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Improving Leader in Me Implementation: A School Improvement Project

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Improving Leader in Me Implementation: A School Improvement Project

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Capstone Project: A School Improvement Plan

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Abstract

This school improvement plan intends to counter the growing trend of negative student behaviors by moving from a partial to full implementation of the social-emotional leadership program called Leader in Me in a suburban Midwest middle school. Studies show that effective social-emotional programs can improve positive behaviors and improve academics in school. The Leader in Me program is explained within the plan. Studies suggest that the Leader in Me program improves the overall culture and climate of a school when executed with high fidelity and full implementation. This school improvement plan looks to integrate social-emotional learning lessons of Leader in Me into the social studies curriculum to ensure sufficient time and faithful implementation.

Keywords: Leader in Me, social and emotional learning, implementation, climate, culture, social studies, integration

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Improving Leader in Me Implementation

Children come to school with a variety of different emotional and behavioral experiences and challenges. To respond well to these challenges, schools have implemented different social-emotional learning (SEL) programs with varied levels of outcomes and results. However, many schools implement SEL programs with varying degrees of fidelity, leading to a difference of variability among their desired outcomes (Dowling & Barry, 2020). Different educators attribute a shortage of fidelity to a lack of time, training, and resources (Kelm et al., 2014). When a social-emotional program is not fully implemented, the students ultimately suffer, contributing to a struggling climate and culture within the school. Students then continue to become at risk for academic delays and behavioral challenges because they are lacking many of the skills necessary for social and emotional development.

The Leader in Me is one of many programs that has been proven effective at helping students reach different forms of success, whether socially-emotionally or academically (Bennett, 2020). Leader in Me challenges students to grow in their leadership skills over themselves, as well as how they interact with others. It is crucial for this program, just like any social-emotional program, to be carried out well and completely for a positive effect to take place.

The purpose of this school improvement plan is to provide a fuller implementation of the SEL program Leader in Me by integrating it within the social studies curriculum of the researcher's middle school, thus providing more quality and quantity of time to carry out the program. This plan arises because of a lack of fidelity and high variability in the implementation of the program. This problem can be solved by restructuring who is delivering the program content and how often. The aim is to bring forward the highest quality of SEL for students in the

environment they are in. Students who receive the program at its highest implementation can tap into how to better manage their emotions. Once they have a better understanding of their emotions, they can create successful habits that can then pour into their academics and behaviors. This domino effect is expected to have a positive effect on the school and community.

This school improvement project relies on evidence-based support for the effectiveness of different social emotional programs like Leader in Me and how to provide best implement the program for students' highest benefit. Articles for this school improvement project were searched using the words Leader in Me, social and emotional learning, implementation, climate, culture, social studies, and integration. Articles included used research from the United States and other countries outside of the United States, such as Korea, Ireland, and Greece. These were included to support the effectiveness of social-emotional programs, regardless of culture, socio-economic backgrounds, and race. Results from research studies were gathered quantitatively and qualitatively. Meta-analysis articles were also used to summarize results from multiple studies. All articles were peer-reviewed, and a majority were published within the past ten years. Research for this paper was drawn from the ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) database, the WorldCat discovery tool through DeWitt Library, and Google Scholar.

When educators have the training, time, and resources, they are more equipped to implement an effective social and emotional learning program (Kelm et al., 2014). The full implementation of Leader in Me would need all three qualities. This fuller implementation can lead to higher student achievement, well-being, and fewer behavioral referrals and suspensions. Implementation with higher fidelity would ultimately help the school become a "Lighthouse School" meaning we have reached outstanding results in student and school outcomes (Leader in Me, 2022). Students would also be receiving the program with a higher opportunity of fidelity, as

fewer teachers would be implementing the lessons instead of expecting all teachers school-wide to teach the lessons. Leader in Me implementation is ultimately seen as a five-year process for full implementation, and this entire process is possible by integrating the program into the social studies curricula, as described in this school improvement project.

The school improvement project describes in detail the effectiveness of the SEL program Leader in Me in terms of student achievement and behavior. Students will be able to learn about healthy habits and build their leadership qualities for the benefit of themselves, their school, and their community. These outcomes can happen only when more time is given for the program to be used and practiced. This improvement plan includes the following main sections: Review of the Literature, School Profile, Needs Assessment, Data Analysis, Action Plan, Strategies, Implementation of School Improvement Plan, Conclusion, and References.

Review of the Literature

Social and Emotional Learning

The effectiveness of social emotional learning (SEL) programs within schools has been studied extensively. In a study by Ashdown and Bernard (2011), four teachers and 99 first graders were studied to assess the effectiveness of the You Can Do It early childhood education program. This study measured quantitatively and qualitatively how the program affects students' social skills, wellbeing, and academic achievement. Two teachers were given extensive training, and their classrooms were given the opportunity to fully implement the program. The other two classrooms were the control group, and did not implement the program at all. All four teachers completed questionnaires for each student. Student scores were also reported through teacher reports. In this study, the SEL program had a positive effect on behavior and academic achievement. This study also showed that teachers who were well trained and prepared to teach

the program created a more positive experience for the students (Ashdown and Bernard, 2011). Durlack et al. (2011) also found that a strong social-emotional program has a positive impact in schools. In this meta-analysis 213 articles were examined describing studies performed in various schools, mostly within the United States. Durlack et al. (2011) found that there was an 11% improvement in student academic performance when there is SEL programming involved. This improvement shows there is a connection between SEL and student achievement.

All students can benefit from a well-implemented program. In a study by Kim et al. (2022), who conducted a meta-analysis over the effectiveness of SEL programs in Korea. This analysis studied 22 peer-reviewed articles related to SEL programs. The researchers found that SEL programs had larger positive effects on students with elementary school compared to middle school and high school social competencies and academic achievement. There was, however, little statistical difference between them. This outcome shows that social-emotional learning can benefit all ages. Programs that were more than 10 lessons long had more of a practical significance in their effect size and maximized the effectiveness compared to programs that were shorter (or lessons that were spread sporadically throughout the year). These results show that more time is needed to fully implement a successful SEL program. Alternatively, this same study suggests that shorter lessons of under 40 minutes were more effective (having an effect size of 0.40) compared to lessons greater than 40 minutes (having an effect size of 0.19). Ideally, multiple, consistent, and shorter lessons have the highest positive effect in implementing a successful SEL program.

A study by Dowling and Barry (2020) found teacher fidelity crucial to an effective social-emotional program. This mixed-methods research looked at a particular SEL program called MindOut and the implementation quality of the program. The assessed were 17 teachers and 280

students in the Republic of Ireland using questionnaires and observations. Teachers reported completing 71% of the key activities and adhered to 82% of the sessions. The reports found that student engagement and enjoyment increased after completion of the program, leading to lower behavioral issues. The average rating given by students for teachers' quality of delivery was 76% when the school had a higher implementation. The higher the fidelity, the more positive views from students and teachers, correlating with a higher effectiveness of the program (Dowling & Barry, 2020).

Similar results were found by Hunter et al. (2022), who reported on the effectiveness of teacher implementation quality under normal school conditions. The research looked at 41 teachers from 13 schools across the United States through observations and questionnaires. The study found that the more lessons the program teachers taught, the more positive views they had of the program. However, the study also highlighted the variability in teaching a SEL program among teachers. Only 10% of teachers fully completed the program, citing issues such as time constraints, pressures to make academic progress, and attempts to better address student needs. These issues play into the fidelity of teaching a program and should be addressed for better implementation.

Early implementation of a social-emotional program can lead to a higher level of future success. This point was supported by Jones et al. (2015), who completed a quantitative study on social competence and future wellness. The study researched 753 children over a period of 19 years. The outcomes of social competence were measured starting at kindergarten and then measured 13 to 19 years later. Different predictors were authority acceptance and life stressors as measured by their teachers. The outcomes of these predicted levels were how much education was finished, as well as potential mental health issues that could arise. The research found that

perceived early social competence serves as at least a marker for important long-term outcomes. When early social skills can be measured as an accurate predictor, the proper interventions, such as a strong SEL program, can lead to more favorable outcomes.

Behavior Interventions

A strong program to address challenging behaviors can benefit both the students and the school. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a researched-based framework to establish positive outcomes for students behaviorally, socially, and academically. Kelm et al. (2014) found similar strong positive effects implementing PBIS within schools. The two-year study involved 200 students: the first year was partial implementation of the program, and the second was full implementation. Teachers completed surveys, and data was analyzed to measure academic implications. The study found that overall problem behaviors were reduced by 50% percent, and there was academic growth of 44% in reading scores.

In contrast, PBIS may not be effective for all types of students. Reno et al. (2017) completed a study with 71 students in first through fifth grade. In this school, there was an over representation of males and students of color in the Tier II problem solving phase. The research showed that, unfortunately, PBIS was not meeting the needs of students as it became more commonly applied to subgroups. It was also found that there was no correlation between PBIS Tier II interventions and improved academic achievement.

A study by Gage et al. (2019) found more positive effects of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports when implemented with fidelity. This study was quasi-experimental, lasting two years, examining 593 schools in Florida using PBIS. Schools with strong implementation fidelity reported a decrease in out-of-school suspensions. This result was especially true with African American students and students with disabilities (with mean

differences of $-.31$ and $-.56$ respectively), compared to students in schools not part of a strong PBIS system or not using it with fidelity. Additionally, Gage et al. (2019) found there were still no differences found for lowering in-school suspensions (ISS) between PBIS schools and non-PBIS schools. The reasoning behind this result could mean PBIS was effective at lowering incidents that normally result in OSS and, in turn, result in ISS instead.

A study by Andreou et al. (2015) considered what it looks like to sustain a program like PBIS. This qualitative study involved 17 teachers to find what incidents helped sustain or hinder the program. The study looked at teachers' experience over a period of time at the tier I level. The top incidents found were continuous teaching (88%) and positive reinforcement given to students (82%). Staff ownership was also emphasized as important for sustaining PBIS (noted by 76% of participants). These three incidents highlight that for complete fidelity for a positive behavior program, consistency and buy-in from all staff, not just administration, is needed to achieve the desired results. A program that can emphasize the cooperation of the whole school, top-down, can change the ultimate climate and culture of a school (Andreou et al., 2015).

Climate and Culture

The climate and culture of a school are the perceptions and shared values within the school. When seeking to improve these elements, it is important to examine the different methods of action. The first level to examine school climate and culture begins at the staff level. Barkley et al. (2014) looked at 172 teachers' perceptions of school climate and culture from nine different schools. Of these teachers, 126 teachers were not using the specific SEL intervention, and 46 teachers were. Teachers were given a survey measuring one through five to rate their school's climate and culture. The results showed 81% of teachers who were using the intervention felt like there was good communication among staff, helping the climate. The study

also showed that 87% of faculty within the schools using the program reflected their school's mission by their performance; a shared mission also improves the culture. When a strong SEL program is in place, staff perception and fidelity towards their school's purpose become more positive. This stronger perception can, in turn, positively affect the students.

Student perceptions and decision making can also strongly affect the school climate. Kautz et al. (2021) examined how student decisions are influenced by school climate and SEL competencies when it comes to students. This study examined 30,462 students across grades three through twelve. The study used surveys to measure how SEL competencies and school experiences differ across grade levels and how they might change for individual students over the years. Students were measured on how rigorous the expectations were, their overall satisfaction, and their sense of belonging. As students got older, these scores dropped, thus affecting their overall perceptions of school. The study also found the lowest social-emotional competency was at the middle school level and beginning of high school at 70%. The students at these ages are heavily influenced by peer pressure and social belonging. For interventions to change the climate, interventions must be in place at appropriate ages and happen consistently (Kautz et al., 2021).

Systems that are in place can also affect the overall climate. Elrod et al. (2022) looked at how a behavior system (PBIS) can affect school climate. The three-year study had 204,701 students at the middle and high school levels completing surveys measuring school climate. Items on this survey were on a four-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with high scores showing a more positive perception of the school. Student disciplinary data was also measured. The results of this study showed that over a three-year period, student perception became more positive at 78% more favorable. Student disciplinary referrals also decrease over

this span from seventy-four to sixty-nine referrals per one hundred students. When a strong intervention and support system is in place, student perception of the school is more positive (Elrod et al., 2022).

To improve the overall climate within a school, different opportunities must be offered for students' participation. Pedersen et al. (2012) found that student-led leadership programs influenced school climate and culture. The study qualitatively measured twenty-two educators through surveys and interviews. These surveys gauged their perspectives on distributing leadership opportunities to students. Of the respondents, 82% believe the Ambassador Program has made a significant impact by creating a more positive school climate, and 77% of the respondents believed that student leaders made a significant positive impact on character development of all students. Teachers stated that all of these leadership opportunities have found success because all members had trust in each other. Involving the whole school to make a change of climate and culture can have positive impacts overall (Pedersen et al., 2012).

In contrast, Xu et al. (2022) found little success in student leadership opportunities in terms of improving climate. The study looked at the effect of 20 student ambassadors on a school of 312 students. Students completed two different surveys throughout the school year. The results showed that student leaders had an influence on others, but it was mostly within their friend group. The study also showed ambassadors had little influence on students helping others outside of their friend groups. This study suggests that the responsibility of improving climate and culture does not fall on students alone: the effort takes a whole network of members within the school (Xu et al., 2022).

Leader in Me

The Leader in Me (LiM) is an evidenced-based program using SEL learning processes that empowers students with leadership and life skills to thrive in the 21st century (Leader in Me, 2022). Bennett (2020) looked closely at the effect of LiM when it comes to student achievement. This research involved ten schools that had implemented LiM in Hawaii. The study used student test results and principal interviews to measure the effect over a school year, from pre-LiM implementation to full implementation. The data showed growth in academics, with one school showing improvement in math from 36% proficiency to 61% proficient. All principal interviews noted improvement in academic success and behaviors in students.

In contrast, Wilkens & Wilmore (2015) looked at the effects of LiM and student achievement. This study was conducted in Texas comparing schools that had implemented LiM and schools that did not have this program in place. The study found no significant difference between academic achievement and disciplinary issues between LiM schools and non-LiM schools, with scores for math and ELA being 1% to 3% higher for the non-LiM schools. There were major significant positive differences in academic scores and lower disciplinary issues shown to be from one school at “lighthouse level” of implementation. Lighthouse level happens after four to five years of successful implementation. This finding suggests that implementation level is key for LiM to be successful (Wilkens & Wilmore, 2015).

The study examining climate and culture by Barkley (2014) compared the climate and culture perceptions of LiM schools and non-LiM schools. It was found that LiM schools had a more positive effect on behavior, and teacher perceptions were overall better than non-LiM schools. The mean for behavior referral rates was a 1.03 out of 5 for LiM schools. Teacher perceptions were also higher at believing their performance reflected the school mission at 89% compared to non-LiM at 85%. An interesting contrasting result is that non-LiM schools had

higher communication between teachers. This finding, however, was believed to be in correlation with the topic of higher office referral rates.

A similar study by Humphries, Cobia, & Ennis (2015) looked at how teachers perceived LiM when it comes to decreasing student behaviors. A survey was given to teachers in nine LiM schools, all at different levels of implementation. The survey asked questions measuring how well LiM was shown day to day, as well as how well student behavior was being addressed through the program. The results showed that perception of the process of LiM had a significant impact on reducing student behaviors. When looking at the scores out of five, the mean implementation score was 4.10 and the mean student discipline score was 3.67. For a program to have complete fidelity, the perception of the program must be positive for it to take full effect.

Building student leadership through interventions can have immediate lasting effects for a school. Rosch & Caza (2012) looked at 612 students at the university level. The research examined the effects of a short-term leadership intervention on students' leadership competencies. Students were given surveys after short leadership interventions completed throughout a three-year time span which measured their leadership capacities. The results of the surveys showed growth in leadership competencies. The survey data showed leadership skills can be developed after short-term training. Students also scored similarly three months after their initial interventions had ended. This study suggests that leadership skills developed in short-term training can be retained over time (Rosch & Caza, 2012). When looking at a behavior intervention program that builds social-emotional learning, complements other interventions in place, and improves school climate and culture, the LiM program can accomplish all of these goals.

School Profile

School Characteristics

Located in central Iowa, Southeast Polk Community School District (SEP) is one of the ten largest districts in the state, serving approximately 7,100 students (Public School Review, 2022). The district has eight elementary schools, one sixth-grade building, one junior high, and one high school. There are approximately four hundred and fifty teachers district wide (Public School Review, 2022). Students attend SEP from the cities of Pleasant Hill, Altoona, Mitchellville, and Runnells, as well as the surrounding rural areas. The sixth-grade center, which is named Spring Creek, is the focus of this school improvement plan.

Student & Community Characteristics

Students at Southeast Polk are 76% white; 9% Hispanic; 7% African American; and the last 8% make up Asian, Pacific-Islander, and Native American (Public School Review, 2022). There are more than thirty different languages spoken at SEP. Approximately 33% of students are on free- and reduced lunch, and 12% have an individualized education plan. Roughly 95% of students graduate within the district. The overall graduation rate for students at SEP is 95%.

Of the district's feeder communities, Altoona is the largest with a population of roughly 20,000 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). The population has increased around 34% in the last ten years. Altoona is comprised of multiple races and ethnicities, with the largest portion being white at 91%. The median household income in Altoona was approximately \$79,000 in 2020 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

Altoona and the surrounding district communities offer many recreational activities including an aquatic center, amusement park, casino, theatres, skate park, tennis courts, an indoor recreation center, two golf courses, public ball fields, hiking and biking trails, and two

state parks with a lake. There is a wide range of churches and other places of worship available for people to attend services (altoona-iowa.com, 2022). Each town within the district has its own public library as well as community events regularly happening within each season.

Mission and Vision

The mission for SEP is “to engage all students in learning a challenging curriculum delivered through quality instruction” (southeastpolk.org). The vision for the district is to learn, lead, live, and to provide success for college, career and civic life. The core values of SEP are students first, high expectations, collaboration, integrity, stewardship, adaptability, and respect. SEP’s district priorities are high academic achievement, financial responsibility and stability, and effective and engaging communication (southeastpolk.org).

Student Performance

Roughly 600 students attend the sixth-grade building, which serves the entire district. The data being presented for the school improvement project is based on sixth-grade academic achievement and behavior because this school improvement plan is focused on LiM implementation in the sixth-grade building. Students at the 6th grade level take aReading, an adaptive screener measuring general reading skills. Students take this three times a year: Fall, Winter, and Spring. In the Fall, 77% of students were proficient while 23% were at some or high risk. By the Spring, students finished at 75% proficient, with 16% some risk and 9% high risk. This data was from the 2021-2022 school year.

Students start taking the Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP) assessment in third grade, taking the assessment yearly until they reach twelfth grade. According to ISASP, the percentage of 6th grade SEP students proficient in English Language Arts is 70% (southeastpolk.org). The state ELA proficiency for 6th grade is 62%. The percentage of 6th grade

SEP students proficient at math is 77%. The statewide math proficiency is 52% (southeastpolk.org). This data was from the 2021- 2022 school year.

Parent Involvement

Parents are encouraged to be involved in as much of their child's education as possible. Parents can stay updated on events around the district through the district website and social media pages for each school. Parents also can stay involved with student achievement through Infinite Campus, which is a student information system. They are encouraged to attend "Meet the Teacher" in August and attend conferences twice per year. Seasonally, there are family outreach events such as the Fall Festival, Pajama Game Night, and School Block party, all encouraging a fun and positive event for families to attend. The sixth-grade building has recently created a family engagement team of different staff throughout the building to help plan these events.

Current Student Learning Goals

Southeast Polk Community School District has a goal to create a collaborative environment that puts students first and establishes high expectations for student learning and achievement. The belief that all students can learn guides all the district's goals. The district is committed to fostering academic excellence and leading students to succeed in college, career, and civic life. SEP engages all students in learning a challenging curriculum delivered through quality instruction by exceptional staff. The district goals are stated as:

All SEP students will have the social and emotional skills to achieve their goals and contribute to society. SEP students will have the knowledge and skills to enter a complex, diverse, and evolving workplace at the concluding education point. SEP students will have the knowledge and skills to successfully engage in post-secondary work (southeastpolk.org).

Curriculum, Instructional Strategies, Assessment Practices, & Professional Development

The district's priority is student learning. The belief is everyone can achieve more working together. This priority is accomplished by establishing clear learning targets, mental modeling out loud, and checking for understanding. The district's teaching classroom practices support a student's progression of learning in relation to a standard. The district uses a standards reference grading scale, ranging from 1 (beginning) to 4 (exceeding). This scale communicates "progress, growth, and mastery in relation to the priority standards for learning" (southeastpolk.org).

The entire district is a professional learning community that provides many opportunities for the development of teachers. At the elementary level, every Wednesday is a 90-minute early dismissal. At the secondary level, every Wednesday is a 90-minute late start. Teachers are organized into collaborative teams by subject. Assessment practices are discussed among content teachers during daily Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings. Southeast Polk was awarded a model PLC district in 2021. In the Fall of 2022, SEP introduced Southeast Polk University, a professional development program, for teachers to gain renewal credits and teacher quality hours.

Leader in Me was partially implemented in the 2021-2022 school year as a school improvement program. Once a month, teachers were given professional development time to train in the program. Teachers also begin teaching introductory lessons to students. These lessons introduced the seven habits, which are the foundation to the LiM program, to guide students into making positive decisions in their academic and personal lives. Teachers began to model these habits by referencing visuals around the school and in their language with students. This

modeling allowed students to start being more proactive (Leader in Me, 2022) in their choices throughout the school year.

Needs Assessment

What Is the Problem?

Currently, the schedule at the sixth-grade building provides twenty minutes, once a day, for SEL learning, with once-a-week for LiM lessons specifically. For a SEL program to be fully integrated and successful, more time must be provided for the program (Dowling & Berry, 2020). Using a program once a week will not yield the desired results that research has supported leads to higher achievement and low behavioral issues. Students are struggling to buy into the program, and many factors the program addresses are not able to be fully taught with high fidelity. The students are not able to put into practice the seven habits (Leader in Me, 2022) because of low exposure and little opportunity to practice. The goal of this school improvement plan is to provide a higher quality of implementation of the SEL program Leader in Me by integrating the lessons within the social studies curriculum.

There are effective programs at Southeast Polk already in place to address behavioral issues, such as PBIS and the Olweus Anti-Bullying program. LiM was partially implemented last year with the goal of complementing the intervention programs already in place, as well as addressing the climate and culture within the school. The current school year (2022-2023) is the first year of full implementation. Many teachers have not been able to devote time to understanding the program because of an already full schedule. The lessons are currently condensed, so students are missing out on crucial components. Since the program involves the whole school, staff who are not trained in classroom management are still expected to teach these lessons. There is also variation of the content delivery due to varying teaching styles and fidelity

to the program. To improve implementation, the lessons need to be integrated within a specific subject's curriculum. This approach would allow more time for students to learn and more fidelity from teachers, who can then implement the content within their own lessons. The social studies department already works with different citizenship standards, so it would make the most sense for this department to implement the LiM program.

Like many schools across the nation, the sixth-grade building has had issues with negative behaviors. When negative behaviors are allowed to continue, they begin to impact student academics, as well as the overall climate of the school. LiM does not focus on behaviors or academics alone; it is a whole-school approach to education, redefining how schools can measure success (Leader in Me, 2022). The program helps to form relationships with students and model to students how we can and should respond in certain situations. It ultimately helps students learn how to recognize what they are in control of and grow confidence in their own abilities. To completely change the climate and culture of the sixth-grade building, a better implementation is needed.

Data Analysis

How Do We Know?

Students at Spring Creek Sixth Grade Center are expected to be respectful, act responsibly, and be motivated learners. These expectations are called the RAMs Way, which acts as a creed for the school. Currently, RAMs grading (See Figure 1) is being implemented as a choice by teacher, with full implementation expected by the second semester of the 2022-2023 school year. In this grading, a "3" means the student showed proficiency in this area and had 0-1 reminders. A "2" means the student is developing the skill with 2-4 reminders. Lastly, a "1" means the student is emerging in the skill with five or more reminders. Students are assessed

every two weeks based on their ability to show the RAMs way. This communication allows students to receive feedback and make any improvements needed before they are assessed again.

Figure 1

RAMS Way Citizenship Grading

Was the student respectful?	1	2	3
Was the student acting responsibly?	1	2	3
Was the student a motivated learner?	1	2	3

Strengths

A strength at Spring Creek is that students have the opportunity to be assessed and improve their behavior. The example of a RAMs Way student report card (See Figure 2) shows that a student's behavior may change throughout the year. The first number is from the first week, and the second number is from two weeks later in the same reporting period. In the example, the data shows the student staying respectful during the first month but needing some reminders to act responsibly as the month went on. The data also shows there is the possibility of improvement, as the student became a more active and motivated learner. The more opportunities students get to improve on managing their behaviors, the more motivated they can become.

Figure 2

Example Report Card for Rams Way Citizenship

* RAMs Way: Respectful 9/7 - 9/17	3
* RAMs Way: Respectful 9/20-10/8	3
* RAMs Way: Acts Responsibly 9/7 - 9/17	3

* RAMs Way: Acts Responsibly 9/20-10/8	2
* RAMs Way: Motivated Learner 9/7 - 9/17	1
* RAMs Way: Motivated Learner 9/20-10/8	3

Weaknesses

Is there a weakness to this RAMs Way system? The data for behavior was collected during the 2021-2022 school year (see Figure 3). Behavior is clearly a large area of concern for the sixth-grade building with 2,053 total referrals throughout the year. So, in the 180 days of the school year, there were an average of 11 behavior referrals disbursed. Almost half of the student population received at least one behavior office referral, and the number of students with suspensions were suspended an average of two times throughout the year. This data suggests that the interventions in place were not working, as the same students continued to be suspended. This data was also during the same year of a partial implementation of LiM. A fuller implementation of Leader in Me could teach students habits on how to solve conflicts and make healthy decisions within their circle of control.

Figure 3

Spring Creek Behavior Data (2021-2022)

Total Number of Events (Referrals): 2053	Event Types: 29
Total Number of Students Involved: 287	Staff Involved: 41
Number of Suspensions: 111 (In-School & Out of School)	Number of Students w/Suspensions: 56

The amount of time provided for social-emotional learning is another area of concern. The daily schedule provides twenty minutes for RAMS Way time (See Figure 4). Twenty

minutes once a week will not allow for full implementation of any program designed to improve whole school culture. More time must be provided to allow for the instruction and practice of healthy habits provided through LiM.

Figure 4

Daily Schedule with RAMS Way Highlighted

6th Grade Schedule A & B Day			
Block	Start Time	End Time	
Soft/Start Home Room	7:35	7:45	10 minutes
Block 1	7:45	8:55	70 minutes
Block 2	8:59	10:09	70 minutes
Rams Way	11:13	11:33	20 minutes
Block 3	10:37	12:16	A Lunch: 10:37-11:02 B Lunch: 11:07-11:32 C Lunch: 11:50-12:16
Block 4	12:20	1:30	70 minutes
Block 5	1:34	2:45	70 minutes

Looking at the weekly schedule for RAMs Way, the type of intervention for social-emotional learning is different for each day (See Figure 5). Tuesday is the scheduled day for the LiM lessons, while the other days have their own program lessons or activities. To continue a specific lesson or topic in the LiM program, a week-long gap or more between the interventions exists before being able to continue with the lesson.

Figure 5

RAMs way weekly schedule

<i>Mon.</i>	<i>Tues.</i>	<i>Wed.</i>	<i>Thurs.</i>	<i>Fri.</i>
Olweus Anti-Bullying Lesson	Leader in Me Lesson	PBIS Lesson	Leadership Clubs and Jobs	Counseling Lesson

Assessment Needs

To gather a full picture of culture, surveys could be conducted among staff and students. The surveys could measure if staff feel as if there is enough time to successfully teach and practice the social-emotional lessons throughout the week. Student survey questions could gauge whether they feel that the twenty-minute lessons are valuable or not. With this data, there can be a greater understanding of whether the current structure to implement LiM is working.

Future research could look at the pattern of student behavior from before partial LiM implementation to measure if there was growth with limited instruction compared to no instruction. Data could include the number of student referrals from the 2020-2021 school year when the school was doing just PBIS. There could be a trend of improvement between those two years. Another possible area of research would be the effect of full implementation of LiM on student behavior compared to the partial implementation period.

Action Plan

Strategies

The relevant literature has highlighted three themes. Negative behaviors are a large issue within schools, and these behaviors call for intervention (Gage et al., 2019). There are many effective programs in place that focus on behaviors. These programs will not succeed if there is not fidelity from all acting members of the programs (Hunter et al., 2022); (Dowling & Barry, 2020). Ways to create higher fidelity are to provide more training, more time to allow the program to culminate, and more support from administration (Dowling & Barry, 2020). Lastly, school climate and culture can be drastically improved with a successful social-emotional learning program in place (Barkley et al., 2014); (Elrod et al., 2022). LiM at full implementation will address these themes.

The interventions needed should address social-emotional learning that is effective at lowering undesirable behaviors. Currently a behavior program is in place called Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), which is a tiered framework designed to change practices to improve student outcomes and intervene on unwanted behaviors. This program should be maintained, as it is shown to be effective at organizing data and locating issues at their sources (Gage et al., 2019); however, PBIS does little to address the social-emotional learning aspect. One must also look closely at how the climate and culture of the school will be affected with any program. A negative climate and culture can drastically affect student achievement, behavior, and motivation.

The LiM program has been shown to work well as a social-emotional program that motivates students to become various types of leaders. Students are challenged to use healthy habits to control their behaviors. This program works well alongside other programs; it complements many others, such as PBIS or anti-bullying programs. When students successfully become leaders of themselves, a more positive environment emerges within the school, thus changing the climate and culture. The LiM is not a program just to teach short lessons; using only in this way will lead to low buy-in and eventual failure. LiM should be integrated within each class, displayed in non-instructional environments, and modeled daily by staff and administration as well. The program is all about creating habits with the idea of them carrying over into students' daily choices in and outside of schools (Leader in Me, 2022).

Steps To Solve the Problem

The following steps describe how to fully implement LiM within Spring Creek Sixth Grade Center. Starting in January 2023, the plan must be approved and supported by administration, curriculum specialists, and social studies teachers within the school. The rest of

the 2022-2023 school year will be used to develop and train staff in the LiM curriculum, develop a unit plan, and re-structure the school schedule for next year (See Figure 6). Social studies teachers and instructional coaches will attend on-site, or online training offered by LiM. The training will then allow for the department team to begin creating a plan for instructing students on the “7 Habits” (Leader in Me, 2022) for their social and emotional well-being.

Figure 6

Proposed Timeline for Action Plan

Date:	Who:	Process:
January 2023	Administrators and stakeholders	Action plan receives approval.
	Social Studies Department and Instructional Coaches	Social studies teachers learn about the program and begin to take professional development workshops on Leader in Me.
February 2023	Social Studies Department and Instructional Coaches	Curriculum plans for integration within social studies are created for habits number 1 and 2.
March 2023	Social Studies Department and Instructional Coaches	Curriculum plans for integration within social studies are created for habits number 3 and 4.
April 2023	Social Studies Department and Instructional Coaches	Curriculum plans for integration within social studies are created for habits number 5 and 6.
	Building staff	Social studies teachers begin to lead professional development for the rest of the staff in their roles for the program.
	Administrators and stakeholders	Administration drafts new schedule for the next school year.
May 2023	Social Studies Department and Instructional Coaches	Curriculum plans for integration within social studies are created for habits number 7.
	Building staff and administration	The new schedule is shared with staff and feedback is considered for adjustments.

A new schedule must also be considered to allow more time for social studies to implement LiM in their curriculum. This change would include dividing the 20-minute time frame built in the schedule for RAMs Way activities and allocated back within the block schedule. The rest of the staff would then have training roles on how to model LiM habits and language and to provide leadership jobs for students within the schedule. Training all staff will create consistency for students and increase the chances of improving the school climate.

Implementation of School Improvement Plan

How Will We Know It Worked?

This school improvement plan is something that can be implemented quickly as the resources are already available. The LiM program is already implemented foundationally within our school. The plan will take five months to take effect, essentially the second half of the 2022-2023 school year (See Figure 6). This time will be used for the social studies department to prepare for the lessons and administration to create a new schedule. The improved implementation of LiM, with integration into Social Studies, will begin in the 2023-2024 school year.

Two methods of full implementation and integration of LiM within social studies are possible. The first method would be to create a separate unit for social-emotional learning, which would be taught at the beginning of the year. This unit would detail in practice the 7 Habits (Leader in Me, 2022), which are foundational to the program. Workbooks for students are already provided, which could then be used as evidence for assessment. The second method would be to allocate a portion of the daily lesson for LiM. This approach would allow for the habits and lessons to be spread throughout the school year, as opposed to just the beginning within a single unit. Students would be able to make connections within the current unit and the

LiM lessons. Social studies teachers could then model the appropriate habits through the way they interact with students during the lesson.

Resources

Social studies teachers would need to attend the full training for the LiM program. This training will allow for greater fidelity and understanding of the program so it can be taught and modeled successfully. A subscription to the LiM website would be needed as it is an excellent source of activities, lessons, materials, and visuals (Leader in Me, 2022). Student workbooks would need to be purchased and provided yearly as they give students their own reference of the habits, provide practice, allow for self-reflection, and give students ownership within the program. Lastly, time must be given to the social studies department to plan integration of the program into their curriculum.

Responsibilities

When the program first started as a partial implementation, the building administrators and a select few teachers took on the role of facilitating the content and teaching the staff. With a solid foundation in the program, facilitation roles can be shifted to the social studies department. Instructional coaches will serve as an accountability tool for the content delivery to students as well as the ones who provide feedback for the social studies teachers. Social studies teachers will be leading professional development for the rest of the building staff to deliver instruction and guidance in their roles. A large component of the LiM is to create a strong whole-school community. Although Social Studies is leading the lessons, building-staff will be supervising leadership jobs and clubs, as well as modeling LiM habits within their classrooms. This expectation for staff will allow for the program to integrate itself within the fully school culture. Lastly, building administrators will serve as the contact between stakeholders and the LiM

organization if any questions arise. Full implementation takes everyone working together to provide the best opportunity for students to succeed academically and emotionally.

Monitoring Success and Failures

The LiM program is designed to improve the culture at the school. Members within the school community must be in communication with each other. The social studies department will meet weekly as a PLC to discuss how the program is going as well as address any concerns. Other building staff can also attend the PLCs to vocalize any successes, questions, or issues arising within their roles.

During the school year, a Measurable Results Assessment (MRA) will be given in the Fall and the Spring. This assessment measures leadership, culture, and academics, which are the areas LiM focuses on for improvement. This assessment is taken by students, parents, and faculty. The data can be used to show growth or decline in school climate and culture, as it will be graphed to compare the two sets of results. The overall level of success in the program can result in a school being labeled as a “Lighthouse School,” a title given by the LiM organization to schools modeling success in the three areas measured by the MRA.

Administrators will continue to assist in collecting data of daily behaviors. The behaviors can be used as an area of growth and can be addressed as a talking point within the daily lessons by teachers. If behaviors continue, the PBIS committee can problem solve using the appropriate LiM language and move the students to Tier II intervention and support. The students can then be shown which habits they can improve based on their actions and can be monitored through a check-in, check-out (CICO) sheet.

Barriers and Challenges

Possible barriers and challenges can arise from this school improvement plan. The first challenge would be to address when the other social-emotional programs would be able to be taught. These programs, such as Olweus and Counseling were taught during the original twenty-minute RAMs Way time, which is being re-allocated back within the five-block schedule (See Figure 5). The solution to this challenge would be to move those other programs back into the alternative Wednesday 2 hour-late start schedules. Before the five-block schedule and partial LiM was implemented, all social-emotional learning happened on Wednesdays, which has professional development for staff in the mornings. The morning social-emotional learning time was forty minutes long. Counseling and Olweus can alternate every other week and have just as much time as they did in two weeks of RAMs Way.

Another barrier would be stress and lack of time. Teachers already have a busy schedule, and change is always met with push-back. The challenge would be to get everyone to buy into the idea of LiM. The program is already present in the district, but the accountability to complete the lessons is not in place. The improvement plan is not just for social studies to take on running all of the concepts of LiM, but a school-wide effort of modeling the habits and running the Leadership jobs component. This problem might lower fidelity if only social studies staff are using the program language and modeling the habits, as many students would just see it as a thing required for the specific class. A lack of support from staff will render the program ineffective: the original idea is to improve the whole school community.

Conclusion

This school improvement plan is a multi-step process to improve the quality of implementation of LiM at Spring Creek 6th Grade Center in Southeast Polk School District. Through simplifying the delivery of the content to a subject-specific curriculum, fidelity of the

program will increase. Although there are many programs out there to increase SEL learning needs, address behavioral issues, and increase academic achievement, LiM is one of the few programs that addresses all three and involves the whole school for success.

The results of this project will impact teachers and students at Spring Creek Sixth Grade Center and Southeast Polk in a variety of ways. This improvement plan will be attainable and successful when full implementation happens through allowing more time to be devoted to the program. When the bulk of the lessons can be implemented through one subject, the buy-in will be much higher, while the other members of the school community can model the program so climate and culture to be improved. Social studies is a subject that naturally makes sense to take on a higher role in SEL teaching. Once LiM is implemented with fidelity, a school can see how the program impacts the students and how it will change the climate and culture of the school. Faith implementation can lead to higher academic achievement and fewer behavioral problems. This school improvement is a step forward in the goal to provide what is best for our students to make them ultimately ready for college, career, and civic life.

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