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Implemeng TIA in Classrooms to Reduce Behavior and Strengthen Relationships

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**Implementing a Trauma-Informed Approach in Classrooms to Reduce Behavior and
Strengthen Relationships**

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Capstone Project: A School Improvement Plan

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Abstract

Schools are seeing an increase in challenging behaviors in the classroom due to trauma that the children have experienced. Research suggests that a trauma-informed approach helps reduce unwanted behaviors and out-of-school suspensions. Other studies also show the importance of increasing Social-emotional learning and guidance counselors' time and how it can positively affect students' behavior. These slight changes can help children learn coping strategies and learn how to act in social situations. This school improvement project creates a five-year plan for Black Hawk Elementary. This plan intends to reduce behaviors by meeting students' needs by becoming knowledgeable in trauma-informed care.

Keywords: trauma-informed care, trauma-informed approach, guidance counselors, student behavior, professional development, out-of-school suspensions

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Implementing a Trauma-Informed Approach in Classrooms to Reduce Behavior and Strengthen Relationships

Schools across the nation are struggling with the increase in student behaviors; many of those behaviors are due to trauma that the child has experienced. This issue is not limited to the United States. “In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (referred to here after as First Nations) have been found to have higher rates of suspensions and exclusions compared to their non-indigenous counterparts” (Bellamy et al., 2022, p. 1). Schools are seeing increased office referrals and suspensions, especially for minority students. “Without an understanding of the effects of chronic stress and trauma, trauma-impacted students are at risk of being seen as children with “problem behaviors” rather than as children in need of help who have made adaptations in order to survive trauma. Over time they are at risk of dropping out or being pushed out of school via repeated suspensions and/or expulsion” (Dorado et al., 2016, p. 164). The problem that schools face is that children are experiencing trauma which is causing them to exhibit behaviors in the classroom. Trauma-informed care or Trauma-Informed Approach (TIA) has been researched and proven to reduce student behaviors and increase teachers' knowledge on how to respond to trauma-related behaviors. By increasing knowledge of the TIA, teachers can regulate students and help the student de-escalate. The strategies used to de-escalate students will help students stay in the classroom, teach them how to regulate themselves and increase their social-emotional learning.

This school improvement project aims to make a plan for Black Hawk Elementary. Black Hawk is a school in Southeastern Iowa. Like many schools, Black Hawk has seen an increase in student behaviors. Black Hawk staff must complete training in proactive trauma-informed care and provide staff with classroom management strategies. Having staff be trained and applying

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said training with fidelity will decrease behaviors and increase students learning by keeping them inside the classroom.

The research collected for the school improvement plan included trauma-informed care, emotional regulation, behavior reduction, and classroom management. All the articles are peer-reviewed and collected through the DeWitt Library database at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa. The information collected will be helpful to school staff and students as they work to move past trauma that students have experienced. This is why the research collected was not limited to just quantitative data; data also included qualitative data and meta-analysis. Different forms of research allow researchers to ask students, parents, and staff how they felt during and after the intervention or training. The research was not limited to any geographic area; even though Black Hawk Elementary is in the United States, other nations are experiencing similar behaviors and challenges.

Through research, it was found that the trauma-informed approach lowers student behaviors, which also lowers office referrals and suspensions. This approach gave teachers tools to help students de-escalate and refer students to group or one-on-one sessions with a guidance counselor or social worker. It was also found that student and staff relationships are also strengthened through this approach. Students can feel safe and heard, and staff is equipt with strategies to help students through trauma. Different classroom management strategies were also researched that can be paired with the TIA to aid teachers in the classroom. With new kids every year, different challenging behaviors arise. Teachers need to have strong classroom management and research-based methods to refer to if they need to change their strategy to suit their students better.

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A school in California used Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools (HEARTS) and saw an 87% decrease in incidents, an 86% decrease in incidents that involved physical aggression, and out-of-school suspensions decreased by 95% (Dorado et al., 2016, p. 171). A Southern California public elementary school principal “noted “soft signs” of the TIA’s success in the palpable reduction in staff tension and parental defensiveness about their child’s behavior or needs. Moreover, she observed that overall attendance is good, which she attributes to the students feeling safe and being fed” (Giboney Wall, 2021, p. 134). My thesis is that applying a proactive trauma-informed approach will reduce student behaviors, office referrals, and suspensions. This approach will also strengthen student-staff relationships.

The following school improvement project seeks to improve student behavior using trauma-informed care. First, the plan will cover how trauma-informed care can affect student behavior. The plan will also discuss programs, interventions, and classroom management strategies that can be implemented to reduce behaviors and meet the needs of students. Most importantly, this school improvement plan will outline a framework that Black Hawk can use to fully implement a trauma-informed approach with fidelity over a five-year period. This plan will collect and analyze data on student behaviors and have staff complete training and a fidelity checklist. Collecting qualitative data from staff and students, or the “soft signs” discussed above, is also essential. This information from staff and students will let the data collectors know how the plan works before the five-year period ends. In conclusion, this plan aims to increase learning and reduce behaviors in a way that makes students and staff feel safe.

Review of the Literature

Teachers are facing more challenging behaviors than before. With so many changes to the world around us in the few decades, many people like to point the finger. Video games are

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the biggest outlet used for blame; television and pop culture are the others. The increase of tablet usage among children giving them “instant gratification,” is a new blame on the rise. But what if it's none of those things? What if we aren't facing the elephant in the room? Trauma affects children worldwide, and schools must be educated on how to help students. “More than two thirds of children reported at least 1 traumatic event by age 16 and at least 1 in 7 children have experienced child abuse and/or neglect in the past year” (*Understanding Child Trauma*, 2023). Plans and procedures must be implemented to recognize signs of trauma and help children overcome trauma they have experienced.

Trauma-Informed Framework

The hardest part of starting anything new is the time it takes to see the benefits. Implementing trauma-informed care is no different. “There was not a significant decrease in out-of-school suspensions after 1 year of HEARTS implementation, but there was a 95 % decrease in out-of-school suspensions after 5 years of HEARTS implementation compared to the year prior to HEARTS implementation” (Dorado et al., 2016, p. 171). Schools, let alone individuals in a school, will not see improvement overnight; change takes time. This is why schools must be patient and implement plans with fidelity to see the actual outcome of a trauma-informed approach.

Staff needs time to review and complete professional developments over a trauma-informed approach so that the students and staff can see the benefits. Safe Schools NOLA created easy-to-follow implementation progress. “The work within each stage is accomplished through three core elements: use of teams to lead implementation efforts, data-based decision-making, and capacity building to support systems change” (Davis et al., 2022, p. 2458). This framework has four stages or phases, and similar to the school that implemented the HEARTS

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program, it takes five years. Another study stated, “before beginning training, administrators can first review the current practices in their school to determine what structures they may already have in place that support TIC” (Taylor, 2021). Phase one was over the spring and summer and would involve a team looking at many programs to find the right fit for the school.

Over the next full school year, phase two begins. Teachers will start attending professional development and participate in coaching. “Capacity building to support systems change is fostered through the all-staff foundational professional development training to create a common understanding of trauma and the framework for trauma-informed schools” (Davis et al., 2022, p. 2458). Professional developments were seen as necessary in other studies as well. At Baylor Charter School, 93.33% of teachers and staff reported that the TIA made BCS a better workplace, and 83.33% reported that the training increased job satisfaction (Somers & Wheeler, 2022, p. 7). Assessments would be given to find the needs of the building. Although the new practice still needs to be implemented, the supporting infrastructure is in place to support the new approach.

In the second academic year, phase three begins. This is when the new practice is implemented. Data is collected to measure fidelity and process. Training continues to support the new trauma-informed approach. Community partnerships are also made to help students in and out of school. “The implementation team monitors initial implementation through regular meetings to discuss implementation successes and challenges” (Davis et al., 2022, p. 2459). Improvements are made when needed to help strengthen the program during the last phase. The fourth and final phase is completed over academic years three to five. “Capacity building for the organization is focused on continuous improvement in infrastructure support, community partnerships, and allocation of resources to support full implementation” (Davis et al., 2022, p.

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2459). The school now knows what to expect from the program and implements it using a multi-tiered system approach. Another study found this approach effective for elementary students receiving trauma-informed care. In this study, 5 out of 15 students improved at tier 2, and 8 out of 10 in tier 3 (Elswick, et al., 2021, pp. 82-83). Tier 2 students received group trauma services with the school social worker, and each had an individual intervention plan. Tier 3 students received a Functional Behavior Assessment, a Behavior Intervention Plan, and individualized trauma-responsive therapy from the school social worker. However, it can be inferred from this data that individual services yielded better results than group services.

One step that is crucial is cutting down non-counseling duties for guidance counselors or school social workers. This will allow them to spend more time working one-on-one or in group sessions with students. “School social workers are often the front line in the process of creating caring and empathic programming in the school” (Elswick et al., 2021, p. 67). A study at Baylor Charter School revealed that counselors were spending only 69.4% of their time on direct and indirect services; however, by the end of the grant, they were spending 87.3% on services (Somers & Wheeler, 2022, pp. 6-7). Students prior to the grant received no SEL support as an alternative to in-school suspensions, whereas at the end of the grant, 100% of students received the SEL support alternative (Somers & Wheeler, 2022, pp. 6-7). Between the year before the grant, 2017, and the end of the grant, 2022, student referrals decreased by 26%, and out-of-school suspensions decreased from 360 students per year to 85 (Somers & Wheeler, 2022, pp. 6-7). Counselors spending time with students paired with effective interventions can decrease behavior referrals and out-of-school suspensions.

As a result of training, teachers will adjust their classroom management strategies and switch to a “conversation over consequence” (Giboney Wall, 2021, p. 130). A study completed

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in a large charter school revealed that “Creating this nurturing culture allows the trauma-informed processes to be infused through education on trauma and student-directed opportunities to share during the school day, focusing on a strengths-based approach. This empathetic environment also provides the social worker with the opportunity to help teachers reframe and recontextualize student maladaptive behaviors within the context of trauma rather than simply labeling students or implementing punitive and reactionary consequences from the outset of an outburst or display of anger” (Elswick et al., 2021, p. 67). This framework aims to educate teachers on the trauma students experience and how to respond to that trauma in the classroom.

Managing Behaviors in the Classroom

There are many small changes teachers can make to support this. A study done in a Southern California Public school found that "physical classroom supports from a TIA mentioned by participants included frequent "brain breaks," classroom "emergency" snacks, naps as needed, flexible seating, "chill out" spaces in classrooms with comfortable seating and pillows, walks outside, mindfulness or deep breathing, and sensory-soothing methods such as turning off lights, using quieter voices, and playing music" (Giboney Wall, 2021, p. 131). A study at two public and one private school in Detroit, Michigan, used a Martial Arts program called Heros Circle. After five months of implementing Heros Circle, 84% of students felt breath breaks helped calm them or the people around them (Marusak et al., 2021, p.10). Teachers can help model breathing techniques to students to help normalize the strategy.

As stated above, brain breaks and music can be used to support students' sensory needs. Music can be a great tool in the classroom and can be used to set the climate, during transitions, and get attention. Styles of music can change the state of the brain and can promote excitement to learn, strengthen memory, and calm students (Holmes et al., 2014, pp. 254-255). The same

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study shows that adding movement can be beneficial during or before academic tasks because it triggers positive emotions through play and stimulation (Holmes et al., 2014, p.255). This can benefit your "busy" students, as it will promote their movement, but it is also helpful for all children to move. It is important for students, especially young students to move, this makes lessons feel like play and increases engagement.

Although the basics of excellent classroom management still apply, such as teaching expectations, routines, and procedures and keeping them consistent. Slowing down so students had enough time to learn content also occurred at a Southern California public school. "Principal Kristen emphasized the importance of "taking time on" instead of "getting through" the curriculum and intentionally seeks to lower her teachers' anxiety about rushing through content" (Giboney Wall, 2021, p. 131). While this helps foster a growth mindset in students, this can also be true for teaching expectations, routines, and procedures. Taking time to teach, practice, and reteach expectations helps teachers decrease transition times, increasing time spent on curriculum. After completing behavior skills training in an elementary school, three teachers were able to decrease their transition time to recess. Josie's class average was 5:08 minutes which decreased to 1:47 minutes, Demis' class average went from 5:02 to 2:34, and Ambers' class went from 3:16 minutes to 2:15 minutes (Smith & Higbee, 202, p.635). As teachers, one thing we always wish for is more time. It is essential to highlight that this was one hallway transition; my classroom usually has 6-8 hallway transitions. Properly teaching the curriculum, expectations, routines, and procedures can save teachers time and anxiety.

Teachers also had to give up control, to meet student needs. "After learning about the TIA, Helen found that establishing relationships was more effective than rewards. Nina learned that giving up control using a "guide on the side" approach was more helpful. Bruce now keeps

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teaching when students go under their desks, assuming they will probably listen to the lesson better when they feel safer" (Giboney Wall, 2021, pp. 131-132). Teachers were also trained and aware of research on triggers and emotional escalation. "Several participants found success in strengthening student self-awareness and self-regulation" (Giboney Wall, 2021, p. 131). Morning meetings were also found to help get a read on students before the school day started. Another study done during covid stated that "creating opportunities to stay connected to students, especially our students with EBD, will lessen any anxiety they are feeling and help them to begin working through the trauma of this current event" (Taylor, 2021, p. 131). Starting each morning with a meeting and greeting students at the door are great ways to make students feel welcomed and lets the students know the teachers cares about them.

Positive reinforcement is also a great way to keep students engaged. A study done at an elementary school in the southwest United States found that "increases in the use of behavior-specific praise, in particular, can result in higher levels of academic engagement and decreases in disruption" (Eaves et al., 2020, p.241). Students respond to positive praise by paying attention in class, where negative feedback can cause less engagement. Another study done over 65 elementary schools in the United States also found that to be true. A teacher with "average classroom management" gave positive feedback to students at a rate of 0.095, and negative feedback at a rate of 0.029 had students engaged 95.9% of the time (Gage et al., 2018, pp. 309-310). While a teacher who gave positive feedback at a rate of 0.036 and negative feedback at a rate of 0.060 had students engaged 86% of the time (Gage et al., 2018, pp. 309-310). The positive feedback was also behavior-specific. It is crucial for teachers to say more than "good job" to students; teachers need to praise specific behaviors so that the student and peers understand the behavior being praised.

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Praises do not have to come from the teacher to reinforce good behavior. A study in a rural school in the United States found that tootling, the opposite of tattling, decreased disruptive behavior. They did this by having reporting stations using the Classroom Dojo app. Three classrooms participated in the study; classroom A disruptive behavior baseline was 41% after using an ABAB withdrawal design, and the final mean of disruptive behavior was 19% (McHugh Dillon et al., 2019, p.24). Class B disruptive behavior baseline was 51% and ended with a mean of 10% (McHugh Dillon et al., 2019, p.24). The last classroom, class C, had a baseline of 59% which decreased to 8% at the end of the study (McHugh Dillon et al., 2019, p.24). All classrooms saw an increase in engagement as well; Class A saw a 19% increase, Class B saw a 39% increase, and Class C's engagement increased by 49% (McHugh Dillon et al., 2019, p.24). Positive reinforcement, whether from a staff member or a peer, will encourage desired behaviors and decrease disruptive behavior.

Trauma-Informed Approach and Student Behavior

Great classroom management is an excellent way to decrease student behavior, but that does not eliminate the lion behind the door. To truly help students in our classroom overcome trauma, teachers must be knowledgeable of a trauma-informed approach. "Rather than rebuking students, a TIA seeks to proactively disrupt harmful cognitive patterns and replace them with more positive coping skills to produce healthier, more productive behaviors. By teaching students to name their emotions and bodily responses (such as an increased heart rate, sweating, or upset stomach), they begin to understand their brain and the connections between external events, internal emotions, and triggered responses" (Giboney Wall, 2021, p.125). Although teachers can never take away trauma, they can help students cope by teaching strategies and modeling them during school.

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Teachers and support staff need to be knowledgeable of how trauma can affect students physically and emotionally. "Because trauma and continual stress affect executive functioning, students may struggle with remembering new information, reasoning through an issue, and recognizing cause and effect relationships. Students' abilities at problem-solving, planning for the future, and paying attention may also be affected" (Blitz et al., 2020, p.116). A study done to connect metacognition and emotional regulation also found that their "results highlight the importance of social support to help children regulate their emotions using appropriate, socially acceptable strategies and hence develop a realistic feeling of difficulty to solve the task" (Pennequin et al., 2020, p.13). Teachers need to be taught how to recognize and respond to trauma. This is because "parents are guarded, and students are being told not to divulge information about their home life" (Blitz et al., 2020, p.111). Whether that is because parents feel their home life is private or they are worried about teachers calling child protective services. Proper trauma-informed training would teach staff to recognize signs and respond by providing the student with support and strategies.

School staff that is trained in a trauma-informed approach know how to respond to students. "Teachers also utilized strategies such as responding calmly, giving more physical space to those with escalating emotions, and not positioning themselves between the child and the door so as to not increase anxiety by blocking potential escape routes" (Giboney Wall, 2021, p. 131). In another study, "86.67% of teachers and staff reported feeling capable of handling SEL and behavioral issues in the classroom" after receiving multiple trauma-informed trainings (Somers & Wheeler, 2022, p. 7). When teachers know how to respond, children are less likely to escalate further, which helps them stay in the classroom and out of the office.

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As a result of teachers being trained, fewer office referrals are made. One study done in Bayor Charter School saw a 76.38% decrease in out-of-school suspensions after three years (Somers & Wheeler, 2022, p. 6). Another study in California saw a 95% decrease in out-of-school suspensions after five years (Dorado et al., 2016, p.171). The same study also saw an 87% decrease in total incidents and an 86% decrease in physical aggression incidents (Dorado et al., 2016, p.171). Another study in Australia also saw a decrease in major and minor referrals; "The result follows a general trend in a reduction in the rates of problem behaviors over the three years of the program implementation" (Bellamy et al., 2022, pp.7-8). All these studies point to one thing: when given the proper support, children will have fewer behavioral outbursts.

Trauma-Informed Programs and Interventions

The key to success in applying trauma-informed care is to have a great program to follow. This will allow staff to receive proper professional development. The strategies and procedures followed will be researched based and efficient. A study was conducted in New Orleans using Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS). A pre and post-test were given to test the effectiveness of the program. After ten weeks of the intervention, there was a reduction of 6.09, and "a paired sample t-test showed that this reduction was statistically significant, with a large effect size ($d=0.80$)" (Allison & Ferreira, 2016, p.186). Another study used the Healthy Environments and Response to Schools (HEARTS) and saw a reduction in students exhibiting trauma symptoms. They also say other positive outcomes include decreased office referrals, out-of-school suspensions, and acts of physical aggression. "School personnel who responded to the Program Evaluation Survey reported significant increases in their understanding of trauma and use of trauma-sensitive practices, as well as

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significant improvements in their students' ability to learn, time on task, and school attendance" (Dorado et al., 2016, pp. 172-173).

However, not all schools see a change in the programs they implement. A study completed in Detroit, Michigan, used Conscious Discipline over one year. They measured the effectiveness using the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale TSES and Maslach's Burnout Inventory MBI. The Control group scored 184.47 on the TSES and 61.13 on the MBI, while the treatment group reported 170.08 on TSES and 67.42 on the MBI (Cooper, 2019, p.11). These scores showed no significant difference between the control and treatment groups. Nevertheless, another study completed in Tuscany, Italy, over one year found that groups who received intervention using Coping Power Program saw decreased hyperactivity and less disruptive behaviors (Marusak et al., 2021, p.437). Schools must find a program that meets the needs of their students.

The right program should provide schools with interventions that work; however, other interventions can be used to meet students' individual needs. Check-In/Check-Out is currently used at Black Hawk with students struggling with behavior. A study on three children showed that CICO could work for some students but not all. Only student one showed a score reflecting an effective treatment range (Mitchell et al., 2020, p.191). The other two students had a score that showed the intervention was questionable or ineffective (Mitchell et al., 2020, pp.192-193). Other interventions can be used with students who need support. Choice is one strategy teachers can use for children. "Participants shared control by diverting lesson plans to talk about student areas of interest, co-constructing class mission statements with students, allowing students to apply for leadership jobs, and letting students determine whether they want to do math or reading

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first" (Giboney Wall, 2022, p.265). Choice allows students to feel in control and can reduce negative feelings that come along with instructions, directions, and rules.

School Profile

Community Characteristics

Black Hawk Elementary is located in Burlington, Iowa. According to the 2022 census, the population of Burlington is 23,611, and the poverty rate is 18% (US Census Bureau, 2020). In Burlington, 85% of the population is white, 4% is multiracial, 4% is Hispanic, and 8% is African American (US Census Bureau, 2020). Burlington is connected to another city West Burlington, which is much smaller and has its own school district. West Burlington is where the hospital, mall, and Shearers Food factory. Burlington has several factories such as Antennacraft, Borghi Usa Inc., Burlington Basket Co., Cobo, GE Electric, CASE, and Ipc Inc. Burlington also is on the Mississippi River and home to a beautiful historic downtown.

School Characteristics

Black Hawk is rated as needing improvement, scoring 46.47 out of 100; the state average is 54.94 (Department of Education, 2020). In the 2018-2019 school year, 79 suspensions were issued (Department of Education, 2020). In 2017-2018, 60.29% of third-grade students were proficient in reading, according to the Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress (Department of Education, 2020). That same year, 53.49% of fourth-grade students were proficient on the ISASP (Department of Education, 2020). In math, 55.88% of third-graders and 52.94% of fourth-graders were proficient on the ISASP in the 2017-2018 school year (Department of Education, 2020).

School Mission and Vision

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The vision of Black Hawk is as follows: The Burlington Community School District strives to have a profoundly positive impact on each student's adult quality of life brought about by the student's individual and collective educational experience. The mission is to inspire and challenge students through diverse opportunities. Black Hawk is a part of Burlington Community School District. The exit outcome of BCSD is: The Burlington Community School District supports all students achieving skills and abilities to become productive citizens in the community in which they live. This includes academic goals, social competencies, employability skills, and technology skills. These skills are a guide for teachers and students in determining projects and areas of focus at various grade levels. The district has an early childhood center, four elementary schools, an intermediate and middle school, and one high school. Even though the district is large, district grade-level teams meet monthly, and building grade-level teams meet weekly. This allows teams to discuss pacing and student success and collaborate on lessons and strategies.

Parent Involvement

Black Hawk has an open house at the beginning of each school year for parents to drop off supplies and to meet the teacher(s) of their student(s). There is also a fall and spring conference, although parents can set up meetings with teachers at any time. Black Hawk also has a PTO, although there is not much involvement. Towards the end of every school year, there is a field day that many parents attend to watch their children participate in games. Teachers try to stay in contact with parents through calls, emails, and apps. A new app will be used district-wide next year, making communication more accessible.

Student Characteristics

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In the 2022-2023 school year, Black Hawk had 330 students, 164 are males, and 166 are females. The student population is 57% white, 10% multiracial, 7% Hispanic, 25% African American, and 1% other. Out of the 330 students at Black Hawk, 73% receive free and reduced lunch, and 1% are homeless. Something we have noticed with our families is that many families move to Burlington from Chicago. The students usually bring up that they moved here because it was safer. Many of them still have family in the Chicago area, whether that be grandparents, cousins, or fathers, and visit them on holiday weekends.

Current Student Learning Goals

Black Hawk data teams meet weekly to discuss student progress and group students for Houndtime. Each data team comes up with learning goals for students. For example, the kindergarten team's goal for literacy was to increase proficiency from 37% in the spring of 2023 to 43% in the spring of 2024. Their math goal was to increase spring 2023 proficiency from 59% to 64% in spring 2024. The building-wide goals will be created at the beginning of the school year. However, the 2021-2022 school year goals are for the percentage of students proficient in FAST Reading Screening to grow from 47% in Spring 21/22 to 53% in Spring 22/23. The percentage of students proficient on the iReady Math screener will increase from 28% in Spring 21/22 to 50% proficient in Spring 22/23.

School Performance

Black Hawk is located in Southeastern Iowa along the Mississippi River. According to data collected through the Panorama platform, 89% of students completed the FAST literacy screener, and 47% of students were at benchmark. Panorama does not account for students who move out of the district or complete alternative assessments, so 100% of students were not screened. In math, 90% of students were screened, and 45% were at benchmark using the iReady

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diagnostic. According to Panorama, there were 216 behavior referrals, 170 majors, and 46 minors. This does not account for incidents where teachers forget to log the behavior, which in a perfect world would not happen but does occasionally. The school uses Fountas and Pinnell Benchmarking kits to assess students' reading levels. Many teachers also give PRESS assessments to measure phonological awareness skills, phonics, decoding, and reading fluency and accuracy. Comprehension checks through iReady are used to check students' understanding of math lessons.

Teacher Behavior Strategies

Teachers at Black Hawk have many behavior strategies. Some classrooms and associates use hound tickets, which are part of the school's PBIS team. Staff can also give students a PAWsitive office referral and get their names added to the wall outside of the office. The building has PBIS rewards each trimester. In the fall, there is a fall festival that is full of fun games and activities for students. In the winter, there is an indoor snowball fight, and in the spring, there is an obstacle course. Each teacher has their method for behavior management; some use WOW boards, PBIS tickets, and whole class sticker charts, and others switch it up to keep students engaged.

Assessment Practices

Black Hawk uses many assessments throughout the year. Fast and iReady are given three times a year in the fall, winter, and spring. For kindergarteners, the Fountas and Pinnell benchmarking kit is given in the winter and the spring, while first-fourth grade are tested in the fall, winter, and spring. The ISASP are taken by third and fourth-grade students and are taken once a year, usually in March. Each district-wide grade-level team uses common assessments to assess student learning on the Iowa Common Core Standards. Report cards come out at the end

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of each trimester. Educators can give additional assessments to track student progress or find what additional instruction the teacher needs to provide.

Professional Development

The current professional development we receive is CPI. This is from the Crisis Prevention Institute and teaches staff how to respond to crises. Online lessons involve watching videos, reading slides, and taking quizzes. The second part is an in-person training that goes over holds for students. This program states: "These strategies focus on the *Care, Welfare, Safety, and Security*SM of all students and staff with evidence-based, trauma-informed behavior management and crisis prevention approaches" (*Education Professionals / Industries*, n.d.). Talking with colleagues and even my building principal, we viewed this as something other than trauma-informed approach training. This is because the program seemed more reactive than proactive.

SEL Curriculum

Black Hawk uses Positive Action for their SEL curriculum. These lessons teach students to regulate emotions, improve self-concept, bond with families and peers, and learn communication skills. The program has many great things, such as cute lessons, puppets, and activities that keep students engaged. However, I do not see students generalize the lessons to real life or relate to the lessons since their trauma is much more intense. The kids that already have those skills from home and use what is taught during SEL. However, those kids that genuinely need the skills still are lacking after the lessons and small group lessons. I hear similar things from other colleagues.

Needs Assessment

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Black Hawk is working hard to improve students' literacy and math proficiency, but we must address the elephant in the room before we can do that. Behaviors not only decrease the instruction time of the individual but the whole class as well. Therefore, an area that needs improvement is behavior. Black Hawk Data teams have plans for improving literacy and math proficiency but no plan for reducing behavior referrals. Black Hawk needs to make a plan to reduce office referrals while also supporting staff in a trauma-informed approach. I believe that behavior comes from students who need more emotionally. “Without an understanding of the effects of chronic stress and trauma, trauma-impacted students are at risk of being seen as children with “problem behaviors” rather than as children in need of help who have made adaptations in order to survive trauma” (Dorado et al., 2016, p. 164). It is a common saying that children “act the worst” when they feel safe. Students feel safe at school and are letting their emotions brought on by trauma out while they are out at school. When staff does not have the knowledge to help them regulate these emotions and behaviors, students miss out on necessary instructional time.

One study done in an elementary school in the United States found that increasing behavior-specific praise decreased disruptive behavior and increased academic engagement (Eaves et al., 2020, p.242). I believe reducing behavior would also help increase literacy and math scores. A school in Southern California found that applying trauma-informed care improved their state test scores. “Though many students are still not meeting grade-level standards, over the last three academic years, scale scores in both English language arts and math for every grade level (3rd-5th grade) that took the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) at the focal school improved” (Giboney Wall, 2021, p. 134).

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Reducing behavior referrals will increase students' instructional time, not only for the student who is exhibiting the behavior but the students witnessing the behavior. A teacher with a disruptive behavior rate of 0.03 only has students engaged 86.0% of the time (Gage et al., 2018, p.310). However, a teacher with a disruptive behavior rate of 0.01 had students engaged 97.1% of the time (Gage et al., 2018, p.310). Imagine as a child witnessing a classmate throw chairs and other supplies and hurting you or your peers physically or verbally. Everyone in the classroom will need to regulate before they are ready to learn again. Teaching regulation skills whole group is important for this reason. This is why I believe Black Hawk needs a new SEL curriculum that better fits students' needs.

Guidance counselors also need a program to use with students in group and individual settings. Students who are often exhibiting trauma through their behaviors need to be referred to these specialists to receive the help they need. A study found that once guidance counselor services were redirected to counseling, an increase from 69.4% to 87.3%, school suspensions decreased from 360 to 85 (Somers & Wheeler, 2022, p.6). “The school counselors increased their skill alignment with the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies (ASCA, 2019b). The BCS advisory council managed components of the comprehensive school counseling program and progress toward aligning the curriculum with the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors (ASCA, 2019a) and trauma-informed practices” (Somers & Wheeler, 2022, p.6). Bayor Charter School increased their guidance counselor time and their knowledge of trauma, and as we can see, it directly affected school suspensions.

Data Analysis

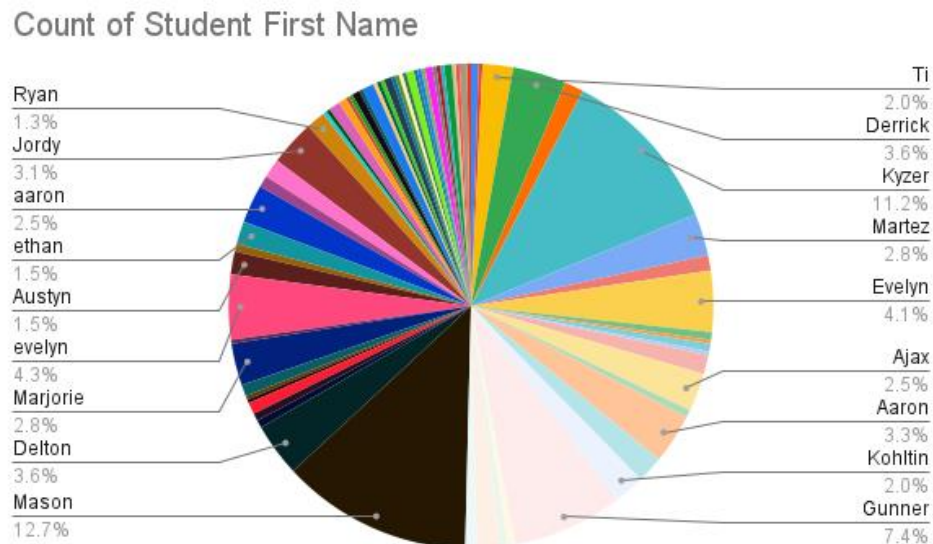
When looking at behavior, there are two data points that can be looked at. The first is SWAT Team calls. This program started in the 2022-2023 school year for students needing a

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break rather than an office referral. The other data that needs to be analyzed is office referrals. Data for office referrals can be broken up into types, such as time spent in the office, loss of privileges, and in-school or out-of-school suspension. Looking into the reasoning for office referrals can also tell us what behaviors are occurring the most. This will allow us to look for programs that can help us support our students where needed.

Figure 1

Pie Chart of SWAT Team Calls by student name



Black Hawks SWAT Team was created in 2022-2023 to reduce unnecessary office referrals for students who are overstimulated or having a bad day and simply need a break from the classroom to regulate their emotions and take a walk or go for a sensory break. The sensory room was also started in the 2022-2023 school year and contains a breaking corner, tent, sand table, and other sensory fidgets. There were two ways to reach the SWAT Team, one was by texting a team member, and the other was by filling out our online form. Now, to make data collection easier, the form is the best way to reach the data team. During the 2022-2023 school

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year, there were 401 SWAT Team calls. Many students benefited from the SWAT team, as shown in Figure 1 above. It is important to note that both Aarons and Evelyns are the same students and that we must be consistent next year with the capitalization and spelling of students' names. I believe implementing breaks provided by the SWAT team helped keep students out of the office. This is because it allows students to regulate and have adult support. Having that time spent with staff can also help form relationships with students.

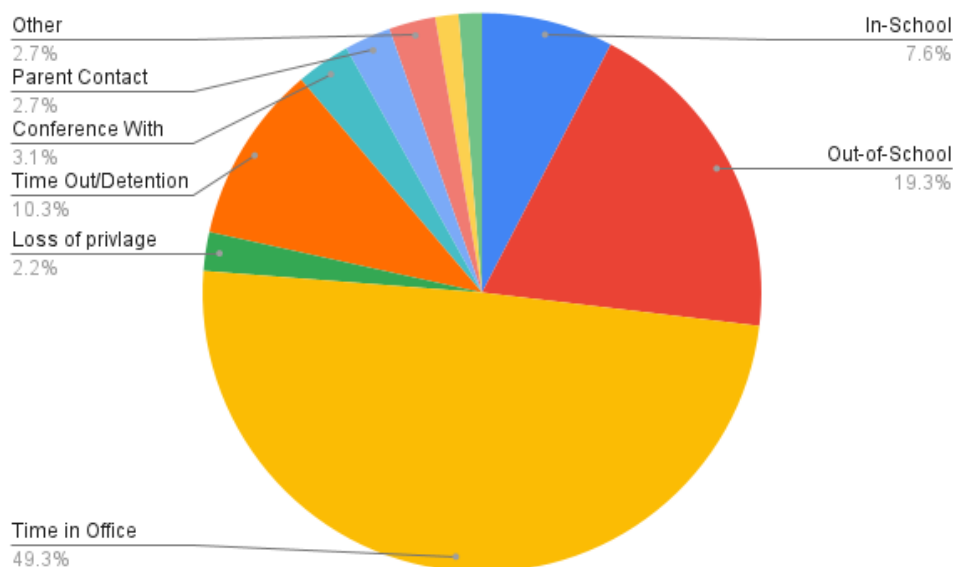
Another important area to look at is office referrals. According to Panorama, there were 216 behavior referrals, 170 majors, and 46 minors (Behavior Report, 2023). However, after reviewing the data from our Infinite Campus system, those numbers are inaccurate. According to Infinite Campus Behavior Type Report, there were 398 office referrals. Of those 398 referrals, 102 students were referred by 31 staff members. However, according to Infinite Campus Behavior Resolution Detail Report, there were 223 Events by 58 students (Behavior Resolution Detail Report, 2023, p.48). This data will be used since this data is where you can find the resolution type, such as time spent in the office.

According to the Behavior Resolution Detail Report, 110 incidents required time in the office, and 23 required timeout/detention; refer to Figure 2 below. Seven Incidents required a conference with the student, while 6 required parent contact. Five incidents led to a loss of privilege, and 3 led to an apology. Six resolutions had “other” resolutions, and 3 of the reports were filed for the student who was the victim. Forty-three incidents led to the child serving out-of-school suspensions, and 17 required in-school suspensions.

Figure 2

Behavior Resolution Type

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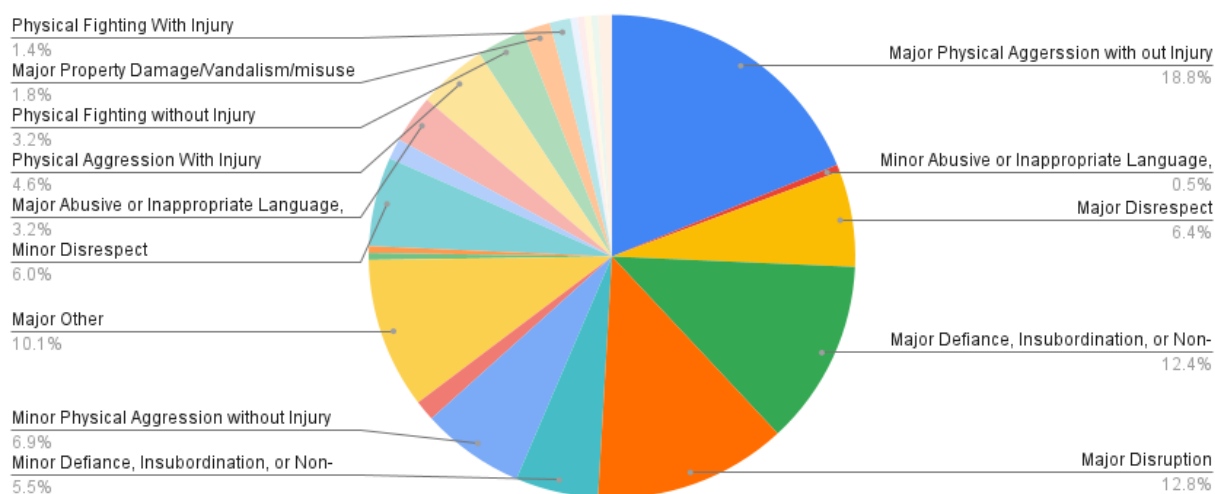
This data tells us a few things about Black Hawk. One thing I would like to highlight is the effectiveness of the SWAT team. This would be a strength that we already have. I truly believe that without the opportunity to regulate, students would have ended up in the office, and referral rates would have been higher. The data also tells us that over 50% of referrals lead students to sit in the office, making it difficult for office staff to do their jobs properly. Suspensions as a resolution account for 26.9% of the referrals. The reasons for each referral also tell us that we must teach children to resolve problems without using violence, as that accounted for 34% of incidents. The data also tells us that children must learn how to act in social situations since disrespectful behavior, disruption, and defiance rates are so high. Studies done in Australia and California show that implementing Trauma-Informed Care programs can help reduce office referrals. The study done in Australia found that a trauma-informed approach decreased major and minor referrals by being culturally responsive and engaging students through play-based learning (Bellamy et al., 2022, pp.7-9). The California study found that trauma-informed training

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allowed staff to work through their own trauma and help students work through theirs (Dorado et al., 2016, pp.172-173).

Figure 3

Behavior Referral Type



There were various reasons for office referrals, which can be viewed in Figure 3. Major physical aggression without injury accounted for 41 of the office referrals. There were 10 incidents of physical aggression with injury, 3 physical fights with injury, 7 physical fights without injury, and 15 incidents of minor physical aggression without injury. This means that 76 office referrals were due to a physical aggression incident, which is 34%. There were 14 referrals for major disrespect and 13 for minor disrespect. While there were only 3 reports of minor disruptions, there were 28 referrals for major disruptions, which accounts for 14% of the office referrals. Referrals for major defiance, insubordination, or non-compliance accounted for 27 of the reports, while only 12 were minor infractions. Some office referrals only had one report, such as minor abusive language or profanity, major technology violation, inappropriate display of affection, minor other, minor property damage/vandalism/misuse, harassment, and

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minor technology violation. There were two referrals for skipping class, 3 for theft, 7 for abusive or inappropriate language and profanity, and 4 referrals for major property damage/vandalism/misuse. However, 22 referrals are under the “major other” category; staff may need to develop more categories or have training to categorize infractions properly.

One area of weakness is that we do not have sufficient data on is guidance counselor time. Last year we only had a counselor half of the school day, as we shared them with another school in the district. This made it very difficult to find time to provide students who needed additional services with the help they needed. However, the new superintendent sees the importance of mental health, and we will have a full-time counselor in the 2023-2024 school year. Tracking how counselor time is spent is important to see if it directly affects office referrals by decreasing them, like the study done at Bayor Charter School (Somers & Wheeler, 2022, p.6). It is important for the counselor and the home-school liaison to receive training to properly meet the needs of elementary kids who have experienced trauma. A study completed at a charter school found that increasing counselors' direct and indirect service time and having all staff complete trauma-informed training helped decrease out-of-school suspensions (Somers & Wheeler, 2022, p.6).

An additional assessment needs to be given to staff. This would be a survey to analyze how the staff feels about trauma-informed training, how it has helped their personal life, how it has affected their students, and if they feel it has helped decrease behaviors in the classroom. This will tell us if our chosen program is a good fit and how it directly affects staff and students. If this survey is given at the end of each year or twice a year, staff can receive more support when needed. This will also give us qualitative data since our other data points are quantitative. Another positive of the survey is that we could see the program's strengths and weaknesses. If

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many staff members are having issues with one area of the program, research can be done to find an effective way to supplement that area.

In a perfect world, I would like to get more background on students to assess their mental health. This way, children can be flagged before the school year begins. Parents would play a huge role in this process which is a huge hurdle in our community. Many families fear CPS calls and will try to brush things under the rug to keep their families together. Relationships need to be built with families and community members to strengthen the bond with the school so they know we are here to help, not to tear them apart.

Action Plan

Black Hawk needs training in a trauma-informed approach. This would allow staff to meet the needs of students by responding to behaviors appropriately and teaching them how to self-regulate. In many studies, when a trauma-informed approach is applied, defiant behaviors, office referrals, and suspensions decrease. “There was not a significant decrease in out-of-school suspensions after 1 year of HEARTS implementation, but there was a 95 % decrease in out-of-school suspensions after 5 years of HEARTS implementation compared to the year prior to HEARTS implementation” (Dorado et al., 2016, p. 171). This would require all staff to receive professional development to ensure everyone in the building is educated on what a trauma-informed approach looks like. Having coaches or leads perform a fidelity checklist would also be beneficial.

Teachers also benefit from a trauma-informed approach. In a study done at Bayor Charter School, 93.33% of teachers and staff reported that the TIA made BCS a better workplace, and 83.33% reported that the training increased job satisfaction (Somers & Wheeler, 2022, p. 7). The

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trauma-informed practice aims to develop relationships with students while teaching them skills to work through their emotions. "Rather than rebuking students, a TIA seeks to proactively disrupt harmful cognitive patterns and replace them with more positive coping skills to produce healthier, more productive behaviors" (Giboney Wall, 2021, p.125). This makes school a place where students want to be and learn, as well as staff wanting to come to work every day to make a difference.

With Black Hawk having a full-time guidance counselor next year, we can help more kids and provide more services. Ensuring that most of the guidance counselors' time is spent doing direct and indirect services is crucial. Too often, guidance counselors are called to deal with behavior issues in the office or classrooms. While if they have free time is fine; however, if it throws off their schedule, a child is missing services that were deemed necessary for their success. As one study stated, "school social workers are often the front line in the process of creating caring and empathic programming in the school" (Elswick et al., 2021, p. 67). As mentioned, BCS increased counselors' time spent on services and offered SEL support instead of suspensions. As a result, referrals decreased by 26%, and out-of-school suspensions decreased from 360 to 85 (Somers & Wheeler, 2022, pp. 6-7). Black Hawk needs to make a commitment and honor how important these services are to children.

Other strategies to keep in mind are often referred to as having great classroom management, such as positive praise, giving students choices, behavior skills training, and teaching routines and procedures. When a teacher is struggling with their current class, it could be helpful to have a coach or come in to watch and suggest other great classroom management strategies that could be beneficial for the teacher to try with the class. The coach would then follow a normal coaching cycle, checking in a few weeks later and making changes if needed.

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With groups of children changing every year, teachers may find that their bag of tricks will need to adapt to each unique group's needs.

These changes all seem pretty minor, and I believe they are; however, effort toward a consistent trauma-informed approach is crucial. Teachers and staff will need to follow strategies and procedures with fidelity for there to be change. Too often, people think of new approaches as too much work or needing tweaking without fully implementing the original procedures. Sooner or later, those staff members become frustrated with the program not working when it truly had no chance. Staff will need to commit to following the chosen program's procedures with fidelity to see the true effects. Having staff complete fidelity checklists throughout the year will help staff with support when needed.

Implementation of School Improvement Plan

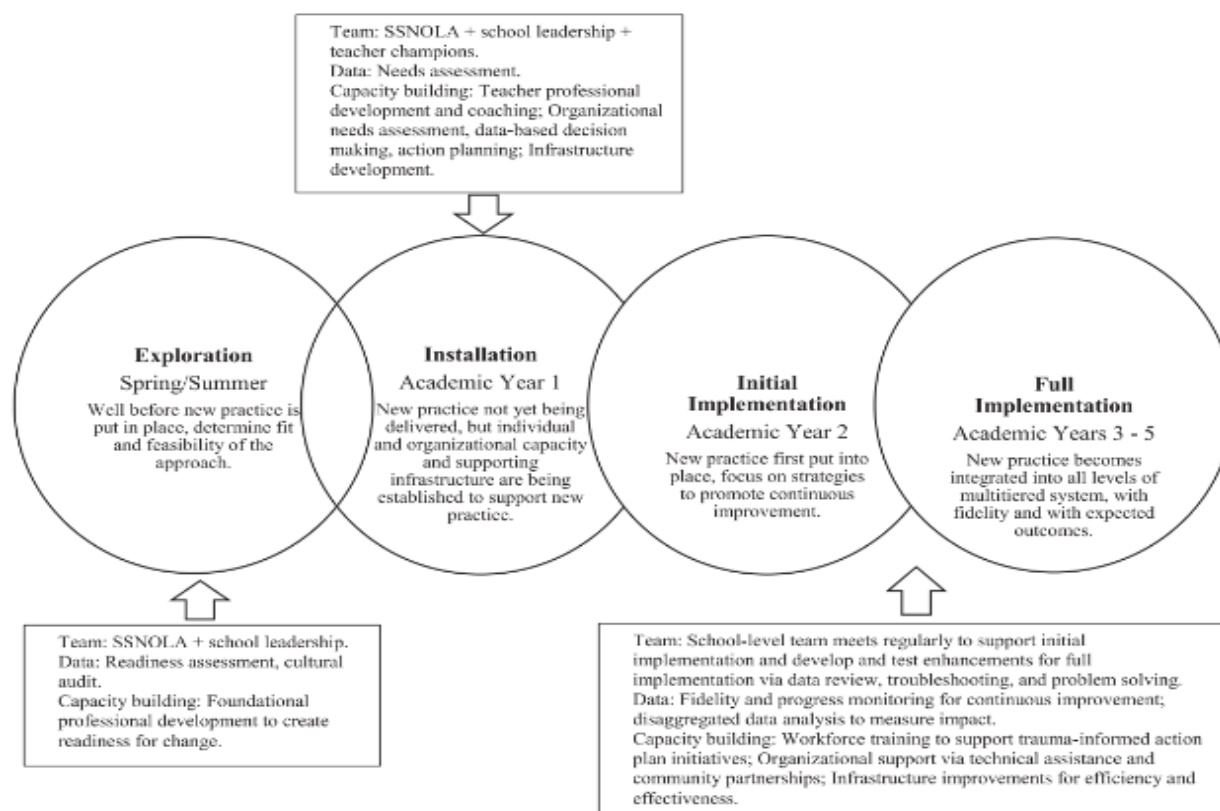
Timeline

Following the five-year framework, as the New Orleans Trauma-Informed Learning Collaborative did, would allow Black Hawk time to choose a program, learn about the program, and start implementation slowly. Ideally, during the first five years, there will be “soft signs” that the program is beneficial, such as teachers noticing less violent behaviors, shorter outbursts, or students using coping strategies. Data collected over the five-year period should show a decrease in behaviors and suspensions. Figure 4 below shows the four stages that would need to be implemented over the course of five years.

Figure 4

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Stages to full implementation



(Davis, et al., 2022, p. 2458)

During the first stage, which happens during the spring and summer, Black Hawk would need to look into programs that apply a trauma-informed approach. This would be the job of the PBIS team, which could also be renamed. The team should include the principal, teachers, paraprofessionals, the guidance counselor, and the home-school liaison. It is important while looking for a program that Black Hawk is meeting the needs of their students and teachers. The best way to do this would be to make lists of must-haves before looking at programs, allowing the team to be very selective during this process.

The first full academic year becomes much busier. This is when staff will attend professional development. Normally only teachers, interventionists, coaches, and the principal

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would attend. However, it is crucial that all staff attend this training to ensure that the trauma-informed approach is applied school-wide. Coaching cycles to support the program would begin to be offered as well. Having coaching available to teachers and staff would help lift the stress of using a new program. During the second year, also referred to as the installation state in Figure 4, assessments would need to be given to find the needs of the building. This would be a survey that staff will complete that focuses on knowledge of trauma and student behavior. The supporting infrastructure is implemented during the installation process, with the new practice to come later. This will allow staff to slowly start implementing these new practices and reflect on old ones.

Initial implementation would happen over year two; with the supporting infrastructure in place, the new practices will be fully implemented. Data continues to be collected to measure the effectiveness, and fidelity checks are performed. Further training is offered to refresh staff and continue their professional development. The PBIS team would also find connections within the community to help support their process and student needs.

The last stage, the full implementation stage, occurs over academic years three to five. Data is reviewed, and changes are made where needed to strengthen the program. Staff should be familiar with the program now, and community partnerships should be strengthened. A multi-tiered system should also be applied if not already implemented. Training is offered to new staff or staff that need refresher training. The key to successful implementation is supporting staff and collecting and analyzing data.

Responsibilities for Implementation

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The PBIS team will be responsible for implementation. The team currently consists of the principal, the home-school liaison, one paraprofessional, and two kindergarten teachers. A goal should be to have at least one teacher per grade level on the team and the guidance counselor. The team also could be renamed, possibly to Behavior Intervention Team. The first job of this team would be to create a list of the program must-haves that would meet the needs of students and teachers. The next goal would be to find a program that meets those needs. Over the next few years, the team would be in charge of collecting and analyzing data. They would also need to find community resources to help strengthen our services to students and families.

Each teacher and paraprofessional in the building will be responsible for following the procedures of the chosen trauma-informed care program. The principal, office staff, guidance counselor, and the home-school liaison would have the responsibility of following the procedures and helping students seek behavior resolution when emotions and need for services are the highest. Teachers and administration can also communicate coping strategies to parents to help children generalize these new skills. Parents then would share some of the responsibilities of helping their children overcome traumatic experiences or simply learn how to meet their child's unique emotional needs better. Students will be responsible for using the strategies taught to them; staff should encourage using these with praise.

Monitoring Success

Data that must be collected over the next five years includes office referrals and resolution types. Black Hawks SWAT team also needs to continue collecting data. The guidance counselor and home-school liaison must also keep detailed records of services given, such as type of intervention, minutes of intervention, and attendance. Data must also be collected to

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reflect when guidance counselors or the home-school liaison is pulled from their daily schedule. Coaching cycles will be completed using the district's current forms. Hopefully, the program selected will have forms to use during fidelity checks. However, if they do not, the PBIS team will need to make a checklist, which is an important part of the framework. Data collection and analysis will also be the PBIS team's job.

Resources

Finding the right community connections is important; we all know the saying, “it takes a village.” The first connection is community action; they offer a wide range of support from energy support to head start. Young House Family Services is another connection that would benefit Black Hawks families. They offer behavior services, brief intensive services, day treatment, achieving maximum potential program, pediatric integrated health program, child welfare emergency services, tracking and monitoring program, and enhanced monitoring and outreach program. Black Hawk has great connections with churches in the area and the rotary club, providing students with new books several times a year. If more support is found to be needed, the PBIS team can research other partnerships that can help fill those holes.

Barriers and Challenges

Some behaviors and challenges that could impede the plan's success include students moving, staff “closing the door,” and parents not supporting the trauma-informed approach. Students who are receiving services with the counselor or home-school liaison and move will not get the pleasure of completing a full intervention cycle, and data can no longer be collected for that child. Staff who refuse to try to implement the new program with fidelity will also impede progress. Most of the time, these staff members attend meetings and training, but once they are

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behind their classroom door do what “they always have done.” It is important for staff to understand that what we have been doing hasn’t been working for all of our students, and it is time we find a way to ensure the success of all of our students. Parents who do not support the school is also an obstacle. However, I like to remember what the late principal, Mr. Richards, would always say: We must only deal with things in the realm of our control. While we can provide support to families, we cannot change their ways. Another challenge would be if we ever had to go virtual again. No one expended the challenges that came with Covid-19, and although I hope something like that never happens again, it is always possible.

Conclusion

Students' traumatic experiences are being exhibited in the classroom as challenging behaviors. Students exhibiting challenging behaviors are likelier to drop out or experience suspension or expulsion (Dorado et al., 2016, p. 164). Staff needs to be able to meet their needs by being educated in what trauma looks like and how to give trauma-informed care properly. Teachers who are able to meet students' needs with a trauma-informed approach will see a decrease in challenging behaviors and increased relationships with students.

Black Hawk Elementary is seeing what many schools around the world are seeing, increases in behavior and office referrals. Many of these are physical altercations, which result in time out of class or missed school days. The goal of this school improvement plan is to improve behavior at Black Hawk by having all staff complete trauma-informed care professional development and increase guidance counselors' time providing direct services. Black Hawk will do this by following a five-year plan allowing a team to select an appropriate program, collect

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data, start implementing the supporting infrastructure, implement new practices, and find connections within the community.

Following a plan when making changes is critical, such as implementing a trauma-informed approach. It is also essential to give those changes time to really make a difference. The San Francisco Unified School District saw this firsthand when after a year of implementing a new trauma-informed approach, showed no significant decline in out-of-school suspensions. However, after five years of implementing the same program, SFUSD saw a 95% decrease in out-of-school suspensions (Dorado et al., 2016, p. 171). Increasing guidance counselors' time also helps decrease suspensions by providing services to students who need it the most. BCS saw a 76% decrease in out-of-school suspensions when guidance counselor support increased (Somers & Wheeler, 2022, pp. 6-7). When students are provided with adequate support, such as trauma-informed care, they start to learn strategies and coping mechanisms that will not only help them in school but will help them in daily life. After completing martial arts-based training in Detroit, 84% of students felt breath breaks helped calm them or the people around them (Marusak et al., 2021, p.10). Black Hawk can learn from these findings by increasing guidance counselor time and finding a trauma-informed care program that will best fit the needs of our students and staff.

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