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Implementing Social-Emotional Supports with Coaching in a Preschool Program

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Capstone Project: A School Improvement Plan

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Abstract

Research findings show that coaching paired with professional development around a set of

identified instructional practices is one way to increase teacher use of these practices. Combining

coaching and professional development can be used to train teachers in the Pyramid Model.

Studies show that effective Pyramid Model implementation can positively improve student

relationships and adult-to-student relationships as well as increase positive behaviors in schools.

With these research findings in mind, a school improvement plan was created to add professional

development opportunities on the use of Pyramid Model Practices to improve social-emotional

instruction in a preschool program in Eastern Iowa. Executing this plan should lead to improved

social-emotional and behavioral outcomes for preschool learners.

Keywords: Pyramid Model, social-emotional learning, professional development,

practice-based coaching

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Implementing Social-Emotional Supports with Coaching in a Preschool Program

Teachers are feeling continued pressure to meet the diverse needs of their students, often with varying levels of support for themselves. Such work conditions can lead to high turnover rates. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, many teachers have been feeling burnt out and are considering leaving the profession. Teachers' mental health has also been negatively impacted due to an even heavier workload and lack of support within their districts (Marshall et al., 2020). Early childhood is an area with high educator turnover rates (Ratner et al., 2018). One barrier is that in early childhood, many teachers are often underpaid and undervalued, news that is not surprising to many educators in the field (Baker, 2017).

One method used to support teachers is the coaching model. Coaching can be both time-consuming and expensive. It has traditionally relied upon external coaches, who may not be fully aware of the program's climate and culture (Giordano et al., 2021). The most commonly used form of coaching used by early education consultants in our state agency is practice-based coaching (PBC). This type of coaching includes the coach delivering new learning content around practices, classroom observations of teacher implementation, debriefing, and email/written feedback (Hemmeter et al., 2015). Pairing coaching with an identified set of practices may be one way to move the needle on the research-to-practice gap in a small district.

Snyder et al. (2018) states that there is a "research-to-practice" gap when it comes to evidence-based practices, and it's unlikely that the gap will be reduced unless there is support in place to practice implementation. In order for students to make the gains that teachers hope to see, teachers have support as they implement new practices. Teacher professional development should be relevant, interesting to them, beneficial for their learners, as well as providing them with new content they can use back in their classrooms (Schachter et al., 2019). Teachers will be

better supported and equipped if they have more opportunities to learn and implement practices in their classrooms.

Individual coaching is said to have "an improved effect on teacher and student outcomes especially when teachers are able to receive feedback on their implementation and practice" (Snyder et al, 2017, p.214). Teachers need individualized support just like students do. One way that the fidelity of implementation can be improved is when "teachers have one-on-one coaching to support the practices they wish to use" (Brock and Beaman-Diglia, 2018, p.33). In PBC, the components fit into a framework that is based on collaborative partnerships that include shared goals and action planning, focused observations, and reflection and feedback (Snyder et al, 2015).

The purpose of this school improvement plan is to use district data to support evidence-based practices in the area of social-emotional learning that will improve the program practices in supporting children's social-emotional well-being. The Pyramid Model is a framework that supports young children's social-emotional behavior and consists of evidence-based practices designed to prevent challenging behavior (Hemmeter et al., 2015, p.145-145). The Pyramid Model is featured in the 2020 book *Unpacking the Pyramid Model: A Practical Guide for Preschool Teachers* (Hemmeter et al., 2020). The Pyramid Model is a three-tier framework of support that increases children's prosocial behaviors in both individual classrooms and program-wide classrooms (Fox et al., 2021).

Resources for this school improvement plan were found through the DeWitt Library at Northwestern College located in Orange City, Iowa. The studies referenced were published within the last ten years in a peer-reviewed journal. The research was around the pyramid model, practice-based coaching, mental health, and professional development, with additional keywords

being specifically around early childhood. There was a starting point of 20 peer-reviewed articles, and additional articles have been found to support the plan around coaching and Pyramid Model practice in an early childhood setting.

Review of the Literature

Individual coaching as a form of professional development is said "to have an improved effect on teacher and student outcomes especially when teachers are able to receive feedback on their implementation and practice" (Snyder et al, 2017, p. 214). Brock and Beaman-Diglia (2018), also supported coaching as a form of professional development, stating that "when teachers see themselves as in charge of their own learning, they engage more with their coach" (p.42). It was also determined that even teachers who don't have as much experience or education can still implement evidence-based practices through coaching support in preschool classrooms. The Snyder et al. (2017) study compared the types of professional development being delivered; some of the research that was done was to "determine whether or not on-site coaching, self-coaching, or business-as-usual professional development had the best learning outcomes for all parties that were involved within the study around embedded instruction" (p.216).

Professional Development in Early Childhood

Professional organizations like the National Association for the Education of Young Children and rating systems such as Quality Rating and Improvement Systems identify that professional development is an important piece of developing and growing a quality preschool program (Ratner et al., 2018). In Ratner et al. (2018), 16 of 19 diverse early childhood centers located in a large Midwestern city formed a consortium. Consortium members included directors, staff, faculty from local universities, and also organizations that partner to support the

centers. They were offered monthly meetings, two days of in-service, and a free annual conference. The directors were interviewed about their experience with the consortium, and participants who attended the conference completed evaluations. Through joint learning, researchers were able to determine whether program quality and professional development were positively connected to one another.

A key finding from this consortium project was that there was an increased sense of community from the directors who had received coaching: they indicated that there was less competition among themselves (Ratner et al., 2018). Through building a community of support, they were able to build positive partnerships. Further research and data could have been taken around the assessments as they were only completed once and were self-reported. The results indicated that the benefits may have differed depending on participants' level of engagement within the consortium and their Quality Rating System status (Ratner et al., 2018).

Professional development for early childhood (EC) teachers is changing from the once-traditional one-and-done style of training. Such training has not shown much success in changing practice (Schachtner et al., 2019). By contrast, Schachtner et al. (2019) described how a three-year teacher expressed an interest to her director in learning about math instruction. She received training online through a local college and requested that she be mentored. After a month of receiving support, she was asked to share her newly learned practices with colleagues. Schachter et al. (2019) indicated that the content teachers are receiving should support student needs and that effective professional development (PD) should include teachers observing the practice, implementing the practice themselves, receiving feedback, and engaging in self-reflection. Further research could be done on the use of additional programs receiving the same form of professional learning could have a positive outcome for the peer learning community or program.

Snyder et al. (2017) indicated there's more of a need for PD for EC teachers as more research has become available relative to the fidelity of implementation and meeting the needs of children. Snyder et al., (2017) compared the use of different professional development models and how they impact teachers' use of embedded instruction practices. The study included 36 preschool teachers from three school districts in three different states; the majority of the teachers were white women. The interventions tested were using Tools for Teachers with workshops and onsite coaching or online workshop training (or business-as-usual). Findings showed that students who had teachers engaged in onsite coaching had more embedded interventions in place. Additional findings were that teachers need explicit training and implementation support through coaching, and onsite coaching was rated higher than self-coaching from the teachers. Overall, individualized coaching has been found to be a successful PD option for teachers as they try new practices and receive feedback (Snyder et al., 2017).

Professional development sometimes comes with barriers. Teachers who work in under-resourced areas are often not able to attend training, impacting their ability to make changes in practices (Schwartz et al., 2019). Schwartz et al., (2019) conducted research that aimed to describe how teachers' lives varied in disadvantaged areas in Ghana and also to see if there were outcomes related to successful PD around the areas of staff attrition, engagement in professional learning opportunities, and application of training within classrooms. Schwartz et al., (2019) identified that many of the teachers suffered high rates of depression, poverty, and illness, and also suffered from shortages of food. Many of the teachers lacked the support they needed such as supervision, support staff, parent and community involvement, and mentoring. The overall findings were that teachers who had added stressors in their personal lives struggled to attend professional learning, and missing such opportunities was reflected in their teaching.

One of the practices that have been identified as appropriate and effective for EC teachers is receiving professional development in the form of coaching (Thompson et al., 2021). Thompson et al., (2021) observed two expert-level coaches in multiple coaching cycles. They were both white females in their 50s and 60s who had an average of nine and a half years of experience working with infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children. They each had nine years of coaching experience supporting teachers who taught ages of birth-5. The research was conducted over two years, and data was collected through verbal interactions with teachers. The coaches also used recordings from classroom visits, home visits, and parent-teacher conferences. Thompson et al. (2021), found that acknowledging and affirming teachers and making connections to their previous conversations were much higher than when there was not an already established coaching relationship. Having a structured coaching process was helpful for all teachers, even those who had already established a strong partnership with their coach. Some of the areas that were identified as needing further research included the frequency of coaching and understanding of coaching conversation behaviors.

Practice-Based Coaching as Professional Development

Practice-based coaching is defined as a continuous process where teachers are supported and their use of practices has positive outcomes for their students (Snyder et al., 2015). Snyder et al., (2015) conducted research on how practice-based coaching supports teacher use of evidence-based practices. There were 36 preschool teachers in study one who focused on embedded instructional practices, and 40 preschool teachers in study two who focused on Pyramid Model practices. The research took place over 16 weeks and was conducted in classrooms and virtually.

In the first study group, the one focused on embedded instruction, there were three groups of teachers who had a professional learning (PL) focus on embedded instructional practice for

children who are in special education. The first group received 15 hours of PL and received personalized in-person and virtual coaching. The second group received 15 hours of PL and had self-coaching. The final group was business as usual PL. In the second study group, there were also three groups of teachers whose focus was on pyramid model practices. Each group received the same levels of professional learning as those in the first study group.

One of the main findings was that coaching with the use of a coaching log and following a coaching protocol such as Practice-based coaching can help teachers more than BAU PL and self-coaching. However, Snyder et al., (2015) stated that there's much more to be learned about the different coaching approaches, the delivery formats, how the formats are used, and the impacts on practice implementation and child learning outcomes. Future recommendations may need to establish who needs coaching and what the dosage for coaching should look like for preschool teachers. It should be noted that research on coaching in preschool is still relatively new and the components and the effects of coaching could be further studied (Snyder et al., 2015).

A study by Kranski and Steed (2022) examines how practice-based coaching was used to support four early childhood teachers' knowledge and ability to be more culturally responsive in the classroom. All four teachers had baseline data taken on their culturally responsive practices with the use of the Culturally Responsive Practices in Early Childhood Checklist. Other measures they used were the Early Childhood Ecology Scale: Observation Form and the Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale. Over two-three weeks, the teachers received a workshop style of training with follow-up practice-based coaching. After receiving training and coaching, all teachers increased their implementation of culturally responsive

practices. Areas that could still see growth were around using children's home languages, incorporating food from other cultures, and providing books that challenge stereotypes.

Kranski and Steed (2022) said that teachers may benefit more if they received coaching throughout the year (the coaching they received took place only at the end of the school year). They also indicated that they may need to find a more exhaustive list of culturally responsive practices due to it being easy for teachers to check off ten areas but still be missing practices. A final consideration is that all of the teachers and the coach were white females; having diversity among teachers or the coach may change the outcomes. Future research may consider how racially diverse coaches approach their coaching with teachers (Kranski and Steed, 2022).

Another way that practice-based coaching has been examined is through Shannon et al.'s (2020) study on the interactions between coaches and teachers. The study included seven coaches and 15 preschool teachers from southern states in the U.S. over 15 weeks. Before coaching began, teachers received 16 hours of workshop time. Once coaching began, they used practiced-based coaching for shared goals and action planning, focused observation, and reflection and feedback around embedded learning practices. Coaching conversations were evaluated via video coding using a research version of a coaching observation tool and a questionnaire.

Shannon et al., (2020) found that coaching can have a positive impact when there's a protocol. Also, as teachers became more familiar with the protocols, they initiated more conversations than they had at the beginning. There may need to be more research on scaling up coaching processes. Shannon et al., (2020) also noted that the coding system used may have been more sensitive to the coach or teacher, and a larger scale of sample teachers may be needed.

In a vignette with a teacher and paraeducator, Dennis et al., (2021) explored how to support a paraeducator in shared reading with the use of practice-based coaching. The sample identified that the intervention took two-to-three weeks with weekly coaching. The coach (Lead teacher) met with the coachee (para) to determine the needs of the para and the students. Subsequently, observations were completed around the shared goal they had set, and action plans were completed. After observations, feedback was shared and discussed. The primary findings were that practice-based coaching is a great framework that doesn't need an outside coach or consultant.

Social-Emotional Learning in Preschool

Prekindergarten teachers' views on social-emotional learning (SEL) vary. Liesch et al. (2022) included 22 teachers from the southeastern U.S. who had either an associate's degree or a bachelor's degree and 324 students, of whom 98% were students of color. The research was conducted using a 12-item Teacher Social and Emotional Learning Beliefs Scale that the teachers completed themselves. The intervention tested was to gather information to determine whether or not teacher education levels and knowledge of SEL were aligned.

Teachers' results around classroom culture were the same and did not vary based on education level. However, results also indicated that teachers who had a bachelor's degree scored higher than those with an associate's or graduate degree in their comfort levels of SEL. Liesch et al. (2022) also found that teachers who have taught for 20 or more years scored higher in the areas of commitment and culture. Future implications from Liesch et al., (2022) stated that survey data was self-reported and that outcomes may have been different if participants were from different classrooms in different centers.

Soliman et al., (2021) explored social-emotional learning approaches and the impact they have on preschool-aged children. This research included four teachers and 69 preschool students from the University of Melbourne Early Learning Centre. The research took place in two separate classrooms within the center; one was the intervention group and the other was the comparison group. The intervention tested was to determine if the COPE-Resilience program used in one classroom had stronger outcomes in areas of prosocial behavior and coping skills. The intervention classroom followed a program with specific topics and learning objectives. The comparison classroom teachers were provided exposure and some modeling using prosocial and empathy without specific learning objectives.

Teachers indicated through ratings that the preschool students involved in the COPE-Resilience program had increased prosocial behavior and positive coping skills. The researchers note that there remains a gap in research around prosocial behavior and positive coping skills directly relating to empathy. It was also identified that the assessments used to measure empathy didn't match the COPE-Resilience program being used. The replication of this study in a more diverse setting may provide more varied results (Soliman et al., 2021).

Wilkinson and Tao (2019) interviewed 27 preschool teachers to determine their perspectives on children's socio-emotional learning. The study looked at 20 Kindergarten and daycare sites: ten in Taipei and ten in Tainan. With new guidelines around six learning domains (Physical Education and Health, Cognitive Development, Literacy and Language Arts, Social Development, Emotional Development, and Aesthetics), researchers sought to determine whether certain areas around social and emotional development were being taught. The teachers completed 34 questions. This qualitative data revealed common stories emerging from the responses.

A key finding was that the planning and organization of SEL were not been regarded as important in many locations. In Taiwan, children are often not taught social-emotional skills, and are taught and assessed on math and writing skills (Wilkinson & Tao, 2019). Teachers did indicate that they don't have a strong understanding of socio-emotional development. Through the data, researchers also determined that there was a large difference in the private versus public education systems in terms of what they were expected to teach in relation to social-emotional skills.

Teacher research and social-emotional learning were the focus of a study done in Singapore (Yang et al., 2021). The classroom teacher who completed her research taught eight two-to-three-year-old children. She used the High Scope curriculum's six steps for facilitating conflict resolution to support her young learners. Included in the research were parent pre- and post-checklists to determine each child's ability to self-regulate at home. There were also classroom observations, tasks, and the teacher's implementation of the conflict resolution steps. The teacher completed her intervention over the course of six weeks and was able to see an increase in conflict resolution where children solved problems without teacher support. By engaging in her own research, she become a more reflective practitioner. It was stated that Singapore has tight schedules in their early childhood programs and that there's often not time to teach children self-regulation.

Pyramid Model as a Framework for Social-Emotional Support

The Pyramid Model (PM) is described by Hemmeter et al. (2016) as "a framework for organizing research-based practices for use in early childhood classrooms to promote social-emotional competence and prevent and address children's challenging behavior" (p. 134). Their study examined teacher implementation of the PM with 40 preschool teachers throughout

Tennessee and Florida over two years in classrooms and through email exchanges. Coaching

took place on a weekly basis where the coach observed, engaged in reflection and feedback with

the teacher, and sent email feedback. There were in-person workshops that took place over the

course of three days, and a total of 19.5 hours where the teachers were given materials to support

the implementation of the PM. Through classroom observations and coaching cycles, they were

able to support teaching practices around the PM.

Some of the findings were that teachers in the intervention group made more gains than

teachers in the control group on the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT), and that

teachers with PD on practices had better outcomes with implementation. Children in the focal

groups didn't make improvement, but researchers suggested that their stagnation was possibly

due to teachers not individualizing to prevent challenging behaviors in specific students. The

TPOT didn't provide information on the individual children's challenging behavior. And lastly,

the research was done with highly qualified and experienced teachers (Hemmeter et al., 2016).

In an additional study on the impact of the Pyramid Model (PM) Green et al. (2019)

wanted to determine the effects of bi-monthly individualized professional development sessions

on the implementation of the universal tier of the Pyramid Model for Head Start teachers. They

also tested whether or not there is a difference in the change scores on the TPOT when

comparing Head Start teachers who received individualized coaching with Head Start teachers

who received large group professional development. They also considered whether or not

individualized professional development is a socially valid approach to professional development

for Head Start teachers (Green et al., 2019). The participants were six female Head Start teachers

from two different sites. Five teachers were African American and one was Native American.

Each classroom had an assistant: five of the assistants were African American females and one

was an African American male. The study took place over eight weeks in a large urban area in the southeastern United States. The classrooms had 18-21 students, and 85-90% of the students were African American. The coaches provided training for the control group and the intervention group. The control group received four, 90-minute trainings around the levels of the pyramid. The intervention group received 45-minute individualized sessions that focused more on individual implementation needs based on their TPOT scores.

Findings indicated that the teachers who were in the intervention group made improvements in each area of the TPOT. The control group had varying levels of regression and improvements. Both groups had a decrease in red flags. Further research could be done to include more Head Start classrooms throughout the US and also have more inclusive preschool classrooms that might have more children with challenging behaviors (Green et al., 2019).

Another study looked to determine what implementation looks like in areas where the educators have never been exposed to the PM. Data was gathered from Mainland China, and 20 preschool teachers from five preschools received TPOTS on their implementation of PM practices (Luo et al., 2017). The teachers all had varying levels of education in early childhood, ranging from an associate's degree to a master's degree. The TPOTS took place in classrooms with 25-43 students. There were TPOTs taken to determine where a small amount of Chinese preschool teachers landed with the TPOT data. There was no real methodology, but the information was collected to determine the baseline of PM practices for a small group of teachers in China.

Overall, the teachers who were observed scored low on the TPOT (Luo et al., 2017). Results indicate that large class sizes could impact the ability to interact with individual students. Teachers also scored themselves higher in areas than what the observation data showed. Another

consideration is that culture could play a role in the lack of engaging in problem-solving, teaching social skills, and modeling emotional literacy. More samples need to be taken throughout other areas located in China. Some items may need to be altered on the TPOT to be more culturally sensitive to practices that are acceptable throughout China. The current groups' implementation score was 31%, indicating they may need more support with addressing challenging behaviors in the future (Luo et al, 2017).

Recent research looked at whether challenging behaviors that resulted in suspension and expulsions could be reduced and eliminated with the use of the PM (Fox et al., 2021). This study took place over the course of two years in two different programs: one from the Southeastern United States that included eight classroom teachers and eight paras, and the second located in the mid-Atlantic that included 16 classrooms. The intervention tested was to determine if the use of building a leadership team and following the pyramid model would improve outcomes for students and reduce challenging behavior. Fox et al. (2021), provided in-person training that provided teachers with information on the pyramid model, implicit bias, and culturally responsive practices. They also used coaching around the TPOT and received training on how to use behavior incident reports. The educators and coaches determined that building a diverse leadership team that met monthly supported both programs and that using the PM was a great way to meet the diverse needs of children in the areas of social, emotional, and behavior, rather than using suspension and expulsion in preschool (Fox et al., 2021). Future implications for this research questioned whether or not more programs could eliminate suspension and expulsion by removing those options for behaviors in preschool programs.

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School Profile

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School Performance

The Iowa school performance profiles indicated that general education students who completed the Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP) scored above the state average. In the area of language arts, 76% or 477 out of 625 students were proficient. Of students who were identified as having low socioeconomic status, 67% or 91 out of 136 students were proficient. Of students identified as having disabilities, 28% or 24 out of 85 students were proficient, which was also above the state average. In the area of mathematics, 67% or 420 out of 625 students were proficient. Of students identified as being of low socioeconomic status, 60% or 81 out of 136 were proficient. Of students identified as having a disability, 24% or 20 out of 85 were proficient. In a survey given to 3rd-12th grade students assessing conditions for learning, Tipton scored six percent below the state average with a percentage of 44% (Iowa Department of Education 2022a). The four-year graduation rate of Tipton students is 87%, which is three percent lower than the state average (Iowa Department of Education, 2022b).

The students enrolled in the preschool program are assessed using Teaching Strategies GOLD (TSG) during three reporting windows throughout the school year. During the Fall 2022 screening period, students were assessed in the following areas: Social-Emotional, Physical, Language, Cognitive, Literacy, and Mathematics. The students are also screened three times a year with MyIGDIs, a literacy early warning screening tool. The TSG snapshot report from the fall of 2022 stated that four (12%) of the 35 children were below the widely held expectations (WHE) while 30 (88%) of students were meeting WHE in the area of social-emotional well-being. In the physical development domain, six children (18%) were below WHE, and 28 (82%) were meeting expectations. In the area of language, six students (16%) were below WHE, and 27 (79%) were meeting, and one student scored above WHE for language. In the cognitive development area, ten (29%) were below expectations, and 24 (71%) were meeting WHE. The

area of literacy had eight or 24% of students below WHE, and 26 students, or 76% of the

students were meeting WHE. Math was an area where 11 students or 32% of the students were

below WHE, 22 students, or 65% of the students were meeting WHE, and one student was

exceeding WHE (Iowa Department of Education, 2023b).

Student and Community Characteristics

Located in eastern Iowa, Tipton is located in Cedar County. Tipton has a population of

3,221 (Tipton Economic Development, 2023). The median age in the community is 42.3 and the

male population is 1,555 and the female population is 1,666. There is also a high rate of adults

over 18 in Tipton—approximately 2,442, and the rate of unemployment is 4.6% for Cedar

County (Tipton Economic Development, 2023).

Tipton Community School District has approximately 915 students enrolled in

kindergarten through twelfth grade (Iowa Department of Education, 2022b). The preschool

program, which is housed in the elementary school, has 35 preschool students split between two

classrooms. There are single elementary, middle, and high schools that support the district's

learners. The most recent data, from the Iowa Department of Education (2022b), Kindergarten-

12th grade students were identified as predominantly white with 94.4% or approximately 860

students. There are 25 students of Hispanic origin making up 2.8% of the student population.

There are 19 students identified as multi-racial who make up 2.1% of the student population, and

six students, or .7% make up the Black/African American student population. The preschool

demographics closely match those of the rest of the district.

School Characteristics

Based on a 2021-2022 report, there were 85 staff members who averaged 39 years old in

the Tipton school district. Of the teachers, 60% were female. Additionally, 27% of teachers had

advanced degrees, and they averaged 13 years of experience (Conditions of Education, 2022).

The building that houses preschool also has grades Kindergarten through four. There are also

multiple paraeducators throughout the building. The preschool program is unique in that it runs

from 8:15 am to 1:00 pm Monday through Friday. Wrap-care is provided from 1:00 pm to 3:00

pm on a schedule that follows the district calendar (Tipton Community School District, 2023b).

Both classrooms adhere to guidelines set by the Iowa Department of Education and complete

yearly desk audits that ensure the implementation of the Iowa Quality Preschool Program

Standards (IQPPS).

Parent Involvement

Parents and community members are invited to complete volunteer forms and are

welcome in all Tipton Community School District buildings. The district encourages parents and

community members with skills to share, to become involved with our school programs and

classrooms. There are additional opportunities for family involvement at preschool through

family nights. The preschool teachers also conduct a beginning-of-the-year home visit to begin

learning more about the preschool child and their family. The desire for parent involvement is

written into the district preschool handbook. (2023b):

> The district encourages the use of volunteers to support and enhance instruction and co-
>
> curricular programs, enrich the curriculum, and broaden student learning opportunities
>
> by adding a voice of experience or background knowledge, providing students with
>
> individual attention, assisting students with varying abilities, and providing teachers
>
> with more time to work with students (p.23).

School Mission and Vision

The Tipton School District (2023) indicates that the aim of the district is "to provide a rigorous academic experience that fosters creativity and curiosity while also ensuring that students' social and emotional needs are met." Specifically, the aim is to "show up, do your job, and be kind, and the mission is to inspire curiosity, grit, and empathy in all learners" (Tipton School District, 2023a). Additionally, there are three goals that are identified on the Tipton School District (2023a) site stating that all students will prepare for success beyond high school, all students will utilize technology to prepare for success beyond high school, and all students and staff will feel safe and connected at school. The district includes goals for families: "Families will feel welcome in the classroom and school, families will work with the school in a meaningful partnership to help their children be better prepared for the learning environment, families will advocate for their children, and families will be committed to having their children consistently attend the preschool program" (Tipton Community School District 2023a, p.3-4).

Current Student Learning Goals

Current student learning goals are being refined this year by prioritizing the Iowa Core standards and the Iowa Early Learning Standards. The current learning goals in preschool are to meet the preschool color band in Teaching Strategies Gold. The teachers meet on a weekly basis to discuss children's progress and concerns. There has been a shift from looking only at assessment data in preschool to also using the IELS to guide instruction.

Teacher Instructional Strategies

Teachers use multiple instructional strategies throughout their day. Students have opportunities to learn through small groups, large groups, and individual learning. They also have opportunities to learn through many adult-directed student-choice activities and student-

directed activities. They also have opportunities in preschool to take their learning outdoors for free choice time. The teachers use short phonemic awareness lessons to build literacy skills. Preschool teachers are beginning to use peer-mediated instruction to build children's social skills and implement problem-solving strategies.

Assessment Practices

Students are assessed three times per year through observations and parental input used for Teaching Strategies GOLD. GOLD measures physical, cognitive, social-emotional, language, literacy, science, social studies, and the arts. The teachers are working toward prioritizing the Iowa Early Learning Standards, creating proficiency scales, and developing formative assessments. The work done around prioritizing standards will eventually result in the creation of a program report card that is shared with families. In addition to GOLD, teachers use MyIGIDs as an early warning screening tool that measures literacy. Specifically, MyIGDIs measure picture naming (oral language), rhyming (phonological awareness), alliteration (phonological awareness), sound identification (alphabet knowledge), and which one doesn't belong (comprehension) (Renaissance, 2023).

Professional Development

Throughout the 2022-2023 school year, the preschool team has received professional learning on a variety of topics. They have continued to deepen their knowledge of pyramid model practices with the use of a book study. Last year the preschool teachers took the online course offered through Grant Wood Area Education Agency (GWAEA). This year's follow-up has continued with action plans where each teacher uses the implementation checklist from the book to create and implement action plans on areas identified as needing improvement. Teachers receive feedback from their coach on a bi-weekly to monthly basis. The teachers have also

received learning from a math consultant from GWAEA around the Big Ideas of Early

Mathematics: What Teachers of Young Children Need to Know (Brownell et al., 2014). They

have also worked weekly with a literacy consultant and the early education consultant to

prioritize and unwrap their preschool standards.

Needs Assessment

The Tipton Elementary School needs further professional development to build staff

capacity in the preschool program to support the social-emotional needs of their preschool

students. Currently, there isn't a social-emotional curriculum taught in Tipton's preschool

program. In a Teaching Strategies GOLD report run for the fall of 2022-2023, there were

specific areas where children scored lower than others. For example, while looking at objectives

in the social-emotional domain, there were eight children who hadn't reached the widely held

expectation range on the objective of interacting with peers, and 16 students who were below in

solving social problems (Iowa Department of Education, 2023b).

There have also been three years in a row of changes to the preschool teaching staff. The

teachers and paraeducators would be developing the groundwork for an effective workforce

crucial in supporting the additional tiers within the pyramid model framework (National Center

for Pyramid Model Innovations, 2022b). Additional tiers that should be noted and supported to

address the social-emotional needs of the learners are nurturing and responsive relationships,

high-quality supportive environments, targeted social-emotional supports, and intensive

interventions (National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations, 2022b).

With the classroom teachers' current engagement in the *Unpacking the Pyramid Model:*

A Practical Guide for Preschool Teachers (Hemmeter et al., 2021) and creating action plans

around the checklists found in the book, a logical next step would be for the whole team to

receive Early Childhood-PBIS training. According to Center on PBIS (2023), children have better social skills and less problem behavior in Pyramid Model classrooms. The Center on PBIS (2023) also states that practitioners are able to implement Pyramid Model practices better when they receive training and practice-based coaching. Center on PBIS (2023) also states that when implemented there are reductions in children's challenging behavior, increases in children's social skills, increased satisfaction of program staff and families, reduced turnover in the program, increases in teachers' competence and confidence in the support of children, changes in the classroom and program climate, and sustainability within the model.

Data Analysis

How Do We Know?

Tipton Elementary preschool through fourth-grade students are monitored on the state system for tracking behavior data. The data from Tipton Elementary School around the area of behavior and social-emotional well-being indicates that this is an area for growth. Children are engaging in challenging behaviors throughout the elementary building in PK-Grade 4 as indicated in Figure 1 (Iowa Department of Education, 2023a). A current strength is that there is a system in place for collecting and entering behavior data. Looking at the number of incidents present in the elementary school, the beginning months appear to be a crucial time to identify classroom and building-wide expectations. There were also significantly more behaviors toward the beginning of the school year than there were after winter break. However, a strength is that behavior incidents have decreased as the year has gone on, with the exception of January.
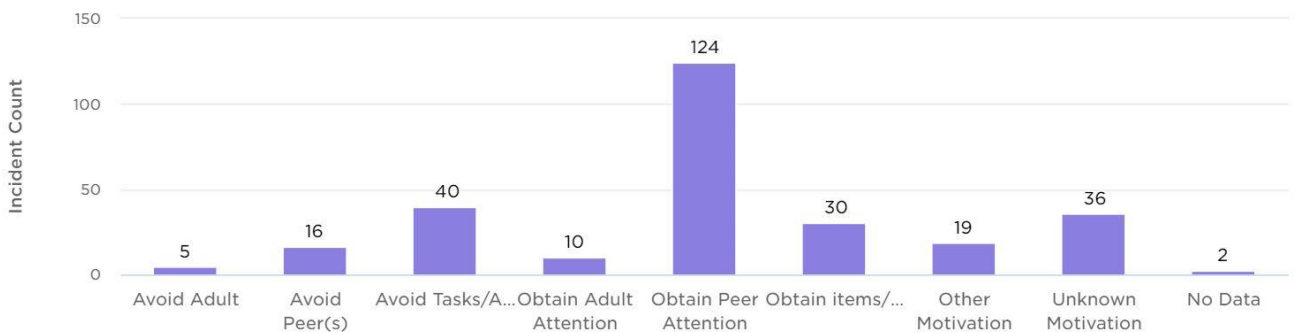
Figure 1

Behavior Incident Count
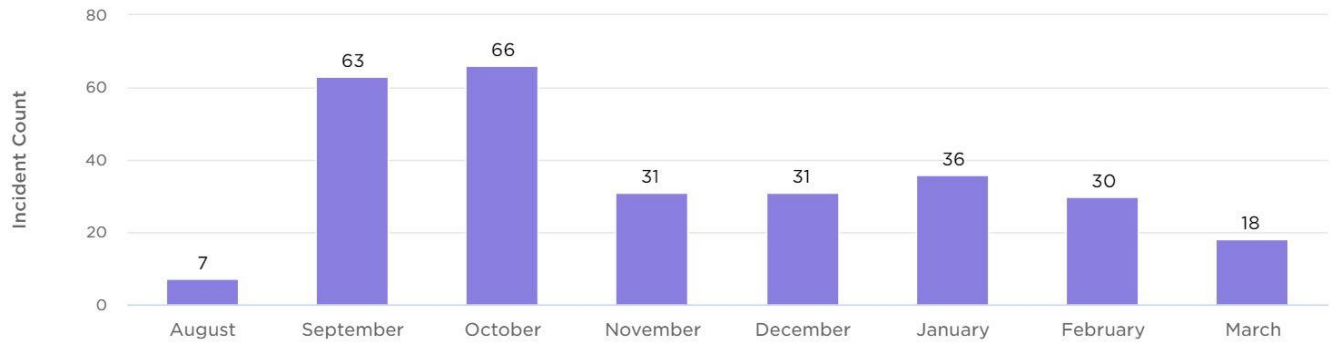
The high number of incidents represented in Figure 1 are all considered major in severity; however, those specifications aren't defined on the reporting site. Figure 2 indicates that the highest perceived motivation was to obtain peer attention (Iowa Department of Education, 2023a). One strength identified is that there aren't many incidents where students are avoiding adults. This low number may be an indicator of positive relationships between students and their teachers.

Figure 2

Perceived Motivation
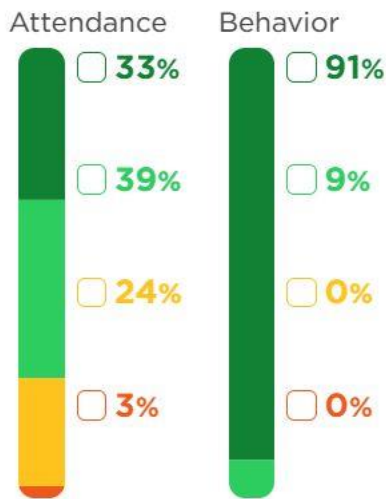

Preschool Data

The preschool data below in Figure 3 identifies preschool attendance and behavior incidents. There are 24 preschoolers in the top two tiers of the attendance graph, indicating that they are on track for graduation and education beyond high school. The yellow hand indicates

that eight students are at risk and have attended only 80-90% of school days. The lowest

percentage in attendance was 3% or one student identified in an area that is critical (Iowa

Department of Education, 2023a).

The behavior data indicates that 91% of students are on track for college or career

readiness based on behaviors observed and reported. The remaining 9% or three students are still

identified as being on track for graduation and have had incidents on 1-2% of school days this

year. This data is overall positive when looking at the percentages of behaviors as none are

identified as at risk or critical. A current weakness at Tipton Elementary is that attendance seems

to be an issue in preschool: only 72% of students have attended 90% or more school days this

year.

Figure 3

PK Attendance and Behavior

Fall TS GOLD data indicated that there were areas in the social-emotional developmental

area where children are below widely held expectations. Specifically, some Tipton preschool

students in the fall of 2022 were below their grade-level peers. In the areas of taking care of their

own needs appropriately, interacting with peers, and solving social problems (Figure 4), the

percentages of students below widely-held expectations ranged from 14%-47% (Iowa

Department of Education, 2023b). Overall, preschool-aged children were able to manage their

feelings and follow limits and expectations independently. In preschool, some of the skills that

children are missing correlate to the major incidents listed in Figure 2 such as obtaining peer

attention.

Figure 4

Teaching Strategies Gold: Social-Emotional Data

Teaching Strategies GOLD Objective	Students Below	Percentage of Students Below	Students Meeting	Percentage of Students Meeting	Students Above	Percentage of Students Above
1a. Manages Feelings	0	0%	34	100%	0	0%
1b. Follows Limits and Expectations	0	0%	34	100%	0	0%
1c. Takes care of own needs appropriately	5	14.71%	29	85.29%	0	0%
2a. Forms realationships with adults	2	5.88%	32	94.12%	0	0%

2b. Responds to emotional cues	0	0%	32	94.12%	2	5.88%
2c. Interacts with peers	8	23.53%	26	76.47%	0	0%
2d. Makes friends	4	11.76%	29	85.29%	1	2.94%
3a. Balances needs of rights of self and others	1	2.94%	33	97.06%	0	0%
3b. Solves social problems	16	47.06%	18	52.84%	0	0%

Assessment Options

It would be helpful to know what exactly constitutes a minor versus a major behavior incident and why minors aren't reported. It would be beneficial to see the number of minors broken down by grade level. Preschool GOLD data is often not sensitive enough as the color bands span across ages. Data collection around GOLD also varies drastically from one teacher to the next. The plan for the 2023-2024 school year will hopefully provide clarity on how to use common formative assessments across the preschool program.

Action Plan

Strategies

To change the outcome of student social-emotional data, educators will need to be

provided with the appropriate professional development opportunities. All educators, including

classroom paraprofessionals, should participate in the proposed professional learning to engage

in the strategies together. The two classroom teams will work individually on their own

identified priority goals after they have received their TPOT scores. To provide follow-up

support, the preschool teams will engage in coaching for internal and external support.

The literature review identified key areas to consider in creating an action plan. The first

is that the Pyramid Model described by Hemmeter et al. (2016) was that through classroom

observations and coaching cycles, coaches are able to support teaching practices around the

pyramid model, something that can easily be done within the Tipton School District. When

considering how to gather baseline data to determine individual needs, a logical step would be to

have a TPOT done in each classroom, with each teacher using that information to improve their

practice. After the TPOT has been completed, individualized coaching would take place for both

classroom teams coaching has been identified as a successful PD option for teachers to try new

practices and receive feedback (Snyder et al., 2017). With routine or bi-weekly use of practiced-

based coaching that includes shared goals and action planning, focused observation, and

reflection and feedback around an identified set of practices. This will result in beginning to

address social-emotional teaching practices in each classroom.

The interventions should address building a strong preschool program that focuses on the

implementation of pyramid model practices. Another consideration for professional development

would be to connect the current learning they've received around the pyramid model with Early

Childhood PBIS module training. Connecting the learning and implementation will be supported

through the use of TPOTs being taken in both classrooms. It will help to determine individual needs and areas of growth for the preschool program as a whole in the areas of social-emotional support. The results from TPOTs could be used to engage in routine practice-based coaching with the teachers.

Implementation of School Improvement Plan

How Will We Know It Worked?

The two classrooms have identified that social-emotional learning is a place to concentrate instructional efforts as the preschool teachers have currently been working with their Early Education Consultant on a book study around pyramid model practices. The study has spanned over a two-year period as the first year teachers identified they didn't have the opportunity to engage the content as deeply. Already in 2021-2022, the teachers had action plan goals based on the social-emotional learning developmental area. Social-emotional learning is an area that is included for all children birth-5 in the Iowa Early Learning Standards.

This 2023-2024 plan (Figure 5) can begin to be implemented in the first half of the school year. Building a preschool system that supports social-emotional learning will help to support the rest of the building system. The implementation of the plan will be ongoing throughout the year, with a heavy emphasis on routine coaching. The 2023-2024 year will be structured around common learning around pyramid model practices and both individual and team goals. Each teacher and/or classroom goal will be determined through a variety of resources.

Figure 5

2023-2024 Action Plan Timeline

Timeline	Members Involved	What Needs to Happen

May 2023	Author (Early Education Consultant) Elementary Principal	The school improvement plan author shares the proposed school improvement plan with the elementary administrator to gain support and approval to share with the preschool team.
August 2023	Author Preschool team Early Childhood PBIS Consultant Instructional Coach	The author shares the research and data and improvement plan for teaching social-emotional learning.
September 2023	Author Teachers Paraeducators	TPOTs are done in both classrooms as baseline data.
September -December 2023	Author Teachers Paras EC PBIS Consultant Instructional Coach	Early Childhood PBIS module training will take place to provide professional learning.
October 2023-May 2024	Author Teachers Instructional Coach	Ongoing (bi-weekly) coaching will take place. Teachers will receive a

		briefing on what that cycle includes.
December 2023	Author Teachers Instructional coach	Review fall 2023 TS GOLD data and also behavior data in student success.
February 2024	Author Teachers Elementary Principal Instructional Coach EC PBIS consultant Parent	Begin developing a leadership team that determines the program expectations and begins to form a leadership team.
March 2024	Author Teachers Instructional coach	Review of winter 22-23 TS GOLD and also review behavior data in student success.
May 2024	Teachers Coach	TPOTs are completed to determine growth and next steps for the 2024-2025 school year.

The plan includes a lot of collaboration between the district and the Area Education

Agency. One important consideration for implementation is to also find out what the current

state is of the district program implementation of Leader in Me. Leader in Me was to be

implemented in the 2021-2022 school year at Tipton, but with a new preschool team,

implementing that program was not identified as a priority by the previous principal. With the

development of a Preschool leadership team, the team could easily make connections between

Leader in Me and the Pyramid Model, thus meetng the needs of the building and the preschool

program.

Resources

The preschool teachers would each have a Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT)

done in the classrooms. The TPOT can be done to support the effective implementation of the

proven PBIS-based Pyramid model and promote social-emotional competence in young children.

It would also be used to implement strategies, compare implementation across classrooms, and

guide coaching efforts (Hemmeter et al., 2013). The tool would specifically provide

opportunities for individual coaching with the possibility of team coaching if the teachers both

had similar scoring areas on their TPOT.

Additional resources crucial to training are the newly updated Pyramid Modules. There

are six modules that only the early childhood PBIS consultant will be trained on before the start

of the school year. Along with the Pyramid Modules and TPOT scores, there is the Pyramid

Model Implementation Checklist (PMIC). The PMIC measures teachers' use of nurturing and

responsive relationships, high-quality supportive environments, teaching social-emotional skills,

and addressing challenging behaviors (National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations, 2023).

Responsibilities

The classroom teachers, principal, and instructional coach will work with staff from

Grant Wood AEA. The AEA staff will be the early childhood PBIS consultant and the early

education consultant. The early education consultant is trained to complete TPOTs in preschool

classrooms. The EC PBIS consultant will be responsible for providing module training. The Early Education Consultant and the instructional coach can work together to support the implementation of individual action plans through practice-based coaching. The consultant or coach will complete two coaching cycles per classroom each month to allow teachers time to implement new content that will be ongoing throughout the school year.

Once the teachers have started to build their knowledge of their social-emotional instructional system, they will create a leadership team, which often includes an administrator, teacher, coach, behavior specialist, family member, and a data coordinator. The teachers can also use the PMIC with their team to self-monitor throughout the year. The teaching teams would then need to collaborate with each other in order to make plans and changes as needed. The coach will work to support the teachers and teams as needed.

The principal will work with the consultant to determine the current state of the preschool program. There may be additional data that was not used in this current plan. The consultant will share a coaching agreement that identifies the roles of the principal, the teacher, and the consultant/coach. The action plan will also be shared with the principal on which to base feedback if doing a walk-through.

The instructional coach will learn alongside the classroom teachers as that individual does not have an early childhood background. The instructional coach and the AEA consultant will collaborate to use practice-based coaching in both preschool classrooms. The coach will also be expected to sign a coaching agreement that states the role of the coach in supporting the teacher. As the coach becomes more comfortable with the content and the coaching model, the consultant may shift some of the responsibilities over to the district as we want to build internal capacity.

The parents and students would be responsible for knowing the identified classroom

expectations. The teachers will be responsible for sharing the social-emotional skills that

students are learning in parent communication whether that be newsletters, apps, or

communication boards at school. The students will begin to use social skills during independent

learning times. The teacher will clearly identify a reinforcement system so the students know

they are working toward something as individuals and as a whole class.

Monitoring Success and Failures

The implementation of pyramid model practices is designed to improve social-emotional

outcomes at Tipton. In order for this initiative to be successful, there must be a collaboration

among the building principal, AEA, preschool teachers and paraeducators, preschool families,

and students. The coaches both external and internal will meet with the leadership team to

determine the current state, analyze data, and make future plans. Teachers specifically will

include the practices in their social-emotional teaching and can monitor progress with their

identified social-emotional standards during peer learning communities.

During the school year, TPOTs will be given to determine a baseline. A coaching cycle

that is complete with reflection and feedback will also be completed based on the individual

teacher's needs. Other guiding resources to support adult learning and implementation are the

pyramid model checklist from the book study and the pyramid model implementation checklists.

Another success benchmark will be when the preschool program identifies a common language

and expectations of the learners and students begin to follow the expectations with limited

redirections.

In addition to building teacher capacity around the pyramid model, the teachers along

with the rest of the leadership team will engage in monthly data conversations (National Center

for Pyramid Model Innovations, 2022a). The data sources can include Teaching Strategies

GOLD, behavior incident reports, and kindergarten- fourth grade building data. In looking at the

data, the teachers can then plan for individual student needs and interventions. Building a solid

system that connects instruction and assessment in the area of social-emotional learning will

benefit the teachers and the preschool students.

Potential Barriers and Challenges

Potential barriers and challenges could be that the administration decides not to

implement this plan due to possible staff turnover. An additional barrier could be that the

consultant who would lead the training may not be able to attend due to being the only

consultant, with a focus on building cohorts rather than providing individual training. Providing

individualized professional development can be a downfall for the trainer because she might

want to hit a larger target audience than two teachers at a time. Many of the surrounding districts

have Wednesday as a non-preschool day and can attend professional learning at a centralized

location with teachers from other schools.

The Tipton district is unique in that it has a 1:00 pm dismissal each day, which provides

some flexibility for scheduling professional learning time. The remaining afternoon time is,

however, a bit unpredictable due to teachers scheduling IEP meetings or meetings with other

consultants. Another barrier is that if the school is short on preschool associates, the teachers will

need to be present in the wrap-care room to maintain the appropriate child-teacher ratio. Along

with having only the afternoon off, module training may take a while to complete if broken down

into two-hour professional learning sessions.

Another barrier that could arise is if the teachers don't take ownership in the plan or the

content being delivered. It will be important to clearly identify the roles and expectations of

teachers and coaches. One consideration that may be beneficial is the use of a coaching

agreement, which can eliminate some confusion about who is doing what and when. Along with

buy-in, the actual updating and implementing of action plans by teachers is important as the

coach wants to have a focused observation around the action plan items.

Conclusion

This school improvement plan is a year-long process to improve the quality of

implementation of the Pyramid Model in the Tipton Elementary preschool classrooms. School

leaders can work to provide educators with content that is specific to social-emotional learning

along with coaching (Hemmeter et al., 2016). Some of the supporting tools that can be used are

the TPOT, Pyramid Model Implementation Checklists, and checklists from the Unpacking the

Pyramid Model book. These tools can support the fidelity of implementation and provide

baseline and growth data to determine the implementation of practices. The coaches will use the

data and plan individualized learning to help support the research-to-practice gap (Snyder et al.,

2018). The plan will also support teachers in the work they've done around identifying Iowa

Early Learning Standards in the area of social-emotional learning. The standards will help to

support the team and determine which professional development and coaching will specifically

relate to the implementation of social-emotional teaching (Snyder et al., 2017).

The results of this plan will hopefully provide a positive impact on teachers and students

at Tipton Elementary in developing positive child-to-child relationships and child-to-teacher

relationships. The plan will be monitored and reviewed at monthly team meetings. The team will

also keep track of the relation to TSG social-emotional data and the corresponding behaviors

found on the Iowa Department of Education Student Success portal. The goal will be that by the

end of the 2023-2024 school year, there is an established leadership team and monthly meeting dates set for the following year (Fox et al., 2021).

The identified coach(es) should also use a coaching log to ensure they are fulfilling their duties routinely and providing one-on-one coaching to support their practices (Brock and Beaman-Diglia, 2018). The teachers and the administrator will provide feedback through surveys about how they feel coaching has impacted practice and suggestions for future coaching sessions. As a result of the implementation plan, preschoolers with support from their teachers and families will have more opportunities to develop strong friendship skills and problem-solving skills, resulting in fewer occurrences of challenging behavior. The data provided around social-emotional and behavior around interactions with peers will continue to be routinely monitored. Empowering teachers to use their data around social-emotional areas will then hopefully drive teacher instruction and result in more positive student outcomes.

This school improvement plan focuses on the impact of using practice-based coaching around an identified set of social-emotional practices. The use of evidence-based practices with the support of coaching will improve teacher fidelity of implementation. By providing opportunities for family input on the leadership team, the preschool program will be more connected to families and have more bi-directional communication. By providing teachers with individualized learning opportunities, the preschool program at Tipton Elementary will close in on the research-to-practice gap.

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