The idea behind PBIS programs is to help students improve academic performance and safety, while decreasing problem behavior.

The pyramid model, or the "Three Safes" at the preschool level, feeds directly into the "GMS Matrix" for middle school and the "Cowboy Code" in high school. Preschoolers are taught to "keep ourselves safe, our friends safe and our things safe."

When behavioral incidents occur, children are referred back to those "three safes" which helps them learn to modify their actions.

Estrada believes the foundation for children’s success at every level begins in early childhood.

"The pyramid model is that foundational piece," Estrada explained. "It provides specific strategies and interventions and consistent rules for a school to operate from.

We always refer back to those core rules in how to guide or discipline or resolve conflict with our students."

Estrada has hired Mary Burt — previously with the Gunnison/Hinsdale County Early Childhood Council — as its program coordinator. Two program "coaches," Jane Moloney and Care Mitchell, were recently brought on board, working to implement the program and gather baseline data. They have also been offering pyramid model parenting classes and are working to provide strategic development for teachers.

A further goal will be to develop other coaches in five area learning centers: Lake School and Fendertord Child and Family Development Center in Gunnison, Red School House in Crested Butte South, Summer Stone’s Children’s Center and Paradise Place in Crested Butte.

Coaches go beyond educational training by working on one-on-one development skills and strategies in working with children that need special help.

"The whole purpose of the pyramid model is to help teachers learn to handle children with challenging behaviors," Moloney said. "It’s exciting to see the changes we’ve made in the community. Teachers feel they are learning in supported ways to work with the children, having the skills and knowing how to (help them)."

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BRIEFS

Building the ‘pyramid’

RE1J implements expansion of early childhood program

Chris Rourke

To Your Valley

A program that has helped prepare Gunnison Valley children to be more "school-ready" is taking the next step toward having a lasting impact: Gunnison Watershed RE1J School District is expanding its "pyramid model" program with the help of a grant from the El Pomar Foundation.

The $33,000 grant has allowed Lake School Director Matt Estrada to hire three new, part-time staff members to administer the program. Estrada says it will serve children and teachers into the future.

"We can implement the program with more fidelity at more sites and with more teachers who are properly trained and coached on how to deliver this effectively in their classrooms," said Estrada. "This isn’t something that every teacher is required to have training in, but we want to really create this as a foundational form to create school readiness in kids.

The pyramid model is known as a positive behavioral intervention and support (PBIS), which fosters social and emotional skills in young children, particularly those who have "at-risk" factors.

Those factors can range from family income to the number of parents! in a home.

Early childhood development experts say these factors can lead to struggling academic cognition and emotional behavioral skills, which can ultimately affect learning.

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OBITUARIES

Mary Alice Hansen

Mary Alice (Larson) Hansen, long-term resident of western Colorado and more recently of Hendersonville, N.C., passed away peacefully at home in her sleep on Friday, April 18, at age 98.

Mary Alice was born on Dec. 20, 1915, in Chickasha, Okla., the eldest daughter of Clarence and Clarice Larson. After graduation from high school in Oklahoma City, she attended the University of Oklahoma in Norman, and graduated Phi Beta Kappa, receiving her B.A. in English in 1937.

On June 23, 1939, Mary Alice married Kenneth Hansen — a marriage that lasted 56 years until Ken passed away in 1995.

The family lived in the Midwest for the next 10 years. In 1949, they moved to Gunnison, Colorado, where Ken accepted a professorship of education at Western State College (now Western State Colorado University) and where they raised their three sons. This began a period of over 35 years in Gunnison and Colorado for Mary Alice that lasted 60 years. In 2009, she moved to Hendersonville to be near her family.

Though living elsewhere around the country after the mid-1960s, Mary Alice and Ken maintained their official residence in Colorado. They acquired a summer cabin on Spring Creek, north of Gunnison, in 1975. Thereafter, they spent nearly half the year at the cabin, spending the winter months in Hendersonville, then later to Montrose, during the winter months. Even after being purchased for subdivision, Mary Alice continued to spend at least part of every summer at the cabin on Spring Creek, enjoying the mountains, tending to a small garden and being very active in local community affairs.

Mary Alice was a long-time supporter of several local community organizations and was known for her warm, engaging personality and kindness to others.

Funeral services will be at 10 a.m. on Saturday, May 10, at the First Congregational Church of Gunnison, with the Rev. Nancy Findley officiating.

Interment will follow at the Crested Butte Cemetery. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Gunnison Watershed RE1J School District or to a charity of one’s choice.

Mary Alice Hansen, 98, of Hendersonville, N.C., passed away at home on Friday, April 18. She was the eldest daughter of Clarence and Clarice Larson.

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