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A Need for Social Emotional Instruction

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Capstone Project: A School Improvement Plan

Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa

Abstract

This article looks at how social emotional learning (SEL) curriculums can improve emotional safety, behavior, and school climate at the elementary school level. The article examines research from twenty-one research papers to show a need for SEL curriculums and outlines a plan for implementing a SEL curriculum school wide.

Keywords: Social Emotional Learning, Covid-19-Pandemic, Emotional Safety, Behavior, and School Climate

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A Need for Social Emotional Instruction

Social emotional learning (SEL) is comprised of five main components: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (Dusenbury et. al. 2017). SEL is dates back to 380 B.C. from Plato's Republic (Beaty, 2018); which focused on character education and holistic education. The head of SEL research, since 1994, is the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). Despite the long history and trends of SEL, a survey conducted by CASEL found only 44% of participants were teaching SEL skills (Taylor & Kilgus state, 2014).

The problem is students are coming into the classroom without the necessary skills to succeed; however, schools across the country are pushing for academic skills which cannot be taught unless students are able to function emotionally. With the estimation of 25% of school-aged children being exposed to a potentially traumatic event, emotional needs should be addressed at school (Scott et. al, 2021). SEL curriculum can lead to improved academic achievement and less conduct issues, which work to help improve school climate (Taylor et. al. 2014).

The purpose of this school improvement plan is to look at the impact of adopting a researched based social emotional learning curriculum to improve academics, emotional safety, behavior, and school climate. This paper will look at the potential benefits of a social emotional learning (SEL) curriculum for elementary schools. The information in this paper will utilize data from various sources to recommend the use of SEL curriculum to improve school climate, learning, and instruction.

All articles used in this paper are peer reviewed journals and articles located in the DeWitt Library from Northwestern College. For articles to be included they were written within

the last 10 years and were peer reviewed. The articles selected to be included discuss one or multiple of the following topics: social emotional learning, emotional safety, or school climate. To narrow down the criteria; articles which focused on a PK-6 setting were selected. Following the research, twenty-one sources were chosen to support the need for an SEL curriculum.

A researched school-based social emotional curriculum improves school climate, emotional safety, and academic scores, reducing conduct issues, and improve prosocial behavior when implemented with fidelity (Dusenbury et.al., 2017). The Dusenbury study shows a research-based curriculum is critical to adopt for all elementary schools. This will, in turn, help students be successful in social regulation and academic achievement.

The literature review will be broken down into five sections: academic, emotional benefits, school climate, behavioral effects, and quality implementation. The academic section will discuss the potential impact on student scores in math and reading. Emotional will discuss how students feel at school and regulation skills. School climate will look at teacher and student perspectives. The behavioral effects will look at behavior impacts from social emotional curriculum. The final section of quality implementation will look at the impact of teaching with fidelity and teacher perspective on SEL curriculums.

Review of the Literature

Academic Benefits

Jones et. al. (2014) studies 12 head start classrooms and 42 elementary classrooms in an urban area looked at the impact of SECURE on social emotional learning and classroom management through observations and interviews. According to their findings, the classrooms had an increased number of students reaching benchmark and found a positive effect on literacy

skills. This study appears to indicate schools who implement SECURe will help fill educational gaps.

Dusenbery et.al. (2017) features a meta-analysis of various SEL programs across 11 different states. In the study there were 270,000 participants and data was collected over a span of 20 years. The findings found students who had a high-quality implementation of an SEL program experienced an 11 percentile gain on academic achievement; follow up studies indicated these results had a long-term impact. Which supports the hypothesis that high quality implementation of a researched based SEL program will increase academic scores.

Coelho et.al. (2016) looked at the effectiveness of school wide universal SEL Program Positive Attitude on self-esteem using 37 schools focusing on 1,237 fourth graders. In the study questionnaires were completed by students and teachers and linear modeling was used. The finding found academic performance was improved between 11 and 17 percent in students. This suggests various programs have significant impact on academic achievement.

Hennessey et. al. (2020) found contrasting results to Jones (2014), Dusenbery (2017), and Coelho (2016) when looking at the impact of PATHS, an SEL program on academic progress in the U.K. This study looked at 45 schools from seven districts. The study used a control group, a post test, and observations. The findings did not find a noticeable change in academic achievement between the control group and students who received PATHS. The data found a 0.01 effect in reading and writing for year five students and an effect of 0.02 on year six students. In other words, PATHS was not found to significantly impact academic achievement.

The various studies on the impacts of a researched based SEL curriculum suggest a significant impact on academic achievement. Jones (2014), Dusenbery (2017) and Coelho (2016)

all featured, at least, an 11 percentile gain in students who received SEL instruction. These studies looked at different curriculums and different age groups within PK-6 showing similar results across the primary grade levels. While the Hennessey (2020) study did not replicate these findings, it only focused on PATHS, while the others were looking at different curriculums. The Hennessey (2020) study also mentioned a limitation of their study being the control group having some SEL instruction without a curriculum. This may indicate the techniques used in the control groups may be closely aligned with research or PATHS is not as effective with academic achievement compared with other curriculums. Jones (2014), Dusenbery (2017) and Coelho (2016) therefore indicate significant benefits on academic achievement when implementing a researched based SEL curriculum with fidelity.

Emotional Benefits

Smith et. al. (2013) looked at how SEL instruction contributes to bullying prevention. In the study, 200 students were surveyed. From these surveys, the data indicates when students learn to use problem-solving strategies, conflict is mitigated 13 times better than students without problem-solving skills. While the study shows SEL curriculums reduce bullying, there needs to be more than just an SEL curriculum to help this topic.

Hagelskamp et. al. (2013), looked at the RULER approach to improve classroom quality. In this study, fifth and sixth grade students from 62 Urban Catholic Schools completed CLASS assessments and video recordings. This study was conducted over two years and used a cluster randomized control group. The study found that the students who received RULER instruction had significantly higher emotional support compared to schools not using the RULER

Intervention. This suggests students have stronger emotional regulation skills when receiving SEL curriculum.

Calhoun et.al. (2020) looked at emotional regulation like the study of Hagelskamp. The researchers in this study wanted to know how PATHS SEL curriculum helps low-income students develop self-regulating skills. The participants were 464 kindergarten students from four public elementary schools. The study used assessments, interviews, and KBIT-2 to determine growth which was then compared to a control group. The results found students who received PATHS emotional regulations skill improved by an average of .66 while the students who didn't receive the intervention emotional regulation decreased from preintervention by 0.66 to postintervention. This indicates PATHS intervention is effective at improving emotional regulation.

Nix et. al. (2016) looks at the long-term effects of REDI. In the study, four-year-old children from twenty-five head start centers and 44 classrooms participated over five years. The study used person-oriented latent class growth models and teacher ratings. Students who received REDI instruction were found to be 1.80 times the odds of a child who attended the traditional Head Start programing. This signals students who participated in REDI were more prepared for kindergarten in emotional safety compared to students who did not have an SEL program.

Smith (2013), Hagelskamp (2013), Calhoun (2020), and Nix (2016) all demonstrate there are positive impacts on emotion for participants of a researched based SEL programing. The articles all looked at different components of emotion. Smith (2013) found teaching students how to problem solve benefits the reduction of bullying while still indicating multiple supports are

needed for this domain. The studies of Calhoun (2020) and Nix (2016) both looked at younger students and the effect of emotional regulation; both finding students who received SEL instruction developed stronger skills than their peers who did not have access to an SEL curriculum. The study of Hagelskamp (2013) demonstrates upper elementary students also have a significant advantage in emotional regulation after participating in SEL instruction. These studies support the claim students will gain skills which lead to better emotional safety in PK-6th students.

School Climate

McCormick et. al. (2015) looks at the impact of INSIGHTS SEL instruction on school climate. The study follows 435 kindergarten and first graders in 22 urban school districts. The research used a compilation of teacher reports on school climate, school demographics, and assessments provided by INSIGHTS over a span of two years. The study found varying results in school climate improvement in schools; however, a pattern emerged among schools with low initial ratings of school climate improving; making gains in academic achievement and emotional safety. This points to the idea that schools with a relatively negative school climate benefit greatly from SEL curriculums.

Taylor et. al. (2014) looked at why social emotional learning is important in schools. This study used surveys which were given to various users of SEL curriculum in the United States. Like the McCormick (2015) study, the findings indicated SEL instruction is likely to lead to a positive school climate. This suggests SEL instructions benefits will lead to a more productive school.

London et. al. (2015) looked at how Playworks, a program focused on implementing a high functioning recess while teaching SEL skills, impacted overall school climate. This study followed six low-income elementary schools and used data from interviews with teachers, the principal, and a recess coach. The study comprised of 865 teachers who have noticed students felt physically safer at school and 90 % of teachers stated students were more likely to feel emotionally safe. Another study, completed by Ng et. al. (2018), looked at how situational factors influence the frequency of SEL support. In this study 1,538 students from 80 preschools participated with the use of video recording and observation. In the Ng (2018) study, the data claims outdoor play was the most frequent time for SEL components to be implemented; suggesting recess should be a priority time for SEL instruction. These two studies illustrate the importance of recess as a time to teach SEL skills and how these skills can be beneficial to school climate.

Soutter et. al. (2019) took a deeper dive into perception of SEL programs between students and teachers. This study looked at 1,000 fourth and fifth grade students from 12 different schools using a diverse selection of SEL programs. The data showed 10 out of 12 educators felt SEL programs gave more agency, control, and leadership to students. While 22 of 36 students felt the programs were more about compliance. This article contradicts various other studies which suggest SEL instruction will improve school climate for students but reaffirms SEL instruction improving school climate for teachers. This study suggests programs which are implemented need to be student centered and incorporated in a way to make students feel empowered.

McCormick (2015), Taylor (2014), and London (2015) all support the notion of SEL curriculum and instruction benefiting school climate. McCormick (2015) and Taylor (2014) both

focus on how school climate is impacted through improvements of behavior, academics, and emotional regulation which led to a better school climate for both students and teachers. While the London (2015) study focused solely on recess, a common time for issues in behavior and emotional regulation and found the impacts of change on recess improved school climate both on the playground and the classroom. While the fourth study by Soutter (2019) argued SEL instruction can make students feel they need to be compliant in upper elementary students, teachers felt school climate had improved.

Behavioral Effects

Domitrovich et. al. (2017) looked at how schools can reduce behavioral outbursts using SEL curriculum. This study was a meta-analysis of 82 SEL studies over two years using surveys and additional research. They found social emotional deficits are a clear predictor of problem behavior. This suggests a need for SEL curriculum to improve behavior, which may also have a long-term impact on improving disruptive behavior.

Green et. al. (2019) looked at how SEL small group curriculum impacts students at risk of behavioral issues. The study followed 137 kindergarten and first grade students over five years from semi-rural school districts using Incredible Years Children's Small Group Training Series. The researchers collected data using the Sutter-Eyberg Student Behavior Inventory-Revised Teacher Rating Form as a pretest and posttest. The results found there was a significant change in the amount of behavior issues from pre-test to posttest; indicating targeted SEL instruction could benefit students at higher risk of behavioral issues

Weissberg et. al. (2013) is a meta-analysis of 213 experimental control groups of K-12 students. The study looked at why the United States needs to make SEL a priority for all schools.

These studies found schools which used SEL curriculum had fewer conduct issues in areas of aggression, delinquent acts, and bullying. It was also found schools had an overall improvement in classroom behavior after implementing SEL instruction. The Weissberg (2013) study demonstrates multiple SEL curriculums may improve behavior in multiple domains.

Carroll et. al. (2020), analyzed the effectiveness of KoolKids, improving prosocial behavior and reducing emotion and behavior problems for Australian primary students. In this study 854 children aged 8-12 participated in KoolKids SEL programming, which was assessed using three different teacher rating skills: social emotional competence questionnaire, strengths and difficulties questionnaire, and academic achievement and effort questionnaire. The study followed a quasi-experimental waitlist-control design. The finding showed a significant reduction in challenges of externalizing and internalizing issues but did not find a significant difference in prosocial behavior. The Carroll (2020) study concludes by suggesting KoolKids has a positive effect on behavior for students who participated.

Domitrovich (2017), Green (2019), Weissberg (2013), and Carroll (2020) all found positive impacts on multiple components of behavior. Domitrovich (2017) and Weissberg (2013) compiled multiple studies on different SEL curriculums showing the positive impacts which relay on to most SEL curriculums. The studies of Green (2019) and Carroll (2020) looked at specific programs which are focused more on students in higher need of behavioral support. These students received targeted small group instruction, and both studies found a reduction in problem behavior in the student samples. The studies suggest implementing a research based SEL curriculum could lead to improved positive behavior in general classrooms and targeted small group instruction could benefit students with social emotional deficits.

Quality Implementation

Wanless & Domitrovich (2015) takes a closer look at how school readiness impacts evidence-based interventions in SEL. In the study, five elementary and two preschools participated in observations, surveys, and an examination to determine readiness impact. The study indicated when implementing an SEL curriculum the teacher readiness, training, and fidelity will impact the effectiveness of a research-based curriculum.

Wanless et. al. (2015), looked at teachers' initial readiness and later fidelity of implementing Responsive Classroom. In the study thirteen teachers and their student cohorts were followed from the end of second grade to the end of fifth grade. The data collected came from video recordings of lessons which were then coded. The findings found initial beliefs did not have a long-term impact on implementation after two years, with year one having a score of 0.40 and year two having an effect of 0.01. The study did find the level of engagement in training increased the level of fidelity in implementation and noted observations from the trainers found that teachers with more emotional support were more engaged leading to higher later fidelity. This suggests when teachers have supports in place before training, educators will be more engaged in training leading to higher quality implementation.

Zinsser et. al. (2014) investigates how teachers' beliefs about SEL impact the development of SEL skills in preschoolers. The study participants were ten preschool centers from North Virginia and was held over the span of three years. Educators were classified based as high support or moderate support teachers of SEL skills. Data was collected from multiple observations and was then coded using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System. It was found that teachers who were classified as high support educators found SEL to be important for all a

student's life while moderate support teachers focused on short term goals. This study showed high support teachers were more confident and purposeful in planning SEL skills while medium support teachers followed the curriculum lessons and had only scheduled time for SEL skills. This suggests teachers who view SEL as something which can impact students' entire life will incorporate the skills being taught in the curriculum throughout the day.

A variety of the studies on SEL discuss the importance of proper implementation. The Dusenbury (2017) study discusses explicit goals are needed in elementary schools for programs to be successful; there must also be high-quality implementation, or the program will not be as effective. Domitrovich (2017) looked at how to reduce behavioral risk in school children using social emotional learning and found programs must take an active approach. The data suggested programs using a more passive approach had an overall effect of 0.12 while programs with an active approach had an effect of 0.37. Both studies suggest engaged teachers who follow a curriculum with fidelity will be more effective.

Wanless (2015), Zinsser (2014), Dusenbury (2017), and Domitrovich (2017) discuss why it is important to have quality implementation of a researched based curriculum to see the full effects of implementation. Wanless (2015) found high implementation is critical which was supported by Domitrovich (2017) where it was found that an active approach resulted in a 0.25 overall higher effect. Zinsser (2014) took a different approach and looked at teachers' ability to extend a curriculum when they have high value and understanding of SEL. In this study, teachers were able to better utilize instruction time by adding to the curriculum. Overall, the literature suggests quality implementation is critical to see the full effects which will lead to better behavior, emotional regulation, and school climate.

The various studies in this literature review suggest there are numerous positive outcomes that can come from implementing a researched based SEL Curriculum with fidelity. Wanless (2015), Zinsser (2014), Dusenbury (2017), and Domitrovich (2017) show when schools and teachers are ready and have proper training, they are more likely to have stronger implementation which is needed to see the full potential of the other benefits discussed. Jones (2014), Dusenbury (2017) and Coelho (2016) all found an 11 percentile or more gain on academic achievement. Domitrovich (2017), Green (2019), Weissberg (2013), and Carroll (2020) found students who participated in SEL instruction had a reduction in problem behaviors. Smith (2013), Hagelskamp (2013), Calhoun (2020), and Nix (2016) found SEL programs help to build self-regulation skills and allow students to feel safe. With the positive outcomes come a better school climate as shared by McCormick (2015), Taylor (2014), and London (2015). These studies show positive impacts of adopting a researched based social emotional learning to improve academics, emotional safety, behavior, and school climate.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, schools across the country are finding students coming in with more social and emotional deficits. When schools were shut down many students' academics suffered and are still recovering. United Community Elementary School and schools across the nation has been noticing the ripple effects of the pandemic and needs a way to help the students to cope. While research on SEL curriculums have been around, and had positive impacts, schools have changed and need SEL more than ever before.

School Profile

School Characteristics

United Community School District is a rural district located between Boone, IA and Ames, IA. The district is comprised of only one school, United Community Elementary School, serving students in PK-6th grade. Following the sixth-grade year students have the option to attend a neighboring district of their choice. The school is known for having a 13-acre outdoor classroom with a forest and prairie. United Community Elementary School also prides itself in having small class sizes with a cap of 20 students. Approximately half of the student population is open enrolled to United Community Elementary School. Each grade level has two to three sections, and the district serves 290 students in K-6th grade.

Student Performance

The biggest indicator in the state of Iowa for student academic performance is the FAST assessment. The state goal is for 80% of students to be at benchmark for each testing period. United Community Elementary School had 68% of students meeting benchmark on FAST literacy assessment in the Spring testing session of 2022 while the state of Iowa had averaged 66% of students meet benchmark; with 1st grade students having the lowest proficiency at 55%. United Community Elementary School has 76% of students meeting benchmark on the FAST Mathematics assessment in Spring of 2022 while the state of Iowa's percentage is 68% proficiency.

Student and Community Characteristics

The community served by United Community Elementary School is largely agricultural and has over 133 square miles included in the district boundaries. There are three communities included in the boundary: Luther, Napier, and Jordan, Iowa. The student population has 149 female students and 141 male students in the 2021-2022 school year. The school makeup of race

and ethnicity is 90% white, 1% Asian, 1% Black or African American, 5% Hispanic/Latino, and 3% of students are Multiracial. There is less than one percent of students who are English Language Learners (ELL). Fourteen percent of students qualify for free and reduced lunch. There are 47 students on an individualized education plan (IEP) making up around 16% of students.

Parent Involvement

United Community Elementary school uses Class Dojo to communicate with parents about upcoming events, student behavior, and parent concerns. The school also sends out a weekly newsletter using SMORE to give parents resources and important information. United Community Elementary School has active participation with 99% of parents participating in parent teacher conferences. There is also an active Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) which has numerous fundraisers and events throughout the year. The school has two annual events to increase family involvement: a family literacy night and a math night.

School Mission and Vision

United Community Elementary School's Mission statement is "Dedicated to providing a unique, nurturing innovative learning environment, where, together with parents, we are empowering our children to be lifelong learners" (United Community School District, N.D.). The following vision statements are provided in United Community Elementary's student parent handbook: "United Community School District will provide a safe, caring environment that will allow students to reach their full potential as lifelong learners. The curriculum will be developmentally appropriate, student-centered and teacher directed. The curriculum will be aligned between grade levels and integrated by merging all subject areas. It will also be

responsive to technological advances. Instruction will be based on individual student needs, abilities, and learning styles. A variety of materials, research-based methods, and appropriate class sizes will be used to facilitate student success. Assessment will be an evaluation of student progress that accurately reflects the curriculum. Curriculum and assessment will be clearly communicated in a meaningful manner to enhance parent and community awareness. United Community School District will provide opportunities for positive interactions and involvement between community members and school personnel” (United Community School District, N.D.).

Current Student Learning goals

Every year United Community Elementary creates a school improvement goals for social-emotional-behavioral-mental health (SEBMH), reading, math, and early childhood. The goal for SEMBH states, “By the spring of 2022 the percentage of students who score at or above benchmark on SAEBERS will increase over the percentage of students who scored at or above benchmark in the spring of 2021 which was 92% of students” (United Community School District, N.D.). The reading goal states, “By the spring of 2022, the average percentage of 3rd-6th grade students who score at or above benchmark on ISASP English Language Arts will increase over the average percentage of 3rd-6th grade students who scored at or above benchmark in the spring of 2021 which was an average of 83.5%.” (United Community School District, N.D.). The math goal states, “By the spring of 2022, the percentage of 2nd-6th grade student who score at or above benchmark on the FAST aMath will increase over the percentage of 2nd-6th grade students who scored at or above benchmark in the spring of 2021 which was 88%” (United Community School District, N.D.). The early childhood goal states, “By the spring of 2022, the percentage of kindergarten-1st grade students who score at or above benchmark on the FAST composite will

increase over the percentage of kindergarten-1st students who scored at or above benchmark in 2021 which was 59%” (United Community School District, N.D.).

Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment

United Community Elementary School currently uses Wonders 2020 as a reading and writing curriculum implemented in grades kindergarten-6th grade. There is a unit assessment completed at the end of each unit completed at teacher discretion. As a supplement to Wonders PreK-2nd grade use Heggerty Phonemic Awareness daily. United Community Elementary School uses Envision 2.0 in kindergarten and 1st grade and the standard Envision curriculum in 2nd-6th grade. There is a beginning of the year placement assessment followed by unit assessments for all grade levels. Preschool uses creative curriculum for both math and reading instruction and is the only grade level with a SEL curriculum; for which they use Kiwi. At the preschool, level teachers use the GOLD and assess teaching strategies three times a year. In kindergarten-6th grade, students take the FAST assessment three times a year in math and reading. All kindergarten-6th grade teachers also fill out the FAST SABERS form for each student; the form assesses students’ emotional and behavioral health. Students’ 2nd grade and up fill out a personal survey for SABERS as well. Students in 3rd grade-6th grade participate in ISAP one time a year.

Professional Development Practices

United Community Elementary School has weekly professional learning committees (PLC) where teachers can discuss what they are seeing in the classroom and problem solve academics or behaviors. Teachers also have one professional learning day and a 2-hour early out every month. During this time, the school looks at the curriculum and participates in various professional development opportunities. Teachers also have a stipend to attend professional

development outside of the district. The school has recently offered two professional development sessions on SEL learning: one of which was in 2021 researching a website with various resources, and a training on the guidance counselor's curriculum which teachers do not have access to. A similar training was offered to parents online.

Needs Assessment

United Community Elementary School needs to improve in curriculum and instruction. Specifically, United Community Elementary School would benefit from adopting a SEL curriculum. United Community Elementary School has multiple areas of need including emotional safety, school climate, and staff capacity. The vast number of studies suggest these areas can be improved with a research based SEL curriculum. With the rise of students exposed to trauma and coming into the classroom with social and emotional deficiencies since the COVID-19 Pandemic, it is critical to put in supports and meet students where they are.

Over the last few years United Community Elementary School has seen a drop in the percentage of students meeting benchmark. This indicates the instruction happening is not currently meeting all student's needs. The research of Jones (2014), Dusenbery (2017) and Coelho (2016) all found a percentile rise in students after implementing a research based SEL curriculum; pointing to one area which can meet multiple needs for students. United Community Elementary School has also had an increase in behavioral concerns and a larger portion of students have emotional deficits. When students are not regulating emotions, they struggle to learn academic content leading to students falling behind.

Another reason United Community Elementary School needs a school wide SEL curriculum is due to poor school climate and culture. According to McCormick (2015), Taylor (2014), and London (2015) SEL curriculums improve school climate for both students and

teachers by helping students feel more confident and can help reduce bullying and helping teachers with burn out and frustration due to the positive correlation between emotional regulation, behavior, and academics. United Community Elementary School has lost thirteen out of 30 certified teaching staff after the 2021 and 2022 school year. It was also determined by a staff survey that 80% of staff were considering looking for employment elsewhere. With these shocking numbers it indicates changes need to be made to retain teachers and improve school climate.

When it comes to adopting a new curriculum, the curriculum is only as effective as the quality of instruction taking place. The research of Wanless (2015), Zinsser (2014), Dusenbury (2017), and Domitrovich (2017) all found quality implementation is needed to see the positive results stated in the literature review; therefore, ongoing professional development would need to happen as part of adopting a school wide SEL curriculum.

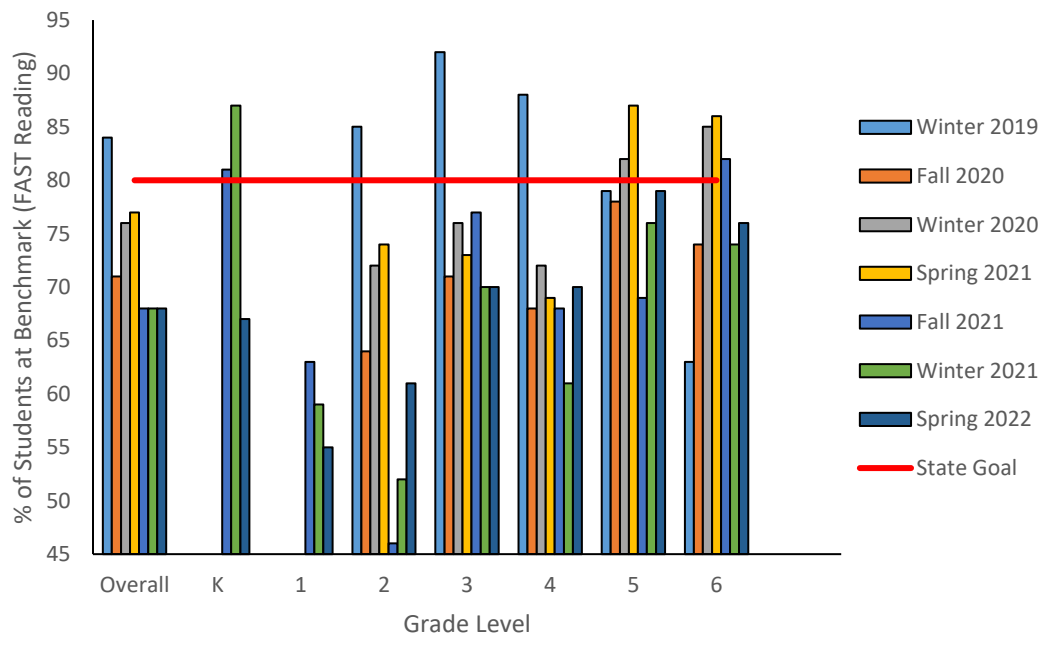
Data Analysis

Data Summary

The data from United Community Elementary School's FAST scores indicates a need for a change in curriculum. The state goal is for 80% of students to meet benchmark for reading and math. United Community Elementary School has only had 80% of students meet benchmark in Winter of 2019. Since the 2019-2020 school year, which was the last testing period before the COVID-19 Pandemic, the percent of overall students reaching benchmark has gone down in reading. An area of strength in reading instruction is students who are staying the same or increasing in meeting benchmark. The only data available for Math is from the 2021-2022 school year where all grades were below the goal of 80% of students meeting benchmark except for

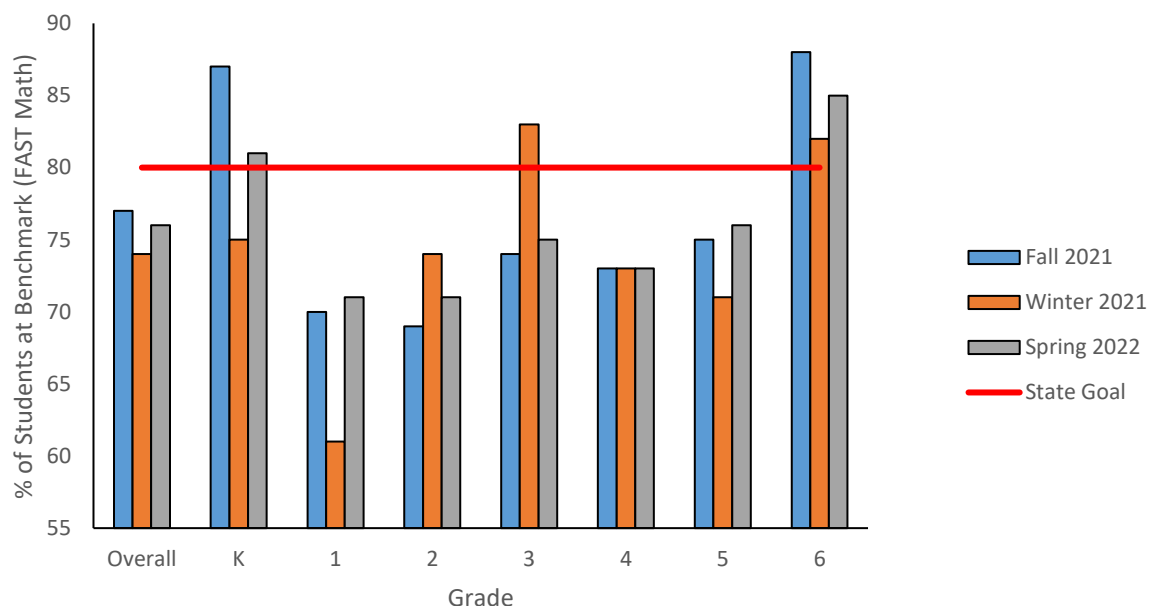
Kindergarten and 6th grade were however meeting state goal at the end of the school year, or the Spring 2022 testing period.

Figure 1



Note: Percentage of students meeting benchmark for the overall school and then broken down by grade level band for FAST Reading for each testing period.

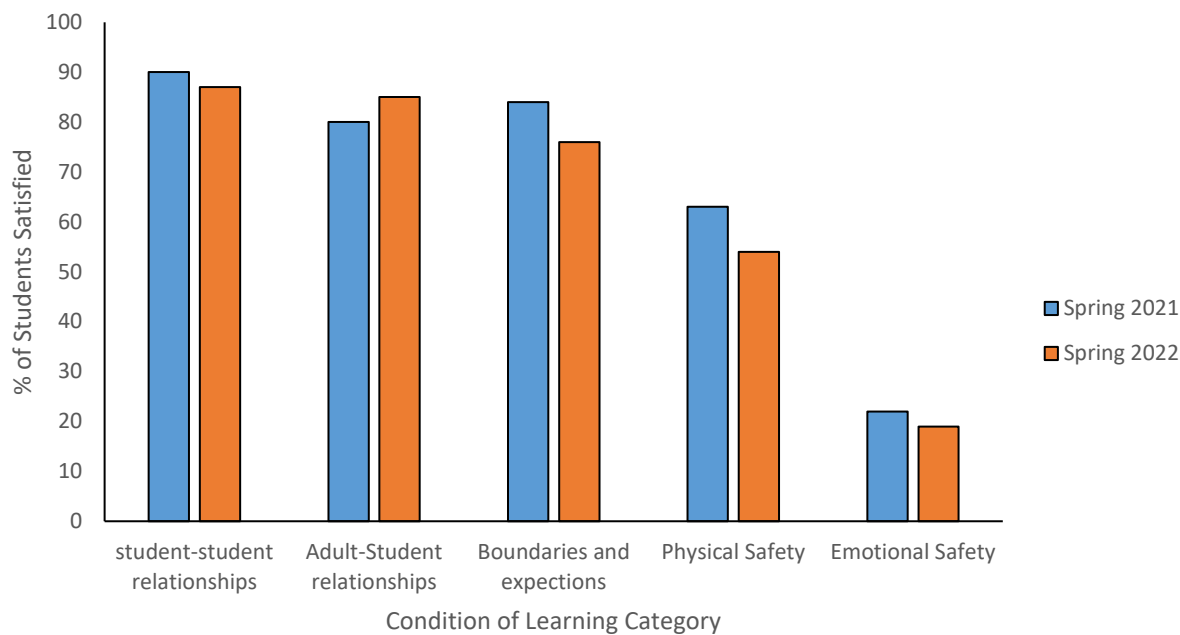
Figure 2



Note: Percentage of students meeting benchmark for the overall school and then broken down by grade level band for FAST Math for each testing period.

The data from United Community Elementary School's conditions of learning survey indicate emotional safety is the biggest concern among students. United Community Elementary's largest area of weakness was emotional safety where 19% of respondents felt they were safe from verbal abuse, teasing, and exclusion while at school. This percentage is trending down from spring of 2021 where 22% of students felt safe. The next biggest need was students feeling safe on school grounds, where 54% of respondents reported they felt safe; while in spring of 2021 63% of students reported they felt safe at school. The only area with an increase in positive outcome was adult-to-student relationships with 85% of students responding favorable, which is an increase from 80% from Spring 2021.

Figure 3



Note: Percentage of students satisfied with each category for the conditions of learning survey.

School Strengths

United Community Elementary School's largest strength is building relationships between teachers and students, student-to-student, and to the community. United Community Elementary's Conditions of Learning Survey found students with positive student-to-student relationships scored one percentage point higher than the state average of 86%. While the teacher-to-student relationships scored 85% with the state average at 80% this is also a large area of growth seen in the last year. The family member portion of the conditions of learning had only 11 respondents. The small sample size found all areas had increased from 2021 but physical safety which was 95% favorable in 2021 and 82% favorable in 2022. All areas except for boundaries and expectations were above the state average on the family member surveys.

School Weaknesses

The data shows the biggest areas of weakness at United Community Elementary School are students feeling emotionally and physically safe at school. With only 19% of students feeling emotionally safe and 54% feeling physically safe these areas need to be addressed to improve academics. Another weakness at United Community Elementary School is falling below the goal of 80% of students meeting benchmark on FAST in both reading and math.

Assessment Options

To have a better picture of needs at United Community Elementary School, someone could gather year to year data concerning the number of office referrals and minor behaviors. Which could be found using raw data or surveying teachers about patterns they have observed in the past five school years.

Action Plan

Purposed Improvement Plan

The first task for United Community Elementary School is to determine what is happening in the classroom and the comfort level of every teacher with SEL instruction. This will help to determine staff readiness and mindset for implementing a new curriculum. The next step would be to have the leadership team look at the surveys and select representatives to be on a pilot team to decide which curriculum would best fit the needs of the school. The instructional coach would then get price quotes for the curriculums: PATHS, Responsive Classroom, and Zones of Regulation.

The next portion would be having each pilot teacher implement one of the selected curriculums in their classroom for six weeks. The pilot team would then meet and share the pros and cons found with each curriculum and would vote on which plan would best fit the needs of

United Community Elementary School. The next part of the plan would be presenting the curriculum to the school board to get approval for funding and training.

The third phase of implementation would be teacher trainings. The trainings will help teachers better understand the curriculum and feel more confident in implementation. Multiple studies have found proper training is critical to have full impact of a SEL curriculum. The teachers will then have an instructional coach supporting and modeling the program as needed. Coaching cycles should also be available to ensure fidelity is continually being met.

Impact on Teaching and/or Learning

Adding a SEL curriculum will have a large impact on teaching and learning. Each teacher will need to add a 10 to 15 mini lesson to morning meetings teaching SEL skills. Then the skill should be practiced throughout the day. A curriculum will also give teachers strategies and skills to focus on when a misbehavior or issue arises allowing for a more positive outcome. SEL curriculums have also been proven to benefit learning in both math and reading; indicated by increasing student scores by an average of 11 percentile points which would bring more students to meeting benchmark in reading and math. Since SEL curriculums focus on teaching regulation skills it also allows for more instructional time and less distractions from learning.

Alignment to Research

The research shows quality implementation is critical for SEL curriculums to meet their full potential. The readiness survey is supported by Wanless & Domitrovich (2015) where they found teachers who feel more prepared in readiness studies have more success in quality implementation and take more away from trainings. This shows the importance of putting teachers on the pilot team with a higher readiness score. The Wanless et. al. (2015), found

teachers had stronger results in implementation when engaged in training. An important component is having ongoing coaching and trainings to continue high quality implementation. The study of Domitrovich (2017) found schools with a more active approach had an overall effect of 0.37 compared to a 0.12 effect size in a passive approach. The coaching model and teaching throughout the day would allow for a more active approach.

Summary

The plan for United Community Elementary School is to be completed in three main phases: phase one will focus on creating a team based on readiness to pilot and select the best curriculum, phase two will be presenting to the school board and purchasing curriculum, and phase three is training and coaching during implementation. These phases will help to improve the learning and teaching of the students of United Community Elementary and have been researched to ensure quality implementation. There will be additional work needed to be put in by the counselor, instructional coach, and classroom teachers for the plan to be successful.

Implementation of School Improvement Plan

Introduction

When implementing this project, it is important to consider the amount of time it will take, what roles will be needed, and what barriers could come up during the process. A helpful resource comes from the selected curriculum. SEL curriculums have trainings for teachers 5 to complete before teaching the content as well as trainings offered throughout the process. This will help increase teacher readiness and comfort for implementing a new curriculum. The task of implementing a new SEL curriculum would take 12 weeks to select a program and then could vary on availability of materials and training dates based on the curriculum selected. Then,

progress monitoring would happen for a minimum of two years to track changes in behavior, academics, and emotional safety. There are potential barriers such as the need for approval and teacher readiness.

Timeline

The total timeline for this plan would be two academic school years. The plan starts with sending out a readiness survey where teachers would have one week to respond. Then, the pilot team would be selected following the readiness survey. Each pilot teacher would attend a one-day training on the program assigned to them and would then pilot the curriculum for six weeks. The next step would be selecting a curriculum from the three pilot programs. The teachers would take one week to prepare a presentation for the school board; and the school board should approve the request and the curriculum will be ordered. Following selection of a curriculum, the teachers would attend the training session offered for the curriculum submitted. Following the training, teachers would have one month to fully incorporate the curriculum into their day. This part of the process would take 12 weeks to start program implementation. Following implementation, coaching cycles and progress monitoring will continue for two academic years and then reevaluated afterwards for next steps.

Role Clarification and Assignments

For United Community Elementary to be successful in implementing a SEL curriculum, there needs to be multiple people taking on additional assignments. The first portion of the plan would start with the leadership team, which is a group of teachers selected to represent the school. They would create the readiness survey and then select which candidates would be best suited to be on the pilot team. The teachers selected to be on the pilot team and the instructional

coach would then attend a one-day training for the curriculum they are assigned. The three pilot teachers would then implement the curriculum with fidelity for six weeks. The instructional coach, school counselor, and the pilot teachers will decide on a curriculum together and will plan a presentation for the school board. The pilot teacher who taught the selected curriculum will also be a model teacher for implementation as needed. Additional roles of the instructional coach include working with the representatives of the various curriculums, attending trainings, and using coaching cycles to help improve implementation of the curriculum. The guidance counselor will assist the instructional coach in training teachers to apply the curriculum throughout the day. The general education teachers will be responsible to attend trainings and implement the new curriculum.

Progress Monitoring

FAST data and the conditions of learning surveys will be used to determine change over time will assist in monitoring progress after implementing the curriculum. The leadership team will look over the data points from the school year before implementation and then for two years after. The data will be analyzed to determine if the students are improving in academics and feeling safe at school.

Limitations

There are a few limitations potentially in the way of implementing a SEL curriculum with fidelity. The biggest limitation is if the school board does not approve the purchase of a SEL curriculum; meaning the curriculum could not be purchased and the needs addressed in this improvement plan would not be met. Another limitation is teachers' willingness to embrace a

new SEL curriculum; if teachers do not take an active approach and implement with fidelity, the results will not resemble what has been found in other studies. Another limitation is not having data for behavior referrals and minor behaviors prior to implementation due to the data not being available.

Conclusion

Research based Social Emotional curriculum has multiple benefits which increase students' academic scores, emotional safety, positive behavior, and school climate. It was found in Jones (2014), Dusenbery (2017) and Coelho (2016) after students participate in a SEL curriculum there is an eleven-percentile gain. Various studies found SEL curriculums improve emotional regulation and help students feel safer. The research indicates students build stronger self-regulation skills leading to a positive impact on behavior. To see these benefits, schools need to take an active approach and implement with fidelity.

The problem is students are coming into the classroom without the necessary skills to succeed. This is true for United Community Elementary school where there has been a decrease in the percentile of students meeting benchmark since the COVID-19 Pandemic. With the research showing SEL curriculums can improve multiple areas of need aligned with the needs of United Community Elementary School, an SEL curriculum adoption would be a great asset.

With the research showing an SEL curriculum has the potential of improving academics, behavior, emotional safety, and school climate for United Community Elementary it is critical it be implemented. If United Community Elementary School implements a curriculum with fidelity

it will help increase areas below the state average. The skills taught from an SEL curriculum will also help students outside of school with community help.

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