

# RISE PROGRAM EVALUATION

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2019, the Nebraska Administrative Office of Probation, Juvenile Services Division's, introduced the Recognizing Increased Skills in Education (RISE) program to address concerns that justice involved youth are vulnerable to the risk of educational failure which can contribute to truancy, negative behavior and repeated involvement in the juvenile or adult criminal justice systems. The goal of RISE is to encourage behavioral change among at-risk youth that can not only improve educational outcomes but reduce the likelihood of future involvement with the criminal justice system.

The RISE program evaluation was designed to assess youth skill development and positive attitude toward school. In this non-experimental outcome study, the goal of the evaluation was to facilitate continuous program improvement by systemically collecting data on the 2022 – 2023 and 2023 – 2024 RISE youth to learn about program's effectiveness in increasing youth educational success and reducing recidivism.

## RISE Program Overview

Between August 1st, 2022, and July 31st, 2024, 314 youth were referred to the RISE program. Two-thirds of these youth identified as white, 57% were male, and were 17 years-old on average. Of the 314 youth, 174 (55%) graduated from the program. The RISE program served youth in 10 Districts across the State during the reporting period. Most of the RISE youth were served in Districts 3J (93 youth), 2 (43), or 10 (42), while District 7 (12) had the fewest youth in the program.

## RISE Youth Outcomes

**RISE graduates showed improved educational outcomes.** School attendance data shows that:

- *RISE youth who graduated from the program showed better attendance outcomes than youth who were referred to RISE but did not complete it.* Graduates had a higher percentage of school days where they were present, and a lower percentage of unexcused absences than youth who did not complete the program.
- *RISE graduates had better attendance after starting the program.* Among the RISE graduates with attendance data available, school attendance was better after they started the program than it was before. RISE graduates had a higher percentage of days present and a lower percentage of unexcused absences after starting the program.

**RISE graduates were more likely to be granted early release from probation.** All of the 314 referred participants completed their probation sentence successfully; however, a higher percentage of RISE graduates were granted early release than non-graduates.

**Some RISE graduates reported that they are more frequently engaged in behaviors taught by the curriculum.** Specifically, RISE graduates completed their assignments on time, did their homework, started to study for an exam at least a week in advance, and asked their teacher questions during class.

**Some RISE graduates reported a positive change in their attitudes towards school.** Specifically, RISE graduates reported a better attitude towards their willingness to ask for help with school, the importance of graduating high school, wanting to learn as much as possible, and being on time to school.

**RISE graduates reported fewer instances of truancy.** RISE graduates reported waking up earlier for school after the program, and, for some graduates, being more likely to get to school on time.

**RISE specialists felt that the program allowed them to connect with the youth.** Specialists felt that the curriculum identifies important skills and can be accessible to most youth who participate in the program and that the flexibility of their role allowed them to serve as not only educators, but a source of support for the youth. This enabled them to tailor the program to meet the needs of each individual student.

**RISE specialists believed that completing the program could help youth.** Specialists believed that RISE helped students build confidence and earn better outcomes in school, which gave them satisfaction and could positively impact their lives.

**RISE specialists identified areas where they felt gaps existed that compromised their effectiveness, including:**

- *The program is too short*, which does not give them enough time to ensure that the referred youth had an opportunity to learn the skills taught in the course. While the RISE program does allow for ongoing support after graduation, not all graduates take advantage of this service.
- *The curriculum, while straightforward for many students, was not always appropriate for RISE youth* who needed more support with foundational social and educational skills (e.g., reading, writing, etc.). The specialists felt that the curriculum could use adjustment to better align with the needs of the referred youth.
- *Program flexibility has some downsides.* Specialists appreciated the flexibility to tailor their approach, and acknowledged the necessity of doing so, the difference in approach could compromise the fidelity to the curriculum across RISE cohorts.

# INTRODUCTION

In 2019, the Nebraska Administrative Office of Probation, Juvenile Services Division's, introduced the Recognizing Increased Skills in Education (RISE) program to address concerns that justice involved youth are vulnerable to the risk of educational failure which can contribute to truancy, negative behavior and repeated involvement in the juvenile or adult criminal justice systems. RISE was designed as an education-based intervention into problematic youth behavior that could result in future involvement with the justice system. The RISE program is a youth-centered service that provides participants with facilitated group sessions as well as individual meetings to help them overcome barriers to educational success.

The RISE program is designed to help participants build their skills as students, adjust their attitudes towards school, develop goals for their educational future, and improve their school attendance. The goal of RISE is to encourage behavioral change among at-risk youth that can not only improve educational outcomes but reduce the likelihood of future involvement with the criminal justice system.

AmeriCorps members facilitate a skill-based curriculum separated into 5 chapters: Goal Setting, Motivation, Organization, Study Skills, and Test Taking (See Exhibit 1). RISE is available to youth, ages 11-18 who have a truancy adjudication, who have scored at least moderate risk on the Education and Employment domain of the Youth Level Service Case Management Inventory (YLS / CMI), who are deemed appropriate for the program by their probation officer, or who are ordered by the court. Youth are enrolled in RISE for at least 5 weeks (this can be extended depending on the youth's understanding of curriculum topic areas), and when a youth successfully completes all five chapters and demonstrates that they have learned the material, they would be considered a RISE graduate.

**Exhibit 1. RISE Curriculum and Skills Learned**

Goal Setting	Motivation	Organization	Study Skills	Test Taking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Understanding what goals are</li><li>➤ Learning the value of goals</li><li>➤ Developing goal setting practices</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Learning about internal and external motivation</li><li>➤ Reflecting on sources of motivation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Learning the value of organization</li><li>➤ Developing organization skills and practices</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Learning how to manage time effectively</li><li>➤ Developing note taking and study skills</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Learning how to prepare for exams in school</li><li>➤ Managing anxiety before a school test</li></ul>

## RISE Evaluation

The RISE program evaluation was designed to assess youth skill development and positive attitude toward school. The goal of the evaluation was to facilitate continuous program improvement by systemically collecting data on the 2022 – 2023 and 2023 – 2024 RISE youth to learn about program’s effectiveness in increasing youth educational success and reducing recidivism. This was done as a non-experimental outcome study conducted by an external evaluator.

## Main Study Questions

The RISE evaluation assessed whether the program operated as planned, what worked well, what challenges were encountered, and what, if any, modifications are needed to improve operations. Three study questions guided this analysis:

1. To what extent do RISE graduates improve their skills before and after the program? Are there particular skills that youth seem to improve more than others?
2. To what extent do youth improve in their attitudes toward school before and after RISE?
3. In what ways do skill development and attitudes towards school among RISE graduates relate to classroom attendance?

## Methods & Data Sources

To address these questions, the evaluation gathered data from multiple sources:

- 1) **RISE youth data:** Data from the RISE program and the Nebraska Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation were analyzed to assess RISE youth demographic information, program, probation and recidivism outcomes, YLS / CMI scores, and school attendance data. This data was made available for the 314 youth on probation who participated in the RISE program between August 1st, 2022, and July 31st, 2024.
- 2) **RISE participation survey data:** Data from 86 RISE youth who completed pre- and post-RISE assessment surveys were analyzed to assess engagement with the RISE curriculum, educational goal setting, and attitudes towards school.
- 3) **Focus groups with RISE specialists:** Focus group discussions were conducted with RISE program specialists to assess their perception of the program and .

## This Report

This report presents the results of the RISE program evaluation and offers key learnings to support the refinement of program going forward. The sections illustrate the RISE program’s operations and



summarize the feedback provided by RISE facilitators, ending with a list of suggestions for improvement and recommendations to support the ongoing administration of RISE.

# RISE PROGRAM DATA

Data in this section reflect youth who referred to the RISE program during the 2022 – 2023 (August 2022 – July 2023) and the 2023 – 2024 (August 2023 – July 2024) program years (the “reporting period”).

## RISE Youth Characteristics

During the reporting period, 314 youth were referred to the RISE program. Of these youth, **174 (55%) graduated from the program**, nearly two-thirds identified as White, and just over half were male.<sup>1</sup> Most of these youth were over 16 years old (*Range* = 12 – 20 years old, *Average* = 17).

*Most RISE youth scored as moderate risk on the Education and Employment domain of the YLS / CMI*

Youth are referred to RISE in part because of their score on the Education and Employment (EE) domain of the YLS / CMI. Of the 314 youth who were referred to RISE, 69 (22%) were considered low risk, 196 (63%) were assessed as moderate risk and 48 (15%) were high risk. This data follows the expected pattern in that most RISE youth scored at least a moderate level on the EE domain prior to entering the program.

There was not a statistically significant difference in RISE graduation rates across these domains. Youth who were assessed as low EE risk on the YLS / CMI graduated at a similar rate (42%) as moderate (45%) and high-risk (50%) youth.

## RISE Youth Overview

Between August 2022 and July 2024:

**314** youth referred to the RISE program

Of these youth:

**55%** graduated from the program

**65%** identified as **white**

**57%** were **male**

**17** years-old, average age of RISE youth

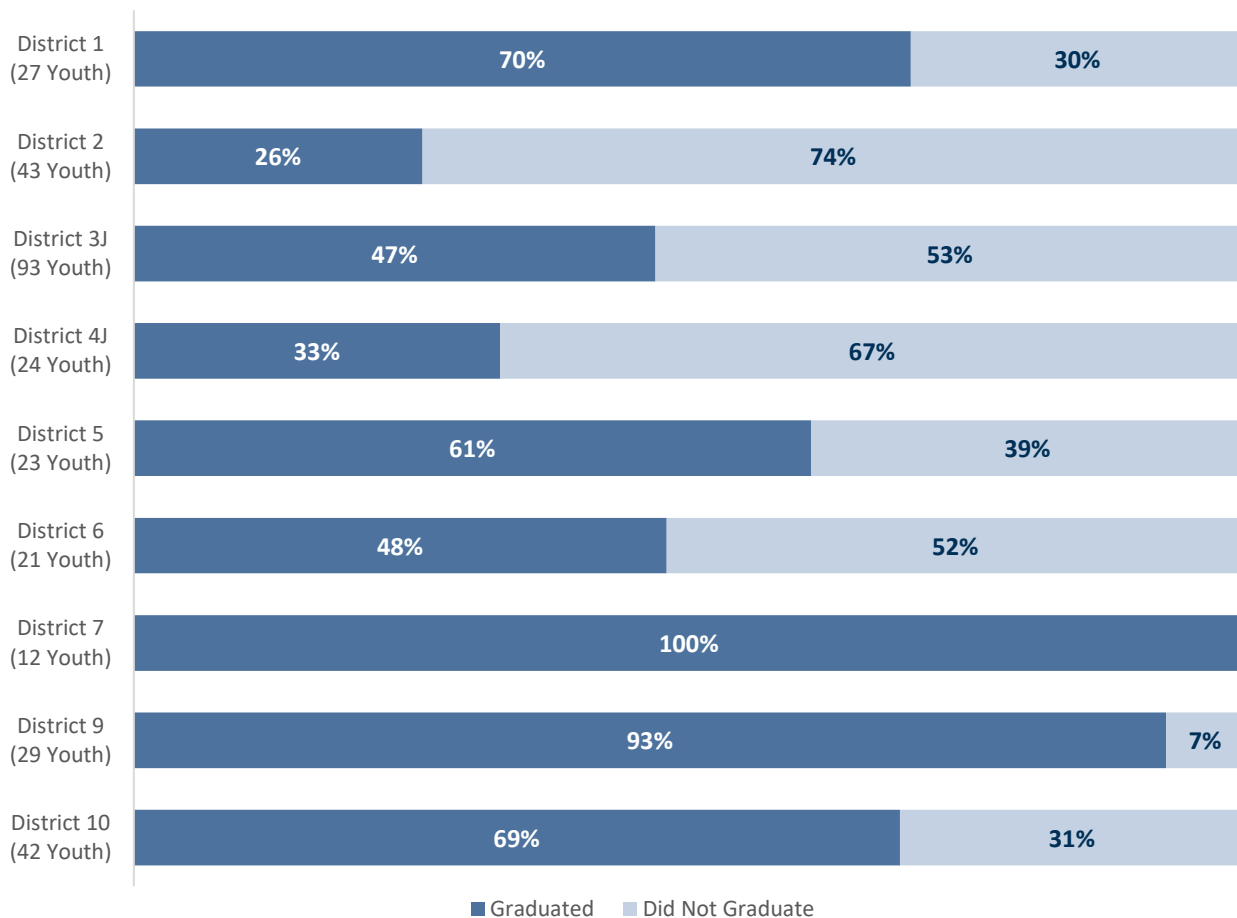
**63%** Assessed as **moderate risk** on the EE domain of YLS / CMI

<sup>1</sup> The RISE youth demographic distribution is consistent with statistics for youth served by the Nebraska Juvenile Services Division. White males represent the bulk of total youths on probation and number of youths who receive programming and services (including RISE).

### *Rural districts graduated more than 50% of RISE youth*

As shown in Exhibit 1, the RISE program served youth in 10 Districts across the State during the reporting period. Most of the RISE youth were served in Districts 3J (93 youth), 2 (43), or 10 (42), while District 7 (12) had the fewest youth in the program. Exhibit 1 displays the variance in graduation rates across the State and shows that the rural districts generally had higher graduation rates than the districts around the Lincoln and Omaha metro area. Districts 7 and 9 had graduation rates over 90%, while at least 60% of youth in Districts 1, 5, and 10 graduated from the program. Fewer than half the youth graduated in Districts 2, 3J, 4J, and 6.

**Exhibit 2. RISE Youth and Graduation Rate by Probation District**



The RISE program has historically graduated around 50% of its youth, and the graduation rate during the data collection period was consistent with program goals. There are key factors to consider when assessing RISE graduation rates, including:

- **Instability in personal life.** Youth often face significant changes in their circumstances during their time in the RISE program, which can lead to issues in both starting and completing their involvement. These challenges include moving between districts, being placed in new living arrangements, or transitioning between different types of schooling. In some cases, youth may also experience shifts due to dual-system involvement.

These changes are largely beyond the program's control, addressing the youth's immediate needs—such as securing stable housing, attending court hearings, or receiving appropriate treatment—takes precedence. These transitions often disrupt the continuity of their participation in the program.

- **Barriers to participation.** Additionally, several factors can prevent a youth from attending or completing a group, even if they initially show interest. RISE program staff have noticed some of the following common barriers to participation to the program across the past years such as:
  - **Non-attendance or Refusal to Participate:** Some youth may choose to stop attending or outright refuse to participate in the program. Depending on the youth's other probation requirements, RISE may not be prioritized by them or required by their officer.
  - **Transportation Issues:** Lack of reliable transportation is a common barrier, making it difficult for youth to attend scheduled sessions.
  - **Competing Priorities:** Youth may also prioritize other activities or treatments, which can interfere with their ability to commit to the group. These choices are sometimes influenced by the urgent needs they are facing outside of the program and by their probation requirements.
- **RISE Program Specialist turnover.** While it is ideal for RISE Specialists to remain for the full 12-month program year, in practice, turnover can pose significant challenges to the program's consistency and administration. Some specialists may start later in the year, or due to personal or professional reasons, end their contracts before the full year is completed. These transitions are often beyond the program's control and can result changes in the quality of the program. Specialist turnover can also affect the continuity of the relationship between the specialist and the youth, which may impact the overall outcomes.

The RISE program continues to navigate these factors, as well as differences in support across the Districts. In some Districts, the probation officers and judges are more familiar with the RISE program which can help participating youth prioritize it. In other Districts, the officers do not have a high level of engagement with RISE, and their youth may not have as much of an incentive to graduate. It is within this context that the RISE program operates, which can affect its overall graduation rate, and the graduation rate between Districts.

# RISE YOUTH OUTCOMES

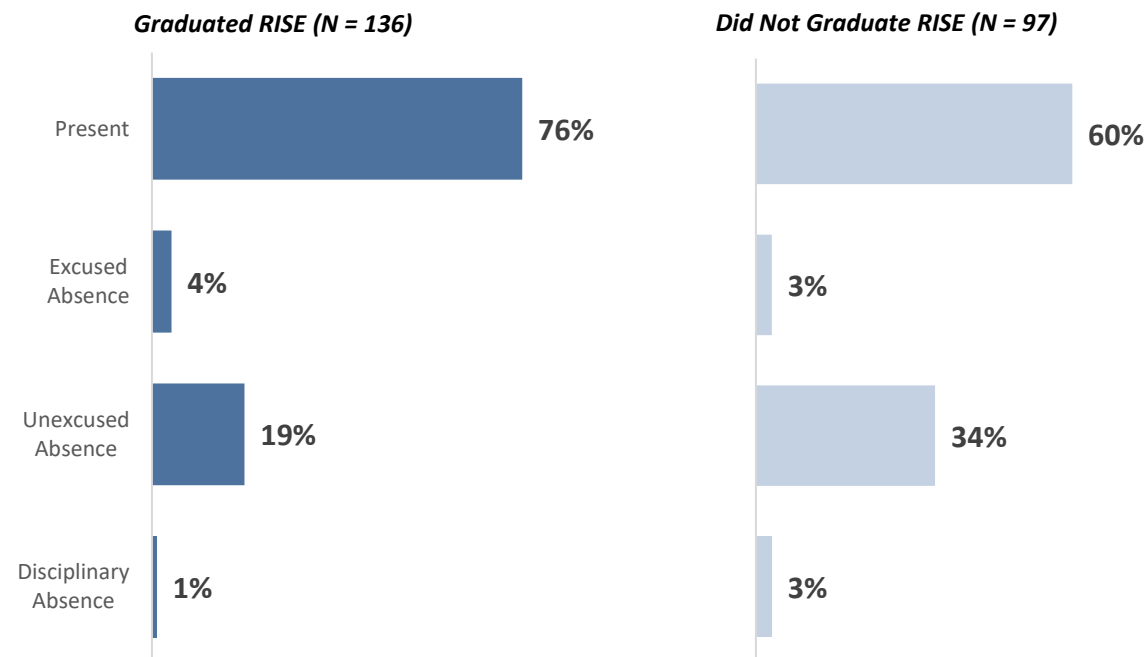
## RISE Youth Attendance Outcomes

RISE Specialists tracked attendance data for 233 of the 314 (73%) youth referred to RISE, including 136 of the 174 (78%) youth who graduated the program. The attendance data for RISE graduates includes data from two time periods: before they began and after they started RISE. RISE Specialists tracked the following attendance events by noting the number of days each occurred during the school year: present, excused absence, unexcused absence, suspension, and expulsion. All attendance outcomes are reported as a percentage of the total days recorded.

**|** *RISE graduates showed better attendance outcomes than non-graduates*

As shown in Exhibit 3 program graduates were present in school more than non-graduates (76% of days vs 60%). Further, RISE non-graduates had a higher percentage of unexcused absences (34%) than did RISE graduates (19%).

**Exhibit 3. Attendance Outcomes by RISE Graduation Status**

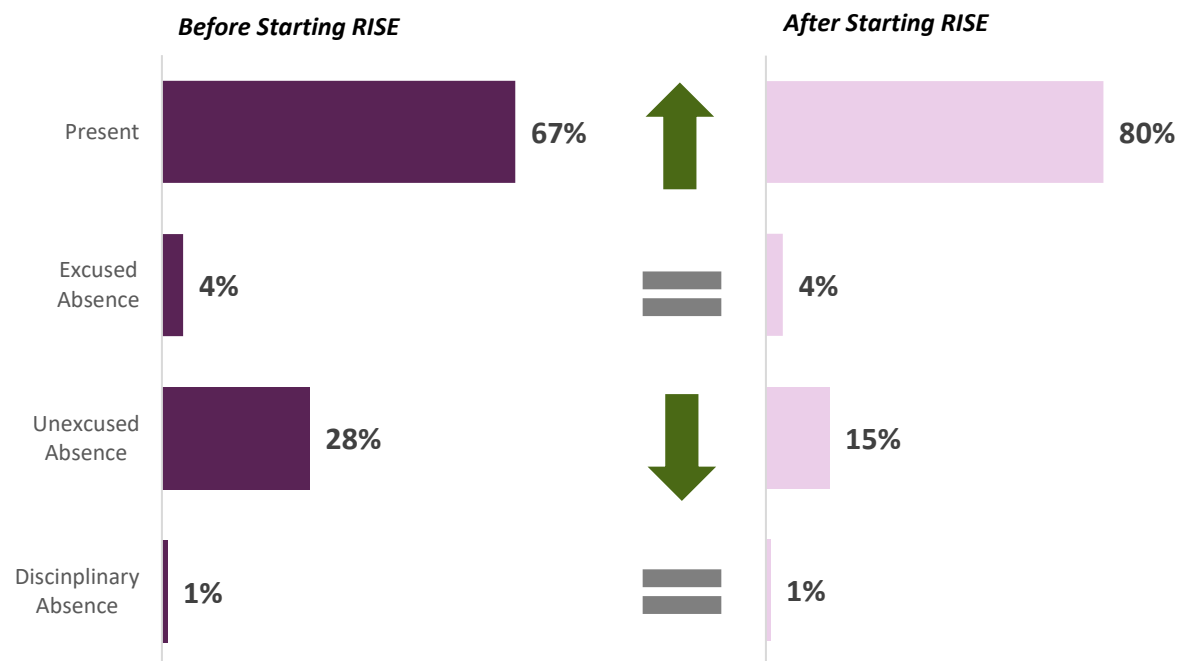


Note: "Disciplinary Absence" includes in and out of school suspension, as well as expulsion

### **RISE graduates showed better attendance outcomes after starting RISE**

Exhibit 4 shows the difference in RISE graduate attendance outcomes before and after starting RISE.<sup>2</sup> As shown in Exhibit 4, RISE graduates showed an improvement in attendance after they started the program. RISE graduates had a higher percentage of days present after enrollment in the course (80%) than they did before starting RISE (67%). They also showed a reduction in the percentage of days with unexcused absences after starting the program (15%) then before being referred (28%).

**Exhibit 4. Attendance Outcomes for RISE Graduates Before and After Starting RISE**



Note: "Disciplinary Absence" includes in and out of school suspension, as well as expulsion.

Taken together, the attendance data again tells a positive story about attendance outcomes among RISE graduates. RISE graduates showed positive changes in school attendance and had a higher percentage of attendance after starting the program than before. This change in attendance after starting RISE contributes to the higher percentage of RISE graduates who have positive attendance outcomes compared with non-graduates.

<sup>2</sup> In and out of school suspensions as well as expulsions have been combined to form the "Other" category due to low occurrences of these outcomes among RISE graduates

## RISE Youth Probation and Recidivism Outcomes

Of the 314 RISE youth in reporting period, information about the probation and recidivism outcomes was available for 253 (81%), including 128 RISE graduates and 125 who did not graduate.

### *RISE graduates completed probation early*

Of these 253 youth, 100% completed probation successfully and 16% were granted an early releasee. Notably, no youth were dismissed from probation or were given an unsatisfactory completion designation.<sup>3</sup> As shown in Exhibit 5, a higher percentage of program graduates (21%) were granted early release from probation youth who did not graduate from RISE (11%).

### *RISE youth did not recidivate*

Recidivism data can only be collected for youth who have been discharged from probation and who have committed a qualifying offense within a year of their discharge date. Of the 253 youth with recidivism data available 40 (16%) experienced a qualifying recidivism event (20 RISE graduates and 20 RISE youth who did not graduate). The remaining **213 (84%) RISE Youth did not recidivate**. There was no difference in recidivism rates based on RISE graduation status.

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<sup>3</sup> One youth completed a problem-solving court.

# RISE GRADUATE ENGAGEMENT AND ATTITUDE SURVEY

RISE participants were asked to provide responses to a survey assessing their engagement with the RISE curriculum, educational goal setting, and attitudes towards school. During the program period, the RISE program director, in collaboration with the RISE specialists, worked with the evaluator to develop the survey that was used for the 2022 / 2023 / 2024 program years. Surveys were administered to RISE youth before they began the program and again after they completed it to monitor changes in their responses during the course of the program. If a youth did not complete the program, they did not complete a post-survey, which is a limitation to this data effecting the outcomes. In addition, the RISE Specialist had to navigate technology issues to have youth self-upload survey's online and then RISE Specialists transitioned into facilitating physical 5copies to youth and later uploading them. In this process change, there were some technology challenges with obtaining all surveys. Pre- and post-RISE survey data was available for **86 (49%) of the 174 graduates**.

As shown in Exhibit 5, the RISE survey assessed **skill improvement** among RISE graduates by asking them to rate the degree to which they engaged in the behaviors taught by the RISE curriculum (blue box). Graduates responded to 9 survey statements using a scale of 1 (Never) to 5 (Almost Always). The teal box of Exhibit 5 shows the 8 statement prompts that assessed changes in **attitudes towards school**. Graduates responded using a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Exhibit 5. RISE Survey Assessment Prompts

Skill Assessment Prompts	Attitudes Towards School Prompts
<div>✓ I do schoolwork at home</div> <div>✓ I complete my assignments before class</div> <div>✓ I pay attention during class</div> <div>✓ I take notes during class</div> <div>✓ I ask my teachers questions</div> <div>✓ I avoid distractions while studying</div> <div>✓ I keep track of my school assignments</div> <div>✓ I start studying at least a week before a test</div> <div>✓ I know how to set educational goals that I can accomplish</div>	<div>✓ It is important to be to school on time</div> <div>✓ I want to learn as much as possible</div> <div>✓ I just want to pass</div> <div>✓ If I knew someone who could help me, I would ask</div> <div>✓ Going to school makes me feel anxious</div> <div>✓ Graduating high school is important to me</div> <div>✓ I do not think it is important to graduate high school</div>

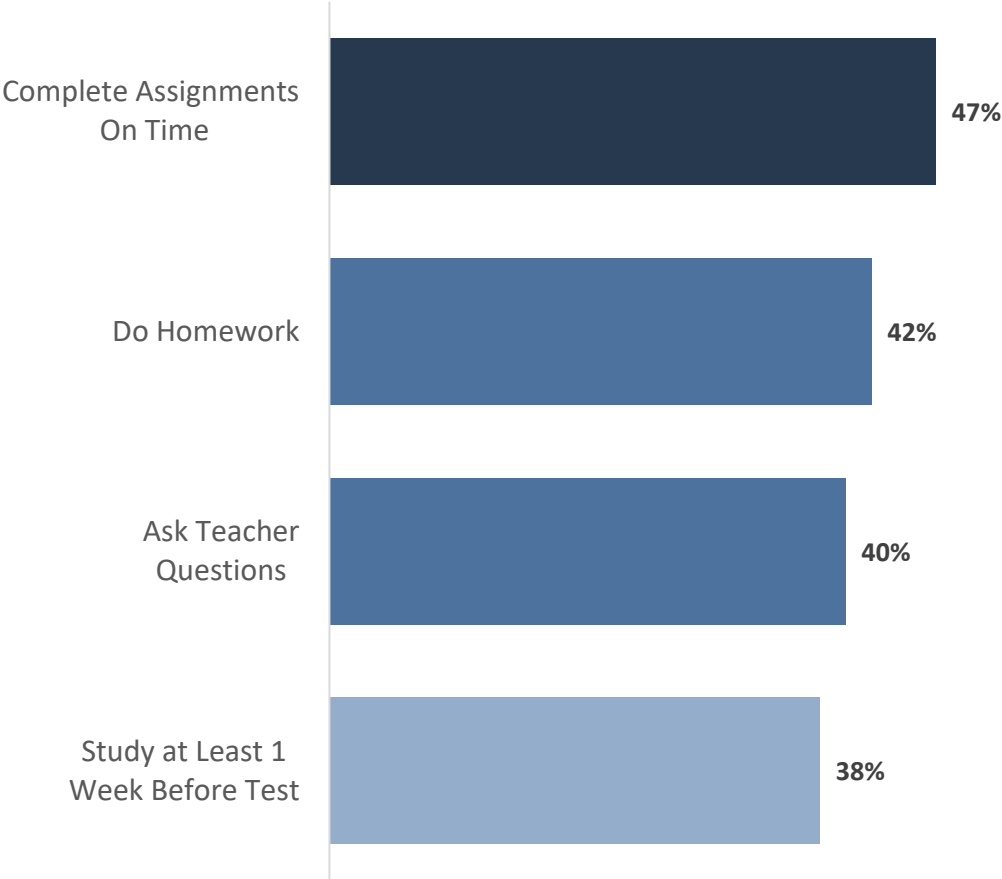


	✓ It is important for me to accomplish my educational goals
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*RISE graduates showed improvement in the frequency of doing homework, completing assignments before class, asking questions, and starting to study at least 1 week before an exam*

The skills assessed by the RISE survey with the highest percentage of graduates who reported an increase in the behaviors after RISE include **completing assignments on time, doing homework, starting to study for an exam at least a week in advance**, and **asking the teacher questions** during class. Exhibit 6 shows the percentage of RISE graduates who reported an increase in frequency at which they engaged in the behavior taught in RISE. The skills highlighted in Exhibit 6 are those that a had a higher percentage of RISE graduates who reported an increase in the behavior than reported a decrease or did not report any change.

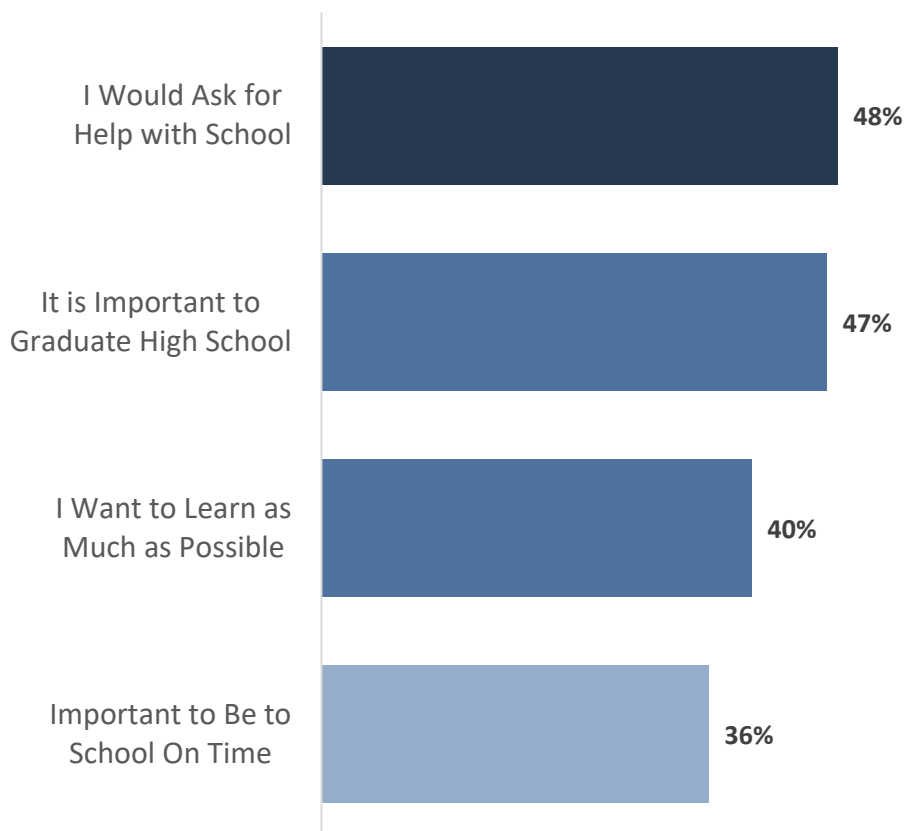
**Exhibit 6. Percentage of RISE Graduates’ Who Reported Increase in Frequency of Behaviors Taught by RISE**



*RISE graduates reported better attitudes towards asking for help with school, the importance of graduating high school, learning as much as possible, and being on time to school*

The attitudes assessed by the RISE survey with the highest percentage of graduates who reported a positive change included **willingness to ask for help with school, the importance of graduating high school, wanting to learn as much as possible, and being on time to school**. Exhibit 7 shows the percentage of RISE graduates who were more likely to agree with a statement that reflected a positive attitude towards school after RISE.

**Exhibit 7. Percentage of RISE Graduates' Who Reported a More Positive Attitude Towards School After RISE**



# RISE Graduates and School Tardiness

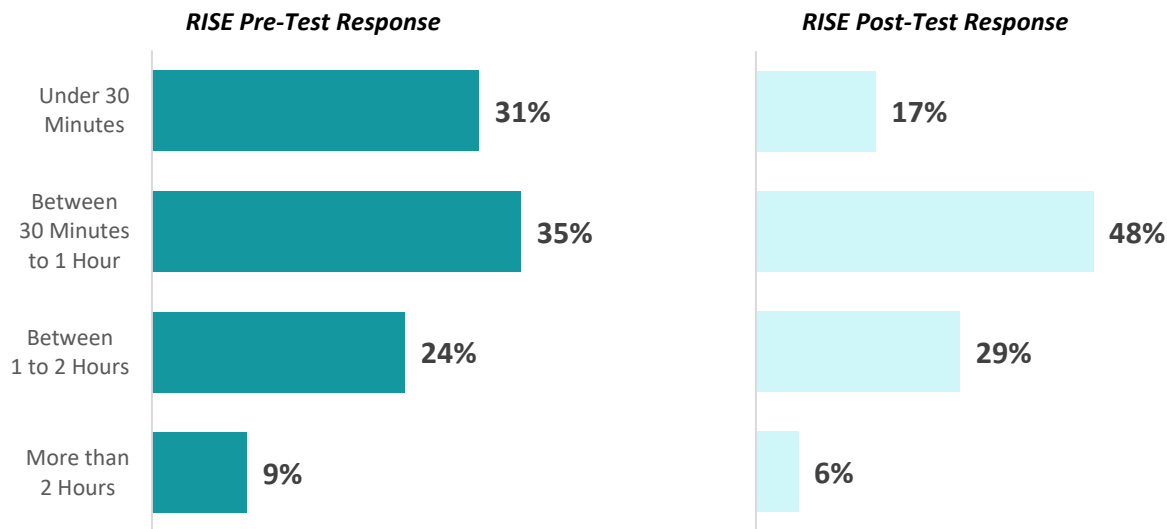
Finally, the RISE participation survey also assessed tardiness by asking graduates to report on how early they woke up before school, and how many days per week that they were late for school.

*RISE graduates reported waking up earlier before school after attending RISE*

RISE graduates were asked to report how early they woke up before school by indicating they woke up less than 30 minutes before school, between 30 minutes and 1 hour before school, between 1 to 2 hours before school, and more than 2 hours before school. Of the 86 RISE youth who completed pre- and post- RISE surveys, **37 (43%) reported waking up earlier for school on the post-RISE survey**. An additional 21 (24%) did not report a change in their wakeup time, while 28 (33%) woke up later.

Exhibit 8 provides more detail into this result by showing a large decrease in the percentage of RISE graduates who reported waking up under 30 minutes before school with a corresponding increase in the percentage that reported waking up between 30 minutes and 1 hour before school. Exhibit 8 also shows a small increase in the percentage of RISE graduates waking up between 1 to 2 hours before school and a decrease in the percentage that reported waking up more than 2 hours early.

**Exhibit 8. Wake Up Time Before School, Before and After RISE**



*Some RISE graduates reported being late to school less frequently after RISE*

RISE graduates were also asked to report how frequently they were late to school, either 0 days per week, 1 to 2 days per week, or 3 or more days per week. Of the 86 RISE youth who completed pre- and post- RISE surveys, **29 (34%) reported being late less frequently after RISE** while 32 (37%) did not report a change, and 25 (29%) reported being late more frequently.

# RISE SPECIALIST PERSPECTIVES

This section summarizes what was learned during focus groups with 5 of the RISE specialists that served the program during the reporting period. Five specialists in total were interviewed via 2 different group interviews by the evaluator. These members participated based on availability and who served in a representative set of locations that are typical of the whole group. The evaluator sent a zoom link that allowed feedback from the available members to be voluntary and anonymous. RISE specialists were asked about their role as facilitators, specific aspects of the RISE curriculum, and what impact they felt the program had on RISE youth. For each of these topics, specialists reported what worked well and any challenges that they encountered during their experience as a RISE specialist.

## The Role of the RISE Specialist

RISE specialists noted that a **significant portion of their work is spent on administrative responsibilities**, including conducting the course on a weekly basis for 5 weeks and tracking RISE youth attendance while they were enrolled in the program. Tracking attendance is a particularly challenging task that can be more difficult in certain school districts that do not cooperate with the program and do not provide access to student attendance data.

Beyond these duties, the **RISE specialists generally agreed that their primary function is to facilitate the curriculum by helping the youth understand the material and develop the skills necessary to graduate from RISE**. Although the specialists relied on the same material, they reported taking different approaches to facilitating the program. Two of the specialists reported that they occasionally brought in an outside party from the community to help talk about the importance of building the skills that the curriculum presented, while others noted that they will use examples from their own experience that highlight certain skills which they feel are particularly important.

Most of the specialists also noted that they are also responsible for **offering pro-social support to their youth**. This includes listening to the youth and meeting with them one-on-one to ensure that they each understand the material, facilitating access to volunteer activities that the youth may be interested in pursuing, and finding ways to inspire them to build educational skills and improve their attitude towards school. Specialists also noted that they help the youth develop practical skills such as constructing a resume and applying for jobs. In this way, the specialists are more than facilitators of the curriculum – **they also feel responsible for developing personnel connections to help the youth get the most out of RISE**.

## Perspectives on the RISE Curriculum

The RISE specialists generally felt that the RISE curriculum provided youth in the program with a **foundational knowledge of the key elements of educational success**. The facilitators felt that the

curriculum was well organized and that it included important information that could help the youth develop skills necessary to succeed in school. The specialist particularly appreciated the sections covering goal setting, motivation, and organization as being valuable to the youth in their program because the content provided practical skills to students that could apply in and outside of the classroom.

Most of the specialists interviewed, however, expressed concern that the content in **the curriculum, while well intentioned, did not always align with the youths' capacity to learn or account for different learning styles**. Multiple specialists observed that the youth who they facilitated were not equipped to understand the material presented by the curriculum. These youth lacked the foundational education to connect with and understand the content, and needed help with skills such as reading comprehension and basic writing before they could move on to engaging with the material presented during RISE. Given the varying capabilities of the RISE youth, the specialists reported that **they often will deviate from the curriculum on an individual basis** to ensure that every youth can get something out of the program. In this way, the RISE experience can vary for each youth depending on how the specialist leading the course views each student's capability to understand the material.

## RISE Impact on Participating Youth

RISE specialists felt that **the program helps build confidence in the youth who attend and who understand the material presented**. The specialists agreed that it is clear when a participant has an “A-ha moment” when information makes sense to them and learning occurs. When this happens, the impact of RISE is clear: **the youth understand and begin to learn a critical skill that can help with their educational development**. In this way, the RISE program can improve knowledge and build the skills that help youth appreciate the importance of school and improve their educational success. Specialists also noted that **RISE helps youth understand the importance of goal setting and gives them the tools necessary to set manageable goals for their future**.

While the specialists felt that the RISE program provided benefits to the youth, they universally expressed that **the program is too short to have a profound and lasting impact on the youth who participate**. With a 5-week curriculum, and a short period of ongoing support after graduation, the **RISE specialists did not feel that they had sufficient time to engage with the youth** to ensure that the lessons learned would stay with the youth after they completed RISE. Given the varying levels of educational capabilities across the youth, the short timeframe was particularly challenging for youth who had a hard time reading and understanding the curriculum.

# SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A review of the RISE program data, participant youth survey responses, and conversations with RISE specialists indicates that the program has met several of its goals. More than half of RISE youth graduated from the program, with graduates showing better school attendance after they started the program. Further, several RISE graduates reported a positive change in the behaviors taught by RISE and in their attitudes towards school after completing the program. Finally, data collected from conversations with the RISE specialists highlights the areas where the program is working well, and what challenges remain for RISE to address going forward.

## Youth Served by the RISE Program

Between August 1st, 2022, and July 31st, 2024, 314 youth were referred to the RISE program. Of these youth, two-thirds identified as white, 57% were male, and were 17 years-old on average. Of these 314 youth, 174 (55%) graduated from the program. The RISE program served youth in 10 Districts across the State during the reporting period. Most of the RISE youth were served in Districts 3J (93 youth), 2 (43), or 10 (42), while District 7 (12) had the fewest youth in the program. The rural districts generally had higher graduation rates than the urban districts in the Lincoln and Omaha metro area.

## RISE Youth Outcomes

Data presented in this report suggests that the program has met several of its goals:

### **|** *RISE has a positive relationship with school attendance*

One of the goals of the program is to improve educational outcomes for youth who are referred to RISE. School attendance data shows that the program is meeting this goal:

- **RISE youth who graduated from the program showed better attendance outcomes than youth who were referred to RISE but did not complete it.** Graduates had a higher percentage of school days where they were present, and a lower percentage of unexcused absences than youth who did not complete the program.
- **RISE graduates had better attendance after starting the program.** Among the RISE graduates with attendance data available, school attendance was better after they started the program than it was before. RISE graduates had a higher percentage of days present and a lower percentage of unexcused absences after starting the program.

*All RISE youth completed probation, graduates had a higher rate of early release*

Probation outcomes were consistent across all the youth who were referred to the RISE program as all of the 314 referred participants completed their probation sentence successfully. A higher percentage of RISE graduates were granted early release than non-graduates. Further, 84% of RISE youth did not recidivate, with no difference in recidivism between graduates and non-graduates.

## RISE Graduate Skill and Attitude Improvement

Data collected from the RISE pre- and post- program surveys addressed the three evaluation study questions:

*To what extent do RISE graduates improve their skills before and after the program? Are there particular skills that youth seem to improve more than others?*

Although there was not a significant increase in the frequency of engaging with the skills taught by RISE among graduates as a whole, some RISE graduates reported a change in the positive skill behaviors that the RISE program seeks to address. Specifically, close to 40% of RISE graduates reported that they more frequently **completed their assignments on time, did their homework, started to study for an exam at least a week in advance, and asked their teacher questions** during class. While a percentage of RISE graduates reported positive change in behavior for each of the skills assessed by the survey, the highlighted skills saw a higher percentage of RISE graduates report an increase in their behavior than reported a decrease or did not show any change.

*To what extent do youth improve in their attitudes toward school before and after RISE?*

Similarly, there was not a significant difference in the attitudes assessed by the RISE survey; however some RISE graduates reported a positive change in their **willingness to ask for help with school, the importance of graduating high school, wanting to learn as much as possible, and being on time to school**. In addition to the change in attitude, RISE graduates reported waking up earlier for school after the program, and, for some graduates, being more likely to get to school on time.

*In what ways do skill development and attitudes towards school among RISE graduates relate to classroom attendance?*

While not enough RISE graduates reported an increase in skill development and attitudes to conduct statistical analysis of the impact on attendance, results of the evaluation analysis suggest that the RISE program overall has a positive impact on classroom attendance. The responses to the pre- and post- RISE surveys regarding wake-up time and school tardiness, along with the positive attendance outcomes among RISE graduates, indicate that RISE graduates are more likely to attend school and have fewer unexcused absences, meeting the program's goal of encouraging better attendance outcomes in youth who graduate.



## Perspectives of RISE Specialists

Focus groups with RISE specialists highlighted areas where they believed the program was effective, and where there were opportunities for improvement. Specialists felt that the content presented during RISE is relevant to building skills among at risk youths and can help improve attitudes towards school and education outcomes. The curriculum identifies important skills and can be accessible to most youth who participate in the program. Further, specialists felt that the flexibility of their role allowed them to serve as not only educators, but a source of support for the youth, enabling them to tailor the program to meet the needs of each individual student. Finally, specialists believed that completing the program could help students build confidence and earn better outcomes in school, which gave them satisfaction that they could have a positive impact on the lives of youth referred to RISE.

While the program has many positives, RISE specialists identified areas where they felt gaps existed that compromised their effectiveness. Specifically, RISE specialists felt that the program was too short, which did not give them enough time to ensure that the referred youth had an opportunity to learn the skills taught in the course. RISE specialists felt limited by the time that they had, particularly because the curriculum, while straightforward for many students, was not always appropriate for RISE youth who needed more support with foundational social and educational skills (e.g., reading, writing, etc.). RISE specialists also reported taking different approaches from each other, which, while giving them flexibility to meet the needs of the cohort of youth in the program, could compromise the fidelity to the curriculum across RISE cohorts.

## PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings in this report, a few programmatic recommendations can be offered.

- **Strategize ways to help youth graduate the program.** Due to the challenges that youth on probation face, the RISE program graduates just over 50% of its referred youth. Addressing these challenges by working with probation officers, parents, and others may help the youth prioritize RISE participation and increase the likelihood of success in the program.
- **Collaborate with the RISE specialists to review the program curriculum.** While the specialists felt that the RISE curriculum presented important information, they noted a disconnect between the needs and educational readiness of the youth and the RISE material. Reviewing the curriculum with the individuals responsible for administering it can help refine the material and enhance the value that youth get from participating.
- **Encourage youth to take advantage of the RISE program's ongoing support.** Although the RISE program lasts 5 weeks, the specialists are available to provide ongoing support to the youth for 6 months after program completion. Finding ways to encourage youth to receive ongoing support through RISE, potentially through collaboration with their probation officer, can help make the lessons taught in the program last beyond the end of the course.