

Miss Kendra Program

Minnesota Expansion Initiative

Application

The Miss Kendra Program is a trauma-informed, social and emotional learning (SEL) program that equips K-12 schools to proactively address the social and emotional needs of students as they return to school while continuing to grapple with the ongoing threat of COVID-19; the lasting impacts of school closures, stay-at-home orders, and family and community trauma; and the upending of other aspects of their lives.

For many children – especially those from communities hardest-hit by COVID-19 – the pandemic has increased exposure to death and illness, but also to neglect, community and domestic violence, economic hardship, and family mental health and substance abuse issues. For all children, changes to routines and relationships, as well as concerns about their safety and the safety of loved ones, have increased stress.

Children are, therefore, returning to school holding many worries inside them. Miss Kendra Programs offers an established, cost-effective, and sustainable intervention to help meet the emotional needs of children as they return to school by giving them a safe space to share their stressors and worries and by creating whole-school environments that welcome open conversation about stressful experiences.

Three factors uniquely position Miss Kendra Programs to support schools during this period of communal fragmentation and fear:

1. Every child has been exposed to stress – and potentially trauma – during the pandemic. Miss Kendra Programs' public health framework gives every student the opportunity to identify core stressors, communicate their worries to a trusted and caring adult, and discharge some of the emotion associated with these stressors.
2. As schools re-open, it is vital to give children opportunities to share what they experienced while schools were closed, and to assure them that *someone is listening*. Miss Kendra Programs offers teachers the training and structure needed to process concerns and worries with their students.
3. Students' sense of school connectedness has diminished during several months of separation, and they return to schools that may feel quite different from what they are used to. Miss Kendra Programs *restores school connectedness* by showing students that their teachers and classmates care about them and their well-being.

In more than 40 schools in 10 states, Miss Kendra Programs has consistently reduced disruptive behaviors, increased teacher efficacy, and improved school climate, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, in rural and urban communities. Best of all, because the program trains teachers and school support staff to deliver the program, Miss Kendra Programs produces *lasting improvements* in a school's ability to support children's social and emotional health at a cost that schools can sustain.

What is Miss Kendra Programs?

Miss Kendra Programs aims for each and every child to know that, no matter how bad things may be, a *trustworthy adult knows about their struggles*. Building these relationships and strengthening children's psychological immune systems produces positive results without necessarily eliminating the stressors themselves.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) such as trauma, abuse or neglect, or chronic stress as a result of financial pressure, lack of resources, interpersonal strain, systemic oppression, or community violence result in a state of toxic stress inside a child that interferes with their capacity to meet the normal demands of life. ACEs have been linked to negative health outcomes including risky health behaviors, chronic health conditions, future victimization and perpetration, low life potential, and early death. Exposure to traumatic events disrupts development and has immediate and lifelong adverse effects on physical, social, and emotional well-being.

Miss Kendra Programs emerged from research on the impact of stressful childhood experiences and *research on protective factors that bolster the resilience children need* to reduce the effects of stressful life events; increase their ability to avoid risks or hazards; and promote social and emotional competence to thrive in all aspects of life, now and in the future.

Research shows that children who have been exposed to ACEs can avoid much of the impact of toxic stress if they have at least one caring, trustworthy adult in their lives (a "*social buffer*"). In fact, "The single most common (protective) factor for children who develop resilience is at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver, or other adult" (Shonkoff, 2012). Research identifies *school connectedness*, defined as "the belief by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals," as another important protective factor.

Miss Kendra Programs builds both of these protective factors by guiding teachers and support staff to provide care and attention to stressed children, in structured and limited times – framed within the imaginal context of the fictional Miss Kendra, introduced in a book: "*The Legend of Miss Kendra.*" Through open classroom conversations, children learn that when they talk about their experiences, they can find the help they need. Children also share their concerns by writing letters to Miss Kendra and receiving empathic responses that assure them they have been heard. By sharing their worries and burdens, children improve their capacity to attend to schoolwork, remain calm when facing demands, and develop a more secure sense of self.

Mine Collapse Survival and Miss Kendra Programs

The single best predictor of survival among miners in a mine collapse is how quickly people on the surface communicate to the miners trapped below that they know what has happened, know they are trapped, and are coming to get them. Miners who hear that message are able to withstand the psychological stress **ten times** longer than those who do not hear it. That is why the first thing done in a mining accident is to guide a loudspeaker down into the mine to blast that message as loudly as possible. *Hoping* that someone will come to rescue them is not enough; the miners have to *know* someone is coming. For children experiencing toxic stress, Miss Kendra Programs is that loudspeaker telling them that someone who cares knows what they are going through.

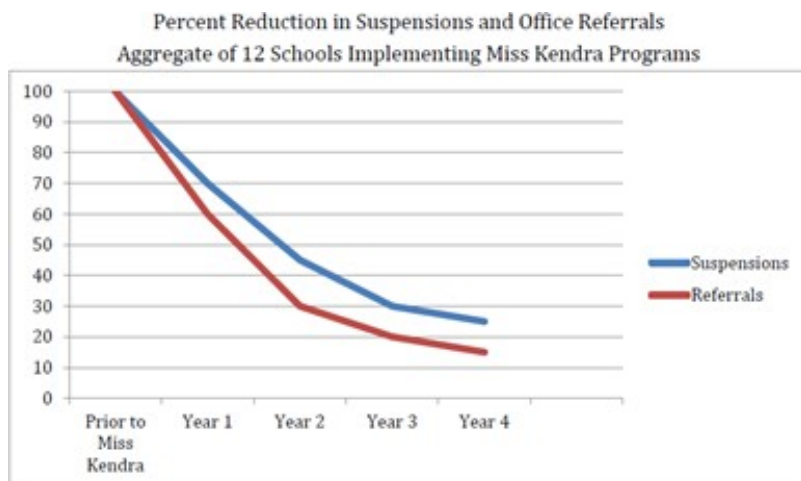
The Miss Kendra Programs model, at its core, centers on asking every child on a regular basis if they have experienced stressful events in order to identify problems early and strengthen children's psychological immunity. For the child, this process consists of:

1. Identifying core stressors using Miss Kendra's List (a list of ACEs that helps children realize that their reactions to relatively minor stressors derive from the important stressors in their lives);
2. Communicating to the child the existence of a knowledgeable and caring listener (their teacher and Miss Kendra); and
3. Gaining language about these concepts to achieve more cognitive control over the emotions that are evoked.

Does Miss Kendra Improve the Things I Care About?

For students and schools across the country, Miss Kendra Programs has consistently produced *reductions in disruptive behaviors and improvements in teacher efficacy and school climate.*

- 75% reduction in suspensions in four years (aggregate data for 12 Miss Kendra schools)
- 85% reduction in office referrals (12 schools)
- 95% of Miss Kendra teachers recommend the program to other teachers (22 schools)
- 90% of teachers report that the program calms down their students (22 schools)



Long-term, the program supports social, emotional, and cognitive development that contributes to academic and career success. In comparison to other SEL programs, Miss Kendra Programs has demonstrated a high level of effectiveness because it delivers a stronger intervention, directly to the children, in open discussions about ACEs.

Miss Kendra Advances Social Justice

In June 2020, Miss Kendra's List added a social justice item stating: "No child should be harmed because of their race, religion, or gender," encouraging conversations about acts of oppression and prejudices. ACEs, including trauma, abuse, and neglect, directly and negatively impact personal identity. In addition, historical, institutional, economic, and cultural sources of oppression and the misuse of power are critical factors behind ACEs that occur in families, neighborhoods, and schools. This holds particular importance for children in Minnesota right now in light of the horror of the George Floyd murder in Minneapolis, the subsequent social unrest, and re-traumatization triggered by the Derek Chauvin trial.

Can My School Afford Miss Kendra Programs?

Because it utilizes a public health model that relies on teachers and school support staff to deliver the program curriculum, the all-inclusive cost of implementing Miss Kendra Programs during the first year of the program is roughly \$25,000, depending on school size – *\$50 per student* for a school of 500 students. In Year 2 and beyond, Miss Kendra Programs costs only \$5,000 per year – *just \$10 per student per year*.

SEL programs that rely on remedial/mental health approaches involving intensive interventions with the most distressed, symptomatic, and needy students, by contrast, can cost upwards of \$5,000 *per student* per year. Because these programs typically rely on outside clinicians to come into the school, the per-year cost never declines significantly, and even effective programs risk fading away as schools cannot afford the ongoing cost and philanthropy eventually looks to invest elsewhere. Miss Kendra Programs offers an *affordable, sustainable alternative*.

Given Miss Kendra Programs' impact on students, teachers, and school communities, a start-up cost of \$25,000 and an annual fee of just \$5,000 represent a fantastic return on investment for schools committed to their students' social and emotional well-being in the wake of COVID-19 and George Floyd.

Resources are available to expand Miss Kendra Programs to additional Minnesota schools. Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds, for example, may support a range of activities that respond to the impact of COVID-19 on students and school communities, including SEL programs to address students' social and emotional needs. Miss Kendra Programs offers districts looking for effective SEL programs an established, cost-effective, and sustainable intervention custom-made for the current circumstances.

Return on Investment in SEL Programs

A 2015 study by the Center for Benefit-Cost Studies of Education at Columbia University's Teachers College found that every dollar schools spend on SEL programs returns an average of \$11 of economic benefits to society.

Miss Kendra Programs in the Spotlight

Miss Kendra Programs was featured in James Redford's acclaimed 2016 documentary "*Resilience: The Biology of Stress and The Science of Hope*," as an exemplar of a preventive program for children in schools and communities impacted by toxic stress, violence, and trauma. For more information on the film, visit <https://kpjrfilms.co/resilience/>.

"It is critically important that we are making investments to support those families and communities that are disproportionately impacted (by COVID-19) because it is a matter of long-term health and well-being for this generation. When we're talking about a major generational trauma, we recognize that we have to implement supports, trauma-informed systems, because we know now that we're going to see a generation with these impacts if we don't do anything."

- Dr. Nadine Burke Harris

California Surgeon General & author of "The Deepest Well: Healing the Long-Term Effects of Childhood Adversity"

How Can We Become a Miss Kendra School?



Miss Kendra Programs is *expanding in elementary schools across Minnesota* to respond to the widespread need for effective SEL programs that reach every student in the wake of the COVID crisis and social unrest. Whether your school is currently operating remotely, in-person, or using a hybrid model, the Miss Kendra team can prepare your administrators, teachers, and support staff to launch and implement Miss Kendra Programs once students are in school. Your school will soon – like more than 40 current Miss Kendra sites – develop a whole-school environment that welcomes open conversations about students’ stressful experiences, reducing stress and behavioral issues and freeing teachers and students to focus on teaching and learning.

Becoming a Miss Kendra School costs \$25,000 for Year 1 launch and implementation, depending on school size. This covers:

- ◆ Initial 5.5-hour training for teachers, social support staff, and administrative staff conducted on-site or online by experienced Miss Kendra trainers.
- ◆ Ongoing phone coaching/supervision of school personnel, follow-up visits, and ongoing support for school administrators to monitor program success from Miss Kendra Programs staff.
- ◆ Official Miss Kendra materials, including worry boards, mailboxes, stationery, training manuals, posters, and stamps.

“We have seen decreases in behavior; we have seen children speak their truths in letters to Miss Kendra and conversations on the carpet. To watch their faces after they speak their truths is like watching someone who has been trying to carry a large weight on their shoulders for a long time finally be able to put it down.”

- 2nd Grade Teacher, Bearfield Primary School, Ahoskie, North Carolina

Miss Kendra Programs is looking for partner elementary schools that have experience delivering trauma-informed care, that can make a whole-school commitment to the program’s guiding principles of trauma-sensitivity, non-punitive discipline, and a whole-child approach, and that are prepared to sustain the program. *If your school is ready to move beyond being trauma-informed and ready to address trauma proactively*, download an **application** to become a Miss Kendra school.

“Miss Kendra Programs provided a way for our students to give voice to their worries, and know our school was a safe place in which they could receive support.”

- Principal, Quinnipiac School, New Haven, Connecticut

If your school does not have experience with trauma-informed care but is *ready to begin your journey*, **contact** the Miss Kendra team for training and resources on trauma-informed school mental health.

To learn more about Miss Kendra Programs, visit **misskendraprograms.org**.

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