Common sense coping: Improving sensory resources in rural schools

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Common sense coping: Improving sensory resources in rural schools
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Abstract
Special education funding and resources for schools are often limited and prevent inclusion of specialized sensory items. Litvinov (2015) argues the government has done a poor job of funding the special education initiative. Although the use of sensory materials has proven to be successful in reducing distress and improving self-soothing among youth (Novak, Scanlan, McCaul, MacDonald, & Clarke, 2012), many children with special needs receive only materials and resources districts are able to afford. While this lack of funding poses an issue for all districts, rural communities may be placed at an even greater disadvantage (Azano & Tackett, 2019).

The proposed project seeks to incorporate sensory materials into a rural special education classroom to assess behaviors and benefits. Data will be gathered using a pre-posttest method to compare behavioral data charted by the school during the 2019/20 school year to the 2020/21 school year following implementation of sensory items. Specifically, data will be compared in the following areas: regulated behavior, disruptive behavior, aggressive behavior, and overall time of dysregulation. Future directions and implications for the project will be discussed.

Proposed Project
- IRB and district approval
- Integration of purchased sensory items into the elementary school in the rural district
- Data will be charted for each child receiving special education services or interventions (regulated behavior, disruptive behavior, aggressive behavior, and time of dysregulation)
- Data will be compared from the 2019/20 school year to data from the 2020/21 school year to assess whether the implementation of sensory items improved classroom behaviors

Did you know...
- sensory toys can help those with ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder, learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, and sensory impairments?
- play is one of the cornerstones of childhood development?
- sensory toys enhance the brain development and help kids to relax and remain calm at home or school?

What’s next?
- More research is needed on the impact of sensory toys in rural classrooms
- Findings from the proposed project will be used to fill in gaps existing surrounding special education services, use of sensory materials, and the need for resources in rural classrooms
- Data will be utilized for grant writing in hopes of securing additional funding and resources for the district and to inform administration and teachers on effectiveness of current interventions

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Rural Focus
- In rural Kansas, there is a shortage of mental health providers and access to resources
- Rural communities are placed at a disadvantage due to lacking resources and funding (Azano & Tackett, 2019)
- children in rural areas with mental, behavioral, and developmental disorders face more community and family challenges than children in urban areas with the same disorders (CDC, 2017)