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## **Improving School Community Cohesion Through Restorative Justice Practices**

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**Improving School Community Cohesion Through Restorative Justice Practices**

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EDU 635: Capstone

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### **Abstract**

Van Allen Elementary is one of 21 elementary schools in the Iowa City Community School District (ICCSA). Van Allen Elementary serves 455 students and has 32 certified educators on staff. ICCSD is a High Reliability School (HRS) with a current focus on level one, which includes leading indicator 1.6: safe, supportive, and collaborative culture. As of October 2023, Van Allen Elementary has 75 total behavior referrals for the 2023-24 school year. There is a restorative team made up of certified educators and the building principal; however, the problem is teachers and administration do not have an adequate amount of training to effectively implement restorative practices in their classrooms and buildings. Research shows the impact of implementing restorative practices as prevention and restoration for a strong school community. The school improvement plan will increase educators' capacity of knowledge about restorative practices and arm them with tools and strategies to increase collective efficacy and staff synergy.

*Keywords:* Restorative practices, social-emotional learning, positive-behavior intervention systems, Circle, collective efficacy, community, relationships

**Table of Contents**

Abstract.....2

Introduction.....5

Literature Review.....7

Site Profile .....13

    Community Characteristics.....13

    School District Characteristics.....13

    School Building Characteristics.....14

    Student Portfolio & Performance.....14

    Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment.....16

    Professional Development Practices.....17

Needs Assessment.....19

Data Analysis .....20

    Data Summary .....20

    School Strengths .....21

    School Challenges.....22

    Assessment Options .....22

Action Plan.....23

    Purposed Improvement Plan.....23

    Impact on Teaching and/or Learning.....24

    Alignment to Research.....24

    Summary.....25

Implementation of School Improvement Plan .....27

    Intro.....27

    Timeline .....27

    Role Clarifications and Assignments.....27

    Limitations .....28

    Progress Monitoring.....29

IMPROVING SCHOOLS THROUGH RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

4

Conclusion .....30

References.....31

### **Improving School Community Cohesion Through Restorative Justice Practices**

Restorative practices use prevention and intervention strategies to build relationships among students and adults while simultaneously decreasing the need for behavioral discipline (Kervick, 2021). The restorative practices model is often implemented using a three-tiered system—similar to School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) (Kervick, 2021)—and is common across school districts, with 40% of US schools having reported use of restorative practices in their classrooms, as of 2021 (Glenn et al., 2021; Darling-Hammond, 2023). Researchers have investigated how these practices may positively impact school behavior data, students' social skills, the well-being of school communities, and the school-to-prison pipeline. The problem is teachers and administrators are not provided the adequate amount of training needed to effectively implement restorative practices.

The purpose of this school improvement plan is to increase educators' capacity of knowledge about restorative practices and equip them with applicable strategies to improve their school community's collective efficacy: the belief that with combined efforts and actions, educators can positively impact student outcomes (Department of Education, 2020). Research suggests that collective efficacy is the leading factor in students' achievement, ahead of both socioeconomic status and home life (Donohoo, 2018). In our current state, every one of the 25 certified teachers at Van Allen Elementary feel they have not been provided the necessary training to implement restorative practices with fidelity. The school improvement plan will allow educators to advance practices through professional learning communities (PLC), professional developments (PD), and action-based learning opportunities.

Research for this literature review comes from the DeWitt Library at the Northwestern College and Google Scholar. All journal articles previously cited—as well as though hereafter—

are scholarly, peer-reviewed research articles published within the last 10 years. The research cited within focuses on the analysis of studies about restorative justice practices and interventions, with the scope focused on the demographic of Van Allen Elementary's student population (preschool to 6<sup>th</sup> grade).

The themes of this literature review are presented as follows: social emotional learning (SEL) and interventions, SWPBIS, impact of restorative practices, and student and teacher perceptions of restorative practices. We will examine how each theme impacts student behavior and collective efficacy within elementaries. The belief is that, with increased opportunity for learning and implementation of restorative practices, community sentiment within the school and students' social emotional capabilities will increase in kind, while student behavior will decrease.

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Social Emotional Learning (SEL)**

Researcher Dyson et al. (2021) conducted research to determine the impact of SEL pedagogies for at-risk elementary students. The study took place across seven K-5 schools in North Carolina over an eight-month timeframe during which the schools implemented restorative practice interventions. Specifically, 14 teachers were part of the study. Researchers collected qualitative data from focus groups, observative field notes, and interviews with the 14 teachers involved in the study. At the conclusion of the study, researchers determined that the climate and connectedness of relationships in the school environment plays a large role in the behavior of both students and staff. Throughout the study, educators realized the importance for positive SEL instruction and modeling through language and behavior. To continue the effective implementation of SEL, educators need consistent professional development learning opportunities. Dyson et al. (2021) believe future studies need to assist educators in changing their perspective from “Does SEL work?” to “*How* does SEL work?” Findings suggest that the benefits of SEL for at-risk students extends far beyond the classroom alone.

Another study in Australia, conducted by Kehoe et al. (2017), researched the significance of SEL in the school community through a social skills intervention called H.E.A.R.T (Harmony, Empathy, Awareness and Accountability, Respectful relationships, and Thinking reflectively). Schools qualified for the study by having implemented restorative practices for at least four years prior to the study. The study included 14 teachers who completed 1:1 interviews and 40 students, with ages ranging from primary to secondary, participated in focus groups which were recorded and transcribed. Results from Kehoe et al. (2017) showed that primary students used more broad terms to discuss the increase of social skills, while secondary students focused on why certain



SEL skills are important and how their impact both personally and communally. Teachers reported that the biggest impact of SEL and restorative practices on school community and culture was an increase in empathy, while students reported a greater feeling of value in student-teacher relationships. The study's findings suggest that observing and teacher modeling had significant impacts on positive student behavior and community.

A similar SEL study, this one conducted by researcher Dyson et al. (2023), explored the buy-in and constraints toward SEL in a high-need elementary school in North Carolina. During the spring and fall semester, 10 classroom teachers, one special education teacher, and three school leaders participated in observation sessions lasting 60 to 90 minutes. The findings—closing resembling those from Dyson et al. (2021)—determined the implementation of SEL practices and competencies were important for students' academic and life success. Like Keohe et al. (2017), educators listed relationship building as a vital competency for students. Dyson et al. (2023) concluded that lack of time was the biggest constraint toward implementing SEL in all classrooms. However, it's important to note that SEL is not a one-time lesson but rather a process. Another listed constraint is the lack of professional development for educators around the topic of SEL implementation and response. Dyson et al. (2023) suggests schools in high-need areas to adapt multi-level SEL approaches where students are being taught and practicing skills across multiple settings.

### **School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS)**

Cook et al. (2015) conducted a study focused on Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) curricula in an effort to prove the advantages of combining universal supports and prevention strategies. SEL focuses on teaching social and behavioral cognitive skills, while PBIS includes applied behavior analysis and

systematic responses (Cook et al., 2015). The participating schools had several characteristics in common: 1) they served a high percentage of students from low socio-economic households; 2) the schools had no prior experience implementing universal practices such as PBIS and SEL. In the context of the study, PBIS and SEL were delivered to the schools in independent models with a blended approach (Cook et al., 2015). At its conclusion, the study's findings showed that students who received the blended model of both PBIS and SEL practices and interventions had the most social-emotional behavioral health growth (2015).

In today's world, children need to be taught social-emotional learning and behavioral skills in addition to academic curricula alone (Young, n.d. & Kehoe et al., 2017). Kehoe and fellow researchers' (2017) studies into restorative justice and its origin found that restorative practices replaced punitive practices, in that the former values an opportunity for "personal change rather than compliance" (Kehoe et al., 2017, p. 6). The use of restorative practices—originally evident in judicial systems—grew in schools in 1994 (Kehoe et al., 2017) and has since directly impacted the school-to-prison pipeline. The data shows that punitive actions, such as suspension and expulsion, create a continued cycle of failure for the students on which they're imposed (Gonzalez, 2011). Furthermore, there is no evidence to support the success of zero-tolerance policies and staffed law enforcement in schools (Gonzalez, 2011); in fact, studies show the contrary: that schools with higher suspension and expulsion rates have a lower overall rating of school climate (Gonzalez, 2011).

The implementation of PBIS and SEL curricula in conjunction with restorative practices links the validity of these studies' findings. Blended models of SEL and action-based implementation work together to decrease punitive practices (Gonzalez, 2011) and increase students' achievement (Cook et al., 2015). Both of these studies support the notion that the

introduction of restorative practices in schools positively impact the long-term academic and social-emotional behavior health of students in their contributions to society.

### **Impact of Restorative Practices**

Researchers Zakszeski and Rutherford completed a systematic review of current research on restorative practices and found that, in schools which have implemented the model, there is a significant decrease in behavior referrals and suspension; an increase in school safety and acceptability; greater learning in communication, empathy, and relationship-building; and a greater feeling of interpersonal connection for teachers and students (2021). The literature review analyzed current school data, teacher and student rating scale completions, observations, and interviews. After a two-year randomized trial, Acosta and fellow researchers (2019) identified three benefits of a Restorative Practices Intervention:

1. They maximize growth and positive impact through strategies such as restorative circles designed to build community and relationships.
2. They create opportunities that encourage accountability for behavior and reintegration to the classroom.
3. They inspire expression of emotion through a variety of different statements and questions for those who have experienced harm and are exhibiting challenging behavior.

After school shootings, especially those with a national impact like Sandy Hook and Columbine, communities and governments have historically pushed for stronger school security and safety (Forber-Pratt et al., 2021). Schools have experienced an increase in digital surveillance and on-campus law enforcement (Gonzalez, 2011). While noting that further research in the area would be beneficial, Forber-Pratt et al. concluded that punitive disciplinary

policies and the presence of law enforcement in schools actually increased criminalization of students with disabilities and students of color (2021). In order for law enforcement's presence in schools to be effective, they need to participate in restorative and trauma-informed practices to help reduce behavior and improve school culture (Forber-Pratt et al., 2021).

In a study by Gregory et al. (2014), reports from the participants said the use of restorative practices increased respect for teachers and led to fewer behavior referrals, specifically in students from minority backgrounds (Gregory et al., 2014). The study also identified several potential barriers to successful implementation of restorative practices: time sensitivity and interference with academic instruction (Gregory et al., 2014); however, the implementation of these practices should be viewed as an investment, since students need to feel safe and loved before they're ready to learn (Young, n.d.).

### **Teacher and Student Perceptions of Restorative Practices**

A study (Reimer, 2020) from an elementary school in Canada found the use of restorative practices to be more successful when implemented proactively, to nurture a school's culture and cohesiveness, rather than reactively. Results from the study showed approximately 70% of student questionnaires found an increase in teacher appreciation and a communal feeling within the classroom (Reimer, 2020). In addition, students understood that, while conflict is unavoidable, the foundation of peer and teacher relationships are strong enough to resolve a majority of classroom conflicts.

The implementation of "circles" is a preventative restorative practice that can be done with people of all ages. Although circles can be adapted, Skrzypek et al. defined a restorative circle with the following components: an opening question, discussion and guiding questions to solicit student thoughts, emotions, and reactions (2020), and a closing statement or question. In

their 2020 study, Skrzypek et al. collected data to identify the impact of circles for students in a K-8 elementary. Surveys with rating scales were used to collect data using a mixed-methods design. Results showed students appreciated expressing their thoughts and feeling in circles when communicating about a more difficult situation. Students identified perspective taking and the opportunity to learn something new as positive components of restorative practices (Skrzypek, 2020).

In another Canadian case study conducted by Reimer (2018), 15 educators participated in learning and restorative circles. The findings established two major themes: 1) “the kids do a better job of it than we do” (p. 10) and 2) “I’d never know if I wasn’t sitting her listening to you” (p. 11). Educators must be willing to practice what they are expecting students to learn. The study found that cohesion and synergy were not consistent among staff, finding that hypocrisy was more commonplace (Reimer, 2018). Reimer stated, “Learning circle participants continually moved the focus away from whether students were acting restoratively to whether adults were acting restoratively” (2018, p. 10). Adult behavior must adapt and adopt a willingness to be reflective on teaching and disciplinary practices before student behavior will change (Jennings, 2021). Participants concluded that in addition to circles being implemented in the classrooms with students, they are beneficial for educators to participate in (Reimer, 2018).

### **School Profile**

Located in the Iowa suburb of North Liberty, James Van Allen Elementary is one of 21 elementary schools in the Iowa City Community School District (Iowa City Community School District, 2022). North Liberty has a population of 21,399 (United States Census Bureau, 2022), is located between Iowa City and Cedar Rapids, is home to one middle school and one high school. Comparatively, the Iowa City Community School District (ICCSA) has three total middle schools and three total high schools, alongside one alternative high school and one online program (Iowa City Community School District, 2022).

The Iowa City Community School District's mission statement is as follows:

To ensure all students will become responsible, independent learners capable of making informed decisions in a democratic society as well as in the dynamic global community; this is accomplished by challenging each student with a rigorous and creative curriculum taught by a diverse, professional, caring staff and enriched through the resources and efforts of families and the entire community (Iowa City Community School District, 2022).

The district has a total of 14,440 students and ranks as the fourth largest school district in the state of Iowa (Iowa City Community School District, 2022). The ICCSD serves students who speak over 75 different languages and offers special education services and extended learning programs in all its buildings. Certified teachers are available for English language learners (ELL), as well as academic support. Fifty-six percent of students in the ICCSD are white (Great Schools, 2023) and the gender demographics are almost identical, with 51% of students identifying as male and 49% of students identifying as female (Great Schools, 2023).

Van Allen Elementary's mission is to "create a resilient school culture that is full of positive learning experiences for all" (2023). Staff and students strive to respect self, others, and school property. Van Allen serves 455 students: 47% of whom identify as female and 53% of whom identify as male (U.S. News, 2023). The minority enrollment at Van Allen is 33% with the remaining 68% of students being white (U.S. News, 2023). Nine percent of students receive additional support through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and 5% are ELL (Iowa Department of Education, 2018). Twenty-four percent of students receive free or reduced lunch based on socio-economic status (Iowa Department of Education, 2018). Thirty-two full-time certified educators work in the building, creating a school community with a student-to-teacher ratio of 14 to 1 (U.S. News, 2023). According to the Iowa Department of Education's 2019 report, Van Allen score (82.31) in math proficiency is above the state's average of 70.16. With a state average of 69.81 proficiency in English language arts, Van Allen ranks above average with a score of 76.87 (Iowa Department of Education, 2018).

The Iowa City Community School District has a five-year strategic plan which includes three goals in the areas of equity, proficiency, and growth. Each district goal is in alignment with High Reliability Schools (HRS) and the Comprehensive Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan:

1. By June 2027, proficiency gaps will be reduced in reading and math across all demographic groups (ELL, IEP, FRL, race).
2. By June 2027, at least 80% of students will score proficient or advanced on ISASP.
3. Each year from 2023 through 2027, the median student growth percentile will be at least 60% in reading and math as measured through ISASP.

As of 2022, 67% of students scored proficiently in the area of math and 74% scored proficiently in the area of reading (Iowa City Community School District, 2022). The district will use the

Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP); formative assessments; and benchmark growth from FAST, demographics, HRS levels one and two certifications, and the Student Climate and Culture Survey as measurement tools.

Teachers within the ICCSD have the opportunity to participate in Teacher Quality (TQ) projects to expand their knowledge and teaching practices and to stay up-to-date on current research. In the last four years at Van Allen, TQ projects have been completed in both academic and social emotional behavior and health (SEBH). More specifically, projects have been completed in the areas of restorative practices, writing, and instructional routines. All certified staff are required to create Career Development Plans (CDP) at the beginning of the year and share with their respective principal. At the end of the school year, certified staff are expected to meet with their principal and reflect on their CDP.

Each school building within the district has a Building Leadership Team (BLT) made up of one teacher representative from each grade-level and content area. Van Allen's BLT has one member from kindergarten through sixth grade, a special education teacher, an academic support teacher, a specials teacher, the building principal, and the building instructional design specialist. Van Allen's BLT vision is as follows: "As a team we will remain committed to growth, persevere when challenged, and demonstrate compassion and teacher efficacy in order to positively benefit our peers and student" (2023). Each grade level and content area representative are responsible for bringing information back to their teams and completing any designated tasks.

Certified educators are also given the opportunity to create and lead clubs and organizations for students. Van Allen Elementary teachers give students the opportunity to participate in student council, safety patrol, and the restorative justice team, Empathy Rockets.



Teachers often receive an additional stipend for leading clubs and organizations. Previously, BLT was a stipend that positions teachers had to apply for, but as of 2023 it is mandatory for each building team to have a representative and engage in leadership work during contract hours.

The ICCSD has a dedicated team that oversees all district curriculum. Throughout the 2023-24 school year, the curriculum team is reviewing the elementary English language arts curriculum to ensure the lessons and stories are equitable. The district developed a Curriculum Review Cycle in the 2020-21 school year that lasts through the 2027-28 school year. All elementary schools are required to follow the district developed instructional time allotments. The time allotments are recorded in “per day” and “per week” increments (Iowa City Community School District, 2022).

Approved district curriculum includes research-based instructional strategies and routines for teachers to use and incorporate in their classroom. The instructional design strategist at Van Allen has worked with the district leadership team to create literacy routines based on the New Science and Art of Teaching. During professional learning communities and professional development, the Van Allen’s principal and instructional design strategist often reiterate that the Iowa Common Core standards are the curriculum and the district curriculum are the materials. The district has an approved list of intervention programs and materials that can be used in conjunction with curriculum materials for extension and reteaching. Intervention materials are typically used by special education teachers, academic support teachers, and general education teachers during the district-allotted intervention time for math and English language arts.

Students in the district between third and twelfth grade complete the Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP) in the spring. All students complete screening assessments through FastBridge once a trimester in the areas of math, English language arts, and

social-emotional behavior. These screening assessments identify students in need of intervention or extension support. FastBridge screening and progress monitoring scores compare students on a district and national percentile. Many research-based, district-approved interventions used at Van Allen Elementary include screening and progress monitoring tools to better identify specific skills and growth. Certified educators use these state-level assessments and district unit assessments to complete progress reports three times a year.

In the ICCSD, educators have the opportunity to voice preferences for professional development topics. The district's professional development schedule assigns dates for district-led curriculum professional development, building-based professional development, parent-teacher conference preparation, and district work from an alternative location. Building administrators are responsible for planning and submitting professional development plans to reflect the building's Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) (Iowa City Community School District, 2022). Following the completion of all district-led professional development, educators are invited to complete a reflection form. As of 2023, the district has encouraged cohesion among buildings. One professional development per month, the special education team from each building meets as a district team to discuss special education team goals and realities.

The district offers a number of no-cost opportunities for educators to participate in additional learning throughout the school year and summer. Educators may use additional professional development for graduate-level credit (at the educator's expense). Along with required professional development throughout the year, the district requires all certified and non-certified staff to complete digital training modules prior to the beginning of October of the current school year. Safety Care Training is another learning opportunity for certified teachers, administration, and paraprofessionals, with approval from the building principal.

These professional development and training opportunities allow educators to improve instructional practices for the betterment of student achievement and growth. The opportunities to collaborate with school-based and district level teams increases teacher efficacy and sense of community. The Iowa City Community School District's mission statement (2022) includes the efforts of families and community. Ongoing training, collaboration, and communication between educators, administration, and the community has helped Van Allen Elementary create a safe, resilient school culture.

### Needs Assessment

Although Van Allen Elementary has strong qualities in this area, the school climate and culture need improvement, which would, in turn, enhance staff relationships to increase efficacy and students' overall achievement. The Iowa City Community School District (ICCS) is a High Reliability School (HRS), and the district is currently focusing on level one, which includes leading indicator 1.6: safe, supportive, and collaborative culture. Before academic achievement can improve, students and staff must report stronger feelings of safety and belonging in the school environment (Young, n.d.).

ICCS's special education department supports inclusive practices, especially for students with behavioral disabilities and struggles. Although Van Allen uses a tiered positive behavior intervention support, more needs to be done to foster a culture that emphasizes a safety, positivity, and restorative practices. At the start of the 2023-24 school year, Van Allen had its Empathy Rockets team, comprised of both staff and students, focus primarily on increasing the use of restorative practices in the building. During the previous school year, staff engaged in a professional development training about restorative practices based on the book *Behavior to Belonging*. Despite these steps, greater efforts toward learning and implementation of restorative practices in all settings and situations within the building are needed to further decrease overall behavior referrals and increase student SEBH and academic achievement.

Learning and professional development about specific restorative practices and action steps, benefits of implementation, and morning meetings needs to be achieved. This supplemental training could be delivered via professional learning communities, professional development, and supplemental asynchronous learning. Eventually, it could also be delivered at a district level.

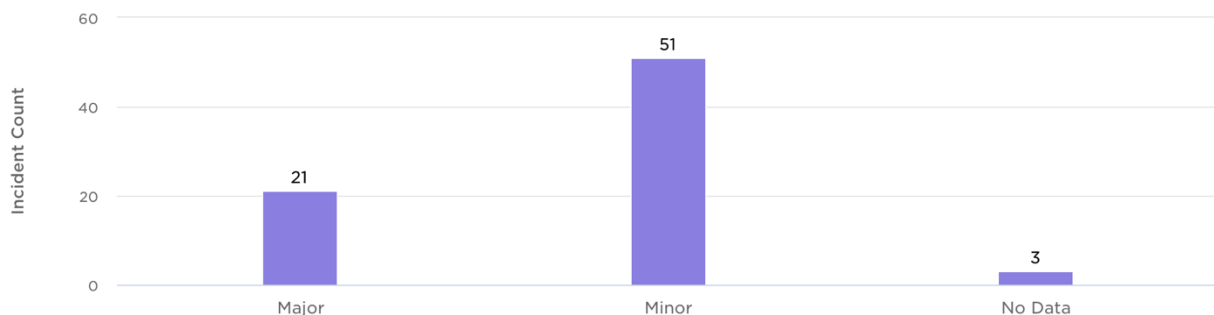
### School Data & Analysis

Behavior referrals at Van Allen Elementary are categorized by major and minor incidents. A major incident is one that includes physical aggression or physical intent. During the 2022-23 school year, there were 343 total incidents reported (Panorama Education, n.d.); however, teacher fidelity in completing behavior referrals was low, meaning the number of incidents reported is likely lesser than the true value. The two largest incident categories were physical aggression (with 130 total reports) and defiance (with 71 total reports) (Panorama Education, n.d.). Most of these behavior referral reports were submitted for students in grades three and six. An overview of the behavior referral process, and the importance of completing it, was included in professional development both at the end of the 2022-23 school year and beginning of the 2023-24 term; the main point being a source of data collection for future decisions and processes.

As of October 2023, Van Allen Elementary had 75 total behavior referrals for the 2023-24 school year, with the majority of these referrals relating to physical aggression and defiance in fourth-grade students (Panorama Education, n.d.). Because behavior referrals were not consistently being completed, it is unreliable to compare data between the 2022-23 school year and the current 2023-24 school year. Figure 1 below shows the breakdown of incidents for the 2023-24 school year, and Figure 2 displays the type of behavior reported.

#### Figure 1

*Van Allen Elementary Incident Count August-October 2023*



**Figure 2**

*Van Allen Elementary Incident Types August-October 2023*

Grade Level	Total Incidents	Abusive or inappropriate language, profanity	Communication of a threat	Defiance, insubordination, or non-compliance	Disruption
1	5	0	0	1	0
2	8	0	0	2	2
3	15	3	0	3	0
4	34	3	1	12	2
5	7	1	0	4	1
6	6	3	0	1	0

Note: Figure 1 and Figure 2 are taken from Iowa City Community School District’s data from Van Allen Elementary in Panorama Education. (n.d.). Behavior report. Copyright Panorama Education.

Van Allen Elementary has the necessary structure in place to allow teachers to refer students for various tiered systems such as Check and Connect and Check In/Check Out. Teachers complete a Google form and the recorded response is sent to the building’s MTSS team to analyze current behavior referral data and the appropriate intervention. Although Van Allen has an effective system for student referrals and behavior data collection, school-wide implementation of tier 1 interventions and prevention and postvention strategies is an area of weakness. Teachers have a significant amount of autonomy in tier 1 practices within the classroom, with no schoolwide system of accountability to balance that autonomy.

Van Allen has a team of educators who participated in a restorative justice training prior to the 2023-24 school year in an effort to learn strategies and help sixth-grade students begin an

empathy team. Since the training, however, there has not been specific restorative justice strategies or interventions implemented as either prevention or postvention. Neither the team of educators or students has met since to continue this learning and debrief on recent student and staff incidents in need of a restorative response. An accountability system should be put in place to ensure all classrooms are implementing universal Tier 1 behavior supports as well as using prevention strategies and responding restoratively.

### **Action Plan**

Students' learning, social emotional awareness, and growth exists on a continuum, meaning a number of different strategies will be applied to the action plan. Elements of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) curricula, and a framework called H.E.A.R.T. (Harmony, Empathy, Awareness and accountability, Respectful relationships, and reflective Thinking) will be infused in the educator's professional development and implementation plan. Van Allen's PBIS team works in collaboration with the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) team to focus on schoolwide expectations, supports, celebrations, and student recognition initiatives. Van Allen uses PBIS points both as electronic tickets and Rocket Boosters in its reward system. Electronic tickets are used for students who meet expectations, while Rocket Boosters are used for students who exceed expectations with regard to respect for themselves, others, and school property.

Although the existing systems do impact students' behavior and emotional success, the collaboration between staff and educators is perhaps the most crucial factor in student achievement. The problem is that some universal systems—like PBIS and Tier I universal supports—have not been implemented in all classrooms with fidelity, leading to inconsistency in expectations and prevention, intervention, and postvention strategies. Interventions and strategies are not mutually exclusive but do equal a product that is greater when implemented in tandem (Cook et al., 2015).

The first step for Van Allen is to reach teacher efficacy by providing definitions for minor and major problem behaviors using examples and nonexamples. Response strategies will be outlined for each categorized problem behavior, allowing educators to act with a continued sequence depending on student response to the initial prompt and universal support (Cook et al.,



2015). Figure 3 shows various Tier 1 prevention and response strategies to behaviors defined as minor.

**Figure 3**

*Negatively Reinforced Behaviors—Escape or Avoid Task or Environment*

Intervention Strategy	Example(s)
Adjust the difficulty of the task	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide easier work</li> <li>• Decrease the amount of work</li> </ul>
Offer choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow the student to choose               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Which task to complete</li> <li>○ The sequence of tasks to be completed</li> <li>○ Which materials to use</li> <li>○ Where to complete the task</li> <li>○ When to complete the task</li> <li>○ With whom to complete the task</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Increase student preference/interest in the activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate student hobbies/interests into activities</li> </ul>
Assure that activities are functional or relevant for the student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a rationale for school tasks or activities that is relevant to the student's everyday life or future goals</li> <li>• Use functional tasks to teach or practice academic skills</li> </ul>
Alter the length of the task	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shorten the activity</li> <li>• Provide frequent breaks</li> </ul>
Modify the mode of task completion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow the student to choose between response methods (e.g., oral, written, typed)</li> </ul>
Use behavioral momentum, task dispersal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present easy requests prior to a difficult request</li> </ul>
Increase predictability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide cues for upcoming activities or a change in activities (instructional, visual, auditory; e.g., a 5-minute warning, schedule posted and reviewed regularly, picture schedule)</li> </ul>
Modify instructional delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce the complexity of the language used</li> <li>• Alter the rate of speech</li> <li>• Use a pleasant tone of voice</li> <li>• Present instruction in the student's preferred modality (e.g., with interactive technology or more visual supports)</li> </ul>

Note: Handout #16 Function-Based Intervention Strategies from Cedar Center (2013). Copyright National Center on Intensive Intervention.

H.E.A.R.T, a restorative practice emphasizing social skills, is often used to support PBIS (Kehoe et al., 2017). Research has shown that the schoolwide implementation of the H.E.A.R.T. framework and similar practices encourages educators to use these strategies in place of other outdated and less effective methods (Kehoe et al., 2017). In conjunction with Van Allen's

monthly morning meeting competencies, each component of the H.E.A.R.T. model could be taught to students and modeled by educators. H.E.A.R.T. is comprised of five elements: Harmony, Empathy, Awareness and accountability, Respectful relationships, and reflective Thinking (Kehoe et al., 2017). Depending on the age of students, teams of educators may need to modify the content and vocabulary used if consistent implementation is to be achieved (Kehoe et al., 2017).

Similar to Figure 3, the Iowa City Community School District has a Classroom Continuum of Response; however, a combination of the elements shown in Figures 3 and 4 would provide educators with explicit examples for minor and major behaviors and the appropriate restorative responses. Based on district procedures, systems, and documents—such as those shown in Figure 4—Van Allen created its own Continuum of Strategies to Respond (Figure 5). Educators and staff at Van Allen need direct instruction on restorative practices and an accountability system to ensure the continuum and restorative practices are being implemented and adhered to on a schoolwide basis.

**Figure 4**

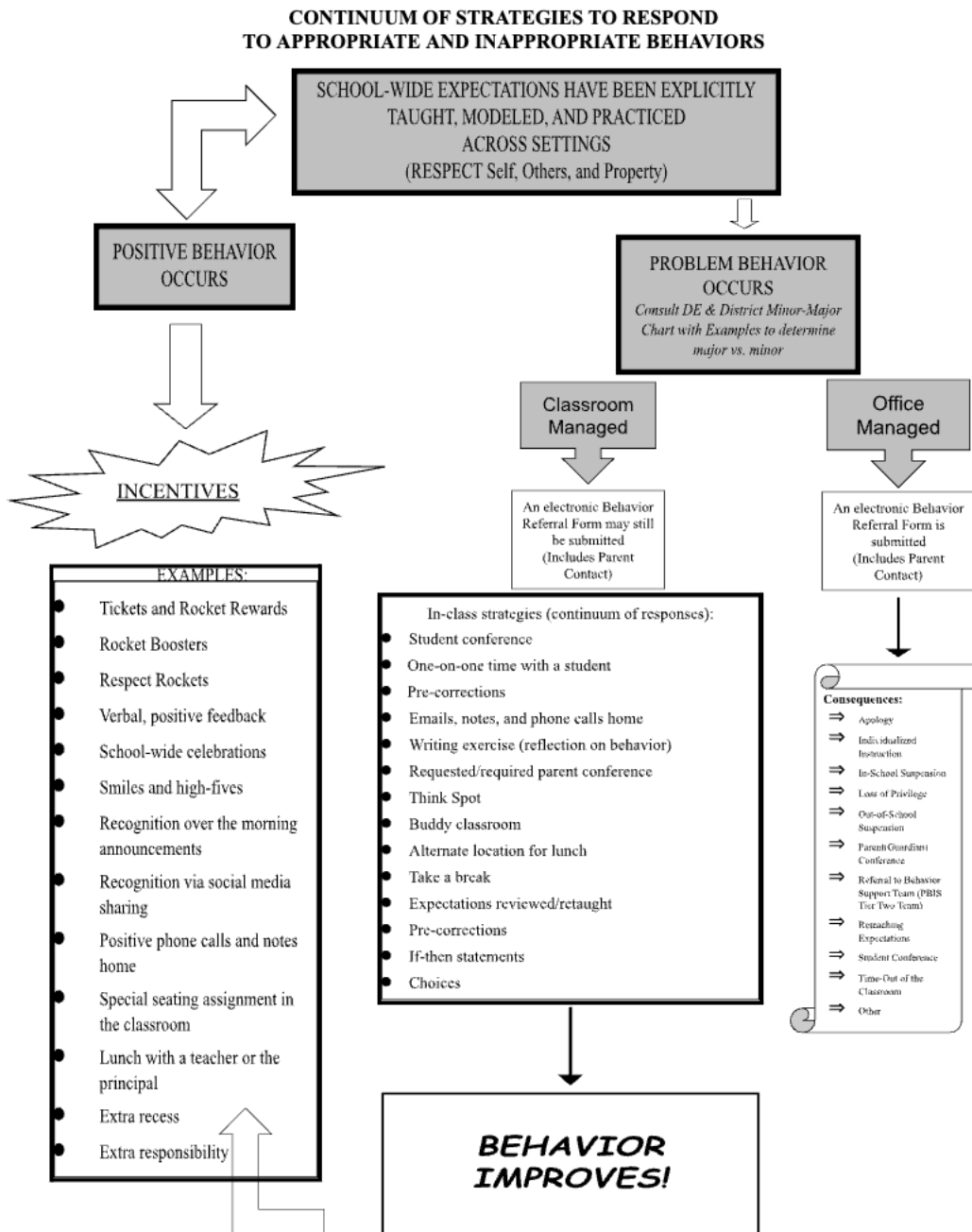
*Continuum of Response*

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CLASSROOM CONTINUUM OF RESPONSE</b>                      1. CALM 2. CONSISTENT 3. BRIEF 4. IMMEDIATE 5. RESPECTFUL</p>	
Proximity	Move and scan. Source of support to the student
Signal	Eye contact, hand gestures, card system, picture cues
Ignore/Attend/Praise	When you notice a student that is not following expectations. Look for and praise 3 students that are following the expectation.
Prompt	Provide verbal and/or visual cue.
Redirect	Restate the matrix behavior.
Reteach	State and demonstrate the matrix behavior. Have student demonstrate. Provide immediate feedback.
Provide Choice	Give choice to accomplish task in another location, about the order of task completion, using alternate supplies to complete the task or for a different type of activity that accomplishes the same instructional objective.
Conference	Describe the problem. Describe the alternative behavior. Tell why the alternative is better. Practice. Provide feedback.

Note: Classroom Continuum of Response (n.d.). Copyright Iowa City Community School District.

**Figure 5**

*Continuum of Strategies to Respond to Appropriate and Inappropriate Behaviors*



Note: Continuum of Strategies to Respond to Appropriate and Inappropriate Behaviors (n.d.) from Van Allen Operations Handbook. Copyright Van Allen Elementary.

### **Implementation of School Improvement Plan**

The school improvement plan will be completed and communicated with school administration prior to the end of the 2023-24 school year. Implementation of the plan will begin in summer 2024. The principal, general education instructional design specialist, special education instructional design specialist, and author of the school improvement plan will deliver the content during two 90-minute, in-person sessions. The first session will outline the specific research regarding restorative justice and SEL practices. It will include school data and create opportunities for educators to reflect. The second session will present an action plan for implementation at Van Allen and expectations for educators.

To be implemented with fidelity, the professional development sessions will be delivered in person, allowing educators to share a space that is conducive to collaboration and multi-media presentations. All participants will receive a one-pager to summarize the day's learning. To implement the teachings, all classrooms will need a designated space or "calm down corner." Each designated area will have universal tools and strategies for all students to use. For example, fidgets, breathing visuals, and weighted blankets will be available. All staff—including certified and non-certified employees—will need access to PBIS Rewards to give PBIS tickets to students for showing respect for themselves, others, and school property, as well as Rocket Boosters for students exceeding schoolwide expectations.

Classrooms will be required to implement a 30-minute morning meeting every day in conjunction with the monthly competency and restorative justice strategies. Morning meeting activities and resources can be found on the Van Allen Elementary Hub website, in collaboration with other teachers, or from *The Morning Meeting Book* by Roxann Kriete. Educators will be encouraged to engage in restorative circles for both morning meetings and academic topics. For

example, students could collaborate in small circles to explain their conceptual understanding of a math problem or standard.

Educators will be guided to use scripted restorative questions (as outlined in Figure 6) to respond to a challenging behavior or to help those harmed by others’ actions. Restorative conversations as a response strategy will be delivered in circles with the impacted students, general education teacher, and other appropriate support staff or administration.

**Figure 6**

*Using Restorative Questions*

<b>Restorative Questions I</b>	<b>Restorative Questions II</b>
<i>To respond to challenging behavior</i>	<i>To help those harmed by other’s actions</i>
What happened?	What did you think when you realized what had happened?
What were you thinking of at the time?	What impact had this incident had on you and others?
Who has been affected by what you have done (by your choices)? In what way?	What had been the hardest thing for you?
What do you think you need to do to make things right (what do you think our next steps should be)?	What do you think needs to happen to make things right (what do you think our next steps should be)?

Note: Using Restorative Questions from Time to Think: Using Restorative Questions (2012). Copyright International Institute for Restorative Practices.

A lack of teacher buy-in will impede the successful implementation of this plan. To make a meaningful difference, staff at Van Allen must be united in their understand and belief in the restorative work that needs to be done. Only when staff have reached complete teacher efficacy will the implementation of the plan positively benefit students, the community, and, eventually, the district. Researcher John Hattie has collective teacher efficacy ranked as the top factor of

student achievement with an effect size of 1.57; the average effect size of factors such as socioeconomic status and parental involvement is 0.40 (Donohoo et al., 2018).

A restorative team, comprised of educators from Van Allen, will meet bi-weekly to review all submitted behavior referrals to ensure the appropriate follow-up response was completed. In the case of major behavior referrals that lead to an in-school or out-of-school suspension, the team will meet immediately to create a plan to welcome the student back to the classroom, with the principal serving as the lead educator for the team.

After both professional developments sessions have been conducted and teachers have materials in place for proper implementation of the plan, random fidelity checks will be completed by members of Van Allen's restorative team. Similar to formative assessments or fidelity checks for students' behavior intervention plans, staff will be graded on implementation of restorative strategies and morning meetings. The restorative team will collect baseline data prior to the implementation of the plan to calculate growth. After implementation, the goal is for 90% of classrooms to use restorative practices and learning per week.

### **Conclusion**

Creating a safe, restorative environment for students starts with implementing universal supports, prevention, intervention, and postvention strategies; before they can effectively learn, students must first feel safe and loved (Young, n.d.). According to Dyson et al. (2021), SEL and PBIS competencies and implementation supports student success within the classroom and in the community. Although Van Allen Elementary has systematic processes for submitting behavior data and requesting support, teachers and administrators have not been provided the necessary amount of training to effectively implement restorative practices across classrooms and buildings.

Research concludes that the implementation of restorative practices in cohesion with SEL and PBIS, increase students' social and emotional well-being and growth (Dyson, 2023; Reimer, 2020; Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021). Educators and students have reported positive outcomes from restorative practices at both a K-8 level and a secondary level (Reimer, 2020; Skrzypek, 2020). Professional development sessions at Van Allen will increase educators and supporting staffs' knowledge of restorative practices and their implementation while also decreasing the use of punitive disciplinary actions.

Research should continue to better identify specific restorative strategies for educators to implement in a school community for prevention, intervention, and postvention. Although continued learning is necessary, upon completion of the implementation of the school improvement plan at Van Allen, the researcher and team of educators will present the plan to elementaries in the district. Our students, and the society in which they live in, are progressing through a restorative lens; our schools must do the same or we risk playing a detrimental role in the school-to-prison pipeline.

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