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The Impact of Morning Meetings on Student Teacher Relationships, Peer Relationships, and Student Achievement

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**The Impact of Morning Meetings
on Student Teacher Relationships, Peer Relationships, and Student Achievement**

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Capstone Project: A School Improvement Plan

Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa

Abstract

Many students today need social-emotional supports in place to have academic success. Morning Meetings are one way to provide social-emotional support. This elementary school improvement plan demonstrates a need for teachers to implement daily Morning Meetings with fidelity in their classrooms. These Morning Meetings will help create a positive learning environment for students to build trusting relationships with their teacher and peers. Students are likely to feel increased levels of safety, personal value, and support in their classrooms. Creating a classroom community using Morning Meetings will cause students to be more motivated to learn, experience more academic success, and have fewer behaviors in the classroom.

Keywords: Morning Meetings, academic achievement, social-emotional learning, fidelity, implementation, relationships

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The Impact of Morning Meetings on Student Teacher Relationships, Peer Relationships, and Student Achievement

Today classroom teachers everywhere are facing problems with student behaviors, students who do not care about their academics, less parent involvement, and students who are not engaged or wanting to focus. On top of this, teachers have more pressure than ever to have students with good test scores and meeting state standards. Many people remember loving school as a child. They remember playing fun games, creating crafts, playing with friends, and other fun activities. Today many students begin hating school as early as the primary grades because of all the academic stressors put on students. All this pressure on academics has taken away from the teacher-student and peer relationships and opportunities for students to learn and practice social-emotional skills.

If students have a close relationship with a teacher, they are more willing to participate in class because they feel safe, listened to, valued, and respected. The students that have conflict with teachers dread going to their class each day and will do anything just to pass the class. To show the importance of relationships, Brenda Morrison (2004) created a hierarchy of restorative responses pyramid using three tiers: the bottom tier as universal-reaffirming relationships through developing social and emotional skills, the middle tier as targeted-repairing relationships, and the top tier as intensive-rebuilding relationships. According to Morrison's pyramid (2004), the premise of Restorative Practices and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is that relationships matter: "The more work we invest in the bottom two tiers, the less there will be to do at the top tier and the more effective the top tier work will be when it is necessary" (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018, p. 118).

The purpose of this school improvement plan is to ensure that students are getting the opportunity to learn and practice social-emotional skills that will help them be successful in their academics and their future. One way for students to learn and practice SEL is to have teachers implement daily Morning Meetings into the curriculum. Through Morning Meetings, teachers model behaviors and help students practice social skills such as how to cooperate with others, actively listen, problem-solve issues, show empathy, be respectful to everyone, disagree respectfully, use critical thinking skills, build a sense of community, and hold meaningful discussions.

Research for this literature review was drawn from Google Scholar and Northwestern College's DeWitt library. The articles used are from the past ten years. While a few articles discuss middle school and high school students using SEL, the main focus is elementary grades. The scope of research focuses on teacher-student relationships, peer relationships, mental health issues, and community-building in the classroom affects academic achievement and behaviors in students. Research results demonstrate a need for intervention and SEL programs, such as using Morning Meetings.

The hope is if teachers implement Morning Meetings with fidelity into their daily curriculum schedules, students will have higher academic achievement and fewer behavior issues in the classroom. First, teachers will receive professional development training on SEL and Morning Meetings. Teachers will learn to use Morning Meetings with fidelity based on research, including *The Morning Meeting Book* by Roxann Kriete and Carol Davis. According to Morrison et al. (2019), the success of social-emotional interventions depends on how programs are implemented. For Morning Meetings to be effective, teachers cannot just take the professional development training. It is essential that teachers plan and put in the work needed to implement

the meetings with fidelity each day. Teachers and students must build trusting relationships and a sense of community where all students feel safe, valued, and respected for students to be successful.

Review of the Literature

Teacher and Student Training Needed on SEL Interventions

Schools are beginning to realize that social-emotional skills are just as, if not more, important than academic skills for students. Administrators, teachers, and students need training on how to handle SEL in the classroom. In the study by Anyon et al. (2016), 24 teachers, 3 administrators, 3 social work interns, and their K-8 student population were given the whole-school intervention called Responsive Classroom (RC) to help increase staff's capacity to maintain and support social, emotional, and academic outcomes for disadvantaged students. There were three core RC practices that were implemented in classrooms: Morning Meeting, Teacher Language, and Logical Consequences. Anyon et. al. (2016) writes, "Emerging evidence suggests that schoolwide and teacher-focused interventions are among the most effective approaches for improving student behavioral outcomes" (p. 81).

According to Anyon et al. (2016), three factors influenced whether RC practices were implemented with fidelity. The first factor was compatibility with staff members' beliefs about behavior changes and management. All teachers found that Morning Meetings were a good fit to build relationship with students, but some teachers thought it took away from real academic learning time. The second factor was principal and teacher buy-in to the program. There was less buy-in from middle school teachers versus elementary teachers; therefore, lower implementation of RC occurred in middle school classrooms. The third factor was how much intervention support systems were in place, such as training and technical assistance to teachers. There was a

limited amount of professional development given to teachers. All these findings indicate that when implementing a whole-school intervention program, there is a need for different models of professional development for different grade levels. Each grade level needs to learn different skills because they are teaching students with different needs.

Similar findings were discovered by Morrison et al. (2019) when researching the implementation of the Sanford Harmony social and emotional learning (SEL) program in five elementary schools in western United States. In this study, principals, teachers, and roughly 3,000 students implemented the SEL program and experienced its benefits for students and school climate. The researchers found that there was variation from teacher to teacher in the implementation of the program. While teachers saw value in the program and school climate improvement, teachers felt as if they were not trained adequately on the program. Therefore, Morrison et al. (2019) concluded, “Implementation fidelity is a critical component in ensuring that SEL programs function how they are intended. Using evidence based SEL interventions is not enough to ensure positive outcomes. The success of an intervention on children’s social emotional competence depends on how it is implemented” (p. 18). In other words, teachers need to be trained on how to implement SEL programs, including Morning Meetings, with fidelity for them to be successful for students.

Along with teachers needing training for SEL programs, students need to be taught and given the time to practice social emotional skills to be successful in school. In Shala (2013), 96 children from Pristine, Kosovo were followed to determine whether social-emotional experiences in preschool years had an impact on their academic success in later elementary years. According to the findings, preschool children who had positive quality social-emotional experiences with their teachers and peers showed significantly greater social and emotional

development. The social and emotional skills that developed included interaction with those around, recognizing and expressing emotions properly, and the ability to self-regulate emotions. The greater social and emotional development was a predictive value for academic success in first, second, and third grades. The findings indicates that students need to experience positive social-emotional experiences to learn better. Shala (2013) reports, “Social-emotional skill deficits impact a student’s academic performance and remain a sometimes-overlooked characteristic of young children’s transition to grade school” (p. 787). In other words, adults need to make sure that young children are developing their social-emotional skills early for later academic success.

Related findings come from MacCann et al. (2019), where meta-analysis of multiple studies showed how emotional intelligence (EI) highly correlates with academic performance. MacCann et al (2019) says, “EI is an important skill for students to develop, both for their future wellbeing as well as their future workplace success” (p. 150). The findings of the study showed that when students have knowledge about the causes and consequences of emotions, vocabulary of emotion words, and ways to manage emotional situations they have greater academic success. Other findings were how SEL programs are more effective when there is adequate time allowed for skill development, a step-by-step approach, learning goals, and teacher run programs. In other words, social-emotional learning cannot be left to chance; it needs to be taught.

Student-Teacher and Peer Relationships Matter

After training teachers to implement SEL programs, schools recognize how much relationships matter and how relationships need to come first to create a school community where students feel safe, respected, and ready to learn. Teachers’ pedagogy affects teacher-student relationships. In a study completed by Amerstorfer & Frein von Münster-Kistner (2021),

34 students and three English teachers from Austria were part of a problem-based learning classroom to see if this approach had more positive effects on student academic achievement compared to lecture-type teaching. The most important finding was that students had higher academic achievements when teachers showed students respect and did not treat students as if they were superior to them. Students found that problem-based learning increased their engagement because they felt as if they were more in charge and had a say in their learning. Students perceived their teachers as role models if the teachers came across as trustworthy, listened without judgment, demonstrated a genuine interest in students, welcomed diversity, and had open mindful communication. “Students who perceive their teachers as credible and caring are more academically engaged, including a higher willingness to take risks and a higher level of persistence when faced with failure,” (Amerstorfer & Freiin von Münster-Kistner, 2021, p. 3). To put it another way, students who feel as if they have a teacher to turn to for academic and personal needs will be more willing to participate in school and therefore have better academic achievement.

In addition, a three-year study performed by Miller-Lewis et al. (2014) assessed 460 Australian children ages 4-6 on student-teacher relationship quality with the Student Teacher Relationship Scale. Findings noted that having an early intervention of high-quality student-teacher relationships and prevention strategies, starting in preschool and students’ transition into formal schooling, helped reduce mental health issues in students during the early years of school. Curtailing mental health issues early on is critical because “mental health problems in the early years often persist into later childhood and adulthood, and are associated with adverse educational, psychosocial, and health outcomes in adulthood,” (Miller-Lewis et al., 2014, p. 2).

To reiterate, reducing mental health issues as early as preschool will reduce students with behavior issues, therefore giving students a more positive school experience and a better future.

Furthermore, a study done in many different schools by Hulvershorn & Mulholland (2018) showed that in many different schools when restorative practices were implemented with social-emotional learning, students developed skills that included kindness, empathy, relationship skills, decision-making, self-management, communication, and more. The study revealed how restorative practices create a positive school climate versus zero-tolerance policies. “Zero tolerance policies have contributed to the school-to-prison pipeline. Such policies do not work because the root cause of the misbehavior is not addressed,” (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018, 112). The study showed how proactive circles were a way for teachers and students to build relationships. The circles were ways for teachers to model and show students how to handle their emotions and feelings. In other words, teachers having zero-tolerance policies and consequences, such as suspensions, will not help students succeed. Students need positive relationships and a positive learning environment to better themselves.

Likewise, a positive learning environment for students includes positive relationships between students and their peers. In a study completed by Alzahrani et al. (2019), researchers reviewed many studies on the impact of social and emotional competence on children’s academic achievement and behavioral skills. Researchers found that social-emotional skills are related to communication skills and the ability to connect with others. Findings stated that children learn social-emotional skills from interacting with their teachers and peers in school. “Communication between peers is just as important as communication with teachers,” (Alzahrani et al., 2019, p. 143). The research indicated how positive development of these social and emotional skills can lead to better school achievement, overall well-being, and the ability to

manage good behaviors. Relationships matter for academic achievement and students' future success.

Student Feelings and Attitudes Affect Student Learning

Students and teachers must believe in what they are doing and have a positive attitude for any situation to be effective. Boyd & Edmiston (2021) tested whether introducing Morning Meetings every day in a second grade and third grade classroom influenced social practices and increased academic success for students. Findings showed that both classrooms had an increase in student involvement and academic success after Morning Meetings were introduced. Students and teachers learned to trust one another, cooperate with one another, and work together to complete assignments. Students and teachers believed that everyone counted, everyone had worth, everyone was equal, and everyone was needed to attain a classroom community. "School is a miniature society, so a core democratic aim of education must be to socialize young people into learning how to live together in community. Democratic classroom life should not be presented as an idea but rather experienced as a humanizing reality," (Boyd & Edmiston, 2021, p. 2). Moreover, Morning Meetings built trust, gave an opportunity for students to have fun together, have open communication, have respect for one another, and feel safe and heard. All these things from Morning Meetings created "buy-in" from kids and therefore had a positive effect on students wanting to learn.

In a related study by Kwon et al. (2014), 342 third, fourth, and fifth grade students and their teachers took questionnaires, peer nominations, and teacher rating scales to determine if children's beliefs about the importance of social skills had a positive effect on their school attitude and academics. The results of the research showed that children's attitudes and beliefs towards social skills had a positive impact on their social behavior and school adjustment and

were negatively associated with aggression. When comparing genders, girls were found to have more advanced social functioning than boys. These findings can be useful to teachers because by being able to identify students' beliefs about social skills, teachers can assess and plan interventions to help students who are at-risk and dislike school. Furthermore, if teachers know how students feel about social skills and school, they can work with that student to get them what they need to feel positive and be successful in school.

In connection with student feelings and attitudes, Tran (2014) studied 110 first-year primary education Vietnamese students were studied over an eight-week period to see if cooperative learning had positive effects on achievement and knowledge retention. The students were split into two groups of 55: one experimental group who used cooperative learning and one control group who used lecture-based teaching. Findings revealed a large difference in means when comparing students who were taught to learn together compared to students who learned through lecture-based teaching. The students who learned together had much greater academic achievement.

Tran (2014) states, "If basic elements of cooperative learning are included in cooperative learning groups, students achieve better, demonstrate superior learning skills, and experience more positive relationships among group members, and between student and teacher, and more positive self-esteem and attitudes toward the subject area," (p. 132). Students must get to know each other and trust one another, learn to communicate, accept, and support one another, and learn to resolve conflicts if they arise. In other words, students must learn to "swim together" in group learning activities to achieve higher academic achievement and retain the knowledge they learn.

Using Different SEL Programs to Improve Student Academics

There are many social-emotional learning (SEL) programs available for schools to use. Many studies have been performed to help schools find what programs are beneficial for students and which ones are not. Schools need to find the best SEL programs that best fit the distinctive needs of their student community.

Albrecht & Brunner (2019) revealed that implementing Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) in conjunction with the Second Step Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum had a positive effect on 235 Pre-K-5th grade students in a Kansas elementary school. Findings showed a decline in office discipline referrals, in-school suspensions, and out-of-school suspensions. Using “punitive discipline can trigger backlash from students, making behaviors worse. Proactive programs that promote healthy, productive, and safe learning environments show increases in graduation rates, achievement scores, and life outcomes,” (Albrecht & Brunner, 2019, p. 28). Furthermore, traditional discipline of the past worked only as a “band-aid” for student behavior issues. It will benefit students if people stop thinking about what is wrong with these students with behavior issues, to instead asking what happened to these students to make them this way; how can we help them?

In a related study on behavior by Kilgus et al. (2017), 1058 students from a suburban public school district in the northeastern United States were given SAEBRS (teacher rating scale on student behaviors), Adaptative Math, and Adaptive Reading assessments to predict academic achievement. Findings indicated that using SAEBRS composite scale and all three subscales predicted academic performance for students. “Children’s risk for behavioral problems influences cognitive development and academic achievement,” (Kilgus et al., 2017, p. 247). Moreover, schools that screen for behavior risks can detect behavior barriers to students’ academic success and can put interventions in place where needed.

In a different study on behavior interventions done by Bavarian et al. (2013), 1170 students from seven Chicago public schools had the Positive Action, a social-emotional and character development (SECD) program implemented in their schools. This six-year study used student self-reports, teacher ratings of students, and state-wide test (ISAT) scores as indicators of whether the Positive Action program was having a positive effect on students' educational outcomes. The findings showed that the intervention has a positive effect on absenteeism, students had greater growth in motivation and ability to complete schoolwork, and there was favorable growth in students' ISAT scores in reading and math. "There is an increasing need to demonstrate the impact that multifaceted prevention programs can have on academic performance and student and community wellness," (Bavarian et al., 2013, p. 778).

Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2014) conducted a study on how Responsive Classrooms (RC) help students with academic achievement. RC is where teachers create caring, respectful classroom environments that are academically engaging and well-managed. The teachers use different strategies to support not only students' academics, but their social and self-regulatory skills as well. The study was completed on 2904 children in second through fifth grade in 24 elementary classrooms. Using classroom observations, teacher questionnaires, and academic tests, findings showed that only when teachers used Responsive Classroom practices with fidelity did students show achievement gains. Additionally, the RC approach is how to teach rather than what to teach. It is just as important how teachers teach and relate to students as is what subject they are teaching.

Dougherty & Sharkey (2017) looked at whether the Reconnecting Youth (RY) dropout prevention program influenced student achievement and provided positive student outcomes. The study was performed on 110 middle and high school students in Southern California for one

year. The findings showed that RY had an association with higher levels of GPA but did not predict later levels of academic achievement for all students. RY was restricted in its scope because it did not expand to family and community factors, which have been known to influence dropout rates along with teacher and peer relationships. “Numerous family and school factors have protective effects on the likelihood of students dropping out of high school, including two-parent, biological families; warm, supportive families; schools with ample resources; schools with positive climate; and experienced, supportive, high-quality teachers,” (Dougherty & Sharkey, 2017, p. 29). In other words, there are so many factors that influence a student’s academic achievement.

While all these studies have supported social-emotional learning and its positive effects on academics, there is one study that showed school connectedness failed to predict later academic achievement. Panayiotou et al.’s (2019) study on 1626 students from 45 state-maintained elementary schools in Northwest England used self-report Social Skills Improvement System-Social Emotional Learning, a 4-item School Environment subscale of the Kidscreen-27, a 20-item teacher informant-report version of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, and Kay Stage 2 national curriculum test scores in mathematics, reading, and writing.

Findings showed that mental health difficulties were found to be the only component to statistically predict later academic achievement. The study suggests the need for more studies that address all components of SEL and how they interact over a long period of time. Most studies do not include all factors of SEL and scan short periods of time. “The majority of SEL studies focus on behavioral outcomes and relatively few address the impact of SEL on academic achievement (around 2-10% of the studies),” (Panayiotou et al., 2019, p. 196).

There is insufficient evidence that Morning Meetings have a big impact and should be used along with other SEL programs to help students achieve greater relationships with teachers and peers and gain higher academic achievement. Therefore, there is a need for a school improvement plan, such as this one for my current elementary school, to study the effects of using Morning Meetings with fidelity.

School Profile

According to the 2020 U.S. Census, Mount Pleasant has a population of 8, 936 and is the 47th largest city in Iowa (World Population Review, 2023). Out of the total population, 82.86% is white and 89.51% of households speak only English (World Population Review, 2023). Mount Pleasant has an overall poverty rate of 13.53%, with the race most likely to be in poverty being reported as multiple (World Population Review, 2023).

Mount Pleasant has a school district with four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. According to The Mount Pleasant Community School District (2022), “the mission of the Mount Pleasant Community School District is to empower students to achieve without limits.” The Mount Pleasant Community School (2022) states that they “provide pathways for future success; students will have the ability to communicate, problem solve, and be skilled with technology in a safe, secure, and nurturing environment where all members of the learning community demonstrate respect, compassion, and acceptance. Students learn differently and will be engaged in learning experiences that meet their individual needs. The needs of each student will be met so they can grow physically, emotionally, and intellectually. Quality education is a shared responsibility that is achieved through meaningful collaboration among staff, students, families, and community members. Mount Pleasant students will receive a high-

quality educational experience. Lastly, all students can learn when provided with proper support, motivation, and guidance.”

According to the Mount Pleasant Community School District (2022), the vision statement for the district is that the “Mount Pleasant Community School District will create an environment dedicated to empowering all students to achieve individual excellence.” The Mount Pleasant Community School District (2022) states that “the vision will be supported by state-of-the-art facilities, community partnerships, financial stability, teaching, and learning. Recruitment and retention/professional development will be completed through innovation & research, advanced technology, a healthy nutritional program, and quality transportation. Student learning & opportunities will be provided through academic programs and clubs.”

Van Allen Elementary School is one of the four elementary schools of the Mount Pleasant Community School District. As of the year 2022, Van Allen had 244 students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. Each grade level in the building has two sections. The school building houses preschool for the district, but their student numbers are not included.

According to *Iowa School Performance Profiles (2022)*, out of the 244 students at Van Allen, 71% are white, 15.6% Hispanic, 5.7% Multiracial, 5.3% African American, and 1.6% Asian. Male students compose 48.8% of students, and 51.2% are female. The Low Socio-Economic Status (Free Reduced Lunch) is 63.1%. Students on IEPs are 16%, and 2.5% are English Language Learners.

In the past few years, Van Allen has shown consistent improvement in students’ academic performance. In 2022, Van Allen had an overall performance as acceptable with 53.48 out of 100, which is comparable to the state average of 54.65 (*Iowa School Performance Profiles, 2022*). With this score, the school met the comprehensive status and target status and

does not require ESSA support. Grades 3-5 students completing the Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP) reported language arts and mathematics scores just under the state average of 50 with 48.66 and 47.81, respectively (*Iowa School Performance Profiles, 2022*).

One thing that Van Allen is known for is its parent involvement and commitment to what is best for the students and staff. There are many ways that parents are involved with school functions. One way is through Van Allen's wonderful PTA, a group of parents who volunteer in different ways to help improve the school. In the 2022-2023 school year, the PTA parents volunteered to paint the playground blacktop to add games and make it more appealing for students. They volunteered to provide food for teachers during parent-teacher conferences, they made a Christmas Dinner for students at lunchtime complete with lights, music, and decorations. They have decorated bulletin boards in the school to make it welcoming for students.

Another way parents are involved has been through fundraisers. Each year the school holds a Scholastic Book Fair where students can purchase books and other items. A certain percentage of the proceeds are then donated to the school library. Another annual fundraiser is Kids Christmas, where people in the community donate items for students to shop and purchase for their families for Christmas. Parents, teachers, and people in the community donate their time to set up the event, help students shop without their parents, and wrap presents. Proceeds are then given to the school.

Additionally, parents at Van Allen are willing to help those in need. Parents have donated snack food items for classrooms to have during the week. If there is a student who cannot afford milk for snack time, parents or people in the community have donated money for them. Parents have donated school supplies for the classrooms such as Clorox wipes, Germ-X, Kleenex, glue, crayons, and more.

Lastly, parents are always invited into the school to volunteer in classrooms, help with class parties, go on field trips, and attend graduations, music programs, and P.E. field day activities. Many teachers use Infinite Campus, Class Dojo, or Remind to communicate with parents about school happenings. Teachers send home weekly and monthly newsletters to communicate with parents. Parent involvement is key to helping students be successful at Van Allen.

Van Allen believes that every student can be successful. The current learning goal is for all students to show growth toward mastering the Iowa Common Core State Standards. The Mount Pleasant Community School District has moved towards standards-based grading and shares progress reports with parents and guardians four times a year. Teachers communicate students' progress towards standards through parent-teacher conferences held in the fall and spring of each school year.

To help students towards their learning goals, Van Allen provides a variety of different curricula. To teach literacy, the Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) is used. To teach mathematics, iReady is used. Mystery Science is used for the science curriculum. Teach TCI Social Studies is used to teach social studies. Sandford Harmony, Zones of Regulation, and Morning Meetings are used to teach Social-Emotional Behavioral Mental Health (SEBMH). All these curricula are used in grades kindergarten through fifth grade.

Assessments are given throughout the year to help teachers identify which students are progressing towards mastering skills and which need interventions. One assessment is the state mandated FastBridge literacy assessment. This assessment is given three times a year to all students: once in the fall, winter, and spring. FastBridge supplies teachers three times a year with the Social, Academic, and Emotional Behavior Risk Screener (SAEBRS). This screener is filled

out by kindergarten through second-grade teachers in the fall, winter, and spring to screen students' social-emotional well-being. Third through fifth-grade students fill out their own screener. Based on the results, support is put into place for students flagged as needing help. Another assessment given three times a year to kindergarten through fifth grade students is the mathematics iReady diagnostic. Teachers use the results of all these assessments to help understand where student needs are. The results of these assessments are sent to parents and guardians with progress reports and through state-mandated letters.

To help students be successful, the Mount Pleasant School District provides teachers with many professional development opportunities. Full professional development days are planned into the school year for teachers to work on the district's three big rocks: standard-based grading, social-emotional learning, and gradual release of responsibility. Beginning in the Fall of 2023, the district will change its schedule to early outs every Friday to provide teachers with weekly opportunities to work in Professional Learning Communities (PLC) with their grade-level teams. This scheduled time will promote collaboration and consistency in teaching grade levels. Teachers are required to have a personal professional learning plan (PLP) each school year of something they would like to learn more about and improve on as educators. Teachers are required to meet with their principals three times a year to share their PLP progress.

Needs Assessment

The Mount Pleasant School District has many great things in place for students and teachers to be successful, but there is always room for improvement. One area of improvement is student behaviors and student academic achievement. Whereas Van Allen Elementary has been improving in the past few years on student behaviors and academics, there is a need for more

professional development on social-emotional learning and Morning Meetings so teachers can further student progress.

The Mount Pleasant School District (2022) states, “The interests, needs, and welfare of the students are paramount in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the curricular and cocurricular program.” Unfortunately, consistency is something that the Mount Pleasant School district needs to improve. Lack of consistency is due to improper or no training for staff on new curricula that is to be implemented in classrooms.

Current teachers have been given *The Morning Meeting Book* by Roxann Kriete and Carol Davis. Other than that book, there was no further professional development before teachers were told to implement Morning Meetings. Some teachers read the whole book and have been teaching with fidelity to the best of their ability. Other teachers did not read the book and complete Morning Meetings how they think they should look and when it is convenient for them. Staff members cannot be expected to implement Morning Meetings without adequate training for everyone. Training should include teachers, paraprofessionals, and new staff, as each person working in the building is important to students.

Staff members need to be trained on the four components of the Morning Meeting: greeting, sharing, group activity, and morning message. The order of the four components matters. There needs to be teacher responsibilities assigned and student responsibilities assigned to help make the meetings work. Each Morning Meeting requires an established routine for students and purposeful planning in place by the teacher. Teachers must be given opportunities to practice implementing the meetings.

The staff at Van Allen need to recognize how powerful Morning Meetings can be for relationship building and student academic achievement. According to Kriete & Davis (2017),

students who feel connected to school report they like school, feel they belong, have friends at school, and believe their teachers care about them and their learning. Attendance improves along with students' motivation and engagement with learning. Adequate professional development on Morning Meetings can help staff to accomplish relationship building and student academic success.

Data Analysis

Providing teachers consistent professional development on social-emotional learning, including Morning Meetings, is essential for them to understand how to help students with social-emotional issues. It is important to have consistent training across the school because it gives teachers a common goal and focus. Consistency can help boost teachers' confidence knowing they have been trained properly like everyone else.

The Mount Pleasant School District offers many professional development opportunities. However, most of the professional development relates to academics. There is a need for more professional development on social-emotional learning and how to deal with student behaviors. The goal is that by helping students social-emotional needs, student academic achievement will increase.

As of the 2022-2023 school year, Van Allen Elementary had 244 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. To keep track of student behavior data, Van Allen uses the SWISSuite program. This program is a great way to show where and when behaviors are occurring. The program displays whether behaviors were minor or major offenses and who dealt with the issue. By looking at the data, Van Allen's administration and teachers can find patterns of behaviors and know where to put the highest social-emotional learning focus.

Observing the past five years of data, the two locations where most behaviors occur are on the playground at recess and in the classroom. In 2022-2023, there were 140 classroom referrals and 57 playground referrals (SWISSuite, 2023). The bathroom and library were the locations with the fewest referrals, having one each (SWISSuite, 2023). The three highest behavior issues referred to the office were students being defiant with staff (37 referrals), unwanted contact with someone else (19 referrals), and being disrespectful (15 referrals) (SWISSuite, 2023). The behaviors with the fewest referrals were inappropriate affection and theft, both having zero (SWISSuite, 2023). If the students are comfortable being defiant, this data may indicate to staff that students do not feel a connection with them. Morning Meetings would be a great start to build those needed relationships. There needs to be more social-emotional learning taught to students on how to handle their feelings and issues that may arise at recess, too. The data shows that there is no need currently to reteach expectations in the bathroom and library as students are following the rules in those locations.

Looking at grade levels, the fourth grade had the highest referral level at 0.18 referrals per 100 students per day. The grade with the second highest referrals was kindergarten with 0.12 referrals per 100 students per day (SWISSuite, 2023). This data suggests that these two grade levels may need more intervention with social-emotional learning than other grade levels. More resources should be given to these grade levels, especially kindergarten, so they do not have more behavior problems in later years. The grade with the fewest referrals was first grade with 0 (SWISSuite, 2023). The first grade could be seen as a strength for behaviors in the building. It may be helpful for administration to speak with these teachers to see what is working well in their classrooms and then share with other staff.

Upon more examination of the data, the days that students were referred to the office the most were Mondays and Tuesdays, both with totals of 26% referrals (SWISSuite, 2023). The time of day when most referrals were happening was between eight and nine o'clock in the morning with 18% (SWISSuite, 2023). This data shows how behaviors are developing right away in the morning, along with the beginning of the week on Mondays and Tuesdays. The timing could indicate that students had a rough weekend or night at home. Some students may not have had what they needed, had no stability, or experienced something traumatic while not at school. Kriete & Davis (2017) write, "Students' learning begins the second they walk through the doors of the building. Children notice whether they are greeted warmly or overlooked, whether the classroom feels chaotic and unpredictable or ordered and comforting" (p. 12).

Morning Meetings are a great way to start a student's day, letting them talk about anything they need or want to. Starting the day with a Morning Meeting with everyone together being welcoming, actively listening, and caring can set the pace and attitude for the day. It says everyone counts and our classroom is a place of respect. The Morning Meeting could be a place where students learn how to deal with their feelings appropriately so that the rest of their day is more productive and positive.

One reason to help improve student behavior issues using Morning Meetings is the hope that social-emotional wellness will help improve academic achievement. Van Allen screened 98% of students using FASTBridge literacy assessments. Out of the 98% screened, 56 % are meeting grade level benchmarks (*Panorama ed, 2023*). Van Allen screened 99% of students using the iReady Mathematics Diagnostic. Out of the 99% screened, only 33% were meeting grade level benchmarks (*Panorama ed, 2023*). This data shows that a strength of Van Allen is

that most students are being screened for academics. The weakness is that a lot of students are not meeting benchmarks and need interventions to help achieve the learning goals they need.

Other assessments that could be used to acquire data for Van Allen would be staff and student surveys. Staff could be given surveys on how they are implementing Morning Meetings or any social-emotional learning in their classrooms. Staff could be asked what is supportive or challenging for implementing Morning Meetings with fidelity. Students could be given surveys on how they feel about Morning Meetings, their relationships with peers and teachers, and how staff can make Van Allen a place where students want to come each day. Students could be asked why they think behavior issues are arising in the mornings, at recess, and in the classroom. This information could be used to further look for patterns at Van Allen. Another useful assessment that could be used is observations done by administration and teachers during Morning Meetings. Administration and teachers could visit classrooms in the building to take notes on what is working and not working well with students. The school could then come together to share the data and ideas on how they can improve.

Action Plan

Implementing Morning Meetings can be a daunting task for teachers if they do not understand what the meetings are, how to implement them with fidelity, and how they can positively affect students. Teachers are like students: they need to know the “why” they are doing something to be invested. According to Kriete & Davis (2017), there are things teachers can do to help with the transition of Morning Meetings in their classrooms. The earlier teachers start implementing the meetings, the earlier positive changes can happen to their students.

Giving teachers the resources and training needed to understand SEL is the first step to implementing Morning Meetings with fidelity in the classrooms. Anyon et al. (2016) stated how

there is greater program fidelity in school settings when there has been quality training, consultation, and coaching provided. Van Allen Elementary needs consistent training on Morning Meetings, so every staff member hears the same message and is on the same page regarding standard implementation. Training and teacher accountability will ensure more buy-in from the staff.

The first part of the action plan will be a book study training provided for all staff. The staff will follow a timeline to read and complete *The Morning Meeting Book*. Staff meetings will be planned every other week after school as a time when discussions will occur to help everyone understand expectations and to share ideas on how Morning Meetings can be successful for students.

After staff completes the book study, teachers will be expected to start planning and implementing the Morning Meetings into their classrooms. For accountability, staff will record themselves implementing Morning Meetings and submit the video to the principal. Additionally, the principal or a district coach will observe teachers in person during their Morning Meetings. The observations will need to be completed at least one time per quarter. The principal and coaches will give written feedback on what is going well and how the teachers could improve.

The next step in the action plan will be for teachers to make a Google Document where they share their ideas on how they have been implementing the four components of the Morning Meeting—greeting, sharing, group activity, and morning message. Teachers learn so much from collaborating and sharing what works in their classrooms with one another. According to Boyd & Edmiston (2021), teachers and students should get every opportunity to display their passions and skills in personal ways or, in other words, show their stuff.

The next step in the action plan will be an end-of-the-year staff survey asking teachers what went well and what needs improvement with implementing Morning Meetings. Part of the survey will include if the staff has seen improvements in student attitudes, relationships, and academic engagement. Staff will be asked what further training they need to help them feel more comfortable executing Morning Meetings and building classroom communities. As mentioned by Cristóvão et al. (2017), teachers' well-being and beliefs are directly related to whether SEL programs are successful. After the survey is given, the administration will evaluate if more professional development is needed for the next school year.

Last in the action plan will be student input. There will be an end-of-the-year survey that students will complete about the Morning Meetings. Students will be asked how they think the meetings went, what were effective parts of the meetings for them, ways the meetings could improve, and if they feel more connected to their teachers and classmates. Part of the survey will be if students believe they have a safe and welcoming classroom environment where they can learn best. It is beneficial for teachers to know if students feel more engaged in school. If students do not feel engaged, they can share what would help make school better for them. As indicated by Amerstorfer & Freiin von Münster-Kistner (2021), teachers have the position where they can create a motivating learning environment where students are engaged. The best way to find out what engages students and helps them learn is to ask students themselves.

When all these action plan steps are in place for at least one year, Van Allen teachers and administration can look at behavior data using the SWISSuite program to observe if fewer behaviors are occurring, including the number one behavior of defiance. Teachers and administration can look at academic scores using FastBridge for literacy and iReady for mathematics to see if student scores improved. If there are improvements, it could be an

indication that Morning Meetings are having a positive effect on student-teacher relationships, peer relationships, and academic engagement and performance.

Implementation of School Improvement Plan

The first step in the school improvement plan for implementing the Morning Meetings is to ensure that all staff at Van Allen Elementary have been given and read *The Morning Meeting Book*. This book was given to teachers a couple of years ago. Some teachers read the book, while others did not. There have been a lot of staff changes in the past couple of years as well. This is why it is important that there is consistency, and that all staff understand Morning Meetings.

The following book study schedule for the 2023-2024 school year will be given to staff, including paraprofessionals, special education teachers, specials teachers, and intervention teachers. Staff needs to read the book, as everyone has a role to be a positive influence on students and to be a part of the meetings. The goal is for everyone to have read *The Morning Meeting Book* by the end of the first quarter. Staff meetings are held on the second and fourth Wednesday of each month. At these meetings, staff will discuss the chapters that have been read. They will be directed to bring any positives, negatives, and questions they might have about the book.

Book Study Schedule

Week	Book Chapter	Discussions
September 4- 8	Chapter 1	
September 11-15	Chapter 2	Discuss Chapters 1, 2 Staff Meeting September 13

September 18-22	Chapter 3	
September 25-29	Chapter 4	Discuss Chapters 3, 4 Staff Meeting September 27
October 2-6	Chapter 5	
October 9-13	Chapter 6	Discuss Chapters 5, 6 Staff Meeting October 11
October 16-20	Chapter 7	
October 23-27 (27th End of 1st Quarter)	Finish reading if have not done so. Write down any positives, negatives, or any questions you might have about the book.	Discuss Chapter 7 and the book as a whole Staff Meeting October 25

Components of Morning Meeting

After Van Allen staff have read *The Morning Meeting Book* and had time to discuss their responses, the next step is for teachers to plan and practice the components that go into a Morning Meeting. The first part is to plan a routine schedule for when to hold the meetings every day. For best results, it is recommended that the meetings take place right away in the morning. Teachers should plan on the meetings being not less than twenty minutes as the emotional and

academic goals will be difficult to meet. Furthermore, meetings should not be more than thirty minutes as students are more likely to become restless and lose interest. If a class needs to build stamina, teachers can begin with shorter meetings and work their way up to longer ones.

Teachers then need to plan where the meeting will take place. There needs to be enough room for all students to sit in a circle and be able to see and hear one another.

Before teachers begin Morning Meetings, they should inform their students of what is going to be happening at the beginning of each school day. Students thrive on familiarity, predictability, and consistency, so it is important that students know the meetings will happen each morning. It would be beneficial for teachers to write a letter to parents and guardians explaining the Morning Meeting process and its benefits to students. When parents know the important learning that is being provided to their children, this knowledge can prompt conversations when students go home and share their experiences.

After teachers have introduced the plan for Morning Meetings to students, teachers and students need to learn and understand their responsibilities to help make the meetings go smoothly. Kriete and Davis (2017) list teachers' responsibilities for implementing Morning Meetings. Teachers need to make sure there is enough space so all students and staff in the classroom can participate. Teachers need to act as timekeepers and redirect anyone who needs it. Teachers need to plan a meeting that supports students' social-emotional learning and academics. Teachers are role models and need to use positive language. Teachers need to make sure everyone is participating, being respectful, and being greeted.

Kriete & Davis (2017) list students' responsibilities for implementing Morning Meetings to include getting to the meetings on time and forming a circle safely. Students need to participate fully by actively listening and responding to classmates respectfully. Students need to

interact with several students, not the same students each day. Students need to know when the Morning Meeting is over so they can transition to the next activity.

To make Morning Meetings effective, teachers and students need to create rules together for everyone to follow. According to Kriete & Davis (2017), the teacher should begin by asking students, “To make our Morning Meeting respectful, safe, and fun, what rules will we need?” Answers should include actions such as raising your hand to speak, keeping your body in control, actively listening, looking at the person who is speaking, and offering thoughtful comments or questions to one another. It is important that the teachers post and review these rules when the meetings begin each day.

Once teachers have a plan, time, place, responsibilities, and rules established, it is time to start the meetings. The order of the Morning Meeting is very important, and teachers must stick to the order. The order includes four components—greeting, sharing, group activity, and morning message.

Greeting—Component One

Morning Meetings should always begin with greeting. Teachers should make sure that the greeting takes place even on days when there is not enough time for a full Morning Meeting. The purpose of the greeting is to help set a positive tone for students for the day, recognize students and help them feel as if they belong, help students learn their classmates’ names, and teach students hospitality. “When we make time for greeting every morning, no matter how full the schedule, we make a statement as teachers that we expect class members to treat each other with courtesy and equity and that we will do our best to make sure that they do so,” (Kriete & Davis, 2017, p. 53). Greetings can be as short as giving all your classmates a high five while saying good morning. Otherwise, greetings can be more complex such as having students write

their names on a piece of paper, crumble it up, and have a snowball fight. When the teacher says stop, the students must find a snowball, unwrap it, and then greet whose name is on the paper. The activity could continue for several minutes. No matter the greeting, it is an effective way for students to start their day on a positive note.

Sharing—Component Two

Morning Meeting greeting should be followed with sharing. Sharing can be done with around-the-circle sharing (where everyone gets a chance to briefly share something), partner sharing, or dialogue sharing where a few students share and then the class responds. The purpose of sharing is that it helps everyone get to know one another; teaches students listening, thinking, and speaking skills; strengthens students' vocabulary and reading success; and helps students develop social and emotional competencies. Kriete & Davis (2017) stated in their research that the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) identified self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making as the five groups of social and emotional competencies that children need to be successful in school and life. Sharing during Morning Meetings helps build these skills.

Group Activity—Component Three

After sharing in a Morning Meeting, group activity is to follow. Group activities should be short, cooperative, noncompetitive, fast-paced, and inclusive of everyone in the classroom. The purpose of group activities is for students to practice social skills, inclusion, cooperation with others, persistence, and active participation in a community. Group activities are “to ensure that all students start their day with a sense of accomplishment and reminder that they are successful learners,” (Kriete & Davis 2017, p. 136). Teachers need to remember they are not there to entertain students with a group activity but to engage them in some form of learning.

Morning Message—Component Four

The last component of a Morning Meeting should be a morning message to the students from the teacher, often in the form of a letter. The purpose of the message is to build community because everyone is hearing the same message, and it should develop and reinforce previous academic learning interactively. Teachers should avoid using this time as a reminder of the day's schedule or to go over mistakes students made in lessons the day before. The morning message is a transition and should help students become excited about the rest of their day. To make the message more powerful, students could read it together.

Accountability and Feedback

After teachers have had time to plan and implement Morning Meetings into their daily routine, the next step is feedback. Teachers will be required to record themselves implementing a Morning Meeting at least one time in the second, third, and fourth quarters of the school year. Teachers will share this video with the principal to receive verbal and written feedback on what went well and ideas on how to improve. Another requirement of teachers will be to have the principal, or a district coach observe at least one Morning Meeting in person during the second, third, and fourth quarters. The principal or district coach will give the teachers written feedback on what went well and ideas on how to improve.

At the beginning of the second quarter, staff will be given access to a Google Document where they can add any valuable ideas and/or experiences they have had for Morning Meetings. The document will be open all year to add ideas and to learn from. This will include ideas on things teachers can do for all four components: greeting, sharing, group activity, and morning message. Teachers collaborating, sharing, and adding knowledge is powerful and will help have a positive effect on students.

At the end of the school year, teachers and students will be given a survey made by the Building Leadership Team (BLT). The teacher survey will include questions about what is going well with implementing the Morning Meetings and what has been a struggle. The survey will ask if teachers have seen improvements in relationships and academic engagement and performance with students. The student survey will ask them what they like and dislike about Morning Meetings. It will include questions about their feelings towards teachers, their classrooms, and their peers.

The last step is for the BLT team and the principal to take the survey data and compile it into things that are going well with Morning Meetings and things that can improve. The team will share the survey data with staff at the beginning of the next school year and share what further training is needed for staff. The BLT team will look at behavior and academic data to conclude whether there was a positive change from the previous year.

Limitations

While most research shares positive views and effects of using Morning Meetings in the classroom, there could be some challenges to successful implementation of the action plan. The first barrier is time. Teachers everywhere are being forced to have more on their plates to complete with students than ever before. To provide more core learning time, some schools are cutting recess or specials like art, music, and P.E. Van Allen is one of those schools. They have cut students' recess length. Finding time to complete a Morning Meeting for 20-30 minutes daily could be challenging.

The second barrier is buy-in from teachers. Adding one more thing (Morning Meetings) for the teachers to plan and complete daily could add stress for them. Some teachers may get

overwhelmed, causing less buy-in to implement the meetings with fidelity. Teachers may rush through the Morning Meetings to get to the core subjects they need to teach instead.

The third barrier is that the action plan will have incomplete data for evaluation. Not all teachers and students may take the surveys given out at the end of the year. Not all teachers and students may be truthful in the surveys about their feelings. By not having complete data, the BLT team will not get an accurate picture of what staff and students need to help make Morning Meetings effective. Time, teacher buy-in, and complete data are all crucial for the action plan to be successful.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is change needed at Van Allen Elementary School. There is more pressure on teachers to deal with student behavior problems and students who are not focused or don't care about their academics. The problem is that there has been a shift away from teacher-student relationships, peer relationships and opportunities for students to learn and practice social-emotional skills. There has been too much concentration on student test scores than on the emotional well-being of students. Van Allen needs to bring the joy and community feeling back to classrooms. Van Allen needs to be a place where students want to come and learn every day.

“Young children cannot learn if they have problems that distract them from educational activities, problems following directions, problems getting along with others and controlling negative emotions, and problems that interfere with relationships with peers, teachers, and parents,” (Shala, 2013, p. 788). These problems are why all staff at Van Allen need consistent training on Morning Meetings and how to implement them with fidelity.

Morning Meetings help build strong relationships by creating a climate of trust. Morning Meetings are a place where students can share problems, thoughts, needs, or whatever is on their

minds. Morning Meetings are where teachers can help students learn the social-emotional and problem-solving skills they need to deal with their feelings and issues. Morning Meetings help build community because they teach students that we are all in this together and everyone has a voice and is worthwhile. When students feel respected, supported, loved, and listened to, there are fewer behavior challenges and higher academic engagement and achievement.

While there may be limitations to implementing Morning Meetings, such as time restraints, buy-in from teachers or students, and accurate data collection, with adequate training, practice, and consistent implementation of Morning Meetings and SEL, these limitations can become a thing of the past. Moving forward, teachers and students will begin to see that the time and effort it takes to implement Morning Meetings with fidelity is worth it because of the positive results.

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