al.). First Step Next is a collaborative, Tier II school- and family-supported early intervention that teaches school success skills to give students the best start possible in their school career. This manuscript covers five major topics: (1) program history, (2) rationale and procedures for the First Step revision, (3) First Step Next implementation, (4) maintenance and follow up procedures, and (5) current and future research on First Step Next.

Keywords: First Step, intervention, education, Tier II, First Step Next, revision, update

The First Step to Success Program (Walker, et al., 1997) is a Tier II early intervention designed specifically for K–3 students who bring challenging or disruptive behavior patterns to the schooling experience. It is founded on the prevention science knowledge base (Pennington, 2002) and is a collaborative school-home intervention. The original First Step school-home intervention included (a) one-to-one instruction from a behavioral coach in school success skills, (b) ongoing opportunities and feedback provided to facilitate mastery of these skills in classroom and playground contexts, (c) a home component where parents learned to teach and support

school success skills in the home context, and (d) use of group and individual contingencies at school and home respectively to facilitate skill acquisition and sustainability of achieved gains. First Step Next involves a cooperative arrangement among parents, teachers, peers and a behavioral coach, which lasts approximately three months and teaches social skills and academic enablers focused on supporting school success.

The original First Step program is set up and operated initially by a behavioral coach who then gradually turns over its daily operation to the cooperating teacher. The coach provides supervision and troubleshooting support to the teacher for the remainder of the three-month implementation period. The program's components are gradually faded out as part of the implementation schedule until the focus student's gains are supported by the intrinsic reinforcements of enhanced academic and social performance and positive feedback and praise from the teacher, parents, peers and coach. The purpose of this manuscript is to describe a substantial revision and update of the original First Step Program, as described above, to highlight essential features of the updated First Step Next Intervention, and to profile current and future research efforts.

Program History

First Step was originally created through a model development grant from the U.S. Office of Special Education programs to the senior author of this paper. The grant ran from 1992 to 1996. Over the ensuing 20 years, following its initial development, a robust evidence base has developed around the First Step Program, consisting of a mix of single case studies and randomized controlled trials involving both efficacy and effectiveness studies. This evidence is reviewed extensively by Walker et al. (2014).

First Step has been the focus of four randomized controlled trials (RCT) that have produced impressive effect sizes on behavioral, social and even some academic outcome measures (Feil et al., 2014; Frey, Small et al., 2013; Walker et al., 2009; Walker, Golly, McLane, &

Kimmich, 2005). There has also been a national, five-site RCT that demonstrated its effectiveness with limited involvement by the program's developers (Sumi et al., 2013; Woodbridge et al., 2014). As part of this process, the First Step parent component was enhanced through the addition of motivational interviewing, technical and empirical knowledge (Frey, Lee et al., 2013). In addition, subsample analyses of these studies have produced evidence for First Step's success with children at risk for ADHD (Feil et al., 2016; Seeley et al., 2009); autism (Frey et al., 2015); and, at least partially, anxiety disorders (Seeley et al., in press). There has also been a separate, successful RCT for tertiary-level students (Frey, Small et al., 2015). Multiple studies have consistently shown positive effects on a full range of outcomes including teacher and parent reports as well as direct observation.

In addition, the program meets Flay et al.'s (2005) criteria for indicators of efficacy, effectiveness, and readiness for dissemination (Walker et al., 2014). First Step has also been reviewed and recognized by the What Works Clearinghouse of the U.S. Department of Education as a promising intervention. It is worth noting that First Step to date has been applied successfully with over 2,000 behaviorally at-risk students in the preschool and primary grade ranges. The program has been translated into Spanish and has been adopted and implemented successfully in the following countries other than the U.S.: Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Holland, Norway, Indonesia, and Turkey.

Rationale and Procedures for the First Step Revision

The revision team's efforts were guided by three core principles: (1) to standardize the First Step Program components and forge them into a single unified module; (2) to make the program more user-friendly for implementers, including parents; and (3) to increase the program's efficacy by adding new components and updating existing ones. An important issue considered in initiating this yearlong process was that, over two decades of adoption

and implementation, the program had undergone a number of innovations and adaptations by different implementers, resulting in competing versions of the original intervention being circulated among end users.

Further, through a program of troubleshooting and technical assistance efforts, the team received important feedback from numerous implementers regarding certain recurring challenges. One was that parents and some teachers felt the program required too much time and effort to justify the gains achieved, leading to lowered implementation fidelity and reduced program acceptance. A second criticism was that First Step coaches needed more detailed information on student behavioral characteristics and academic skills to individualize the program successfully. Third, implementers commented that the coach phase of the program needed to expand to provide younger students increased opportunities to acquire the new skills taught. This anecdotal information was derived from hundreds of First Step implementations and proved invaluable in helping guide the revision process that resulted in First Step Next. By maintaining a qualitative archive of this feedback, the team was able to see recurring patterns of implementation and structural issues that needed addressing in a revision. It also indicated a need for certain changes in program content. Go to <http://www.firststeptosuccess.org/> to access documents produced by this research and for more detailed program information about First Step.

The First Step revision team consisted of a subset of the original First Step Program authors (Walker, Stiller, Golly, and Feil) along with the addition of two new members (Marilyn Sprick and Cristy Coughlin of Pacific Northwest Publishing). This group met regularly for a year to plan and carry out the revision.

Differences Between Original First Step and the Updated First Step Next Program

The revision process that resulted in the updated version of First Step preserved the core elements of the original program that most account for its efficacy (i.e., direct instruction in school success skills, group and individual contingencies, peer and home support, school and home reward activities, and a dense schedule of positive feedback and descriptive praise). A number of the original procedures were identical, revised or only slightly updated. Overall, the First Step Next revision team's goal was to make the program more streamlined, less complex, and easier to implement with integrity. At present, the group is evaluating whether First Step Next appears to be more acceptable to consumers (i.e., perceived as less work by cooperating teachers and parents) than the original version, as described in the "Current Research" section. First Step Next now covers the pre-K through Grade 2 student population with only one program, whereas the original First Step program covered grades K-3 and relied on a separate preschool version to handle earlier developmental stages.

A fundamental difference between original First Step and First Step Next is that the latter is a more curricular-based intervention with a stronger instructional focus accompanied by a behavior-management component that provides incentives for the student to master and demonstrate the program's Super Student Skills, while simultaneously fostering adherence to the teacher's classroom rules. The original First Step Program was primarily a behavioral intervention with much more of a developmental focus. First Step Next by design has a more balanced academic and social-emotional emphasis, as the team received feedback from many teachers that academic readiness was also a strong priority for early intervention. Thus, it was decided to revise the First Step skills list to incorporate academic readiness skills as well as academic enablers to address this concern. Aside from improving overall First Step Next

outcomes, it was felt that this change would make the program more acceptable to end users. Specific details regarding the Super Student Skills are provided below under “Changes in First Step Structure, Content, and Delivery.”

In order to address the above revision goals, the team selected two broad program areas for concentration: (a) pre-implementation procedures and resources and (b) the structure, content and delivery of the First Step Program.

Changes in Pre-Implementation

One of the takeaway lessons from the team’s long-term experience with First Step implementation across a diverse set of school contexts was that Tier II programs such as First Step which focus on individual students are less effective when applied within chaotic classrooms. We found that not addressing classroom contextual problems prior to implementation consistently produced less robust First Step outcomes than expected. First Step Next now includes added features designed to address this important challenge by assessing classroom climate and expectations and evaluating students based on the program’s Super Student Skills. These measures allow the coach to judge whether the classroom has a difficult management context that would deter implementation of First Step Next. In this event, the teacher is provided with lessons, resources and coaching guidance/support for teaching four important classroom expectations: (a) when the teacher needs your attention, look and listen; (b) stay in your personal space with hands and feet to yourself; (c) walk in the classroom; and (d) use a classroom voice. Under the coach’s supervision, a five-step instructional procedure to teach these behavioral expectations to the whole class is shared with the teacher. Following completion of this task, the First Step Next program is then implemented with the focus student.

Another change in pre-implementation involved the screening procedures used to identify focus students. Originally, First

Step screening consisted of extensive teacher ratings and in vivo behavioral observations. These procedures in First Step Next now include a reduced number of academic-engaged time observations along with brief teacher ratings of oppositional-aggressive behavior as well as the teacher’s judgment of the focus student’s status on the super skills list. An optional Functional Behavioral Assessment is also included as part of the screening process.

Changes in First Step Structure, Content, and Delivery

Perhaps the most essential addition to First Step Next is the Super Student Skills. First Step Next teaches mastery of a set of discrete social-emotional skills and academic-enabling skills: (a) follow directions, (b) be safe, (c) ask for help the right way, (d) be a team player, (e) do your best work, (f) be cool, and (g) mistakes are okay. Academic enablers are forms of social behavior that facilitate academic performance (i.e. focusing attention, accepting teacher corrections, engaging with assigned tasks, and cooperating with other students; DiPerna, 2006). Mastery of these skills contributes to school success as defined by both academic competence and social-emotional adjustment.

These skills are systematically taught in First Step Next by the teacher and coach, using lesson plans that label, define and describe each skill’s purpose. Appendix A provides a skills list and accompanying narrative text to illustrate each of these features. Each First Step Next focus student also has a Super Skills workbook.

The coach phase of First Step Next is expanded from 5 to 7 program days depending on the focus student’s progress and the cooperating teacher’s judgment. Younger students tend to benefit from a longer coach phase. Program days 8–10 involve transfer of control and management of the program to the teacher, who assumes full program operation on day 11. The daily operation of First Step Next initially focuses on the teacher’s classroom rules with bonus points and praise awarded for reinforcing the focus student’s display of the target Super Student Skills as they are being

taught. These discrete skills are introduced, role played, taught, and strengthened by the coach and teacher during the program's ongoing operation with home support provided by parents.

Substantial changes were made regarding the parents' role in the First Step Next intervention. Specifically, the original parent involvement procedures, called homeBase, consisted of six home visits by the First Step behavioral coach. Using a parent handbook combined with modeling, demonstration, and role plays, the coach instructed the focus child's parents on how to teach the school success skills at home. The child's teacher then looked for, prompted, and reinforced the skills' display at school. Although many of the parent engagement activities, such as phone calls, provision of home rewards, and daily check-in notes were retained, the homeBase component has been eliminated in First Step Next. Instead, parents are given an orientation to the First Step Next program and their roles in it prior to implementation. Close contact between the coach, teacher, and parents during implementation affords parents the opportunity to continue learning about the program and their role in it. Parents are also provided with a workbook that describes home activities and strategies they can use to help ensure the child's school success. In the updated program, the parents' daily tasks are extended to cover the full implementation period of 20 program days.

The rationale for this program change was two-fold. First, the team found some parents had difficulty teaching homeBase skills to their children, due to factors such as insufficient time and lack of motivation. Second, outcome data suggested somewhat lower effect sizes for parent ratings of child outcomes, as opposed to teacher ratings. For these reasons, parents were relieved of directly teaching the First Step Next Super Student Skills at home. That task now becomes the joint responsibility of the coach and teacher at school. Parents are still involved in First Step Next program implementation. However, a major emphasis for parents is to continue positive interactions with their child at home and to support

strongly the child's continuing school progress. If the parents seem ready and request more information on effective parenting skills, the First Step coach also makes this material available to them. The family materials folder includes a home and school connections workbook for parents, a Super Student coloring book, and Super Student lesson cards.

In addition, a more formal debriefing component, immediately following problem situations, has been added to the First Step Next program. In this procedure the focus student and the coach review problems and examine how they played out, with input from the teacher as appropriate. The goal is for the focus student to realize how she or he could have handled the problem situation differently. This procedure is followed on a daily basis initially, and then used through the remainder of implementation based on need. Early on in the program, it is critical that the First Step Next student gets to review how difficult situations could have been handled better. Using a problem-solving process, the focus student is guided in developing positive behavioral alternatives. As a general rule, First Step focus students are not skilled in coming up with adaptive alternatives as to how they might behave differently in problem situations. These self-regulatory strategies have shown considerable promise with students that have emotional or behavioral disorders (Menzies, Lane, & Lee, 2009).

Finally, First Step Next includes different and more robust maintenance options and troubleshooting procedures, new demonstration videos, and a CD-ROM containing program materials that can be reproduced including downloadable training presentations, forms, checklists, and measures. A training DVD is also provided that models correct procedures for conducting parent and teacher meetings for the coach, Super Student Skills teaching lessons, and a teaching session with the class as a whole (see Walker et al., 2015).

First Step Next Implementation

As can be seen in Table 1, the intervention consists of three major tasks, including social skills instruction, the Green Card game, and school-home connections. These tasks are addressed across four implementation phases (preparation, coach, teacher, and maintenance). The coach coordinates these tasks in collaboration with the focus student as well as the student’s parents, peers, and teachers. The primary goal of instruction is to introduce, model, practice, and role-play the seven Super Student Skills: follow directions, be safe, ask for attention the right way, be a team player, do your best, be cool, and mistakes are okay. Coaches initially teach these skills in one-on-one sessions with the focus student. The coach also teaches the focus student about the Green Card game, which has green on one side and red on the other. The card provides positive feedback to the student for following teacher expectations (green side visible) and non-verbal negative feedback when the student does not comply with teacher expectations (red side visible). The coach operates the card initially and then turns it over to the teacher, who wears it on a lanyard around his or her neck for easy display. Students are taught that when the green side of the card is visible, they are doing well, and should keep it up. When they see the red side, they should “stop, think, and get back on track.” An optional whole-class version of social-skills instruction can also be used.

The Green Card game is played with all the children in the focus student’s class. Other students are taught to help the focus student keep the card on green. Points are awarded to the focus student for keeping the card on green; when 80% or more of the available daily points are earned while the green side of the card is showing, a brief, socially-rewarding activity or game involving the focus student and peers occurs immediately. A daily home note communicates results of the game to the parents, who reinforce this success with an individual activity/reward as soon as the child returns home. If the criterion is not met, that program day is

repeated and/or an earlier, successfully completed program day is scheduled before proceeding.

If the daily performance criterion is not met for three consecutive days, modifications are made according to the needs of the child (often in coach consultation with the child, teacher, and parent). These can include changing rewards and adjusting the reinforcement system and the intensity of attention required.

Table 1.
First Step Next Implementation Phases and Tasks

		Implementation Phases				Next year follow up
		Preparation	Coach	Teacher	Maintenance	
Tasks	Social skill instruction	Meet with student, discuss rewards	Conduct Super Student lessons, model with green card	Review Super Student Skills as necessary	Review Super Student Skills as necessary	Reintroduce Super Student Skills, Focus student: 5 lessons, Entire class: 4 lessons
	Green Card game	Observations, teacher meeting	Play Green Card game day 1-7	Play Green Card game days 8-20	Play Green Card game days 21-30+	Play Green Card game with focus student days 1-5 Play Green Card game with entire class days 6-20
	Home-school connection	Parent, teacher, coach meeting	Daily notes, daily phone calls	Daily notes, weekly phone-calls	If still playing with focus child- take daily notes	Daily graduate notes home, daily phone calls

Initially, coaches directly implement the program for brief portions of the school day and also monitor, supervise, and support participating teachers as they assume control of the program. As the First Step Next Program is fully implemented, it is gradually extended to the full school day. It is important to note that spending the extra time to ensure that the child, parents and teacher all share the same understanding and expectations is essential for First Step success, particularly given that many of the focus children are from low-income, diverse neighborhoods in which culturally responsive procedures are especially critical (Council for Children with Behavior Disorders, 2013).

School-home connection activities and resources (i.e., meetings, school-home notes, and a parent workbook) are designed to help parents reinforce the student's successful use of the Super Student Skills. Parents are taught to use positive parenting strategies that help students apply Super Student Skills in the home setting as well as at school.

Maintenance and Follow-up Procedures

First Step Next now includes maintenance procedures intended to provide needed ongoing behavioral support to the focus student during the remainder of the school year as well as follow up into the next school year to effect a seamless transition between grades. Research to date has convincingly shown that short-term behavioral interventions such as First Step should contain a follow-up maintenance plan to preserve achieved behavioral gains both within the remainder of the implementation school year and into the following school year (Sumi et al., 2013; Woodbridge et al., 2014). If possible, focus students should be followed, monitored and supported in subsequent school years to sustain program gains. To achieve this goal with First Step Next, the team has designed a next year follow-up plan, which contains a reduced variation of the full First Step Next implementation. Specifically, the next year follow-up maintenance activities include an initial meeting with

the focus student and new teacher, social skills instruction, and the explanation-demonstration of the Green Card game to the focus student and peers. For the meeting with the focus student, the coach reviews the First Step Next intervention and solicits the child's understanding of the Green Card game, describes the next year follow-up procedures, and gets the student's ideas for how the two of them could best teach the Green Card game and Super Student Skills to the entire class. The social-skills instruction provided is similar to that which occurred during the previous year; daily social-skills instruction is implemented for a minimum of five days, and as needed thereafter. Social-skills lessons last between 5 and 15 minutes.

The coach coordinates the roles of parents, peers and the new teacher in order to sustain program gains and to provide needed supports and assistance to the focus student. The coach calls the parents during each of the first 5 days of the next year's maintenance plan, and completes and sends home the daily school-home connection note. After turning the maintenance program's operation over to the new teacher, the coach strongly encourages the teacher to continue with daily connection notes for the focus student and to use the generic school-home note with other students as needed. It is highly recommended that the coach and teacher jointly sustain these maintenance procedures during the remainder of the follow-up school year, if possible.

Current Research on First Step Next

Currently, the First Step Next research team is conducting two Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Goal 3 studies with First Step Next. The first study provides an opportunity to examine several different outcomes of the intervention along with extensive data on consumer satisfaction and teacher-coach alliance. One of these projects focuses on preschool and the other is a comparative effectiveness study with tertiary-level, K-3 students that examines

the impact of First Step Next, when delivered alone and in combination with a positive parenting intervention, compared to a control condition. Both projects are 4-year RCTs currently at their midpoint (Grant # R324AI50221—Preschool First Step to Success: An Efficacy Replication; and Grant # R324AI50179—First Step Next and homeBase Comparative Efficacy Study).

Preschool Replication Study

This 4-year RCT compares First Step Next with a usual care condition. The purpose of the study is to conduct a Goal 3 efficacy study of First Step Next to replicate the positive effects previously achieved with the preschool version of the First Step intervention in improving social-behavioral and academically-related outcomes and to assess the intervention's utility for preschool applications (Feil et al., 2014).

A diverse group of preschool teachers and parents in Oregon, Kentucky, and Illinois consented to be involved in this study. This IES Goal 3 project will provide the foundation for a future effectiveness study by demonstrating (a) efficacy, supported by at least two rigorous trials; (b) specific intervention enhancements available for training and supervision; and (c) measurement and design features to test the program's impact at a broader site level rather than at just the classroom level. Pre-, post-, immediate follow-up, and one-year follow-up data are currently being collected in this study. The team is using a cluster-randomized controlled trial design that nests teachers and classrooms within early childhood sites, with 58 sites involving 174 low-income families having preschoolers who meet inclusion criteria and who agreed to participate in the study.

First Step Next and homeBase Efficacy Study

The second study, as noted, focuses on young elementary-age children (K-3) and appears to be one of the first comparative effectiveness studies to be attempted in a multi-tiered framework. It involves tertiary-level children with severe emotional and behav-

ioral problems and its feasibility has been supported in a recent preliminary study. This is also an IES-funded Goal 3 study, currently near its midpoint.

In this RCT, the team's interest is in directly comparing the First Step Next classroom-based intervention with the homeBase intervention, including motivational interviewing and function-based analysis procedures, as compared to a third usual care control group. A fourth group combining both interventions is also included in the study so as to examine its potential, relative effectiveness over either of the other two interventions alone.

The homeBase intervention typically includes up to six 60-minute sessions (i.e., home visits) and is designed to increase parental motivation and capacity to implement effective parenting practices. During homeBase, parents are encouraged to reflect upon their parenting practices and consider modifying those practices consistent with one or more of the five universal principles of positive behavior support that are central to the school module: (1) establish clear behavioral and performance expectations, (2) directly teach the expectations, (3) reinforce their display in schoolwork, (4) minimize teacher attention for minor inappropriate student behaviors, and (5) establish clear consequences for unacceptable behavior. In its current form, homeBase was constructed via an IES Goal 2 development grant 2008–2012; it was initially conceptualized as a revised home component to the First Step intervention. However, when the First Step Next intervention was redesigned without a true home intervention component, the team began to consider homeBase as a stand-alone intervention that could be valuable in isolation or in combination with any Tier II or Tier III school-based intervention that might benefit from the inclusion of parental support. This current study partially tests the viability of that assumption.

The relative contributions of these intervention components are being examined using a 2x2 factorial design in which K–3 students ($N = 400$) are randomly assigned to one of four study

conditions: (a) First Step Next only, (b) homeBase only, (c) First Step Next plus homeBase, and (d) a usual-care, control condition. A multiple-gating approach is used to screen and identify eligible students with externalizing problem behaviors. Teachers randomized to school-only or school-plus-home intervention conditions receive training in the school component and ongoing, in-classroom support from a behavioral coach. Parents of children randomized to the home-only or school-plus-home intervention conditions are invited to participate in homeBase, completing up to six 60-minute home visitation sessions with a behavioral coach. The study examines the magnitude of immediate pre- and post-effects, the long-term maintenance of intervention effects, the mediators and moderators of student-level intervention effects, and implementation outcomes across school and home settings.

The team is particularly interested in characteristics of children who respond to each of the above interventions and in differential effects on a wide range of outcome measures. As in the preschool project, this study will include a diverse group of participants at sites in Kentucky and Indiana. Study participants are roughly equally divided across the four groups.

A comparative effectiveness study is an RCT designed to directly compare two different interventions in the same study. It also frequently compares the combined interventions to either one by itself (Alexander & Stafford, 2009). Preliminary results of both these projects are encouraging and, if successful, results of these studies should provide the fields of general and special education with evidence that First Step Next is reliably efficacious in reducing problem behaviors and increasing the prosocial behavior repertoires of at-risk students. In addition, they may also provide exploratory information on child and contextual factors that are important for implementation success.

Future Planned Research on First Step Next

With regard to future research, the authors have long recognized the need for and importance of a universal component to complete the First Step intervention portfolio. A universal First Step intervention component would provide a seamless transition from Tier I to Tier II, allow for additional intervention-based screening to confirm the at-risk status of students who need more than simple exposure to a class-wide, universal intervention, and it would provide a foundation likely to enhance the overall efficacy of Tier II First Step Next. The major difference between a Tier I and Tier II First Step Next program version would be in the dosage received and the manner in which it is delivered. Thus, more students with challenging behavior could be served through a greater economy of scale within such a combined hybrid approach. It would likely also improve the program's adoption by end user consumers. Planning and design efforts are currently underway to produce a universal First Step Next component; the group will also be pursuing federal grants to support these efforts. Finally, the authors are in the early stages of developing and seeking federal funding for a large-scale, multisite dissemination research initiative for First Step Next in collaboration with SRI International Investigators.

Conclusion

The First Step Program was long overdue for a major revision and update, given that nearly two decades had lapsed since its initial publication. This task involved a substantial investment of time and effort over a year-long period by a group of professionals with a diverse set of essential skills. The early results of this investment appear promising. However, the goals of making the First Step program more efficacious, streamlined and user friendly will ultimately be confirmed, or not, by current and future research outcomes and by more complete indications of end user adoption, acceptance and sustainability. With the addition of a "First Step for All" universal component, the authors expect that the added

comprehensiveness and seamless transition between Tier I and Tier II levels of First Step Next will increase its appeal for program adopters and professional implementers. It is also to be hoped that the Tier III study will not only provide critical research data on the various components of First Step Next, but also pave the way for a more comprehensive and complete multi-tier system.

Author note

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Appendix A.
Super Student Skills Labels and Lesson Purpose

Super Student Skill	Lesson Purpose
Do your best	By reinforcing productive work behavior early, young students can obtain skills to support academic success in the future. This lesson teaches the student to work quietly and put forth his/her best effort at school.
Be cool	Many young students need to learn how to de-escalate before frustration turns into a disruptive temper tantrum. This lesson teaches the focus student to recognize feelings of frustration and use a three-step procedure for positively coping with these feelings.
Mistakes are okay	Mistakes are often a trigger for disruptive behaviors. The steps introduced in this lesson help a student diffuse frustration. Because mistakes are essential for learning, this skill provides a gateway to both behavioral and academic learning.
Be safe	Knowing the difference between safe and unsafe behavior is a critical skill that every young child must learn. This lesson teaches the focus student three basic rules that set the foundation for safe behavior at school.
Follow directions	Learning to follow directions is a basic behavioral skill. The skill of following directions operationalizes being cooperative. By learning how to follow directions, the young First Step NEXT student gains the means to achieve school success.
Ask for attention the right way	Some students have difficulty adjusting to the school context where adult attention must be shared among a group of children. By providing the focus student with an explicit signal to solicit help from a teacher, this lesson teaches the student to ask for adult attention in a way that minimizes disruption to the class.
Be a team player	The school setting often requires students to participate as part of a group. This lesson frames this group as a team, and the focus student is taught basic skills for how to be a good team player when working with classmates, including how to use kind, polite, and helpful words when interacting with others.