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Improving Opportunities for Students by Creating Pathways for Taking Art

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Capstone Project: A School Improvement Plan

Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa

Abstract

According to research, art education has gone through a decline, causing a lack of opportunities for students to experience the development of creativity in the general classroom. These opportunities for students in the schools in this study become even harder at the secondary level. With these small schools, it falls on the leadership of the administration to solve the scheduling dilemma for all the students. A school improvement plan is put into place to help increase the pathways for taking art by extending the day at one of the schools and changing the schedules to better help both schools work together by sharing the same teacher to optimize the schedules by making changes to fit the majority of the students from both schools.

Keywords: art education, availability, scheduling, participation, leadership, STEAM, drop-out, general education

Table of Contents

Abstract..... 2

Introduction..... 5

Literature Review..... 7

 STEM to STE(A)M: Incorporating Art Into the Core 8

 Dropout Prevention and Art..... 11

 Leadership and Scheduling Effect Access to Art in School 15

 Importance of Art in School 18

Site Profile 22

 Community Characteristics..... 22

 School District Characteristics..... 23

 School Building Characteristics..... 24

 Missions and Purposes of AHS and EHS 24

 Current Student Learning Goals 25

 School Characteristics..... 27

 Student Portfolio & Performance..... 27

 Parent Involvement 28

 Teacher Work..... 29

 Curriculum 29

 Instructional Strategies..... 30

 Assessment Practices 32

 Professional Development Practices..... 34

Needs Assessments 35

Data Analysis 37

 Data Summary 37

 Data From Students..... 44

 School Strengths Within Districts..... 45

 School Challenges Within Districts 46

 Assessment Options 47

Action Plan..... 47

 Proposed Improvement Plan 48

 Impact on Teaching and Learning 51

| | |
|---|----|
| Alignment to Research..... | 52 |
| Summary | 54 |
| Implementation of School Improvement Plan | 54 |
| Timeline | 54 |
| Role Clarifications and Assignment Responsibility | 57 |
| Responsibilities in AHS | 58 |
| Responsibilities in EHS | 58 |
| The Process of Implementation | 59 |
| Progress Monitoring..... | 60 |
| Barriers and Challenges | 60 |
| Conclusion | 61 |
| References..... | 64 |
| Appendix..... | 68 |

Improving Opportunities for Students by Creating Pathways for Taking Art

Despite convincing research and strong public support, the arts remain on the margins of education, often the last to be added and the first to be dropped in times of strained budgets and shifting priorities (Hancock & Wright, 2018). The arts maintain a precarious position in public education. After a steady increase throughout the middle of the 20th century, art education in the United States has been in steady decline since the 1980s (Katz-Buonincontro, 2018). In a 2012 national survey, roughly half of public school teachers reported art and music receiving less instructional time and resources over previous decades. With this decline in art education, there is a lack of opportunities for students to experience the development of creativity in arts-based learning. Throughout these years, general education has failed to see the value of visual arts programs in its curriculums. Hence lies the problem with program availability at the secondary level of education. People need to realize that art is perhaps the most essential, universal language (Ozga & Cudo, 2022, p. 13). It is not a frill but a necessary part of communication. People need words, music, dance, and visual arts to give expression to the profound urging of the human spirit. Art belongs to all of us, and it stirs in each person in a unique way. Since the beginning of time, the first caveman used sticks and stones to create symbols and sounds to start understanding their feelings and ideas (Chilvers, 2023).

The focus of this improvement plan will be on two school districts that lack art opportunities for students. When evaluating both districts, various aspects showed where possible changes should be made. Two of the most important underlying issues were art availability and scheduling. Other problems facing these two districts include money, time, and support, leaving the district to prioritize which is most important if they choose to move forward.

The overall purpose of this school improvement plan is to prove to the districts that art is an important part of the learning process at all levels of all students in all areas of learning.

In this school improvement plan, it is my intention as the author to use data from the interviews of administration, students, counselors, and other staff, along with literature from several research papers, to make informed decisions. I will also be using a small study of a specific student who has been selected for the purpose of his own IEP to show the influence that art has had on his academic and behavioral outcomes in his education in the past school year. He has been a student who has attended an alternative school connected to our ESU #1 Tower School, which provides a focus on behavior modification, social skills, functional skills, daily living skills, job skills, and transition skills and ultimately prepares students to be contributing members of society and experience success in a variety of settings (ESU#1, 2023). With the knowledge gained by using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research data, I will be able to support the students, staff, and administration by helping the entire school better understand the aspects that should be addressed to improve the overall school climate.

The research for this school improvement plan has been directed through the DeWitt Library at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa, and all articles have been peer-reviewed. Due to the limited number of studies done on the impact of art and opportunities in the secondary level of education, I have included studies of administrative scheduling, art and drop-out rates, and art integration in science, technology, engineering, arts, and math STEAM. I also incorporated interviews and a single study of a student in the districts where I am working. By advocating for my program and finding solutions for the problems in the districts where I work, I hope to solve the problems we face. If we work together as an educational entity for the betterment of the students, there should be no obstacles we cannot clear.

In this plan, I want to prove art is an important part of the educational success of all students, not just those in the fine arts field. Visual arts should be studied for its own sake; it also offers wonderful opportunities for interdisciplinary links to other arts and fields of study. The arts can make other fields of study come alive for learners and provide a connector they cannot do alone. For children to develop their mental capabilities and realize their fullest potential, they need to be exposed to many kinds of knowledge and ways of knowing their world and expressing themselves. I want to show the various ways art makes a difference in the educational process. Then, I want to discuss the issues and problems facing art and scheduling in the districts where I teach, looking at the various aspects to show where possible changes should be made. I can then use the information from interviews and surveys to help guide us toward change. Finally, I want to talk about possible solutions that might help both districts where I teach—giving the students the highest level of opportunities to take art and reach their goals of educational success. These solutions will provide students a chance to create, explore, reflect, express themselves, and actively engage in their learning experiences (Bowen & Kisida, 2023, p. 6).

Literature Review

Art can play a positive role in the total educational experience because has intrinsic value. The arts allow students to develop their creativity in ways beyond that of traditional core subjects. The arts also strengthen all other core education. Research confirms a positive relationship between arts education and academic success for both elementary and secondary students. Studying the arts enhances the study of all other subjects. Integrating the arts with other core subjects in programming allows students to think creatively and develop their problem-solving and critical-thinking skills in a new way. To promote the broad and deep thinking necessary for integrated studies, the arts by virtue of their capacity to embody and share the rich

diversity of human experience across time, space, and cultures, are prime sources of meaningful themes and circular centers for integrated approaches to learning (Shaheen, 2001). As teachers in the field, we must move beyond broad claims about the impact of arts education to delineate the effects of particular forms of arts education. We need to be more precise about what benefits those programs may confer and how those benefits may be conferred (Holochwost et al., 2021).

In this literature review, I present the research surrounding (a) art and STEAM, (b) art and the prevention of dropout, (c) how leadership and scheduling affect access to art, (d) the importance of art in school and how it affects the educational quality, and (e) the equality art has in school. The value and positive impact of the arts and arts education on public schools are often self-evident to artists and art educators. Yet, all too often, it is up to the arts community to justify the expenses of arts education by providing evidence: “Frequently the arts are confused with entertainment and can be enjoyed without a real understanding” (Sahr, 2000, p. #). Arts education nurtures creativity and teaches effective communication skills; provides tools for a critical assessment of what one reads, sees, and hears; gives young people a sense of society and place in the world; the arts can often connect with students who usually have had difficulty in a traditional academic environment and can improve the general learning environment for all students.

STEM to STE(A)M: Incorporating Art I the Core

Since the end of the 2000s, there has been a rise in the interaction of STE(A)M—educators adding art as a core discipline with the other four STEM disciplines (Li & Wong, 2020, p. 323). In particular, STE(A)M education focuses not only on the acquisition of subject knowledge but also on disciplinary integration and the enhancement of students’ creativity, problem-solving skills, and interest in STE(A)M (Li & Wong, 2020, p. 331). In further research,

Uştu et al. (2021) acknowledged art was as necessary as the other STEM disciplines in raising individuals with skills for the 21st century. In addition, they reported that art develops critical thinking skills and creative thinking in problem-solving, enabling individuals to use their imagination to solve even technical problems. In short, combining art with other basic disciplines instead of studying it as a separate subject in schools changes teachers' perspectives regarding art and contributes to the development of optimal learning environments for students (Uştu et al., 2021). Art is the best way to connect all the core subjects and help those students who have trouble with the core subjects and are visual learners. All children are visual learners; art helps all children.

In another study by Hancock and Wright (2018), integrating arts into early childhood and economically disadvantaged learning environments showed an increase in vocabulary, fine skills, and academic and social capacity as a result of the program Wolf Trap Early Learning Through the Arts Residency. This program went beyond a separate art education program and helped teachers understand how to integrate art into their everyday lessons and the required curriculum they were already teaching (Hancock & Wright, 2018, p. 445). This program is especially beneficial for economically disadvantaged students who might not have the opportunity otherwise to be exposed to different art forms. This study helped teach school-ready skills to early childhood students and increase the capacity of classroom teachers by showing them how to implement art-based teaching strategies and teaching artists to acquire and model effective art-based teaching strategies (Hancock & Wright, 2018, p. 446). The study used data from the teaching artists, classroom teachers, and external evaluators.

The Wolf Trap program integrated the arts into subjects in the core curriculum, producing positive academic and social effects and assisting in the development of critical academic skills,

basic and advanced literacy, and numeracy (Hancock & Wright, 2018). One major benefit of art education is increased enthusiasm for school and academic learning, especially for at-risk students. Six major types of benefits are associated with this study of arts: reading and language skills, mathematic skills, thinking skills, social skills, motivation to learn, and a positive school environment (Hancock & Wright, 2018). Though literature on arts integration is scarce, Hancock and Wright (2018) also found that art could help shape the emotions of preschool students introduced to a separate arts education program. They also found students were more socially capable than others in an early learning class (Hancock & Wright, 2018).

In the United States, arts education has gained some attention and has been looked at by the previous administration. A 2016 report by the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities examined the federally funded Turnaround Arts Education program integrated into high-poverty areas and found that math proficiency scores went up 23% on average, and reading scores went up 13% on average. The schools that integrated this program found discipline issues decreased, and the schools that participated in the Turnaround Arts Program outperformed schools that had received similar amounts of additional federal assistance. By the end of the program, student academic achievement and attendance and parent and community engagement were enhanced (Hancock & Wright, 2018, p. 432).

While exploring the interdisciplinary approaches, Heinrich and Kornov (2021) looked at higher education for sustainability. In this research, they experienced the relationship of students in arts and science through which interdisciplinary and problem-solving processes were explored. Their study featured a workshop of students from two programs based on evaluations from experiences through participants' observational and written feedback, workshop facilitators, and postevent reflections. They found that art helps communicate complex ideas, and

research exploring art “as a vehicle” has found that it affects pro-environmental beliefs, values, and attitudes (Heinrich & Kornov, 2021, p. 729). The findings suggest that transformative sustainability is supported by integrating “transdisciplinary study (head); practical skill sharing and development (hands); translation of passion and values into behavior (heart)” (Heinrich & Kornov, 2021, p. 729). They also explore holistic pedagogy and find the development of emotional learning and passion. As argued throughout the studies by Li and Wong (2020), art develops critical thinking skills and creative thinking in problem solving, and it enables individuals to use their imagination to solve even technical problems; it needs to be incorporated into the other cores—not only through STEAM but in daily curriculum.

Dropout Prevention and Art

Art-based programs can be critical players in efforts to prevent school dropouts. Despite the numerous benefits arts have for children, research has shown many children give up on art between the ages of 10 and 12 (Hallam et al., 2014, p. 195). In research done about school dropout prevention, Charmaraman and Hall (2011) stated that one of the most crucial times for students is during the transition periods between middle and high school—between their sixth and ninth years of high school year. They can show warning signs as early as the first month in the school year. Coursework is more demanding, teachers are less supportive, peer groups are larger, and temptations become greater at the same time they begin to experience more personal freedom (Charmaraman & Hall, 2011). These students are experiencing early adult responsibilities; not one factor is responsible, but when several factors are combined, they can build and compound over time. Charmaraman and Hall (2011) also stated that according to the U.S. Department of Justice, after-school programming increases the academic achievements of at-risk youth , and also decreases drug use and juvenile delinquency, increases self-esteem, and

increases positive intersections and connections with adults and peers. In addition, students have attributed positive outcomes through arts education to increased caring and attention from supportive art instructors, increased self-esteem, and a sense of accomplishment through learning opportunities. Charmaraman and Hall have made the connection between drop-out prevention and art-based programming. Developing and implementing effective integration strategies are great ways to help students succeed in all areas of the school.

Other scholars also agree there is no single identifiable cause of dropping out of school, but challenging life circumstances and poor choices leading up to the decision to quit school began many years earlier. Kathleen Thomas et al. (2015) shared that art participation can foster students' attachment to a group and can forge connections between a student and their school. Students who are involved in art can incorporate their own ideas and do not find the classes boring. The arts may also encourage persistence by providing a safe place for students to fail and learn from their mistakes in ways that might not be available to them in other subjects (Kathleen Thomas et al., 2015, p. 328). I believe students feel this way in my classroom because I encourage them to make mistakes! I say things like, "If it doesn't work, we can fix it, or start over . . . who cares!" Students are relaxed because they know I am not going to be upset, and they have my permission to make those mistakes before it happens. Recent research has continued to reveal how important it is for students to develop noncognitive skills to be successful, particularly perseverance, attention, motivation, and self-confidence (Kathleen Thomas et al., 2015, p. 328).

Katz-Buonincontro (2018) examined whether creativity is a human act or a human right as part of her research. Acts are small, separate tasks, whereas rights are freedoms implied for everyone from birth. In the study, Katz-Buonincontro showed the decline in art education, the

lack of opportunities for students to experience the development of creativity in arts-based learning, and whether creativity is a fundamental right to question the nature of reality through the process of making art. If creativity is a human right for all students, it raises the question of how educational opportunities in the arts have been distributed over recent years.

Spending decreases in the arts are relatively common, and the lack of opportunities for students to experience the development of creativity in arts-based learning is all too common. These data point toward a disproportionate effect on decreased art-based creativity. The drive for a creative agency with a paradox: How can educators promote creative agency in a strained arts-based learning environment with an achievement gap and limited resources? (Katz-Buonincontro, 2018, p. 35). Katz-Buonincontro shows we need more research and a more determined drive to support creative agencies to be advocates for art educators and be leaders in our schools, districts, and state education systems, which in turn will help students and parents perceive greater relevance in their schools' art programs. It has been surprising how little research there is on art and course availability in high school, but it is a common theme in every study I find.

Many aspects can cause students to drop out without a single factor, but the importance of how one perceives school as they do art, is important in anything one does. The beliefs about teaching arts education is not different, and an informed teacher's capability to teach the arts matters. If the teacher is positive, they are more likely to do a great job and want to incorporate art into their curriculum, but if their own belief is negative, most likely they will not use art to teach. Garvis and Lemon (2013) surveyed 206 participants about the role of the arts in schools, how it relates to teachers' efficiency in teaching art, and how it relates to their beliefs. Garvis and Lemon found that with limited experience in the arts, generalist teachers may be less confident in

teaching the arts. They were interested in the preservice teachers' (i.e., who have been teaching for less than 3 years) perceptions of arts education in Australian primary schools. The survey was also given to the students. This study provides insight into past and current levels of engagement with arts subjects. Garvis and Lemon's findings showed that:

- 57% of students had never studied an arts course at university prior to the arts course they were currently enrolled in.
- 45% had visual arts experiences outside of university.
- 22% had media experiences outside of university.
- 35% had drama experiences outside of university.
- 24% had dance arts experiences outside of university.
- 48% had music experiences outside of university.

These findings suggest that around half of the students did not experience an art form outside the university (Garvis & Lemon, 2013).

This is one very big reason a lot of general education teachers do not teach art to their students. I can understand why some of the teachers in my district have a hard time incorporating art lessons into some of their curriculum if they have not received art throughout their educational journey. The limited exposure to arts may be part of the overall greater affiliation and identity with the arts. If art is the only connection some of these students might have in keeping them in school, educators need to make sure we are doing a better job incorporating art into all levels of teaching throughout educational experiences, even at the college level. A huge gap is being overlooked in our system of teaching, even in the general education classroom. It could be the only connection for those students ready to give up on graduation and decide to drop out of school.

Leadership and Scheduling Effect Access to Art in School

School leaders have a significant and direct influence on school processes and outcomes. However, the leader's influence on the school's outcomes seems indirect. The quality of a school's performance is linked to a principal leadership style and professional conduct. Specifically, evidence testified to the connection between transformational leadership style and school outcome indicators (e.g., teacher satisfaction school effectiveness, teacher organizational commitment, and school's organizational learning; Nir & Hameiri, 2014, p. 211). This finding could be linked to the studies I have done on how the administration takes care of schedules with planning and encourages art with students. If the organization skills of the administration are not good, then the entire school can struggle to do well. The parts of the process that are more indirect to me would be financial in nature. Most anything related to learning and scheduling would directly affect the students. I can speak directly about this aspect of my school and how well our school is run. Our district has been fortunate to have administrators who have spent quality time as teachers in the classroom before they became administrators. They have a good understanding of the real needs of teachers and staff in the classroom and the entire school system.

A second study done that affects access to art in ways of planning was by Muggy and Easton (2015) in research on a program that helps set up class schedules in minutes, which will help save time and numerous benefits to help find solutions to scheduling dilemmas. This style of schedule gives teachers the freedom to design classes to facilitate students' learning (Muggy & Easton, 2015, p. 375). The sequencing modular algorithmic routines for timetabling (SMART) scheduler creates cohesive modular class schedules using effective techniques such as ejection trees and student sectioning. Some modifications can be done. For instance, some teachers do not

allocate sufficient time to complete all meetings; a teacher might allocate only eight mods to complete a phase that requires nine mods of instructions and needs to be negotiated between the principal and the teacher. These are things computer programs cannot conform to and will need to be discussed. In addition, all teachers are required to take a lunch break between certain mods, and teachers are never permitted to instruct for more than their district allows. This program is a piece of technology used to save time but cannot oversee what students might need to help their overall educational program or schedule. We need a person to oversee each individual student to ensure all students are working toward the goal they personally want, not what a computer calculated as the most optimal.

When looking at research on accessing art through scheduling, there has been little. The first study to examine arts access at the school level using both measures of course availability and student participation was Thomas and her team (2013) at Mississippi State University. They looked at the size, access to resources, and what standards were used to decide what is considered an art-rich school because there is little to no research to go by. The most important thing in determining an art-rich high school is the engagement of the student body. Given the relationship between course offerings and school resources, it is not surprising there is a positive connection between course offerings and school size. However, they did not expect to find a high rate of student participation representation for small school sizes. The main conclusion from Thomas et al. is that extensive course offerings in the arts and high rates of student engagement do not necessarily go hand in hand. When taking participation rates into account, larger high schools can end up with low rankings because of a lack of student participation in the arts. Despite the wide variety of arts course availability system-wide, most high schools offer far less

than the number officially approved as a standard course. Quantity of education is important, but quality of education is even more so (Johnes, 2015, p. 331).

The availability of arts was key in the next research study. Elpus (2020) investigated the access to art in the United States, and the purpose of this particular study was to understand reasons associated with the availability of arts education courses in U.S. high schools. The study took data from the National Center for Education Statistics High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSLs) to understand whether common school characteristics were linked to the availability of art education courses. The results suggest the biggest and most consistent school factor was that of school size. I believe this to be an important factor in the research data because the district where I work is so small. In Elpus's study, as the enrollment increased, so did the likelihood of offering any arts course or more than of the arts disciplines. That is not the case where I work and is an uphill battle for my program. Most public schools are remarkably similar in the offering of art education, followed by Catholic schools and non-Catholic private schools. Public charter high schools were the least likely to offer courses in the arts. With the Every Student Succeed Act, the legislation name checks both "music" individually and "the arts" as components of the "well-rounded curriculum" that American schools should be designed to deliver.

Research in the broader education field has shown that school size is associated with more comprehensive course offerings, but students attending smaller schools, especially newer small schools, may have better overall academic outcomes than students attending larger schools (Elpus, 2020). This research is good for my district. I believe it is a point I find true with the students who struggle in our smaller schools. We are the ones who can pay close attention to those who need that extra time and effort on the three-tier level of interventions in our

classrooms. Smaller schools offer what larger ones simply cannot, which is a more detailed and individualized approach for each student.

Though the availability of a course is important, the next research study also investigated participation as a secondary aspect of the study. Thomas et al.'s (2013) study is one of the first to examine access to art at the school level using both levels of course availability and participation of students. The research has analysts who have examined course offerings jointly with both aspects in mind to accurately identify programs in art with these accurately identify the program in art with these characteristics. To start their research, they needed to find schools that were art-rich, given their school size and access to resources. Documenting the availability of courses in the arts and the rates at which students participate is a big part of the study. Using individual-level administrative data from the University of Texas at Dallas Education Research Center, findings suggest that merely documenting courses offered will not be enough to acutely assess access to high school arts education. It points to an unequal distribution of course offerings and participation in arts education (Thomas et al., 2013). Policy recommendations for states would need to assess the current situation of arts course offerings in their districts. For me, this statement is true and the reason for choosing the topic for this study. All schools need to consider the arts as an important part of their school improvement plans.

Importance of Art in School

Aziz (2023) established what is already known about general education (GE) programs: they have not placed enough emphasis on arts across the university over the years. Aziz discussed how GE should be designed to prepare students for life by offering knowledge of the world, preparing students to think, and giving students skills to collaborate with one another. They need to provide students with an understanding of important concepts and methods,

advance oral and written skills, and improve critical thinking skills. GE programs are meant to help students understand core values and beliefs (Aziz, 2023). Aziz has discovered that the more students age, the less they receive creative aspects of education and the importance of the value of visual art in the upper-level curriculum is overlooked. The arts are the center of society. They make a central impact on students understanding. Art can provide an understanding of values, and culture and offer potential for emotional thinking (Shis, 2019). Aziz also observed that students who become more aware and knowledgeable through the visual arts become more independent and critical thinkers, and this does not just apply to the visual arts but can extend throughout students' educational careers. Visual arts play a fundamental role in self-concept and further help students in developing their identity and engaging social identity (Aziz, 2023). Aziz shared it is time educators across all fields start recognizing art's value to the GE program and pushing for more emphasis and importance on the courses. I could not agree more, students cannot wait to come to my class, and teachers tell me this all the time! They enjoy the freedom of expression and creativity they get to do in my room. It is the only place they get to use these creative skills. Students are ultimately the ones who will benefit from these invaluable courses.

In the study, "Investigating Arts Education Effects on School Engagement and Climate," Bowen and Kisida (2023) conducted an 11-year longitudinal investigation with Boston Public Schools using student-level administrative and school-level survey data from 2008–2009 through 2018–2019. Bowen and Kisida talked about how learning is a social and emotional endeavor, and students develop socially and emotionally in contexts that provide active learning through direct engagement with the world and opportunities to reflect on those experiences. Learning through the arts can provide these kinds of educational opportunities. Boston Public Schools observed students in arts education courses taken over time and the impacts on the school

engagement and school climate. Evidence was consistent that arts course-taking improved students' school engagement and climate. When students took art courses, their attendance improved, both in terms of average daily attendance rate and a lower likelihood of being chronically absent; they reported being more engaged in their learning, and their teachers reported that they were more engaged in school (Bowen & Kisida, 2023). Their findings support theoretical claims and prior empirical findings that art learning facilitates social and emotional development. They noted that prior studies showed arts education provides opportunities for students' expression, collaboration, and interaction, which can promote interpersonal relationship skills and improve school social capital (Bowen & Kisida, 2023). Investing in the arts has a direct link to its effects on students and the education program. Advocating for programs is important in gathering support for the arts in education in the United States. As an art educator, I think it is important to create a solid foundation, starting with a schedule that will work for as many students as possible. The effects of art on education will be shown when students are able to take the classes they need to create a well-rounded education program that helps them succeed.

As talked about earlier, the effects are evident when students are given the proper opportunity and investment in their educational programs. The research done by Bowen and Kisida (2023) was the first large-scale randomized control trial of an arts education program implemented in an authentic school setting. There were 42 elementary and middle schools that took part in this study in the Huston, Texas, and schools were randomized controlled. The findings were whether art educational opportunities reduced disciplinary infractions, demonstrated increased writing achievement, and expressed greater emotional empathy. I have seen this in the individual study done with the student in my classroom who has recently joined

and started coming into the art room last year. The main teacher from his individualized behavior school has been doing a study with his IEP, including his behaviors while attending art. He has shown significant gains in his behavior while attending art versus not attending. In this study, other positive effects were also experienced, such as increases in school engagement, college aspiration, and cognitive empathy. Throughout the study, STARR reading, math assessments, surveys, and administrative data from HISD records were used to prove the effects on educational outcomes, which provided critical evidence that students' exposure to arts educational opportunities positively impacts meaningful policy-relevant outcomes.

The arts are among the oldest and most significant modes of human communicative activity and intellectual achievement (Kraehe et al., 2016). Scholars have also described the remarkable potential that arts education holds for enhancing children's learning. Despite these claims, researchers note that relatively little research has been conducted on the arts in education. Few policies exist to support opportunities for students to learn about their backgrounds to engage in arts and educational experiences affirming their backgrounds, identities, and cultural practices. Kraehe et al.'s (2016) research indicates that art education resources are equally distributed among K–12 students; the distribution of resources is an important aspect of equitable arts education.

U.S. Department of Education (year) provides a useful illustration of the ways in which the distribution of resources is intricately tied to arts education. It shows if there is a fair and just allocation of the materials for the necessary enactment of quality arts education. Principals, classroom teachers, and art teachers from over 1,000 elementary schools and over 1,000 secondary schools across the United States answered survey questions for this research. The report findings indicated students attending schools serving families with the highest populations

of poverty are far less likely to have access to adequate resources necessary for arts education than those attending with more affluent populations (Kraehe et al., 2016, p. 228).

Advocacy is another important force in garnering support for U.S. arts education, but this alone is not enough in today's data-driven educational environment. Kraehe et al. (2016) believe that one of the greatest challenges to an equitable system of arts education is the lack of equitable system of arts education is the lack of large program research. Children have the right to learn in and through the arts, which means having equal opportunities to develop a full range of human intelligence, talents, and gifts (Kraehe et al., 2016, p. 240). Most students in my district tell me they do not have time to take art and wish they could be in my room. I believe if they had the same opportunities that other core subjects, or even sports like weightlifting, receive as class time during the day in our district, I would have more students in my art room.

Most of this research has focused on the importance of art in the classroom and academic-related success as a primary benefit of art being involved in students' educational journeys. Arts education has several benefits, including positive academic success, which, although important in our society today, I believe developing soft skills is just as important as academics. Soft skills include ones such as empathy, cooperation, leadership, interpersonal understanding, and self-understanding. We need to bring our students to understand their own cultures and those of the students around them to gain respect and help them support social and emotional growth. U.S. society needs art to bring them back to understanding the importance of each other.

Site Profile

Community Characteristics

Both schools, Allen Consolidated School (AHS) and Emerson-Hubbard School (EHS), are in their respective hometowns of Allen and Emerson. Although there are many similarities, there are a few differences. The population of Allen is 416; Emerson is 854. The median household income for Allen is \$51,607; Emerson's is \$60,625. Allen's poverty line was 15.7%, and Emerson's was 12.8% in 2021 (Data USA, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). Allen and Emerson school districts are surrounded by communities that offer many recreational and family-involved activities and establishments within their own towns, like city parks, public libraries, several churches, ball fields, and basketball courts. Surrounding communities offer pools, golf courses, campgrounds, and bigger attractions like Ponca State Park, and the baseball capital of Nebraska in Wakefield, and several places to eat and socialize. Both towns are also centrally located between two college towns of Wayne, Nebraska, with Wayne State College, and Vermillion, South Dakota, with the University of South Dakota. Both colleges are located within 25–35 miles in either direction and are only a few minutes from two more colleges in Sioux City, Iowa—Morningside College and Briar Cliff University.

School District Characteristics

AHS and EHS strive to lead their individual students, staff, and communities to be the best they can be and to set high standards upon which they can all follow and strive to improve. Next is a description of each school and community, along with their mission and purpose in their educational journey with their school and community. I hope this description of where I work and love being a teacher is clear and precise. I am proud to be employed by both districts and take pride in helping each school achieve goals and improve each environment for all students by creating this school improvement plan.

The two school districts where I work are located in Northeast Nebraska, which are separated by 18 miles, three counties, and two highways. AHS serves approximately 147 students with 21 teachers, and EHS serves 235 students with 24 teachers, which gives a teacher-to-student ratio of 8:1 to the AHS district and a 9:1 teacher-to-student ratio to the EHS district. Both districts run a PK–12 education program, with some differences.

School Building Characteristics

The AHS district is self-contained into one building. It has all K-12 classes within one building. Whereas EHS is separated into two buildings. One for the middle school and high school student to share and the elementary has the separate building. AHS supports several smaller surrounding towns where students attend from Concord, Dixon, and Martinsburg; EHS has students attending from Hubbard. Both districts rely on these smaller surrounding communities to support and send students to the school to help with enrollment numbers.

Missions and Purposes of AHS and EHS

The mission of EHS (2023) is to empower students to apply their skills and knowledge to become productive and contributing citizens. The EHS district is dedicated to the philosophy of emphasizing academic achievements for life-long learning. Studies show the majority of careers that students will hold in the next quarter century have not yet been created. The Emerson-Hubbard Board of Education, administration, and staff accept the responsibility for providing a foundation of balanced curricular choices. These choices focus on academic skills and physical, mental, social, and behavioral growth to prepare students to be viable, mature, and contributing members of society. The EHS district exists for the purpose of providing educational, social, and cultural opportunities designed to instill a desire for life-long learning. The school provides the nurturing environment necessary to foster the growth of knowledge, promote creative,

independent thinking, and develop character and a positive approach to life (Emerson-Hubbard Community Schools, 2023).

The mission of the AHS (2023) is to provide everyone with an opportunity to receive a quality education in a safe and healthy environment. The staff and community, using technology and proven and innovative methods, will foster a sense of self-worth so all individuals can become contributing members of a changing society. Students have an opportunity to become fully involved in the complete and varied curriculum and extra-curricular activities and programs. They also have the responsibility to maintain and help pass on fine traditions of scholarship, citizenship, and that particular kind of spirit and pride that has become a trademark of the school. As a citizen of this school, students are expected to follow the rules that are established for the welfare of the entire student body. Following the rules will help all students to become better school citizens. Be proud of the school! Take good care of it, and feel free to make suggestions for improving it. School citizens are expected to act and conduct themselves properly. Throughout their lives, students will be looking toward the future, but they will also find themselves thinking of the fun and pleasant experiences they had while a student at this school (Allen Consolidated Schools, 2023).

Current Student Learning Goals

The goal for the AHS (2023) for meeting student academic needs is to use data to track student achievement using assessments (e.g., Aims Web and Maps) and to provide research-based interventions to help students close achievement gaps. Researched-based interventions used in 2023 include Sound Partners, Early Reading Interventions, Accelerated Reader, Saxon Math Rehearsal, Rewards, Pirate Math, and Aims Web Weekly Probes (Allen Consolidated Schools, 2023). Students who qualify for the interventions have a 25-minute block of time used

for interventions. If they qualify both in reading and math, they have 50 minutes blocked during the day of specific interventions and directed instruction. Every week, students' progress is monitored through the Aims Web Plus. Teams meet and discuss data from the weekly progress data points and determine if students are closing the achievement gap, if a change in the intervention is needed, or if students need to go to different levels of support. Data are plotted from the weekly monitoring and shared with the team on a shared Google document. Decision rules are in place to help the team make decisions when meeting and discussing student achievement. Federal funds are used to support this program by pausing for an interventionist who can work with these students. Technology is needed to provide the assessments and to track the weekly progress of the students receiving interventions. Research-based learning is continuously needed to provide specific help to the students who are struggling.

EHS is dedicated to the philosophy of emphasizing academic achievement for life-long learning (Emerson-Hubbard Community Schools, 2023). Studies show most careers students will hold in the next quarter century have not yet been created. The EHS Board of Education, administration, and staff accept the responsibility for providing a foundation of balanced curricular choices. These choices focus on academic skills and physical, mental, social, and behavioral growth to prepare students to be viable, mature, and contributing members of society. To continue surpassing the nation's graduation rate goal, graduates need to be competent in basic skills, lifelong learners, self-motivated, goal-oriented, creative, analytical, and independent thinkers. As a district, EHS needs to provide a positive school environment conducive to learning and employee satisfaction and provide relevant curriculum and instructional programs that allow students to progress in accordance with individual growth and development that will provide

opportunities to develop skills toward advanced technologies (Emerson-Hubbard Community Schools, 2023).

School Characteristics

According to the Nebraska State Department of Education (2023), students who attend AHS are 94% White and 6% Hispanic, with no other representation of ethnic backgrounds. In contrast, EHS has a much larger representation of ethnic backgrounds with 79.5% White, 14% Hispanic/Latino, 9% Asian, and 3.3% American Indian/Alaska Native. The attendance in the schools is very good, with 95 % in the AHS district and 93% in the EHS district. Approximately 42% of AHS students are on free and reduced lunches, and 37% at EHS. Looking at the special education programs, 20% of AHS students are in individual education programs, and EHS has 14% of the students in their program receiving help. The graduation rate is also very good with both schools, with AHS currently at a 100% graduation rate and EHS at 92%, with the state average currently at 87%. When looking at the state testing and rankings for both schools, with all 902 high schools in the state of Nebraska, AHS falls below the 50% average for test scores (i.e., math proficiency is in the bottom 50% and reading proficiency is in the bottom 50%). EHS is above average for the state testing (i.e., math proficiency is in the top 50%, and reading proficiency is in the top 50%) for the 2021 school year (Public School Review, 2023). After graduation, the college rate in the state of Nebraska is 75.6%, above the national average of 61.8% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). At AHS, 91% of students continue to college, but no information was available on EHS for the college-going rate.

Student Portfolio & Performance

The most recent means of assessing needs include reviewing students' performance on local and state levels for both districts listed on the State of Nebraska website. Approximately 75

students in EHS make up the high school in the district. The data presented for the school improvement project are based on overall high school academic achievement over many different growth and percentage areas. For EHS, the participation in English language arts is at 39%, putting them below the state average of 47%. In the assessment for participation in mathematics, EHS is at 52%, above the state average of 46%. NSCAS science for the EHS is at 70 %, which is also above the state average of 66%. At AHS, 65 students make up the high school being tested. Participation in English language arts is at 47%, which is at the state average. In the assessment of mathematics, AHS is at a score of 36%, putting them well below the state average of 46%. NSCAS science for AHS is not listed because there were less than 10 students, and the state wants to protect confidential information about individual students as required by law (Nebraska Department of Education, 2023).

Parent Involvement

Both schools recommended that parents participate as fully as possible in their children's education. Communication is key between students, teachers, administration, and parents. To ensure this is possible, both districts have websites and social media profiles like individual apps so parents may remain informed about events throughout the district. Parents can also stay involved in their student's academic achievement through a web-based program called PowerSchool, a student information system that I am fortunate enough to have the same at both schools. Parents are also encouraged to attend open house nights at the beginning of the year and attend conferences twice a year. Both schools also use designated portions of the newsletters to tell parents they can be active members of the school committees. Parents are continually encouraged to volunteer at the schools and partake in individual class activities. Attendance at curricular and extracurricular activities is encouraged and welcomed at both schools.

Teacher Work

In the EHS and AHS districts, the day begins at 7:40 a.m. and ends at 4:05 p.m. for the teachers. During those times, students are welcome to receive help from the teachers. All teachers provide assistance before and after school to all students in need of additional homework assistance or skills-building activities. Tutoring before and after school is conducted by the high school principal as well. Students failing two or more core classes are strongly encouraged to attend for that additional help. The districts also provide summer school for students who need assistance or fail one or more core classes. Teachers are encouraged by both districts and are sometimes required to attend seminars, workshops, and conferences as available. All levels of staff are encouraged to participate in research-based professional activities. All teachers are actively involved in the school improvement process and are continually encouraged to attend workshops regarding student achievement.

Curriculum

The AHS planning of curriculum alignment aids in student achievement. The curriculum is adapted to meet the diverse needs of each class. Current, research-based strategies identified areas of need are tied to current school improvement efforts per Rule 10 accreditation and federal guidelines. Technological incorporations include Promethean boards, iPads, and learning platforms like Google Classroom and Canvas. All teachers within the district implement APL strategies and classroom management techniques. All teachers provide assistance before or after school to students in need of additional homework assistance or skill-building activities. The core language arts curriculum is McGraw-Hill into Reading, which is scientifically research-based and provides adequate coverage of the “Big5” concepts of reading. In math, Saxon math

was adopted and used in K–12 at AHS. Parent and community volunteers will continue to be used as necessary to provide supplemental instruction and interventions.

The instructional framework and curriculum for the upcoming year for EHS are discussed and reviewed each year. EHS is in a 2-year period of its improvement cycle and is in the process of choosing a new math curriculum to update and ensure it is aligned with the current Nebraska State Math Standards. The school now has an instructional framework model developed by the teacher to ensure good instruction in all areas of instruction. The development of all students is supported by a strong Tier 1 curriculum, a program for high-ability learners, special education, English learner support, guidance and counseling sessions with each class, robotics sessions, and career exploration with the guidance counselor.

Instructional Strategies

In AHS, teachers adapt their curriculum to meet the diverse needs of each class they teach. Current, research-based strategies addressing identified areas of need are tied to current school improvement efforts per Rule 10 accreditation and federal guidelines. Strategies in place include peer assessment, peer tutoring, small group activities, visual aids, oral discussions, and differentiated instruction strategies. All teachers within the district implement APL strategies and classroom management techniques. All teachers provide assistance before or after school to students in need of additional homework assistance or skills-building activities. Before- and after-school tutoring is conducted by the high school principal. Students failing two or more core classes are strongly encouraged to attend before or after school for additional help. All teachers provide assistance before or after school to students in need of students in grades k-9 who fail one or more core classes. Ongoing curriculum alignment aids students for graduation, or high-ability learners are given opportunities to complete APEX online courses. The current school

improvement goals for the district are to increase district achievement in math and reading (Allen Consolidated Schools, 2023).

The entire staff and paraprofessionals at EHS participate in ongoing, quality professional development that focuses on the targeted needs of the students. EHS uses an instructional framework to ensure that they use high-quality instructional practices for teaching in the school. They have professional development days each semester for teachers to meet, review data, and discuss areas of concern. Teachers can request professional time off to attend workshops, classes, conferences, and training to increase their knowledge of instruction and curriculum. EHS is currently updating its school improvement plan and has three visions:

- Goal 1: Create and maintain a district-wide positive culture that promotes strong character, citizenship, and social and emotional health of all students and staff.
- Goal 2: Deliver the highest quality education for each student using evidence-based strategies to meet and exceed state standards.
- Goal 3: Continue to increase opportunities for our students.

To help students meet the goals, EHS implements a program called Work like a CAPTAIN, using Captain as an acronym (see Figure 1). Using the letter “C” in the word RESPECT and the word WORK in the phrase “Work like a Captain, using the letter “P” for the word POSITIVITY also connects to UNITY leads to the word INTEGRITY is connected to the letter “N” in the work Captain.

Figure 1

Work Like a CAPTAIN Poster



The following phrases help connect the meaning:

- Treat others how you'd like to be treated.
- Show optimism.
- Look on the bright side & be happy for others.
- Take ownership in your work and actions.
- Be someone that can be counted on.

The missions of both AHS and EHS is to empower the students to apply their skills and knowledge to become productive and contributing citizens. To accomplish this mission one of the most important lessons education teaches us is discipline. While it does not appear as a subject, it underlines the whole educational structure. It is the training that develops self-control, character, orderliness, and efficiency. It is the key to good conduct and proper consideration of other people. With an understanding of the purposes of discipline in a school, you may form a correct attitude toward it, and not only do your part in making your school an effective place of learning but develop the habit of self-restraint which will make you a better person. Every effort is made to work with students and solve special or disciplinary problems. Assistance from teachers is solicited in an attempt to accomplish this end. (Allen Consolidated Schools, 2023).

Assessment Practices

The most current assessing needs for AHS include reviewing student performance on NSCAS, MAP, teacher assessment, and AIMSweb assessments. The district schedules and conducts a conference (in-service day) after assessments have been administered, wherein teachers and administrators partake in a discussion regarding curriculum enhancement in accordance with student performance trends. Teachers are encouraged to reflect upon curriculum enhancement during periodic school improvement meetings, where they also review current

assessment data and discuss ways to help at-risk students obtain greater academic success. The student assistance team/RIT/MTSS teams meet twice a month to review student failing courses and to determine if sufficient progress is being made. If the student is making little progress, the current intervention is changed. If the student is making little progress, the current intervention is changed. If interventions are deemed unsuccessful, the team discusses whether a special education evaluation is necessary to determine the student's needs. NSCAS and MAP results are also used during school improvement meetings to determine whether curriculum changes are necessary. Teachers also meet on in-service days to discuss curriculum alignment in correlation with standards and how classroom instruction can assist students in meeting standards (Allen Consolidated Schools, 2023).

EHS uses assessment to identify the needs of all the students. State testing, AIMSweb, MAP, NSCAS, and ACT scores guided reading data are collected school-wide throughout the year. All assessments, along with ELL, free and reduced, and mobility data, are reviewed by the planning team and are taken into consideration when looking at our district's needs assessment (Emerson-Hubbard Schools, 2023). The data help to make curriculum and instructional decisions. The data are reviewed at teacher data meetings throughout the year. The principal gave training on how to read and disaggregate the data at the first school improvement meeting of the year. Assessments have been given by then, and teachers can use the data for language arts and math lesson planning. Teachers are encouraged to analyze the data for their classes to determine which students need additional support to meet academic standards. Various student characteristics, such as language acquisition, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and special education status, are considered. Data are also used in MTSS meetings throughout the year to determine the intensity and type of interventions. The data are used to determine which students

are at risk of failing and their areas of academic need. Students are then matched with appropriate interventions to help them develop their academic skills. They may receive intervention time with teachers and intervention with paras. Additionally, students receiving academic interventions are monitored weekly, and their progress is reviewed by their teachers, paraprofessionals conducting the intervention, and the MTSS team (Emerson-Hubbard Schools, 2023).

Professional Development Practices

As mentioned, I work in both districts and came to this opportunity because our districts needed each other's student numbers to be able to compete in extracurricular activities. Originally, we were only low in numbers for girls' sports but combined 2 years later in boys' sports. As we started to co-op in sports, we also started combining other activities. I started teaching at EHS in the second year and now share a Spanish teacher. I struggled the first 2 years because the schedules did not align—mainly because they had different days off and professional development days did not line up. In 2023, the schools are working together, and it has been a great way for me to be a part of the workshops and school improvement plans. The administrators are working hard to incorporate at least one workshop where staff can be on-site together and work side by side. Both staff are encouraged to participate in research-based professional activities. Professional development opportunities are made available to both staff and actively promoted. During each in-service day, the staff receives training from the administration, other staff, or ESU personnel. Staff development activities are provided for all certified and noncertified staff. Optional opportunities are prioritized based on relevance to School improvement goals, improvement of instruction, and assessment practices designed to

improve student performance on the Nebraska Academic Standards (Allen Consolidated Schools, 2023; Emerson-Hubbard Community Schools, 2023).

During in-service days, assessment results are reviewed, and curriculum adaptations and strategies are discussed that promote higher achievement for all students, particularly those who have not performed well on assessments. Curriculum alignment is also discussed in conjunction with school improvement efforts. All teachers are actively involved in the school improvement process and are continually encouraged to attend workshops and training regarding the interpretations of results and how to make assessment a valuable component of progress monitoring and student achievement. The state department of education and the local education service unit are relied upon to provide training to the staff and ensure that the training and professional development are evidence-based (Allen Consolidated Schools, 2023; Emerson-Hubbard Community Schools, 2023).

Needs Assessments

The main issue with the art program in the EHS district is the major lack of availability of art classes throughout the day, which happens because they do not have a full-time art instructor. Right now, I drive over for one period a day to fulfill a fine arts need for some of the students who do not want to take band or choir to fulfill the fine arts requirements to graduate. The administration at EHS has been hired in the last 3 years and because of their recent hire, has no idea of the reasons why there is no full-time art position. I did find out through interviewing teachers on staff that the full-time teacher left for unknown reasons which could have been simply to retire, and the person they hired was not fulfilling the job and was let go. The term that was used was RIFed. If this is the truth, then the position cannot be refilled for a certain number of years because of legal reasons. No one person was positive if the teacher was RIFed or if this

is all hearsay. From my own experience living near Emerson, I have never seen an ad or heard of a position in the paper for an art teacher. Through interviews with many teachers on staff at EHS, several mentioned the board of education was content to save money by having teachers fill in by teaching outside of their academic areas. Before I started teaching one period a day, I was told the elementary principal was teaching in my place because he had a degree in art as well but wanted to devote his time completely to his job as a principal. As I continued to ask more questions, I was informed through the school improvement plan that they are looking into hiring a full-time art position. Although I was happy, I know I will lose my position there, but that also means it would solve the majority of all the issues and problems and the reasons I have started my school improvement plan! So, I am excited to hear this and really do hope this is the plan and a true statement.

In the AHS district, the pathways restriction of taking art is similar to EHS, where the availability of art classes throughout the day is an issue. The difference between the two districts is that I am much more accessible in AHS. I am available at Allen for the seven periods of the day and only one period of the day at EHS. Because I have taught in the AHS district for 26 years, I have dealt with the same issues of availability of art classes for various scheduling reasons (e.g., I was half time art educator). I was excited to be able to improve my program 5 years ago when I left another district where I was hired half time elementary. I approached AHS administration and presented them an opportunity to build my program at AHS because I would be leaving the other district. I offered to teach K–12 for a full-time position. They accepted my proposal for teaching K–12 art but only hired me three quarters time. I was happy to make improvements in my art program but disappointed that I was not hired for a full-time position. Although I know it was a step in the right direction, it was hard to know I would be doing a full-

time position for three quarter pay, I knew it was going to make my program better, and my student's art and the school's overall programs better and that is why I am still here today.

Looking at both districts and how similar they are is uncanny. Both districts need full-time art instructors in their buildings to improve their schedules so students can have art classes available to them for more periods of the day. Currently, I am being split, teaching at two schools that want to have art at a minimum so the students can receive the credit they need to graduate. I want to do more for the students than give them what is considered the minimum. AHS is creating a better opportunity for students to take art, but still not willing to hire me full-time as an art teacher even before I was split between EHS and AHS. I was not hired at AHS any more time before I was teaching in EHS than I am now. The only reason I am full-time now is because I am teaching in two schools and traveling. I started my day at AHS at 10:00 and would start teaching third period every day, teaching K-12 every day, but I knew it was the best thing to do for my program and students, and that was more important to me.

Data Analysis

Data Summary

In this school improvement plan, research was done with two school districts. The first information in these data was from AHS. The research was conducted using a qualitative research method, which included open-ended questions to find and collect the data. The survey questions tell the experiences the students would go through in the process of registration for classes each year. Another set of survey questions was given to the staff that will also help question the importance of art through the eyes of our administrators to students' educational success, and finally, an analysis of a single student was used to study his behavior that was given an art class for a behavioral study. The data indicate that both AHS and EHS need to improve the

availability of art classes in the schools and by looking at all of these methods, it will be clear that art can help students, art is wanted by students, and art needs to be more available to students.

The survey was created to help answer several questions on how registration was being done within the districts. This survey was done with the staff involved with the registration of classes and the art students show that 100% of the students start with a hard copy of their schedules to see the possible classes they can take each period of the day before they move to the next step. At AHS, Principal Oswald does the majority of the class registration and goes into each class level to explain the process to each individual class. I believe this is an important step in the process for the students. Rather than just handing them a hard copy of their schedules and letting them start the process without a clear understanding of what they are doing, Principal Oswald communicates a clear understanding of what they need to do for this year and the next years before graduation.

Table 1 (below) includes an example of the registration with the ninth-grade class. Figure 2 (below) is the planning sheet for graduation. Principal Oswald does this additional step so that students can get a better understanding of why they need to take certain classes within a certain year. AHS is a small school, and the schedule is tight, leaving few periods for electives and times for shifting of classes within their schedules per year. As seen in Table 1 (below), there are few class periods for the students to take electives. Another issue, as mentioned throughout the school improvement plan, is the lack of opportunities for the students to take art because there is no full-time art teacher available during the entire day. If 1st and 2nd periods could be available within the schedule to take art, it would make a big difference for the entire student body. If there

was a full-time teacher in the building at these times, making those periods available for students to take art the opportunities would be much greater.

Table 1

Pre-Registration for Ninth Grade

| Pre-Registration for 9th Grade | | | | |
|---|---|--------------------|--|--|
| 2020–2021 | | | | |
| Name: | | | | |
| Please fill out the RED portions and return with student and parent signatures. Thank you! | | | | |
| Period | Course Choices: | Courses Chosen: | | |
| 1 | Band, Study Hall, Weight Training, Ag Mechanics, Study Hall, Science Ind. Study | | There is a possibility of splitting these classes – please discuss with instructors! | |
| 2 | | Spanish 1 | | |
| 3 | | Civics / Geography | | |
| 4 | Study Hall, Info Tech I & II, Art 1 | | | |
| 5 | | English 9 | | |
| 6 | | Algebra 1 / A | | |
| 7 | | Physical Science | | |
| 8 | Choir, Study Hall, Art 1, Ag 1 (Ag 1 must be split) | _____ / _____ | There is a possibility of splitting these classes— please discuss with instructors! | |
| IND | One Act (S1), Jazz Band (S2), Independent Science Research (2.5 Credits/semester), Creative Writing | | | |
| IND | | | | |
| IND | | | | |
| Please indicate any classes you WANTED to take but could NOT due to a scheduling conflict: | | | | |
| Signatures: | | | | |
| Student: | | | | |
| Parent: | | | | |
| Please return to school via mail, front entry, email back to laoswald@allenschools.org , or text a picture to 402-833-8567 | | | | |

Small schools have a hard time with every type of elective for students mainly because the teachers are only available to them once a day to teach each one of the classes. As stated in the literature review and throughout my paper, the opportunity for students is far less with smaller schools. Documenting the availability of courses in the arts in small schools is shown to be the main factor of why there is less availability of art classes (Thomas et al., 2013).

Figure 2

Allen High School Registration Information Graduation Requirements

| | | | | |
|--|--|------------|------------|------------|
| Allen High School | Name: _____ | | | |
| Registration Information | | | | |
| Graduation Requirements (5 cr. = 1 semester) | | | | |
| _____ | 5 cr. of Speech (1 semester of credit but taught every other day over the year) | | | |
| _____ | 40 cr. of English | | | |
| _____ | 40 cr. of Social Studies (American History, American Government + 20 more) | | | |
| _____ | 30 cr. of Science (to include Biology I) | | | |
| _____ | 30 cr. of Math (<i>some college programs require 40 cr.</i>) | | | |
| _____ | 5 cr. of Financial Literacy – beginning with the class of 2024 | | | |
| _____ | 10 cr. of Vocational Education (All Ag classes, Accounting, Yearbook, Parenting, Adult Living, Sci. Ind. Study, Aide, Striv -in red b/c only semester) | | | |
| _____ | 20 cr. of Computer or Computer related cr. (Info Tech I & II and Dig Design) | | | |
| _____ | 20 cr. of Health & Physical Education | | | |
| _____ | 10 cr. of Fine Arts (Band, Art, Choir, One Act) | | | |
| _____ | 10 cr. of Foreign Language (<i>some college programs require 20 cr.</i>) | | | |
| _____ | 35 cr. of Electives (Any cr. besides all of the above) | | | |
| = Total of 255 credits required for graduation (beginning with the class of 2024) | | | | |
| TENTATIVE HIGH SCHOOL PLAN | | | | |
| Period | 9th Grade | 10th Grade | 11th Grade | 12th Grade |
| 1 | | | | |
| 2 | | | | |
| 3 | | | | |
| 4 | | | | |
| 5 | | | | |
| 6 | | | | |
| 7 | | | | |
| 8 | | | | |
| IND | | | | |

In EHS, the guidance counselor, Mrs. Ahlers, looks through the students’ records, decides what each student needs for credits, and determines their schedules. All students are required to fill out the hard copy and parents are required to sign before their schedules are finalized and added to the schools’ computerized system. Just as AHS their schedules are even more restricted because art is only available to these students’ 1st period of the day. Because this is the only period of the day for art, it creates a restriction to 9th and 10th grade students that can take art, because 11th and 12th grade students have core classes during 1st period of the day. This is a huge limitation, especially for those students. Figure 3 (below) shows an example of a 10th-grade hard copy of classes for a student to use to register for classes, this would also be taken home for parents/guardians to sign before finalized. It only offers art 1st period of the day.

Figure 3

Emerson Hubbard Pre-Registration Worksheet

| | |
|---|--|
| Emerson-Hubbard Pre-Registration Worksheet | |
| Student Name _____ Grade: 10th | |
| Instructions: Select the eight courses that you wish to enroll in during the next school year. Please list the alternative selections for any elective course work. Students should be aware: Enrollment in required coursework will be a priority over elective courses. <u>Students should have a parent/guardian sign the form and submit the completed worksheet to Mrs. Ahlers by Friday, April 28, 2023.</u> | |
| First Period | Art/Weights/Digital Design-Media/Creative Writing/Spanish II |
| Second Period | Band/ Computer Programming/Algebra A/Annual |
| Third Period | Biology/ Algebra II/ Geometry/Weights |
| Fourth Period | Choir/Geometry/Web Design/Ag class/L Sports |
| Fifth Period | World History |
| Sixth Period | Spanish II / Vet Science-Sem-1/Speech |
| Seventh Period | English II |
| Eighth Period | Biology/Algebra B |
| Alternative Electives: | |
| Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ | |
| Date: _____ | |

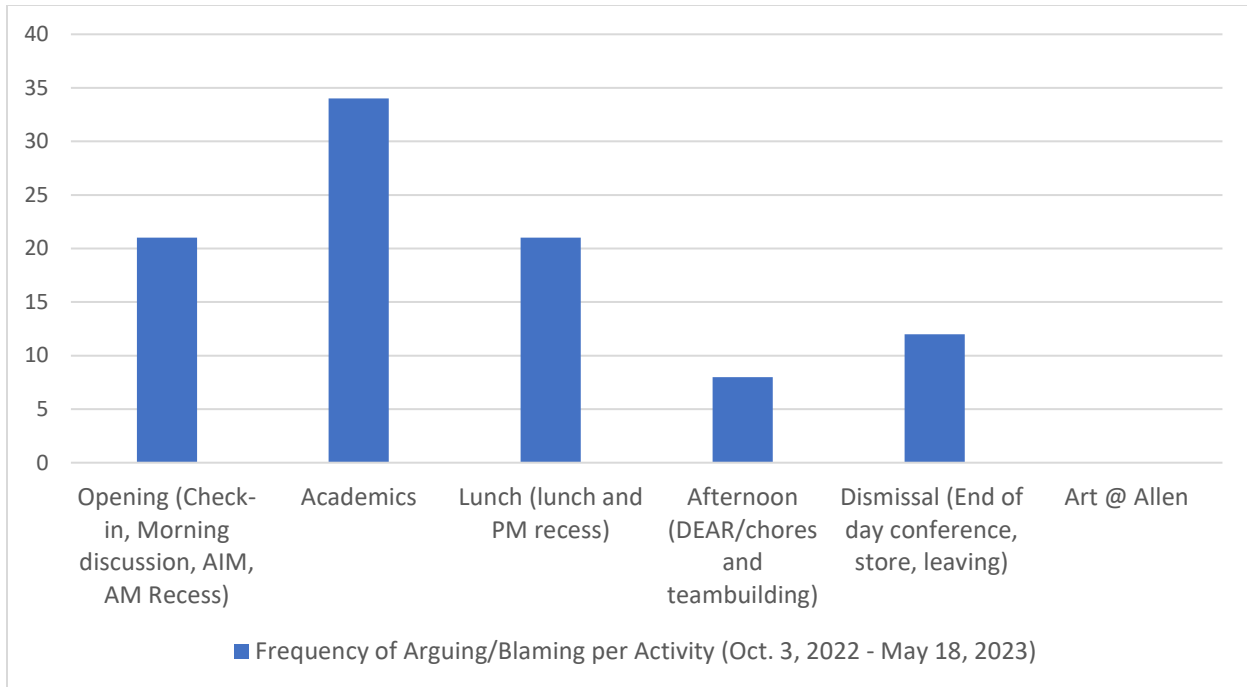
Finally, in other research done with one of my art students in the AHS district, he attended another school for behavioral reasons in a neighboring town of Wayne, NE. With special permission from his guardians, they shared the information collected by his main behavioral specialist, Hannah Panko, for his IEP through a 1-year study of his behavior of transition from the Tower School in Wayne to AHS in Allen, NE. His name is Aiden, and I am glad to share his data in this research. He has been working to add his schedule slowly back into the AHS school system one period at a time. He started transitioning his day with art in October of 2022, the last period of the day. He has been attending AHS for more than half his day and is doing well with the transition set up by AHS's special education teacher and behavioral specialist at the Tower School in Wayne, NE. Table 2 (below) shows important data on how art can help this student create better learning success in his education throughout the day. When Aidan started this process, he was only attending my art class, and data showed his behavior when he had a slip-up in behavior and lost the privilege of coming to AHS for my class. Aidan's cycle went downhill from that point on. Art was a key factor for him throughout the day and almost a reward at the end of the day. He enjoyed my class and could express himself in ways that core classes could not give him.

Numerous studies have found positive relationships between art participation and educational outcomes, and Aidan is no different. Bowen and Kisida (2023) talked about the reduction of disciplinary infractions and how art improves writing achievements and increases students' emotional empathy. Along with producing meaningful impacts on student's academic outcomes and social-emotional development, data in his behavioral charts prove he did better when attending art in AHS than when he was not. Art education opportunities reduce disciplinary infractions for Aidan and improve school engagement. In Table 2 (below), the bar

graph shows Aidan having 0% of behavior Frequency of Arguing/Blaming per Activity when in Art @ Allen, and the next lowest incident was during the afternoon during chores and teambuilding.

Table 2

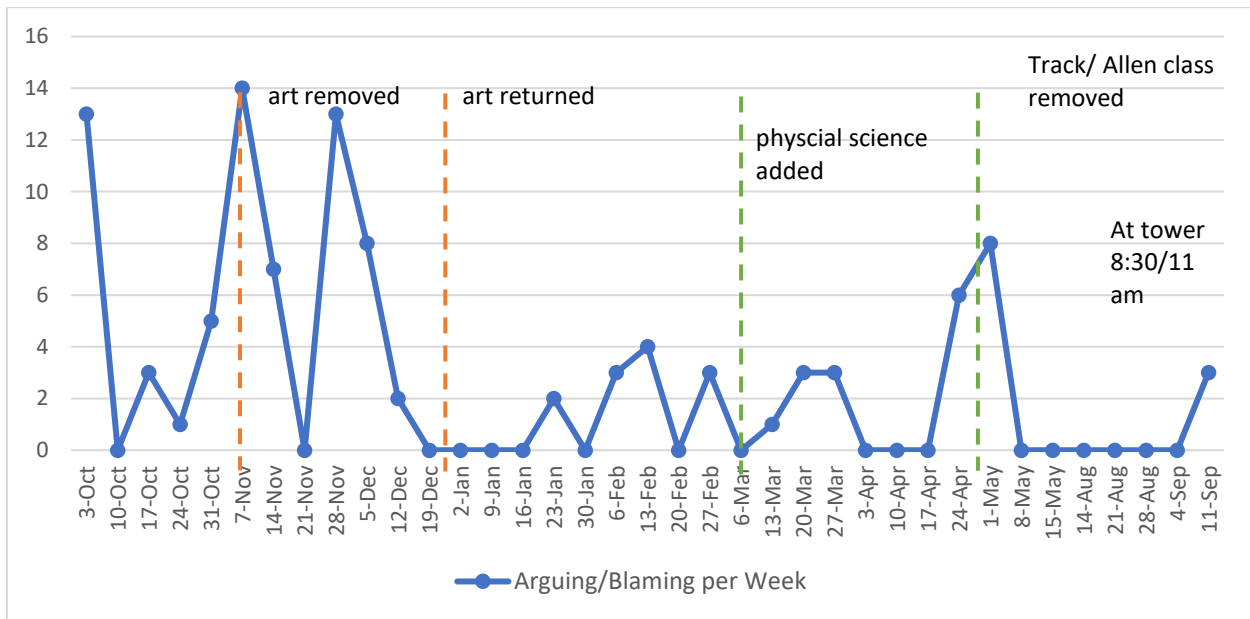
Frequency of Arguing/Blaming per Activity



Other noticeable data that stood out in the data collected was listed in Table 3 (below), which showed the Arguing/Blaming per Week information. When looking at the “Art Returned” section, data show a sustainably low level of instances for Aidan since returning to Art in Allen after being “Art Removed” section with very high instances of behavior for him (Panko, n.d.). These data illustrate Aidan’s need for art to express his creative side and release his creative energy. This part is a definite positive of his day that he looks forward to and needs to be successful in his education.

Table 3

Arguing/Blaming per Week



Data From Students

Data were collected from the students at AHS and EHS; 100% of students filled out a hard copy of their schedule and then, with the signature of a parent/guardian, finalized their schedule. At AHS, the student continued the process by converting their schedule onto the computer to finalize. At EHS, the guidance counselor finished the process on the computer to finalize. In both schools, there is a limited number of periods when students can take electives of any type, especially art. At AHS, art is offered to the freshmen several more times throughout the day than in EHS. In the survey form, both schools’ evidence suggests that teachers tried to sway students to take their classes instead of another class for their electives. Students’ comments were mixed on this subject. They were sometimes impressed that a teacher would take the time to talk to them about their class and it made them feel good that a teacher would want them in their class, but at the same time it also made them feel guilty if they did not take their class.

As the researcher and teacher, I can understand this point of view from both sides. I also want these students to take my class, but I do not want to put added pressure on students who already have enough on their plates. Other questions asked that I felt to get a better understanding of the student's point of view was their opinion of whether they would take art if it was more readily available to them throughout the day and 96% of the students agreed that if art was more available, they would continue to take it the next year even if they did not need it for credit to graduate. Ultimately, students had a great understanding of their rights to take the classes they wanted no matter what a teacher wanted them to do, and that was a great thing to see. It was great to read the enjoyment in their own words about art and how much they want to be in the art room. They use phrases like "It's my break of the day, it's so awesome, it's fun and calming, my day is so much better after art, and absolutely my favorite!" How can educators not make this a priority for change, when we know they love and need this so much? Even for those students who do not know they need it—art was one of the most rewarding parts of their day.

School Strengths Within Districts

Throughout the process of collecting data in AHS and EHS districts, I often enjoyed hearing the true words and positive comments from the teachers, administrators, and students. I created surveys and did several interviews where I had open-ended questions and I was able to let each person incorporate their personal opinions into their answers. It was a wonderful way to see the true meaning of why we teach and why we do what we do. The strength of our schools is clear to me. It is the people who teach here and the administration who are trying to make true improvements for the betterment of students and the teachers who work here. They are the ones who want what is best for the students who are here. A good example for AHS is when students register for art classes, they leave both 3rd and 4th period open to art classes even though one of

those will be my planning period, depending on which period more students sign up for art, they will put my plan in whichever one has less students. I think it is a great way to accommodate the majority of students. EHS is looking into adding a half time art position! This change would solve a large portion of the available art classes and improve the opportunities for students.

Within Districts

The weaknesses are found throughout the data in the main surveys and in the interviews throughout the history of our schools. In the basic reasons why, we do not offer art as a full-time position in the first place. It has always been that way! I heard this from both districts. The largest weakness from AHS would be they are willing to rearrange two periods that can be changed but not willing to hire me at a full-time status in the building. EHS has not been willing to hire a full-time teacher for many years and only has me teaching there because of the sports co-op currently happening between the two schools. This weakness affects the entire student body's scheduling availability of art classes.

We need to change the belief in the way we think about art. It is in the research that I have done. When general education teachers themselves have never experienced art in their own educational experience, they themselves are unlikely to incorporate art in their own teaching. If beliefs are positive, the teacher is more likely to engage with art experiences in their classroom. If beliefs are negative, they will either limit the exposure of art education in their classroom or ignore it altogether (Garvis & Lemon, 2013, p. 98). This is a cycle that finally began to break through the early 2000s when STEM and STEAM started to become an influence in education showing the importance of art in education. The best way to connect all the subjects together is art. Art develops critical skills and creative thinking in problem-solving, and it enables individuals to use their imagination to solve even technical problems (Uştu et al., 2021, p. 254).

The administration and teachers need to see this too and want to make changes to help students learn better and succeed, having better opportunities to take art in the secondary levels of education.

Assessment Options

Many details come into play when considering creating pathways for taking art. The data collected through various interviews and surveys of students, staff, and administration of both schools all point to the major factor of hiring a full-time art teacher to improve the schedules in both districts to help advance the availabilities to create the best opportunities for all students to take art classes. For this to happen it is essential for the understanding of why art is important at all levels of the educational system. General educational teachers all the way to the administration need to have a better understanding of this while in school as a student before they become teachers and administrators so this will come full circle in the advancement of education success as a whole. This is definitely not a quick fix and one of the things in education that will take many years to change. In my plan of action, I hope to make a big enough change to make a difference to help students improve in their opportunities by creating new pathways for taking art.

Action Plan

At both schools, the most obvious solution to open up the pathways to taking art would be to hire a full-time art teacher in both buildings. This would make the student's class schedules free from the most obstacles. However, this still does not fix the restrictions that come with attending a small school. When doing my research, the most common school characteristic linked to the availability of art education courses was the size of the school. This is a factor in both districts where I work; a small school with the style of scheduling used only allows for

students to take art two to three times throughout the day, meaning only one teacher is on the staff for each subject and each subject is only available for a certain level of each class one time a day and only taught that one time each day. Research by Nir and Hameiri (2014) indicated the leadership of the administration was believed to make a strong difference and was a leading force behind scheduling differences, which plays a large role in the process and outcome of the schools' success. The quality of a school's performance is linked to a principal's leadership style (Nir & Hameiri, 2014, p. 211).

Proposed Improvement Plan

First, I want to address the issue of hiring a full-time art position. If hired as a full-time art teacher, I would be available for 1st and 2nd periods of the day in AHS, creating two or more periods for students to take art. Looking at the schedule opens up art for Grade 9–12 students because this is a period when electives are available to a large majority of Grade 9–12 high school students. Creating this type of pathway would be huge because there are students who have no other time throughout the day to fit art into their schedules and I am not currently there at those times during the day. At EHS, if they hire even a half-time art position it would more than double the availability for art opportunities for these students. Looking at the schedule, the afternoon would work even better for electives. Currently, I am teaching one class in the first period of the day and only 9th and 10th graders are available to take art. I know through the research of my interviews with their administration that they are looking into hiring a position as part of their school improvement plan. This would be a great way, as mentioned, to create pathways for all of the student body to take art classes. Table 4 (below) shows the current class schedules for AHS, and Table 5 (below) shows the Grade 9–12 schedules for EHS's current classes and electives to show the best solution of where to add or rearrange classes.

Table 4

Allen Teacher Schedule of Classes

| Period | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | LUNCH | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|---|--|
| Teacher/Time | 8:15 to 9:06 | 9:08 to 9:58 | 10:00 to 10:50 | 10:52 to 11:42 | 11:44 to 12:34 | 12:34 to 1:01 | 1:01 to 1:51 | 1:53 to 2:43 | 2:45 to 3:35 |
| Evan Colfack | Weight Training / Nutrition Basics - 10 | Elem. PE Gym M/T/W Prep TU/TH | Elem. PE Gym M/T/W Prep TU/TH | Elem. PE Gym M/T/W Prep TU/TH | PE II 12th - 7 | LUNCH/Duty | PE I 10th - 11 | Jr High PE/Health MWF - 21 5-6th PE TTH - 17 | Weight Training/ Nutrition Basics - 0 |
| Lori Koester | | Elem. Music T/Th | Elem. Music T/Th | Elem Music T/Th | | | | | |
| Denise Hingst | | | Prep | Art I-IV - 9, 10, 12 - 2 | Jr. High Art - 7th-8th - varies | LUNCH | Art I-IV - 9th-12th - 2 | Elementary Art | Art I-IV - 9th-12th - 14 |
| Nick Curnyn | Math Fundamentals - 2 | English 12th Fundamental - 6 | Digital Design 11-12th - 11 | Information Technology - 9th, 10th, 12th - 14 | JH elective - Interventions | LUNCH | Financial Literacy 11-12th - 4 | Study Hall - 7th graders SH B days only | Prep |
| Vonsinh Sayaloune | OPEN ROOM | OPEN ROOM | Geometry - 8 | Advanced Math-12th | Prep | LUNCH | Algebra 1 - 9 | Algebra II - 11th 10 | OPEN ROOM |
| Marlene Levine | Financial Literacy 11-12th/ Adult Living - 2 | Math 8 - 8 | Fundamental Geometry - 2 | Prep | Keyboarding - 7-8th - varies | LUNCH | Digital Design 11-12th - 4 | Fundamental Alg. II - 5 | Financial Literacy 11-12th/ Adult Living - 2 |
| Callie Anderson | | Study Hall - 5 | English 7th in DL - 12 | | | LUNCH | | | |
| Kristin Moeller | Prep | English 12th - 4 | English 11 Fundamentals - 8 | English 11 - 9 | English 9 - 10 | LUNCH | English 8 - 9 | English 10 - 11 | Speech - 10-12 |
| DJ Smith | Sr. High Band - 8-12th - 9 & 19 | Elementary Band | Study Hall - 3 | LESSONS | Prep | LUNCH | 7th Grade Band - 12 | JH Music TTH - 1 5/6 Music MW - 21? | HS Choir S1 B Full - S2 A Full - 6 (1 every day) |
| Randy Rider Spanish | Spanish II - III (10-12th) - 2 | Spanish I - 9 | | | | LUNCH | | | |
| Dave Uldrich | Social Studies - 7th - 12 | World History - 10th - 10 | Civics/Geo. - 9th - 9 | Social Studies - 8th - 9 | Amer. History - 11th - 16 | LUNCH | Athletic Director | American Government - 12th - 10 | Prep |
| Amber Horton | Power, Structure, Tech 10-12th - 2 | Plant Sci/Natural Res - 11th - 7 | Prep | Welding / Metals 10th or 12th - 12 | Jr. High Ag - 7-8th - varies | LUNCH | Animal Sci / Vet Sci 11th-12th - 2 | Study Hall - 7th graders SH B days only | Ag I (S1A, S2 B) - 9 +2 S2 |
| Marc Bathke | Prep | Life Science - 7th - 12 | Science-8th Grade - 9 | Study Hall - Sci. Ind. Study - 5 | Biology - 10th - 12 | LUNCH | A and P 11-12th - 10 | Physical Science - 9th - 9 | Physics 11th-12th |
| Kristin Smith | K-12 Counseling | K-12 Counseling | K-12 Counseling | Math 7 in DL - 7 | K-12 Counseling | LUNCH | K-12 Counseling | K-12 Counseling | K-12 Counseling |
| Kami Murphy | Prep | Math 8 (Hugo) | English 11 / Math 10 (Abby, Joe) | Biology (Joe) | Work Skills (Joe) | LUNCH | In Biology | Math 11 / English 10 (Abby/Joe Roth) | Resource SH |
| Holli Jackson | Resource SH | Math 8 | Science-8th Grade | SS 8 | Amer. History - 11th - 16 | LUNCH | English 8 | English 10 - 11 | Study Hall A-2, B-7, A-B 6 |
| Shelly Jones | Spanish 2 | Spanish 1 | Geometry (Von's room) | Adv. Math (Von's room) | Lunch Break | high school lunch line | Algebra 1 (Von's room) | Algebra 2 (Von's room) | Study Hall A-0, B-6, A-B 6 |
| Alex Stephens | Title 1 | Title I | Title I | Title I | Title 1 | LUNCH | Title I | Title 1 | Title 1 |
| Distance Learning Room | Spanish II (10-12th) | Spanish I | English 7th in DL | Math 7 in DL | OPEN ROOM | OPEN ROOM | OPEN ROOM | Study Hall - 8th graders SH B days only | Study Hall (Jackson) A-2, B-7, A-B 6 |

Table 5

Emerson Teacher Schedule of Classes

| 2023-2024 Schedule | | Period 1 | Period 2 | Period 3 | Period 4 | Period 5 | Advisory | Period 6 | Period 7 | Period 8 | |
|-----------------------|--------|---------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|---|------------|--|------------------------------------|--|--|
| Instructor | Room | 8:15-9:03 | 9:05-9:53 | 9:55-10:43 | 10:45-11:33 | 11:35-12:53 | 12:55-1:11 | 1:13-2:01 | 2:03-2:51 | 2:53-3:41 | |
| Sandy Ahlers | | High School | Careers/Guidance 6 Careers/Guidance 6 | High School | @ High School | @ High School | | @ Elementary | @ Elementary | English IV / Scholarships | |
| Dawn Oswald | 25 LIB | High School | Life Skills 8 Life Skills 8 | High School | High School | Lunch / Elem. | | Elementary | Elementary | Elementary | |
| Tessa Braun | 21 | PE 6 | Elem. P.E. | Elem. P.E. | SS 6 | Prep | Advisory | SS 7 | 7/8 Sports Study Hall | 7/8 P.E. (non-sports) 7/8 Coaching(GB B, TR) | |
| Michelle Kuhlman | 35 | Science 7 | STEAM 8 STEAM 8 | Biology | Prep | Science 8 | Advisory | Science 8 | Science 6 | Biology | |
| Jeanine Figueroa | 15 | Spanish II | Dual Credit/ELA | Spanish III | Spanish I | Child Development Adult Living | Advisory | Spanish II | Spanish I | Prep | |
| Edward Griesel | 34 | Physical Science | STEM Computer Programming | Physics | Physical Science | Prep | Advisory | Int. Science II | Integrated Science I | Chemistry | |
| Scott Hansen | 36 | Technology | Technology | Technology | Technology | Gr. 4/5 P.E. @ H.S. 2 x each/week 12:35-1:15 | | Study Hall Study Hall | 7/8 Sports Study Hall (in Library) | 7/8 Coaching (FB) 7/8 P.E. (non-sports) | |
| Dylan Huber | 31 | Prep | Ag 7 Ag 7 | Ag Leadership/ Career | Food Science Agronomy | 11th Careers | Advisory | Vet Science Intro to Ag | AgriBusiness Ag Econ | Natural Resources Welding | |
| Joe Kvidera | 14 | Civics Economics | Prep | American History 11 | Social Studies 8 | World History 10 | Advisory | Psychology Modern Problems | American History 11 | Geography 9 Geography 9 | |
| Jase Beckwith | 23 | Creative Writing Literacy for Life | Reading 6 Reading 6 | Prep | English 7 | English 8 | Advisory | English 8 | Dual Credit | English 6 | |
| Doug Mackling | Gym | Weights | Prep | Weights | Leisure Sports | P.E. / Health 9 | Advisory | Transportation | A.D. PE | 7/8 Coaching (Boys BB) AD | |
| Lacey Matthews | 13 | English III | Journalism/ Annual | English I | English I | Prep | Advisory | Speech Speech | English II | English IV | |
| Traci Millard | 12 | PreAlgebra 8 | Consumer Math | Algebra II | E.A.C. | Pre Algebra 7 | Advisory | Math 6 | Prep | 7/8 Coaching (VB) Study Hall 6 (Winter, Spring) | |
| Janelle Nielsen | 11 | Algebra I | Algebra A | Geometry | Geometry | Math 7 | Advisory | Math 6 | Prep | Algebra B | |
| Hope Nelson | 33 | Prep | 9-12 Band | 6-8 Band (M,W,F) 6-8 Choir (T/TH) | H.S. Choir | Dual Credit/SH | | @ Elementary | @ Elementary | @ Elementary | |
| Juanita Wilcox | 8 | Dig. Design/Dig. Media Adv. Media | STEM/Keyboarding 7 STEM/Keyboarding 7 | Video Production Broadcasting | Web Design | Prep | Advisory | Personal Finance (Jr./Sr.) Personal Finance (Jr./Sr.) | Accounting I, II | Info Tech I Info Tech I | |
| N.E.C.C. | | | | | | | | Online Classes | Online Classes | Online Classes | |
| P2T @ West Point | | | | | | Leave 11:50 a.m. | | Afternoon Session | Afternoon Session | Return 3 p.m. | |
| Denise Hingst (Allen) | 15 | Art I-IV | At Allen Schools | | | | | | At Allen Schools | | |

The next major influence that can create issues that control the pathways for students are the school leaders who have a significant and direct influence on school processes and outcomes. Specifically, evidence testifies to the connection between leadership styles and school outcome indicators such as teacher satisfaction, school effectiveness, teacher's organizational commitment, and school organizational learning. Although I can see the change that needs to be made in my area I in no way think this is a blemish on the administration in any way. This is just a new insight and a trial that might give some students more opportunities to take art by creating the best schedule for everyone.

Impact on Teaching and Learning

As an art teacher, I can see what will work for me, and each teacher can see the possibilities and what would work best for their programs. Looking at the schedule as an administrator, I cannot imagine trying to see the schedule through the eyes of EVERY teacher trying to make the schedule work seamlessly for everyone. In the literature review, a study in Omaha, NE, Muggy and Easton (2015) discussed a program that set up class schedules in minutes, which saved time and solved scheduling problems but did not help with solutions like shared working through lunches and factors of teachers having to share rooms and the things that happen within the building.

In AHS, as the art teacher, I am currently only available to the schedule for six out of eight periods of the day, which seems like a lot of time but only three of those are for high school art classes. I use one period for my plan, one for teaching elementary art, and one for teaching jr. high art. Other options for adding to schedules that AHS district has used and were mentioned in the survey and interviews by the administration when asked what they would do if they could fix the problem, they said, they would extend the day. Well, in the matter of speaking that is what I

have done. This is what I call “0” period. They allow students to attend a class from 7:15 a.m. to 8:05 a.m. I have also discussed the same class extension with the EHS administration when I had students approach me about taking art before school because it did not fit into their schedules. I even had permission to have the students start attending and receive half credit for a semester. With the students on board, we decided everything would work with the schedule and then all of the students decided they did not want to take art. Just as discovered in by Thomas et al. (2013) at Mississippi State University, course offerings shows that arts and high rates of student engagement do not necessarily go hand in hand. The participation of students does not always match the availability of the courses and that definitely was the case here. I created an opportunity for students to take art and the participation of students was not there.

Alignment to Research

My solution for this school improvement involves adding or extending the day by adding art to the period “0” and rearranging both schedules with the best fit for both schools. Through the interviews and all the surveys, the best way to improve the pathways of opportunities for taking art is to extend the day and change the schedules to fit as many of the individual students’ class schedules as possible. Through the research of the schedules and interviews, I have learned that it would work best for all students from both schools if I started my day at AHS and ended my day at EHS. With both of the administrations were on board with starting the day early if I needed a “0” period. I was able to look at both schools and see that more students would be available at AHS than at EHS in the morning for the 1st and 2nd periods. It works better for the students’ pathways if I stay in AHS in the mornings and then go to EHS in the later afternoon, which for EHS works much better into their schedules for the entire student body for opportunities for taking art classes during the last period of the day. I am only available to them

for one period of a day, so eighth period works the best. Table 6 (below) shows a new schedule and what my day will look like with a running bell for a combination of AHS and EHS. I will be making a huge adjustment for elementary art classes and will need to move those classes to sixth period instead of seventh because I will be traveling most of Period 7. I may be able to make some adjustments if needed with elementary because I will have some time to use with travel.

Table 6

New Schedule for Art Pathways

| Period | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Lunch | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|---------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------|----------------------------------|--|---------------|------------------------------|--------------|------------------------------------|
| Teacher/Time | 7:15 to 8:05 | 8:15 to 9:06 | 9:08 to 9:58 | 10:00 to 10:50 | 10:52 to 11:42 | 11:44 to 12:34 | 12:34 to 1:01 | 1:01 to 1:51 | 1:53 to 2:43 | 2:53 to 3:41 |
| Denise Hingst | Allen Art I-IV - 9, 10, 11,12 | Allen Art I-IV - 9, 10, 11,12 | Allen Art I-IV - 9, 10, 11,12 | Prep | Allen Art I-IV - 9, 10, 11,12 | Allen Jr. High Art - 7th-8th - varies | | Allen Elementary Art K-12 | Travel Time | Emerson Art I-IV - 9, 10, 11,12 |

With the day extension, it will require me to teach outside my contracted day which is supposed to be 7:45 a.m. to 4:05 p.m. The negotiated agreement states that any teacher required to work beyond 185 contracted days will be compensated at a rate of \$13.75 per hour but this does not fall exactly under this situation. After another follow-up interview with the administration to discuss the position and how they handle the payment of this type of situation, they informed me that they have used a stipend in the past in this type of situation and are in agreement with the teacher they wanted to teach a certain class. They took the teacher base salary and divided it by the 185 workdays and then divided that by the eight periods of the day to figure how much they paid them per period a day.

Creating the solution for the “0” period to fit an art class into the system will be more work simply because we cannot add it to our computer program as a regular class. Mainly because we cannot legally report more hours to the day for students. This would add too many

hours to the day as the state regulates the number of hours a student can attend in one day of school and this would add additional hours to the day through our computer program. To solve this issue the school will be adding this art class as an “Independent Study” instead. This will be equivalent to taking this class online because it will be like they are not really attending them in person on paper or through the computer program. In the grading program, it will be listed as an independent study instead of a regular class within a period of the day. When taking attendance, it will need to be done by hand and accountability will be done by the teacher. All other expectations will be the same as all other art classes.

Summary

When examining the schedules and establishing and offering new pathways to take art it is hard to tell if this will be the best way to create the maximum opportunities for most students. On paper, it seems to show the best solutions for most students. It does not always work out the way it seems it should on paper, and time can only tell through the ways of testing the waters of experimentation. With the extension of the day the addition of a “0” period and the changing of the schedule of both AHS and EHS, the opportunity for the students in both schedules seems to show promising results.

Implementation of School Improvement Plan

Timeline

When starting the implementation of my school improvement plan creating a new period and adding hours to the entire day is not something done without approval. As learned in my literature review, although school leaders seem to have an indirect influence on a school’s outcome, they have a huge part in the quality of a school’s performance and are linked to the school’s performance (Nir & Hameiri, 2014, p. 211). Table 7 (below) shows a visual of the

timeline starting with the first step in the process of creating a proposal for the administration. I know through the process of interview that they agree with the implementation and will only need to get approval from the board of education. Because the board only meets once a month this could take some time When looking at a calendar year. If I plan to implement this before the next calendar year, I will have to start approval soon.

Table 7

Timeline for Implementation

| Date | Who | Process |
|---------------|---|---|
| December 2023 | Board of Education & Administration Principal - Mrs. Oswald | Proposal for School Improvement Plan |
| January 2024 | Board of Education & Administration Principal - Mrs. Oswald | Questions Problems Time for Changes |
| February 2024 | Board of Education & Administration Principal - Mrs. Oswald | Receive Approval for School Improvement |
| March 2024 | Art Teacher-Mrs. Hingst | Work out Problems before implementation. Make Changes to Schedules. |
| April 2024 | Mrs. Oswald/Mrs. Ahlers | Implementation of Pre-Registration |
| May 2024 | Art Teacher-Mrs. Hingst | Collect Data/Evaluate |
| June 2024 | Art Teacher-Mrs. Hingst | Make adjustments if needed. |
| July 2024 | Art Teacher-Mrs. Hingst | Create a new proposal for adjustment to the original plan. |

The new pre-registration would need to be ready to go in April for the administration and guidance counselor for both schools. My proposal should be presented to the administration before the year-end of 2023 if I want to start the next year with my new schedules at both schools. In that case, I need to be ready to start presenting on the first Monday in December, which is the 4th. If they need time to discuss and meet again, that would give them another month to approve. They might have questions and concerns for me before they approve. Other issues (e.g., my contract and approval of a stipend) will need to be discussed and approved

before the entire process can be put into place. All that seems to be simple in the world of education can take much longer and needs to have months to approve because the boards only meet once a month.

When and if it is approved, the next step can take place, if this is possible, we are probably into February if we are lucky and most of the school year is about over. If there are any problems with approval, then we have an extra month of March to work with to get things ready. As we all know, teachers and administrators the last semester and especially the last nine weeks of school are gone in the blink of an eye. During this time, I will be helping the administration get the hard copies ready and preparing for the way that we want to address the students with the change in schedules. I will be prepping the students in class with the news, and they will probably already know about the change before the pre-registration happens. I feel the better the communication the more prepared they will be about the opportunities they have to take art the next year.

When both Mrs. Oswald and Mrs. Ahlers hand out the hard copies of the pre-registration the students should already be aware of the new schedules and take full advantage of the new pathways created for them to take Art in next year's schedule. By this time, it is April, and the school year is about to end. At this time in the process of my school improvement plan, I will be collecting and looking at the data from both of the districts and calculating the number of students to see the differences in the amount that have decided to take advantage of the opportunities that have been created for them. This will be exciting to see if the students have actually decided to take advantage of what I have created for them. As we know from the literature review and the study done throughout this paper, the extensive course offerings and high rates of student engagement do not necessarily go hand in hand (Thomas et al., 2013). Just

because I have created these pathways of opportunities for the students does not mean that the participation will be there, and the study done by Thomas et al. (2013) and the department proves that in her study. In the first year of this school improvement plan, there might not be enough data to support a sound study for a conclusive decision on whether my school improvement plan is a success or not.

Role Clarifications and Assignment Responsibility

Assigning responsibility for the implementation of my plan falls mostly onto me with the approval of the addition of the “0” period and the change of my schedule with both administrations and the board of education. The biggest struggle for me will be the presentation. I will need to convince the schools why this is an important aspect for the students and a need at the secondary level. With AHS and EHS, I feel they have both come so far in the past 5 years in understanding the importance of art. Through the conversations I have had with both the administrators about the student’s needs and how they love art and have asked for more art classes. In AHS, they added me to a larger importance by adding me to a K–12 level 5 years ago. And are willing to arrange some of the class periods for me to fit students’ schedules to fit art classes to accommodate the students. In EHS, through interviews and having the conversion of hiring another person to teach art either as a part-time or full-time time as well as their willingness to let me teach before school even though the students decided not to follow through was a huge step on their part with the dedication to the art department and improvement to the program. This tells me that both of these schools are already starting to understand that art is a great “vehicle” that helps the student learn and succeed in their educational journey.

Responsibilities in AHS

In AHS, the majority of the responsibilities for student schedules are done by Mrs. Oswald as the main administrator in charge of creating the school-wide schedules for teachers and students. She is the one who oversees each individual student's records each summer to make sure they are on the right track toward graduation. The responsibility for adding the new art class to the schedule and communicating to the students that the new class is available and when it is available to them within the day is her responsibility as the leader of the school. She will be handing out the hard copies to each class level and spending time explaining the process to them as they do the pre-registration for the following year. If any student has any problems, she will help guide them through the entire process.

Responsibilities in EHS

The process in EHS is similar to the one that takes place in AHS. The major difference is the responsibility of changing the class schedule will be done by the school's guidance counselor, Mrs. Ahlers, where majority of the work will fall. With EHS, there will be no additional class being added, but there will be a change in the time of the day art is available and this is a huge change. Communication will be an important part of the responsibility of Mrs. Ahlers when she addresses each individual grade level. She will address each class and give each grade level a hard copy of the change in schedule showing art as 8th period of the day instead of 1st period. If any students have any questions or problems Mrs. Ahlers will have to help. She will have to make changes to the schedule within our Power School program as well as the direct contact for students with the change in schedules.

The Process of Implementation

The main implementation process starts with the addition of the art class in AHS because this will be the first major aspect of the plan. Principal Oswald will be the one to add the class to the Power School computer program and to the hard copies for the student to fill out. The communication of the new class and how it will work will be an important part of the implementation. Mrs. Oswald will talk to each class and help them fill out the forms as needed, and as I found out from the students in the surveys, they only talked one-on-one with her if they had questions or issues with the schedules.

In EHS, the implementation will start with the help of the guidance counselor, Mrs. Ahlers. She will have to communicate to the students the change of schedule. This will open the availability to many students at EHS and create many more opportunities for their students. Changing the periods in Power School will be another part of the implementation for her along with making the changes to the handouts for all grade levels for pre-registration. At EHS and AHS, this process is similar and done with the same program on the computers called PowerSchool, which makes my grading much easier to do. Working at two schools, I am constantly learning how to run two systems of everything: copy machines, phones, door systems, bell schedules, and more—so it is nice when something finely aligns!

Up to this point, the planning and implementation has been on my shoulders, but as mentioned throughout my improvement plan, school leaders have a significant role and a direct influence on the process and outcomes of our schools. If Mrs. Oswald at AHS and Mrs. Ahlers at EHS do not communicate the change of schedules and addition of art class at AHS appropriately, my entire process could fail. This is an example of how the administration can help or hurt the process of scheduling the classes for the students. So, as I believe the implementation is all mine

or mostly mine, it is not! This one step, this one small part is so vital that it could be the leaders that make a bigger difference in my school improvement plan. It is the administrators who create effective leadership that is significant and has an influence on our students. I am creating the improvement plan, but the implementation is shared by me and the administrators.

Progress Monitoring

Monitoring the success or failure of the changes I have made to both schools will be fairly simple. When it is time to have students pre-register for class, I will be able to compare and contrast the number of students through the hard copies both schools use to sign up for classes the next year. With previous data from the students' attendance of art classes from the year before. It will be a simplified qualitative process where I can run the numbers to compare them and find a quick answer to my question of success or failure. Although I do not think one semester of students can give me that answer. It will take more time and more students the chance to choose to take art and participate before I believe I have either created a successful new pathway or a failure to connect students to availability in taking art. Sometimes the most important thing in determining an art-rich high school is not the amount of courses offered, it is the engagement of the student body (Thomas et al., 2013).

Barriers and Challenges

Some barriers and challenges I see ahead would be students not being willing to come to school so early to take classes. Not many young people, especially teenagers, want to get out of bed much earlier than they should. Creating the opportunities and having an art-rich school as discovered in my research by Thomas et al. (2013), just because there is an opportunity for students to take art classes, does not mean the participation will be there. Other conflicts that I can think of are meetings of staff and extracurricular activities that take place before school.

Many times, I hear athletes, one-act participants, along with other extra-curricular activities talk about having practice before school. Coaches will not know about the new class or probably just not care that it exists, because “it’s just art!” The major roadblock with this will be attendance because I must set up my class as independent and it will need to have certain requirements for attendance by me and the school. Because this is new, the school will possibly need to add a section in the student handbook about attending an independent class because this type of class has never required attendance before now. As mentioned before, time will only tell if this will be an issue, but if I can foresee and solve any issues before they happen then I feel I will have more success in my school improvement plan.

Conclusion

This school improvement plan will be a process to improve the pathways for taking art at the secondary level at both school districts where I work if they accept the recommendations from my plan. Both districts have problems with their individual schedules and need to work on ways to improve. Although art has gone from a decline in history because of strained budgets and shifting priorities, we have also seen a renewed belief in the arts as an important part of education in the early 2000s with STEAM programs, where the incorporation of art with other core subjects makes connections with all core subjects. If I can show both of the districts these new programs and shifting priorities it will help in creating an understanding with both districts about the importance of art in the learning process to help prove the need for more art availability at the secondary level. Through the research done in my improvement plan it has been proven that art is the best way to combine other disciplines instead of studying separate subjects, which will help them be more successful (Ustu et al., 2012, p.254). I believe my school will be more than happy to create these new pathways for helping their students.

When conducting the interviews and reading through the surveys, I was surprised by the administration's dedication to students' needs. For example, on the hard copy of AHS's pre-registration are Principal Oswald's remarks, asking the students to indicate any classes they wanted to take but could not due to scheduling conflicts. This point shows the dedication to each individual student's needs. Each school has its own improvement plan at work, and at a small school, we can only create a schedule that can meet most students' needs. As an art teacher, I need to keep advocating for my program and work hard to get as many students in my room as possible. Another major aspect of a small school is to educate the staff on why art is important to use in their rooms, to help educators incorporate art in their rooms when they ask and compliment them when they hang art in the halls from students as part of their curriculum.

My next idea for the future is to work on incorporating a STEAM program in the elementary part of the school buildings. I hope to add it as an afterschool program for those students struggling or for anyone who wants to spend time having fun! If I can get other teachers to volunteer, they will be able to learn how to incorporate art into their other core subjects and make connections. Then, we can take the next step into the classroom. Those volunteers will be my connection to the rest of the elementary teachers when the program gets big enough to bring into the general classroom. Art can be a part of how they learn and show them how it can help them be successful. Right now, a gap exists in society for so many students who do not receive art starting in elementary through high school, and some of them are becoming teachers and passing the same processes down to the next generation, but it can be stopped. Art is the one thing that can make the connection to all subjects. Art is the most essential, universal language to all of us, making connections that only it can. The arts are the center of our society, can provide an understanding of values and culture and offer potential for emotional thinking (Aziz, 2023). In

U.S. society, developing soft skills is just as important as academics. Things like empathy, cooperation, interpersonal understanding, and self-understanding are what students need. All kids need art.

When looking at all the evidence in the research I have done and the information found in the literature review it only makes sense to incorporate these changes into the school districts that I work in, but as we know it isn't always that simple. Making these changes will be a challenge, but worth the work. I feel very proud to be a teacher and I want to continue to be a life long learner where I can continually make improvements in my teacher and my artist abilities. One way is to continue being an advocate for my program but more importantly for the students, giving them more pathways to take art. If I can continually make improvements I hope to help as many students as possible and these changes will give these students, the best opportunity to be successful in their educational journey.

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Appendix