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Incorporating Social-Emotional Learning into Middle School Classrooms

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Incorporating Social-Emotional Learning into Middle School Classrooms

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Capstone Project: A School Improvement Plan

Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa

Abstract

This article is how the implementation of social-emotional learning in a middle school can improve behavior, academics, mental health, and social awareness amongst adolescents. This paper examines research from twenty research articles to communicate the need for social-emotional learning to be implemented in a middle school. This article outlines the school improvement plan for implementing a social-emotional learning curriculum.

Keywords: Social-emotional learning, behavior, academics, mental health, adolescents, middle school, professional development

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Social-Emotional Learning into Middle School Classrooms

In recent years, depression has grown and become a major health problem in adolescents (Reicher & Maticsek-Jauk, 2019). Reicher and Maticsek-Jauk took a sample out of 13,000 6-18 years olds (a mean of 13.8 years old) from the United States and discovered that 3% of that population suffer severe depression and 8% suffer moderate depression (2019). Depression not only creates mental battles, but it affects a person's ability in making and keeping peer relationships, negatively impacts academic learning, and reducing the ability to cope with daily problems and tasks, which then leads into behavioral problems inside and outside the classroom. Due to this, students become mildly excluded from peer activities due to their depression (Reicher & Maticsek-Jauk, 2019). When students are excluded at the age of 13 years old, this can heighten a more severe diagnosis of depression (Reicher & Maticsek-Jauk, 2019). Recently, research has shown that social-emotional learning (SEL) programs support the development of skills in regards to emotional regulation, decision making, and conflict resolution (Jones et al., 2020). SEL has also shown gains in students' academic performance and reduced behavioral problems in the classroom.

In recent years, behaviors in the classroom and depression have become a rising concern for school districts. Studies have proven how negative behavior and depression inhibits academic growth. This problem has become apparent in Le Mars Community Middle School (LCMS) located in Le Mars, IA. Currently, the school does not follow a SEL program. This year alone, there has been an increase in student behavior, low academic success, and mental health problems. These issues not only hinder that student's academic and mental growth, but it also negatively affects peers' mental and academic growth, as well as the teachers' mental health. SEL strengthens students' academic performance, improves classroom climate, and lessens students' behavioral problems in the classroom (Herrenkohl, 2019). SEL positively affects a child's long-term development and can continue their success as they grow into adulthood. LCMS needs to adopt an SEL program in order to create academic, cultural, and social success inside the middle school classroom.

The purpose of this school improvement plan is to introduce SEL strategies that can be used in the middle school classroom. These strategies can lessen the need to address behavior problems and will

allow teachers to provide my instruction toward their content. Not only can these strategies lessen behavior, but it can create a positive classroom culture, thereby improving student moral, mental health, and academic success. It is the author's goal that this school improvement project will provide guidance for Le Mars Middle School and schools in a similar situation to make changes to support students and staff.

Research for this project's literature review was conducted using peer-reviewed journals that are available through the DeWitt Library at Northwestern College in Orange City, IA and Google Scholar. All of the articles are peer-reviewed and a majority of them have been published within the last ten years. The author focused on social-emotional strategies, middle school's with SEL programs, and mental health in adolescents. This scope of research allows us to consider the continuum of SEL strategies implemented into middle schools and the importance of implementing these strategies for mental health and academic reasons.

The belief is students in 6th, 7th, and 8th grade at Le Mars Community Middle School will make gains in both academic and social-emotional success when teachers use SEL strategies in the classroom. This change will happen because teachers will be using research-based strategies to support students' social-emotional learning. When teachers use these strategies, they will see an increase in student success, a more successful school climate, and less behavior problems within the general education, middle school classroom.

Review of the Literature

Mental Health in Adolescents

In a study performed by Hackett et al. (2010), 71 middle aged students were tested on their mental health in a school for social, emotional and behavior disabilities. According to Hackett et al.'s research, students' mental health has been deteriorating drastically. 95.7% of the students scored in an abnormal range for conduct disorders, peer problems, and emotional disorders (Hackett et al., 2010). Similarly, a study by Zhao et al. (2020), surveyed about the stress levels, anxiety, depression, and unhappiness of over 8,000 students who were 18 years old or younger in the year of 2017. Three years

later in 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the same survey was administered to a set of 1501 people. The results showed that although stress, anxiety, depression, and unhappiness were prevalent, these numbers doubled by 2020 (Zhao et al., 2020). Mental health is a clear issue that there is a problem with mental health among adolescents.

Depression seems to be a large factor in mental health. According to the American Psychiatric Association, “Depression is a common and serious medical illness that negatively affects how you feel, the way you think and how you act. Depression causes feelings of sadness and a loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed. It can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems and can decrease your ability to function at work and at home” (2023). Depression is a mental health disease that has been on the incline for many years but has increased drastically since the COVID-19 pandemic. Koschmann et al. (2019) studied a sample that was conducted in the United States. The researchers studied how prevalent depression occurs in adolescents. Out of the 13,000 adolescents that were surveyed, 11% of those teens reported signs of depression, 8% suffer from moderate depression, and 3% suffer from severe depression (Koschmann et al., 2019). Depression can take a major toll on physical, mental, and social well-being, but it can also affect the success of a student’s academic career. The report by Koschmann et al. showed a decline in academic success was more prone to those students with depression (2019). Students with mental health conditions struggle with academic success and need assistance to succeed in academic, social, and mental success.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students had abnormal experiences from school closures, isolation, limited physical activity, social distancing, and an increase in screen time. Students were limited physical and social contact with peers for nearly a year and a half. Meherali et al. (2021) found that although mental health is inevitable, children in present day were more isolated after the pandemic. Students with mental health disorders struggle with maintain relationships amongst their peers. The study performed by Hackett et al. (2020), students with preexisting mental health disabilities struggle with creating and maintaining peer relationships. The students struggle with being able to make friends,

participate in class, go out and socialize with their peers, and have a hard time keeping their friendships. Due to isolation, students' mental health declines; this all creates a domino effect, negatively impacting the social-emotional well-being of adolescents. Students need social-emotional coping skills in order to fill the gaps from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Where do schools come into play to help the mental health of adolescents? Should schools help with the mental health of adolescents? The study conducted by Hackett et al., (2020) asked the parents of students if their child received any social-emotional help outside of school. Out of the 71 students, only 24 of those students were receiving outside help. The parents then were asked if they wanted social-emotional help to be offered by the school and 65% of the parents said yes. Not only do students become more successful in academics, students learn how to become law-abiding citizens. Within the Iowa Core, students learn civic literacy, employability skills, financial literacy, health literacy, and technology literacy. Within those concepts is learning how to socialize with peers, adults, and themselves. They learn how to effectively communicate and to control their emotions. Families who live in poverty are less educated and are unable to teach this concepts to their children (Zhao et al., 2020).

The pandemic affected people's mental health from across the globe. The data indicates that there needs to be something done to help mitigate mental health among adolescents. Adolescents are becoming more depressed and isolated. When students become depressed, they isolate themselves. When adolescents are isolated, they become more and more depressed, causing a detrimental domino effect. The mental health is due to the social-emotional gap that was caused from the COVID-19 global pandemic. Students need help and schools are able to assist with the tools and knowledge they contain. Students still need social-emotional help in order to control their emotions and to become successful citizens.

Behavior and Academics

Behavior management seems to be an ongoing issue in education. When students become adolescents, they go through a numerous amount of social, physical, and mental changes. Many times,

students struggle coping with their emotions. However, when students are not given the tools they need to navigate their emotions, it can lead to behavior problems in a classroom setting. According to a study performed by Kutsash & Duchnowski (2004), children with emotional and behavior disabilities had similar characteristics to general education students who did not receive any social-emotional instruction and services. When students struggle with their behavior, it can lead to a disadvantage to academic learning and overall, motivation for learning.

Kustash & Duchnowski (2004) found that there was a correlation between behavior problems and academic problems. Within the study, students who exhibited significant behavior problems were at least two years behind their peers (Kutash & Duchnowski, 2004). Similarly, Saeki & Quirk (2015) found in their research that there was a correlation between psychological and engagement needs. When students were not receiving any sort of social-emotional assistance, they had poor engagement during classroom lessons. As a result, students begin to academically perform poorly when they are not engaged in a lesson. Typically, when teachers see that there is a lack of interest within a lesson, they begin to try new things in order to pique the interest of students. However, Saeki & Quirk's (2015) data found that improving student engagement in the classroom does limited impact on social-emotional and behavior functioning. Social-emotional needs should be addressed first in order to improve behavior and engagement.

Soland & Kuhfield's (2022) data also showed that there is a connection between social-emotional competency and their academic scoring, even their dropout rate. Within the study, Soland & Kuhfield (2022) looked into suspensions, chronic absences, and any grade lower than a C for students in grades 6th through 9th grade. Students who did not receive any sort of social-emotional learning continued to increase in suspension, absences, and low grades than those students who did receive social-emotional services. Not only did the results show that students began to improve in behavior and academics, but students who received the social-emotional services in the earlier grades had a larger increase in academic successes than those who received the intervention in their later grades (Soland & Kuhfield, 2022). This

shows that an earlier access to social-emotional services, the greater the academic and engagement success amongst students in the classroom.

Similarly, Wang et al. (2016) found that students who did not receive social-emotional services had a higher dropout rate by over 3%. Wang et al.'s (2016) results showed "that being in the top 20 percent of the age distribution and keeping in touch with friends who have already dropped out are significant predictors of dropout. Having poor academic achievement (in the lowest 20 percent of the math score distribution) is a statistically significant predictor of dropout (Saeki & Quirk, 2015)." Students who have poor behavior will continue to decline academically, leading to an increase in dropout rates. Adolescents need SEL in order to control their behaviors so that they can be successful students inside and outside of the classroom. Students will be able to be more attentive during classroom instruction, will have more positive behavior, and will have a higher attendance rate.

School Climate, Relationships, and Motivation

According to the National School Climate Center (2021), school climate is based on students', parents', and school personnel's goals, values, norms, and relationships within a school. School climate can revolve around safety, teaching and learning, and relationships. A positive school climate can affect academic success, risk prevention, motivation, and create positive youth development. Rutledge et al. (2015) conducted a year-long case study on the characteristics of two low-performing and two high-performing schools in Florida. The teachers from the high-performing schools received professional development of how to incorporate social-emotional learning strategies in their classrooms, as well as the school in general. The data from the two high-performing schools showed that there were deliberate structures, programs, and values that were taught to students to promote academic and social needs (Rutledge et al., 2015).

Schools are very complex and teachers focus on a variety of aspects when it comes to teaching and learning in the classroom. According to Rutledge et al. (2015), educational core values such as a

teacher's curriculum and instruction activities in the classroom are the primary activities that are involved in schools. Students need engaging activities in order to learn successfully in the classroom. However, the effectiveness of these activities relies on a school-wide culture of learning and the sense of community from student-teacher relationships (Rutledge et al., 2015). Even if activities are seemingly engaging, students will not be motivated to learn from a teacher they do not have a relationship with. Students who lack relationships with their teachers are at a high-risk of negative behaviors, poor academic performance, and poor engagement.

Although instruction is important, the motivation to want to learn from instructional activities is just as important. Rutledge et al. (2015) highlights six important components of learning: quality instruction, rigorous and aligned curriculum, personalized learning connections, culture of learning and professional behavior, connections to external communities, and learning-centered leadership (2015). The findings in the study showed that the major difference between the higher performing schools and the lower performing schools was associated with the relationships teachers and students shared with one another. When students were interviewed, they described the teachers as "caring" or involved. One teacher from the high performing school stated, "I keep coming back to personalization: Knowing the kids, knowing their backgrounds, and creating a sense of family, I think goes a long ways" (Rutledge et al., 2015). In the low-performing schools, promoting school-wide connections was not successful. When interviewed in the study, teachers described that it was students who were responsible for making connections with the teachers. Teachers at the high performing schools felt they had a strong and positive school culture (Rutledge et al., 2015). Teachers felt this way because principals were consistent with school-wide goals, behavior, getting parent involved and supporting teachers in their classrooms. Everyone at the high-performing schools felt like they held each other accountable.

Similarly, in a study conducted by Strahan & Poteat (2020), evidence showed that using project-based learning in a classroom improved the relationships with teachers and peers by getting to know interests, engagements, and accomplishments from one another. In the study, Strahan and Poteat (2020)

observed two classrooms that experienced project-based learning. In one classroom, the teacher taught how to work in a group setting whereas the other group, the teacher did not teach small-group skills. Since students were involved in project-based learning, they would be in groups. Working in groups leads to students and teachers naturally getting to know each other as they are researching and working together in group settings. The groups who had received instruction of how to work in groups knew each other's interests and were engaged in group work. The classroom was loud and students were moving throughout the classroom. In the other room, students were engaged in working but the classroom was quiet and there was not as much interaction. Teachers have the ability to promote a love for life-long learning and to be a positive role model in the lives of students. Relationships between the teacher and the student play a significant role in the motivation and outcomes of student learning.

In contrast, Raphael & Burke (2012) looked into the dynamics of peer relationships and empathy within schools. It is an increasing issue that young adolescents lack empathy. One outcome of the lack of empathy is the prevalence of bullying. Bullying can lead to long-term effects for youth. Raphael & Burke (2012) looked into schools that were struggling with traditional bullying, cyberbullying, and relational aggression, and a sense of belonging in a school. They took a group half a group of 118 students and gave them a program with social-emotional skills and the other group was the control group and did not receive additional instruction. The intervention consisted of six lessons on how to use technology and bullying-relevant scenarios via video, scripts, traditional lectures from teachers, and presentations. After the six lessons were taught, students were given a post-test. From the test, it showed that students' empathy increased and they were more likely to report an issue with bullying as a bystander (Raphael & Burke, 2012). Not only did these two aspects increase, but students felt like they had a sense of belonging as well in the school (Raphael & Burke, 2012). Having a sense of belonging in a school increases school culture and gives students motivation to make their school better. Similarly, Silverthorn et al. (2017) did a six-yearlong study that focused on character development of students from seventh grade to senior year. Within the study, students who received social-emotional learning in their adolescents in comparison to

students who did not, had stronger self-awareness and self-esteem. Students in the control group who did not have any social-emotional learning struggled with empathy, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging. These students tended to have more peer relationship problems. However, when the group of students who received the social-emotional instruction, tended to increase is self-esteem and had strong peer relationships.

All three aspects tie in with each other: motivation, relationships, and school climate. When teachers have strong relationships with their students, they tend to be more motivated and want to work with each other. There is an increase in both in-person and cyberbullying amongst peers when they are not equipped with social-emotional learning tools (Raphael & Burke, 2012). Without having a strong sense of belonging, character traits, and relationships, it can lead to a negative school environment that people do not want to be a part of. Silverthorn et al.'s (2017) data showed that students who did not receive social-emotional learning tools had a lack of empathy and relationships. It's crucial to focus on motivation, relationships, and school climate to make an enjoyable learning environment for everyone.

Effects of Social-Emotional Learning

The Committee for Children (2023) states that social-emotional learning is, “the process of developing the self-awareness, self-control, and interpersonal skills that are vital for school, work, and life success” (page 1). SEL is known to be able to equip people with coping strategies for different academic, professional, and social challenges that they can face in their lives. Social-emotional learning can improve students' academics, mental health, and behavioral outcomes (Bailey et al., 2019). MacDonnell et al. (2021) states that social-emotional and character development programs results in positive student-teacher relationships, positive academic achievement, and self-awareness. Arauz Ledezma et al. (2020) had similar views that not only does social-emotional learning promote positive academic achievement, but it also links to comprehending health and well-being. Social-emotional learning can help student that are classified in low-socioeconomic communities. It teaches them the tools that they can carry for the rest of their lives.

Socioeconomic status correlates with one's mental health, family structure, and the ability to learn. Many times, children in low socioeconomic status are raised in a negative environment and can experience trauma. They are limited to healthy food, more likely to become ill, and can be in unstable living environments. During the stages of adolescents, students need the social-emotional learning programs to provide intervention and prevention. MacDonnell et al. (2021) performed a study for one school year in two low-income school. The study focused on constructive creativity, helpful generosity, optimistic future-mindedness, responsibility, forgiveness, and positive purpose in life (MacDonnell et al., 2021). Teachers conducted month-long lessons that involved one of the focuses. The social-emotional lessons allows students to reflect on their own virtues and values. The lessons allowed them to develop and have the skills necessary to achieve their goals they have set for their daily lives. The social-emotional lessons allowed students who have experienced trauma a sense that they belong and that they are able to have future goals and ambitions (MacDonnell et al., 2021). Bailey et al. (2019) also focused on managing emotions, but also emphasized adolescents being able to focus and pay attention and being able to address conflict effectively.

Similarly, Bailey et al.'s (2019) study took place in a middle school summer program that used social-emotional learning. Teachers participated in a 2-hour long training on how to implement different social-emotional strategies in lessons from EASEL Lab facilitators. Teachers gave a survey before and after the implementation of strategies. The data showed that there was a significant growth in cognitive, emotional, and social skills among students. Teachers were happy with the results and visibly noticed an increase in self-esteem among students and less conflicts during recess (Bailey et al., 2019). Not only did teachers see a difference in their students, but they felt like they had stronger relationships with their students.

In contrast, McCormick et al. (2019) focused on not only the impacts of social-emotional learning on general education students, but also students who needed special education services. McCormick et al. (2019) studied a program called *INSIGHTS into Children's Temperament*. The program is an intervention for teachers and parents to recognize children's behavior and to use strategies to improve their

relationships with children. The program shows adults how they can teach children to regulate their emotions and enhance their attention in the classroom. Before the program was assigned, data showed that students who went into Kindergarten with a low-income background had a more likely chance of having behavioral problems and would be referred to SPED services. The program was an intervention for students who had significant behaviors in the classroom and with their peers. In the study, there was a control group that did not receive social-emotional services and a group that was receiving instruction from the program since Kindergarten. The study proved to show that students were getting short term benefits from the program. Students who reached fifth grade and were receiving instruction from *Insights*, dropped out of their SPED services and were involved in the general education classroom.

In comparison, Araúz Ledezma et al.'s (2020) study focused more on how genders can begin to empathize for one another by social-emotional learning. Araúz Ledezma et al. (2020) found that social-emotional learning has an impact on broadening the viewpoints of adolescents when it comes to interpersonal decision making and creating their own goals. Araúz Ledezma et al., (2020) observed a new social-emotional learning program called *Me and My New World* that took place in a Panama. In comparison to the United States, there are huge gender social norms differences. The unequal gender roles promote behavior, choices and judgment, and creates an identity crisis among men and women. *Me and My Mew World* addressed the equal gender behaviors such as equal roles, equal rights in relationships, and nonviolent problem solving skills within adolescents. The program delivered fourteen lessons within a four month academic school year in a low-socioeconomic school. Teachers had training before they administered the lessons to their students. Overall, the results from Araúz Ledezma et al's (2020) study was positive. Before the program, girls would say how they must help out in the home and that they were scared to ask their boyfriends questions. Boys said that they must bring hoe food for the family and that women are responsible for children and grandparents. After the program, the boys realized that women have the same rights as men and that they are able to pursue jobs and wait to have children. The girls began to realize that they can set their own goals and have ambitions. Within the study,

both genders began to empathize for one another, having a more positive outlook on the importance of sharing roles and opportunities (Araúz Ledezma et al., 2020).

Although social-emotional learning has positive short-term outcomes for students, it also has long-term benefits for students. Students are able to have tools to be able to regulate their emotions throughout their lives. They learn to be empathetic toward themselves and toward their peers. They learn from social-emotional learning what is the correct way to address a situation versus not. They can create strong relationships with not only peers, but with adults that are around them as well, thus, creating a list of tools that students can carry through their lives. Schools that incorporate social-emotional strategies see a higher percentage of graduation rates, college attendance, safe sexual behaviors, less criminal involvement, and stronger mental health outcomes (McCormick et al., 2019). Children are able to advocate for themselves and to protect their mental health, to be successful in their academics, and to thrive in their social lives.

School Profile

Community Characteristics

Le Mars, Iowa is known as the Ice Cream Capital of the World. The Blue Bunny Ice Cream factory was founded in Le Mars, IA in 1935. Not only does the ice cream parlor attract tourists, but the factory provides a lot of jobs for people. The town is continually growing and bringing in many different ethnic backgrounds. Le Mars has a population of 10,572 according to the 2021 July report from the census (*U.S. Census Bureau Le Mars, IA, 2023*). 91.2% of the people are white, 3.4% African American, .3% American Indian, .5% Asian, .7% Native Hawaiian, 7% Hispanic, and .5% multi-racial (*U.S. Census Bureau Le Mars, IA, 2023*).

School Characteristics

Le Mars Community Middle School is located in Le Mars, IA. Le Mars Community Middle School consists of 499 6th through 8th grade students according the Le Mars Community School District (LCSD) Report Card. Within the middle school, there are 35 classroom teachers (National Center for

Education Statistics, 2022). The school is a Title I school due to 168 students qualifying for free or reduced priced school lunches (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). The middle school is ran by a head principal and an assistant principal. The Le Mars Middle School adopted a Behavior Program in 2016 for students with behavior disabilities. The school is made of diverse students from many backgrounds. The school also encourages teachers to use research-based strategies that are shown through professional development (PD) meetings.

School Mission & Vision

Le Mars CSD believes that all people can learn. The district believes that families, school, and the community are advocates in promoting education and nurturing honesty, integrity, and interpersonal skills. Their vision and goal is to raise achievement expectations for not only the students, but also the staff. Everything that students are involved in such as academic, vocational activities, and extra-curricular activities promote and develop life-long learners. Le Mars CSD believes that assessment goals do not matter nearly as much as encouragement from the students and staff members—when students are encouraged and feel safe, the assessment scores will reflect on that.

Parent Involvement

There are several ways that parents can be involved in their child's education. In the Le Mars CSD, parents are informed by PowerSchool, a student record management system, and Schoology, an educational platform. In the first quarter of the school year, parents are able to participate in a parent-teacher conference about student behavior, grades, and other school-related topics. Throughout the year, parents are able to contact staff members via email or telephone. Each midterm, which is halfway through a quarter, a report card is sent home to parents on student grades. Parents are able to be a part of the school board and attend school board meetings as well as athletic and music booster clubs. Lastly, parents are able to access schedules for student activities on the school website as well as social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Parents are always encouraged to communicate with teachers through phone system or by email if they have any questions, comments, or concerns about their child.

Student Characteristics

In Northwest Iowa, the small urban school district of Le Mars Community Schools serves 2,235 students from Le Mars, IA. In the 2021-2022 school year, 499 students were enrolled in Le Mars Community School's middle school (grades 6-8) (LCSD Report Card). The students were 14% Hispanic, 3% African-American, 78% White, 2% Native American or Pacific Islander, and 3% identified as two or more races (LCSD Report Card). Male students made up 52% of the classrooms while females made up 48%. 5% of the students in the middle school are English Language Learners (ELLs). 35% of students come from low-socioeconomic (SES) families (LCSD Report Card). Of the 499 students in the middle school, 36 students are on IEPs and 9 students are on 504 plans.

Current Student Learning Goals

Each year, students in Le Mars CSD are annually assessed on their academic learning through Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP) testing. ISASP testing consists of a math and literacy portion, as well as science which is only taken in 5th, 8th, and 11th grade. Students look at scores from the previous year and the proficiency scale that ISASP assigns in order to make their achievement goals. Students in the middle school create goals on their achievement before they take the ISASP tests. After the test scores are collected, students look at their scores and reflect on what they did well and how they could have done better.

Students are also encouraged to look at their personal goals. At the beginning of the year, students create a vision board on their goals in the future. They can create goals from what they want to accomplish during the year, where they want to go to college, or even what they want to be when they grow up. Students will create a visual whether that is a poster or a GoogleSlide of their goals. Each quarter, students create their academic goals that they want to achieve. In the first quarter, parents are able to participate in a student-led conference which students are able to share their visions and their goals with their parents. The parents get to see the goals their child wants to accomplish and can support them or reflect with them on how they can achieve those goals.

A qualitative goal that Le Mars Middle School wants to achieve is to incorporate engaging lessons that will motivate students. In order to reach that goal, students spend 50+ hours on PD before or after school. Teachers also have the opportunity to take 1-2 paid classes a year through the AEA to improve their teaching strategies. Quantitatively, the middle school wants students to be able to get the grade of C- or better in each content area. Students who are not quite reaching this goal participate in a meeting with the teacher and their parents to discuss a before or after school program to give the students the additional help and resources they need.

Student Performance

According to the Le Mars Community School District (CSD) Report Card, students took the Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP) for the third year in a row. The test includes math, literacy, and science (grades 5, 8, and 10). The Iowa State Board of Education approves cut scores that determine student performance and proficiency. In 6th grade, 69% of students were proficient in reading and 83% proficient in math; in 7th grade, 81% of students were proficient in reading and 71% were proficient in math; in 8th grade, students were 76% proficient in reading, 73% proficient in math, and 67% proficient in science (LCSD Report Card). Comparing the 8th grade scores to state averages, state scores were identical (76% reading and 67% science) however, math scored 6% higher (73%) on average compared to other schools in the state (66%) (LCSD Report Card).

Students going into 6th grade take Formative Assessment System for Teachers (FAST) testing. Middle school teachers use the data that is collected to identify students who may need additional instruction to improve their literacy skills. In 2021-2022, students going into 6th grade collectively scored 73%. Across the AEA, the average incoming 6th grade students was 68%.

Teacher Instructional Strategies

All teachers in the Le Mars CSD have been trained and implement APL (approach, practice, and learning) strategies within the classroom. Teachers focus on staying consistent with the attention getter of a lesson, feedback, and practice. Teachers are encouraged to open up the lesson with a bell ringer. Throughout lessons, teachers must be giving formative assessments to review what the students have been

learning throughout instruction time. Agendas and objectives are posted so that not only the teacher can see but the students and people who walk into the classroom as well. Teachers in Le Mars are encouraged to use less technology and use hands-on lessons or use paper copies.

Assessment Practices

The school uses a few ways to assess students on their learning progress. Within the classroom, teachers use a handful of formative assessments each day to keep the students on track and engaged throughout their lessons. The teachers are encouraged by administration to use bell ringers to start a class and to end the class with an exit ticket. At the end of each unit, teachers use summative assessments to test their level of knowledge. Teachers are able to come up with their own summative assessments. Teachers are encouraged from the administration to incorporate research, projects, and presentations as summative assessments. The school used a statewide test, ISASP, to test the level of knowledge the students have learned through the year. Each year, the students are tested in literacy and mathematics and in 8th grade, students are tested on their science knowledge. The school also used FAST testing as a tool that is used to measure student literacy school for screening, progress monitoring, and program evaluation. Both ISASP and FAST testing is done independently on the computer while teachers are monitoring their progress.

Professional Development

Each month on Wednesdays, teachers have professional development (PD) opportunities for 2 hours after school. During PD's, teachers communicate and share instructional activities that can be used in the classroom and participate in book studies involving successful teaching. 2-3 days a month, content teams gather data on formative assessments that were given in the classroom. Teachers share and record the data with their content teams and discuss ways to provide enrichment or intervention for their students. Lastly, each year teachers fill out an IPDP (Individualized Professional Development Plan). The IPDP allows teachers to write down their teaching goals for the year and instructional strategies they want to improve on. The head principal reviews the IPDP's and will approve them. Throughout the year at PD's, teachers overview and reflect on their plan.

Social-Emotional Learning

In the school year of 2021-2022 and the beginning of the school year of 2022-2023, homebase teachers and students participated in a social-emotional learning program called *EverFi*. *EverFi* is a digital program that incorporates lessons that teachers and students access to learn a variety of social-emotional skills. Teachers assign the online lesson to the students that they will complete in the 35 minute class. Students receive a handout with reflection questions about their lessons. It was up to the teacher whether or not they would go through lessons together as a class or if the teacher wanted students to go through the lessons on their own. After the lesson, teachers would go through the reflection questions with the students.

The digital online lessons from *EverFi* would include *Ignition Digital Wellness and Safety*, *Healthier Me*, *Character Playbook*, and *Future Smart*. *Ignition Digital Wellness and Safety* focused on the how students can make smart decisions through texts and social media networks. They learn how anything online is permanent, the impacts of cyberbullying, and steps of how to avoid online drama. *Healthier Me* lessons focus on nutrition. It has lessons of how to balance the food that students put in their bodies. It teaches students the importance of calories, protein, carbohydrates, and fats. The lesson gave information on the ways the body needs to be fueled. *Character Playbook* focused on building healthy relationships with peers and adults. It teaches students how to navigate through social media, reflect on their emotions, and how to build positive relationships. Lastly, *Future Smart* includes lessons on budgeting, spending decision, and choices on saving and spending.

Recently, *EverFi* lessons in Le Mars Middle School have ended. Looking at the data from lessons, students were not engaged in lessons or would not complete lessons. Teachers also were uninterested in using the online platform to teach the students these skills. Now, students complete *EverFi* lessons during FACS (Family and Consumer Science) class. Students are still uninterested in this social-emotional learning platform. FACS has to make time to incorporate the *EverFi* lessons during her class time. Students need to learn and develop their social-emotional skills so that they can thrive inside and outside of school. In Bailey et al.'s (2019) study, cognitive, social, emotional, and relationships

significantly improved among students when they were learning social-emotional skills within the program that their school adopted.

Needs Assessment

At Le Mars Community Middle School, social-emotional learning has been inconsistent and has been lacking in accountability. Teachers need training on how to teach students social-emotional skills in order to decrease the amount of behaviors and to improve student engagement and rapport within the classroom setting. Middle school is a crucial time for emotional and mental development. Koschmann et al. (2019) stated that, “Mood and anxiety disorders affect 20–30 percent of school-age youth and contribute to poor developmental and academic outcomes, substance abuse, and adult psychopathology, as well as immense social and economic costs” (page 1). Social-emotional learning needs to be implemented into the classroom to decrease mental health, to promote positive behavior, and to increase student engagement and academic success.

Middle school is the time that adolescents are going through a variety of changes: social, emotional, mental, and physical changes. Adolescents are relearning how to deal with their new bodies, emotions, and peer status. Students need to the additional social-emotional skills in order to interact positively with each other and adults. When students are not able to regulate their changing emotions, this can lead to an increase in classroom behavior and a disruptive learning environment. The staff of LCMS has noted that there has been an increase in classroom disruptions and increase in in-school suspensions (ISS), out-of-school suspensions (OSS), and after-school detentions.

Currently, LCMS provides minimal opportunities for students to learn social-emotional skills. At the start of the 2022 school year, students were receiving social-emotional instruction from a digital program, *EverFi*, once a week in their HomeBase classrooms. Due to the lack of engagement and accountability from staff, students switched mid-year to learning social-emotional learning from *EverFi* in FACS class as one of their units. Since FACS is a quarterly class, a quarter of the students in each grade are only receiving social-emotional assistance for one-fourth of the school year. Students should be learning new social-emotional tools throughout the school year. Coelho & Sousa (2018) performed a

study on the effectiveness of incorporating social-emotional learning skills within the classroom over the duration of a year. The findings in the study showed that there was significant social awareness and self-esteem increase from students who were receiving social-emotional interventions within their classrooms versus not (Coehlo & Sousa, 2018).

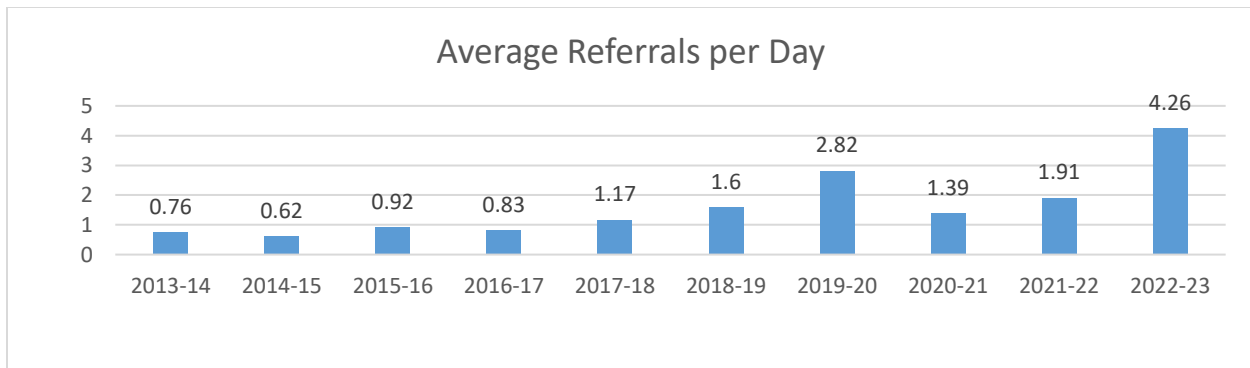
Data Analysis

Data Summary

Le Mars Community Middle School focuses on two goals, behavior and academic goals. The building behavior goals are to: reduce the number of weapons violations, fighting violations, and incidents of harassment. According to the report of the 2022-2023 school year, in the last 10 years there has been an increase in the amount of drug/tobacco violations, fights/assaults, and office referrals per day. Figure 1 below shows the amount of office referrals from 2013-2023.

Figure 1

LCMS 2012-2023 Referrals per Day



Office referrals refers to the minor behaviors or repeated behaviors that can occur inside and outside the classroom: tardiness, running in the halls, refusal to work on assignments in class, blurting out in class, and talking back to the teacher. Behavior referrals need to be written out by the classroom teacher. When a student receives three or more referrals, the parents come in and discuss a plan with the administration to lower the behaviors that are occurring. When a student continues to get written up, it can lead to an in-school suspension (ISS). The school's secretaries keep track of the office referrals and reports to the administration. 22% of students in the building received an office referral in 2022-2023 (Le

Mars Community School District Report Card, 2022). Out of the 108 students who received an office referral, 27 students received two or more office referrals (Le Mars Community School District Report Card, 2022).

EverFi was established in the year of 2021-2022 in hopes of reducing the amount of violations. The data from the Le Mars Community School District Report Card (2022) indicates that there need to be a decrease in students' behavior and violations. The goal is to reduce the amount of violations and behaviors, however, the data shows that there has been an increase in violations. The problem with the amount of violations is the lack of social-emotional guidance the students are receiving both inside and outside of the school.

Students prefer to watch videos on their phones, play video games, or watch TV shows at home. There are less students interested in going outside and participating in sports. According to the middle school volleyball, girls and boys basketball, and girls and boys track coaches, less students are interested in participating in sports. When students are asked what they like to do for fun, most students respond by saying they enjoy playing video games or watching videos on their phones. Due to the lack of face-to-face interactions among adolescents, there are less opportunities for natural social skills to develop.

Le Mars, Iowa is also becoming a more diverse school. Since the world's largest ice cream factory is located in Le Mars, there are opportunities for more jobs to arise for local and non-local residents. There are many families who travel across the United States in order to get hired for a position at Wells Blue Bunny Factory. Over 8.5% of the population of Le Mars is of ethnic background (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). With diversity growing in the town of Le Mars, it also grows within the school district. Students come from different cultures and backgrounds and are taught how to interact in different ways. Students of Le Mars Community struggle with derogatory remarks toward different races. 8 out-of-school suspensions were given in 2022-2023 for racial slurs toward students. Adolescents need to learn how to interact with their peers, whether they are of the same background or not.

School Strengths

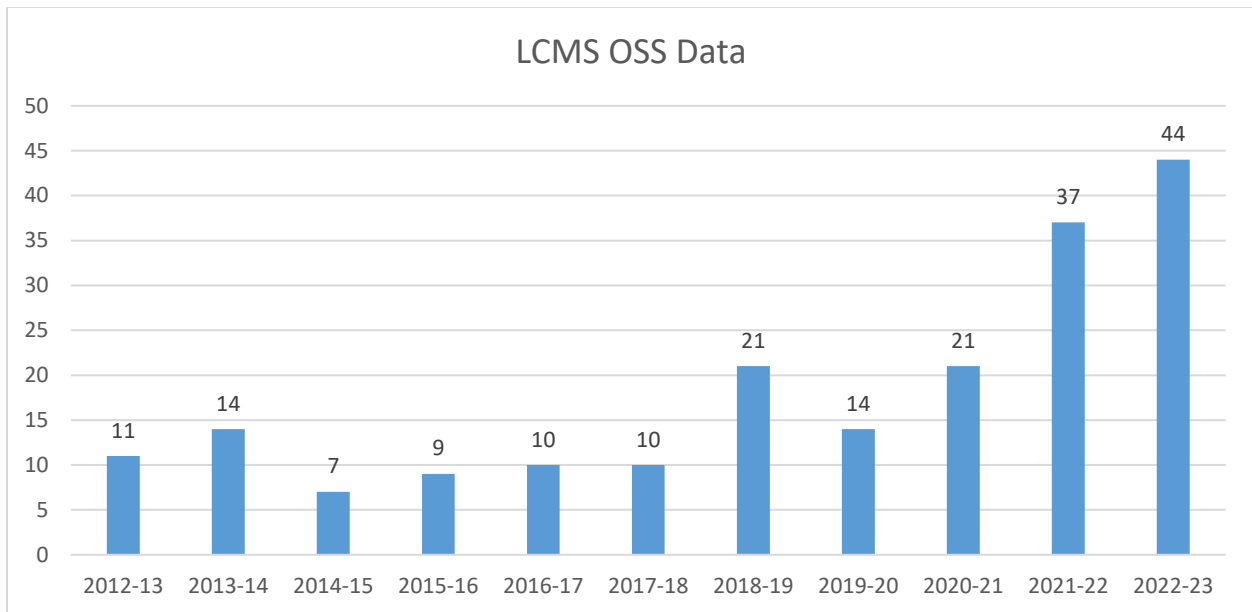
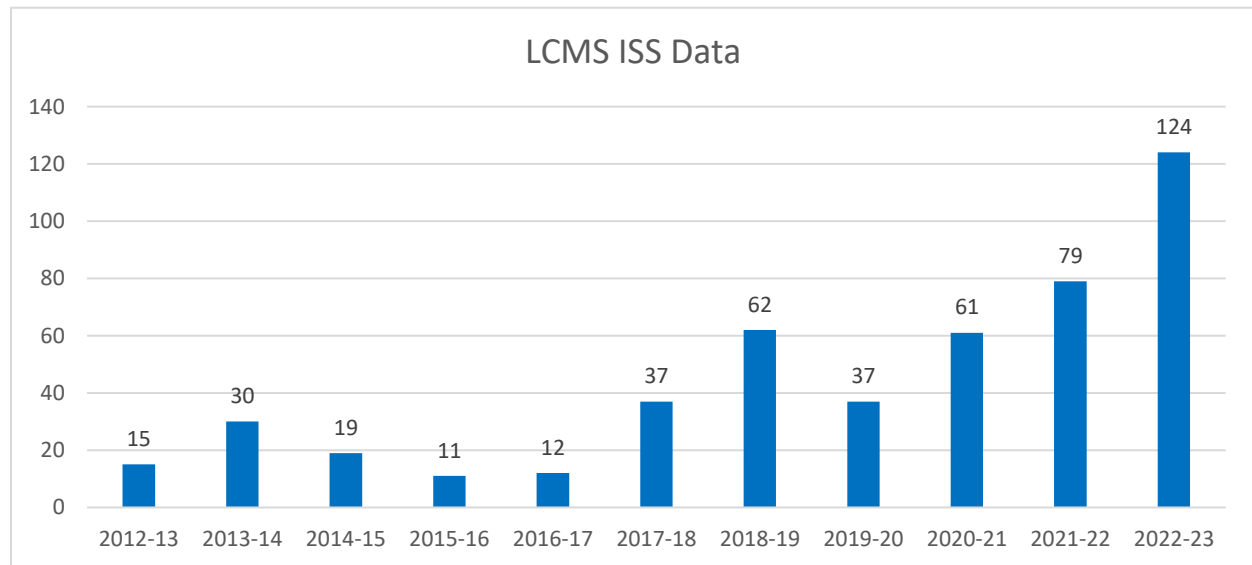
Le Mars Community Middle School's biggest strength is how involved parents are in their child's learning experience. According to the Le Mars Community School District Report Card (2022), 96.9% of the students and parents attended student-led conferences in October. Student-led conferences are a time for students to share with their parents on what they are excelling in and where they need to improve. It is also an opportunity for parents to meet with teachers and ask questions about their child.

The teachers in the middle school are very good at communicating with families whether it is for positive or negative occurrences. At the beginning of the year, families and teachers have the opportunity to meet each other at open house that the school hosts. Parents write down their emails and phone numbers so that the teachers can contact them if needed. However, teachers are required to send at least five positive emails to parents how their child. This encourages building a strong relationship between the parent and the teacher because teachers are communicating about their child's school successes rather than addressing the negatives.

Teachers of LCMS are very educated and are always learning to be a better classroom teacher. 100% of teachers are certified to teach and on average, 96% of teachers have three or more years of teaching experience (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). If there is a new hire teacher, the school requires the new hire to go through two years of mentorship under a veteran teacher. New teachers go through trainings, observations, and must create a portfolio of artifacts from their first two years of teaching experience. Veteran teachers have the opportunity to go to workshops that are located in the Le Mars Community buildings to learn different strategies that can be incorporated into the classroom. Teachers also have access to three different instructional coaches in the building to help enhance lessons and units.

School Challenges

The LCMS End-of-Year Report from the 2022-2023 school year showed that there is a high needs in social-emotional learning. Behaviors have become an issue for the middle school. Each year, student behavior in both the classroom and out of the classroom has increased. More students have received ISS, OSS, and office referrals. There had been a significant increase in ISS and OSS according to Figure 2. There were more the fifty ISS and OSS's given in 2022-2023 than the previous year.

Figure 2*LCMS 2012-2023 OSS Data***Figure 3***LCMS 2012-2023 ISS Data*

Since 2012, there has been fluctuation in the amount of ISS and OSS's that have been given. Since the first year of COVID-19 in 2019-2020, there has been a steady increase in the amount of suspensions. Students are becoming riskier and are starting to test the boundaries within the school

system. Students will try different trends that they see on social media websites, such as stealing soap dispensers from the bathroom walls, hiding vapes in the ceiling panels, and taking away teachers' personal belongings without getting caught. Adolescents have easy access to technology where they can see negative trends. Due to peer pressure from their classmates, students are more likely to conduct the crime. Though technology has some great advantages, there is also a lot of negativity that teenagers see and come across on social media platforms.

From a study by Kutsash & Duchnowski (2004), children in a general education classrooms whom did not receive social-emotional services or instruction had similar characteristics to students with behavior disabilities. General education students in Le Mars are struggling with controlling their behaviors and attitudes. Soland & Kuhfield's (2022) research found that students who did not receive any sort of social-emotional learning continued to increase in suspension, absences, and low grades than those students who did receive social-emotional services. Students of Le Mars Middle School are at-risk of poor academic performance if the amount of behaviors continue to increase. Assisting students in establishing positive relationships with the adults in the building can improve student behaviors. Adolescents learning the tools needed to control their emotions can also decrease the amount of disruptions and poor behavior. With less behaviors, there will be less disruptions and more student participation, which will lead to an increase in academic achievement.

Assessment Options

In order to gain more insight of the needs of the students of Le Mars Community Middle School, a survey could be administered to teachers regarding their concern with their learning environment the last three years. The concerns could address classroom disruptions, social-emotional behavior, peer relationships, and teacher-student relationships. The survey can also address how teachers feel their students are learning in their classroom, as well as their engagement in their classroom. The survey can be sent to teachers via GoogleForms and teachers will be able to answer the questions at their earliest convenience. The data collected can show what needs to be addressed and what teachers may need for additional training.

The school needs to consider having two separate referrals: a major and a minor referral. Minor referrals would be the small things that happen in class such as disrupting the class, not doing work, or playing computer games. Major referrals would be swearing in class, derogatory behavior, or walking out of class. There needs to be clear expectations for students and staff before referrals are given. Currently, there is no way to address whether it is a major or minor referral.

The middle school should consider a new way to collect behavior data. Currently, teachers need to write referrals on paper. These papers are then given to the secretaries of the building to then give to administration. Often times, the referral sheets are not given to the office from teachers due to lack of time. Also, not all data is recorded because the secretaries have many responsibilities and data isn't always entered correctly and efficiently. A computer system can be used for teachers to record major and minor referrals. Data would be collected quickly and efficiently.

The school needs to incorporate social-emotional learning strategies in each classroom. The Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) team can receive training on social-emotional learning strategies from the Northwest AEA. The MTSS team can come train the teachers in the building. Teachers need to use the strategies consistently in the classroom. The school needs to incorporate these strategies within a 1-3 year timeline in order to obtain clear data on OSS, ISS, minor/major referrals, attendance, and academics. Each year, the data can be compared to see how social-emotional strategies are benefitting the students.

Action Plan

Proposed Improvement Plan

In order to incorporate social-emotional learning strategies at Le Mars Community Middle School, all staff members need to be educated on what and how to incorporate social-emotional learning is. First, teachers will be surveyed on what they see are the most problematic issues within the classroom. In the survey, teachers will also be asked on what they know about social-emotional learning. Then, the CIA (school leadership) team will include social-emotional learning strategies into professional

development dates so that all teachers can be educated and trained. In doing so, teachers will all receive the same instruction to promote consistency in classrooms throughout the building.

In a study by Main (2018), pre-service were trained and expected to teach social-emotional learning within their core classrooms for eight weeks. The teachers that explicitly taught social-emotional learning felt that motivation, especially in math and science, increased amongst students and they became more confident in participating in class and working with others (Main, 2018). The teachers also felt more confident teaching social-emotional learning skills to students as the eight weeks progressed (Main, 2018). After LCMS teachers are taught social-emotional skills at professional development, they will meet with grade-level teams to create a plan on teaching social-emotional learning in Homebase which occurs at the start of the day. Once grade-level teams design a plan, they will share and report the plan to a CIA member. The curriculum will be used in an eight week time frame. Within those eight weeks, members of the CIA team will go into classrooms to ensure the fidelity is being met throughout the implementation of the curriculum. At the end of the eight weeks, grade-level teams will report how comfortable teachers were with teaching social-emotional learning skills, as well as how the students responded.

Impact on Teaching

At Le Mars Community Middle School, teaching social-emotional learning skills will occur at the start of the day during Homebase. Teachers will do this for the first fifteen minutes of the thirty-five minute class. As students transition from class to class, teachers will continue to review the skills that were taught at the start of the day. Neth et al. (2020) found that students who were at risk of social, behavioral, and academic decline reported that students stopped and thought more about their actions and consequences after they were taught social-emotional learning skills. Ahmed et al.'s (2020) study found that students began to identify their strengths, weaknesses, and feelings, as well as found students effectively working with their peers during group and class activities. Social-emotional learning allows students and teachers to create relationships. When students have a strong relationship with a teacher, the

student is more than likely going to be more engaged, confident, willing to work with others, and have a stronger growth-mindset within that classroom (Soland & Kuhfield, 2022).

Alignment to Research

Social-emotional learning helps adolescents' decision-making skills as they are going through a series of social, physical, and emotional changes. As students become older, they become more discriminating and self-conscious (Silverthorn et al, 2018). Self-esteem, control, and awareness increased with students obtaining social-emotional learning (Coelho & Sousa, 2018). Social-emotional learning creates a positive experience for students and staff. Staff and teachers feel that they are making strong relationships with their teachers (Bailey et al., 2019). Students feel a sense of belonging when they enter the school building. Learning anxiety is reduced and students want to come to school and participate in academics (Wang et al., 2016).

Summary

The proposed improvement plan for Le Mars Community Middle School will occur in four stages. The first stage is the preparedness that teachers feel in implementing social-emotional learning. The second stage is learning social-emotional learning through a professional development. The third stage will be designing an eight-week plan with grade-level teams on when and how they will be teaching social-emotional learning strategies to their students in the Homebase setting. The final stage will be implementing the curriculum at the start of the day for eight weeks. Within those eight weeks, teachers will continue to review the social-emotional learning skill that was addressed at the start of the day. CIA members will ensure that teachers are implementing these strategies in the classroom. This plan will require time, work, effort, and fidelity. However, the plan will encourage a positive culture in the Le Mars Community Middle School.

Implementation of School Improvement Plan

Introduction

In order to implement a new school improvement plan, steps and consistency need to be in order. Incorporating a new plan requires many challenges and time in order to get it organized. In order to create

success with the new program, a set timeline of events and sufficient training on social-emotional training amongst school staff needs to be considered. In a study by Main (2020), teachers who felt like they did not get an adequate amount of training in social-emotional learning felt like they did not get the opportunity to see the benefits that it can bring in the classroom. Proper training needs to be provided to staff in order to make sure they will provide social-emotional learning to the classroom in a successful manner.

At Le Mars Community Middle School, the first step will be for staff to receive training on social-emotional learning. The Northwest AEA holds a 3-day training on social-emotional learning. Staff will be required to do one of two training events in the summer time, while being compensated for their time. This will allow staff to get more comfortable with knowing and implementing social-emotional strategies into their classroom. The next step will be to make sure that all staff recognize what will need to be incorporated in the classroom so that the plan can be carried out correctly. Before the start of the year, there will be a staff-wide meeting ran by the CIA team and the administration to review social-emotional learning and to discuss what the teachers will be doing for the next eight weeks in their classrooms. The third step will be for teachers to get together with their grade-level teams to design the social-emotional plans that teachers will be using during their Homebase times. The last stage will be teachers implementing social-emotional learning in their Homebase class for the first ten to fifteen minutes of the day. As the day goes on and students report to their core and extracurricular classrooms, teachers will be sure to include the social-emotional strategies that were taught that morning. Throughout the eight weeks, members from the CIA team will go to classrooms to make sure that teachers are staying committed to the plan.

Timeline

At Le Mars Middle School, it would take three academic school years for the school improvement plan. The first step is to determine the comfortability when it comes to social-emotional learning among teachers. Teachers would complete an online survey and would have one week to respond. This will occur in the winter. After teachers respond, the administration and the CIA will look at

the data to determine how in depth the professional development on social-emotional learning will be. Next, teachers would need to report to a 3-day training in either June or July from the Northwest AEA. All veteran staff have two years to complete the class since the Northwest AEA offers two classes each summer. Each new teacher in the years to follow will need to get signed up for the 3-day training and will have two years to complete the class. Teachers will be compensated for their time to go to the training.

Figure 4*Social-Emotional Learning Program Timeline*

| Year 0 | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|--|
| <i>When?</i> | <i>How Long?</i> | <i>What?</i> |
| December | 1 week | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher Survey |
| Summer (June or July) | 3 days | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3-day SEL Training |
| Academic Year 1 | | |
| August | 2 weeks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional Development • Grade-level SEL Design • Approval of design |
| September (week 3 of school year) | 8 weeks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEL Curriculum taught in classrooms • Progress monitoring |
| November – May | 31 weeks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued SEL tools incorporated • Continued progress monitoring |
| May | 1 week | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher survey • Parent survey • Student survey • Year-end report |

| Academic Year 2 | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------|--|
| August | 2 weeks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional Development • Review SEL Design |
| September (week 3 of school year) | 8 weeks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEL Curriculum taught in classrooms • Progress monitoring |
| November – May | 31 weeks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued SEL tools incorporated • Continued progress monitoring |
| May | 1 week | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher survey • Parent survey • Student survey • Year-end report |
| Academic Year 3 | | |
| August | 2 weeks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional Development • Review SEL Design |
| September (week 3 of school year) | 8 weeks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEL Curriculum taught in classrooms • Progress monitoring |
| November – May | 31 weeks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued SEL tools incorporated • Continued progress monitoring |
| May | 1 week | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher survey |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent survey • Student survey • Year-end report |
|--|--|--|

The next stage consists of a professional development on social-emotional training to review the strategies so staff are all on the same page. After the professional development, teachers will go into their grade-level teams to design an eight-week plan on the progression of social-emotional learning that will occur in Homebase. After a plan is designed, the grade-level team will share with administration for approval. On the third week of the school year, implementation of the plan will begin. In Homebase, students will learn the social-emotional learning skill. During the school day, teachers will continue to review the social-emotional strategies within their content classes. During the eight-week time frame, CIA members will conduct a walk-through to ensure that teachers are implementing the plan with fidelity. After the eight weeks, teachers will continue to incorporate social-emotional strategies within their content classes. Progress monitoring will occur at least twice each quarter throughout the academic school year. For the following two academic school years, the same process will begin by teaching students social-emotional learning during Homebase for eight weeks with progress monitoring occurring each week during the curriculum. After the eight-week program is taught, teachers will continue to do progress monitoring throughout the year.

Le Mars Community Middle School teachers need social-emotional training in order to provide instruction and to understand the benefits that come from teaching social-emotional learning to students. This process will take three academic school years, starting first by delivering a survey in the winter months and proceeding to social-emotional trainings in the summer. Teachers will create an 8-week curriculum that will occur on week three of the school year. Teachers must deliver the instruction with fidelity in order for the students to receive the benefits from it. Throughout the 8-week program, students

will be able to work better with their peers, will be more engaged in class due to a building relationship with the teacher, and will decrease the behaviors inside and outside of the classroom.

Role Clarification and Assignments

In order for the social-emotional learning plan to be successful, there will be many people with additional roles and assignments. Teachers will be required to answer the survey that is delivered in the winter months. They also are responsible for attending a required summer training, as well as applying the new curriculum in their classrooms that was created by the grade-level teams. Throughout the school year after the 8-week curriculum is delivered, teachers must continue to build on what they top and incorporate the tools that they taught the students. Teachers must continue building relationships with students throughout the entirety of the school year. Teachers will also be responsible for conducting progress monitoring throughout the academic school year and will report their observations to their grade-level teams.

The grade-level teams are also responsible to come up with an eight-week social-emotional learning curriculum. Grade-level teams consist of eight or nine teachers for 6th, 7th, and 8th grade. After teachers have received training, teachers will get together with their grade-level teams to design their curriculum. During the school year, the grade-level teams will get together in biweekly meetings to share their progress monitoring. The grade-level team must have a shared document created where all the data will be held. A CIA team member will be at the grade-level teams to listen to the data and participate in discussion.

The CIA team consists of one teacher from each content area, SPED teacher, and the two building principals, making a total of seven people. The team is required to go to 3-day summer trainings each year. The CIA team, or the building leadership team, is responsible for leading and scheduling professional development for staff. A member is responsible for checking and giving an opinion of the designed plan that the grade-level teams design. CIA members are held accountable for monitoring teachers throughout the implementation process. CIA members will assist teachers who may need

additional help and will give suggestions to staff in their biweekly meetings. After the members meet with the grade-level teams, CIA members will come together to report the findings.

Although the administration is a part of the CIA team, they have additional roles that they need to follow as well. The head principal will send a newsletter out to families about the new social-emotional learning plan that will take place in the school. The letter will consist of what is being taught to the students as well as encouraging them to incorporate these tools into their homes. The administration will also need to look at the data that is collected from the grade-level teams and will need to organize it. The administration will look for patterns or consistencies in the data. They will also be looking at the data that comes from detentions, ISS, OSS, and referrals. They will collect the data for the next three academic school years and graph the data collection. After the three academic years, the administration will sit down with the CIA team to discuss how to proceed.

The families will receive a newsletter at the beginning of the school year. The newsletter lets the family know about the school improvement plan, what is being taught, and encourages them to incorporate those tools into the home. Families will need to do their best to support their child through the process. They can reassure their child that the social-emotional tools that are being taught in school will help them regulate their feelings and solve problems in a more positive manner. Families are able to call the school and ask questions about the program, as well as how their child may be responding. Families will get a survey at the end of each academic school year asking how they feel that their son or daughter has progressed.

Students are responsible for doing their best in school. They will learn the tools at the start of the year and will continue to use them. Students will be held accountable if they have behaviors. They will still receive referrals, detentions, and suspensions. Students will still be receiving grades and are held accountable in doing their best academically. Students will be responsible to take a survey at the end of the school year. They will be able to do the survey in a Homebase setting at school.

Progress Monitoring

Each teacher will be responsible for progress monitoring. Each week, teachers will take notes on student behavior, academics, and social patterns for their Homebase students on a shared document. Teachers will discuss their observations in the biweekly team meetings. As a team, teachers will look at any patterns or changes that are seen. At the end of each academic school year, teachers will receive an online survey in regards to how teaching social-emotional learning went, how the strategies were incorporated into the content classes, and whether or not they felt that it improved the class and school culture. Students will also take an online survey asking the same questions. The data will be collected and analyzed to determine how the social-emotional learning plan is affecting academics, behavior, and school culture.

The CIA team will report to the administration the anecdotal notes that were provided from the grade-level teams. However, the administration will be responsible for keeping track of referrals, suspensions, and detentions throughout each academic school year. The school will use an online platform to collect the referrals, suspensions, and detentions and will sort them out. The administration will need to look at the data monthly to see any improvements. Throughout the three years, administration will compare the data monthly and yearly. The administration will also be sure to look at the data that was collected from family and student surveys.

Limitations

There are several limitations that can occur in this plan. A limitation for this implementation is the willingness and effort that teachers will put into the new curriculum. If teachers are not implementing social-emotional learning with fidelity, then the results will not be reliable. Students may not be getting the full benefits from social-emotional learning. Teachers also need to take adequate observational notes on their students in order to obtain reliable data. Another limitation is making sure that all staff are trained adequately and feel comfortable teaching social-emotional learning. Students may also not be fully engaged in the process of social-emotional learning. Students come from different families, backgrounds, and support systems. Families may be unsupportive of the program.

Conclusion

According to research, social-emotional learning has several benefits for students and members of the school. Kutash & Duchnowski (2004) studied the impact on schools that provided social-emotional learning to students and found that it supported students' academics and behavior management. Similarly, Ahmed et al. (2020) found that middle school students were more competent in identifying their strengths and weaknesses, as well as their feelings and their dispositions. Social-emotional learning also helps students build strong, positive relationships with their peers and teachers. In order for students within a school to receive these benefits, teachers must instruct social-emotional learning with accountability.

Middle school students are going through a variety of social, emotional, and physical changes. Adolescents are starting to build relationships with their peers and are trying to figure out their niche. Relationships among adolescents come and go and this can affect their mental health. Social-emotional learning provides the skills that are essential for human development and can assist adolescents with social interaction and withstanding peer pressure. Students begin to demonstrate social awareness. Saeki & Quirk (2015) found that students' psychological needs were met during social-emotional learning instruction which mitigated behavior outbursts. According to the data at Le Mars Middle School, behavior management is something that needs to be regulated.

Le Mars Middle School's data over the last decade has shown an increase in suspensions and office referrals. Currently, there is no social-emotional learning taking place in the middle school. According to the research, there are many benefits that can come from teaching social-emotional learning. Incorporating a social-emotional learning curriculum as a staff will help students achieve academic, social, and behavioral success. If the curriculum is taught with fidelity and all staff represent the tools with consistency, then suspensions and office referrals will mitigate, as well as improve student engagement within the classroom.

The goal of the school improvement plan is to create a safe environment for students and staff to learn and grow. Over the last decade, behaviors at the middle school have increased. By incorporating the school improvement plan, students will gain the tools to help regulate their emotions. Staff and students

will create positive relationships with each other by getting to know each other better. Students will be more engaged in the classroom because they feel safe and comfortable. The goal is to minimize the behaviors in the building and to maximize academic success and peer-relationships.

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