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Strengthening Student Success

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Strengthening Student Success:

Benefits of Daily Planners to Reduce Missing Assignments

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Capstone Project: An Action Plan

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Abstract

This action research was driven by the researcher's interest in student planners and the effect they can have on student success by reducing the number of missing assignments. The research was conducted to analyze the effectiveness of student planners in a school setting. The researcher is a seventh-grade science teacher in her nineteenth year of teaching. The researcher conducted a study for four weeks with two seventh-grade classes. One group used student planners as a control group, and the other group of students did not use student planners. The findings revealed a trend of increased student success as students using planners reduced the number of missing assignments in four weeks. This research was conducted to share the positive impact student planners have on student success with the administration team in hopes of the school again purchasing student planners for all students.

Keywords student planners, student success, missing assignments

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Middle school can be a tough time. For some, these might be their hardest years of school . Middle school students deal not only with the pressures of friend groups, moving from class to class, and locker combos, but also with more homework and more responsibilities. Middle school is the first time many students will have multiple teachers, classrooms, and noncurricular activities such as sports and clubs. To be successful, students need to organize their priorities, set goals, and keep track of their day using a daily planner.

In recent years the Maquoketa Middle School provided daily planners for their students. Due to budget restrictions for the 2023/2024 school year, the Middle School did not purchase and provide students with daily planners. This change correlated with an increase in missing assignments so far this school year. The problem is students are not able to organize themselves without a student planner and the planner use role-modeling of staff, resulting in lower grades because of missing assignments.

The purpose of this action research study is to determine the impact of student planner's in reducing the number of missing assignments by middle school students. Data will be collected on missing assignments for a group of 26 seventh-grade students at the Maquoketa Middle School in Maquoketa, Iowa. Missing assignments are a zero in the grade book, showing a gap in individual student learning as not all artifacts are present to show if the student is proficient or not. Completed assignments provide the educator with evidence that the student is proficient, developing, or emerging to the related standard. According to research cited by the Iowa Department of Education (Iowa Academic Standards | Iowa Department of Education, n.d.), clear and rigorous learning standards help students become college, career, and future-ready.

Resources for this action research study were compiled by the DeWitt Library at Northwestern College and Google Scholar. All 20 peer-reviewed journal articles used for this study were published in the last 10 years. The peer-reviewed articles discuss the importance of being organized, using study skills for student achievement, increasing students' homework completion, implementing planners, improving academic success in middle school students to obtain a current knowledge base, and identifying current gaps in student success.

Review of the Literature

Homework Completion and Student Planners

Researchers have examined the use of planners and other methods to encourage homework completion. Below you will find summaries of peer-reviewed journal articles that feature studies relevant to these topics. These research findings can inform future practice.

Chung et al. (2021) conducted a study to determine the impact planners had on homework completion. Participants in this four-week study included American sixth-grade students. The results suggest that engaging students in using planners will help students reflect, plan, and set goals to positively impact self-efficacy. The findings of Chung et al. (2021) imply how important it is to provide students with the skills, strategies, and opportunities to engage in learning and organize themselves through the use of planners. In other words, student planners help students to prioritize their time and efforts to be successful at any stage of life.

Similarly, in a study by Swenson (2019), teachers from a fifth-grade team from a small rural public school noticed on midterm reports that their students were not turning in homework, leading to failing grades. These teachers implemented the use of student planners. Swenson's (2019) research revealed that planners helped reduce missing work, suggesting yet another grade level where student planners are beneficial.

Success using planners coupled with other strategies was also found by Moss (2019) in a study of 100 third-grade through fifth-grade students in a small rural town in the US. A significant number of students were failing and had missing or lost homework. Teachers decided that the implementation of student planners was the first step in starting good organizational habits. However, Moss (2019) concluded that implementing planners was not enough to lower missing assignments and failing grades. Students need to be taught how to use a planner, organize themselves, and set obtainable goals. In contrast to the other studies, this study found value in parental involvement through a school-home partnership in holding students accountable for using their planners.

Methods other than planners have been used to reduce the number of missing assignments. Motz et al. (2021) explored automated nudges to reduce the number of missing assignments for students in seven undergraduate college courses over a fall semester. In this study, students would download an app that would "nudge" them when they had an assignment due soon that was not submitted. Instead of rescuing students already behind, the automated nudge is a more proactive approach, intervening before a problem of missing work occurs. Although the study by Motz et al. (2021) did show a decrease in missing work, it was not a perfect solution as some students did not respond to the process of being "nudged" to complete work. This use of technology is an example of a proactive approach to helping students succeed.

Student Success Based on Social-Emotional Health, Attitude, and Study Habits

Researchers have examined student success based on social-emotional health, attitude, and study habits through the use of student planners. Babinski et al. (2023) gathered 16 middle-level education teachers and eight school counselors through focus groups and interviews to identify student challenges. The top challenges related to their developing age include off-task

behavior and difficulty completing work. The three-month study was conducted to determine if a structured classroom, the use of student planners, and positive role modeling would support students in self-regulation, positive day-to-day interactions with others, skills instruction, and practice work. Babinski et al. (2023) found student challenges were a combination of freedom in middle school along with time management. The use of a student daily planner was the first step in moving forward to help students create routines, study habits and organizational skills.

Bonnesen et al. (2023) conducted a study of 5201 first-year high school students considering ways to prevent stress, starting in August, at the start of the school year, and every month until the end of the school year in May. The study's intervention group used strategies for promoting well-being, a sense of security, time management, organization, and stress-relief strategies. Bonnesen et al. (2023) noted very little statistical difference in stress between the control groups and the intervention groups in the first few months. The researchers concluded that regardless of interventions, the transition to high school is a challenging time of its own at the start of the school year. As research continued, Bonnesen et al. (2023) noted a more remarkable decrease in stress in the intervention group as the months moved on in the school year. The conclusion was that time spent on strategies in taking care of oneself, time management, organization, and stress-relief strategies are worthwhile in reducing stress among first-year high school students

Etcuban (2019) explored how student attitude and study habits affect student academic performance with 177 ninth-grade students. Students were asked to answer a standardized survey to assess their attitudes and study habits. Results revealed that students' attitudes, organization, and study habits are significant factors that affect performance in school (Etcuban, 2019). Of the 177 Ninth-grade students, ninety-two percent of students shared an increase of confidence,

organization and routines from small group interventions. This is yet another study that supports

the importance of organization, among other factors, for student success.

Guo et al. (2023) conducted a study on how students' social-emotional skills affect

students' academic and life success. Early in the study, researchers began to see trends in data

that adolescents tend to be more impulsive, risk-taking, and novelty-seeking during puberty. Guo

et al. (2023) came to the conclusion through a comprehensive evaluation that adolescence is a

critical time to build social-emotional skills as decision-making skills declined during those

periods. Early adolescence is a very impressionable time for building good study habits,

organization, goal setting, and routines as this is an impressionable age.

Lemberger et al. (2015) explored whether student success skills programs affect students'

functioning skills, feelings of connectedness, and academic achievement. This study was

conducted with 193 middle school students in a predominantly Hispanic and economically

challenged school district in the southwestern United States. The multilevel analysis design

involved five classroom lessons, one week apart at the start of the school year followed by three

booster sessions, one month apart during the second half of the year. Lemberger et al. (2015)

concluded that the study adds to the growing literature in support of student success skills

programs. Also, the study highlighted the importance of curriculum-focused teaching practices

that include not only learning but relationship-building activities.

Reyes et al. (2013) researched the emotional connections that students build and grow in

the classroom and the impact that connection has on student success in school. This study took

place in a diverse school district in the Northeastern United States with 63 fifth- and sixth-grade

students. Using a multimethod, multilevel approach, this study examined the link between

classroom emotional climate, academic achievement, student organization, and a positive

teacher-student relationship. As predicted by Reyes et al. (2013), multileveled analysis showed that a positive emotional classroom climate and student success were dependent on student engagement and student organization. Authentic instruction cannot take place unless teachers attend to the social and emotional aspects of learning.

Strom et al. (2023) conducted an anonymous online poll about sources of stress in students' lives, how to cope with the stress, and strategies to lower the feeling of stress. This 17-item stress poll was conducted in a public middle and high school in the Southern United States with 349 students. Results indicated the most prominent stress for adolescents involved getting good grades and having poor time management practices. In Strom et al.'s (2023) poll, students shared that a workshop about stress and how to manage stress along with time management strategies would be beneficial not just in school but in life going forward.

Educator Role Model and Inclusion of Planners Contributing to Student Success

Researchers have examined the effect of having an educator as a role model in the inclusion of student planners contributing to student success. Bachman et al. (2021) conducted a study centered around family engagement and the importance of a healthy school-home relationship–working together as partners to help students grow and learn. The intervention included a student school-to-home planner to track when tasks and projects are due. The planner also included suggested videos from the day's learning. These links served as a chance for parents at home to have the student watch the video (along with the parent, if they so choose) as a second chance to grasp a concept that they struggled with from the day. The other intervention included students recording scores on projects and assessments to remember to share at home in their student planners. Bachman et al. (2021) concluded that open lines of communication and

effective partnerships between schools and parents can support the academic success of middle school students.

In a large-scale study by Bonem et al. (2019), data was collected from September through December on academic performance through student surveys of over 14,000 students enrolled in various disciplines in middle school. Bonem et al. (2019) compared the effects of a control group and a supportive learning coach with a focus on time management, self-care, organization, and stress-relief strategies. All data outcomes suggest that the supportive learning coach had significant positive effects for students including academic performance, time management, and a feeling of less stress.

Similar findings were found by Gunersel et al. (2023) when they conducted a qualitative study on effective classroom management that middle-level teachers must acquire to foster student engagement and learning. This study was conducted with 35 middle-level teachers both in general education and special education in Kansas, Missouri, and Utah. Findings revealed that effective classroom management needs to include teachers using positive reinforcement, student buy-in reward systems, positive immediate feedback to students, teachers consistent follow-through with consequences, and positive student-teacher relationships. Additionally, Gunersel et al. (2023) found that effective classroom management in addition to student planners creates a school-home system that builds communication habits between school and home.

Longobardi et al. (2021) describe the correlation of a student-teacher relationship in modeling a positive attitude toward school with academic achievement. Participants were Italian students aged 7-12 along with 47 teachers aged 26-60. All of the participants completed questionnaires and scales resulting in 32 teacher-student relationships being positively associated with students' prosocial behavior and 15 teacher-student attitudes towards school significantly

impacted by a positive role model. Longobardi et al. (2021) argues that a positive teacher-student relationship helps to enhance students' prosocial behaviors, attitudes, and willingness to learn new routines and habits through positive role models in an educational setting.

Ricket & Skinner (2021) explored parent, student, and teacher warm involvement and students' academic success. Data was collected from 1011 third-, fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade students in the United States. Warm involvement refers to communication in student planners by the students, teacher, and the adult at home about homework, struggles of the day, highlights of the day, and upcoming reminders. Interventions in this study focused on self-system processes to optimize student's academic success. Self-system process refers to students taking the initiative to write and reflect in student planners as a communication bridge to assist students in reflecting on the day with the adult at home. Teachers and parents would add information but students completed a majority of the communication. Ricket & Skinner (2021) found that the warm involvement of a parent, teacher, and student combo uniquely, positively, and indirectly changes a student's academic engagement positively. It is synthesized from the study that this outcome is due to a sense of relatedness, competence, and autonomy between home and school.

Strategies to Support Student Success at School

Researchers have examined strategies to support student success at school. Copeland et al. (2023) gathered a group of seventh- and eighth-grade students from an urban community in the Midwest to consider how to improve middle school students' academic success through motivational strategies. Copeland et al. (2023) used administrative academic records, teacher surveys, student surveys, and teacher observations to collect data. From the data, the researchers uncovered the need for student interventions. Copeland et al. (2023) created three categories to pursue this goal: more instruction in cooperative learning activities, the use of a student portfolio

to increase relevance in learning, and the use of an assignment notebook to improve

organizational skills by ninety percent.

Haynes & Gurley (2022) explored the transition from middle school to high school. The

research centered around best practices in implementing an intervention that nurtures and

acclimates students while preparing them for experiences and challenges. The study took place in

central Alabama with 11 experienced middle school principals. Haynes & Gurley (2022)

concluded that the interventions need a framework to follow. They created seven categories used

to mold and scaffold the interventions: high expectations, organization and goal setting,

communication and collaboration, school environment, parental involvement, development of

character and soft skills, and career explorations.

Similar findings were found by Manzuoli et al. (2019) when they conducted a

questionnaire focused on key factors in maintaining school attendance, lowering school dropout

rates, increasing student engagement, and fostering study habits and routines to increase student

success. The study was focused on four dimensions that compare school engagement: cognitive,

affective, behavioral, and agentic factors. Manzuoli et al. (2019) found the most successful

implementation systems have students engaging in activities that help them recognize their

metacognitive abilities and strengthen their classroom participation. Through the implementation

of a homeroom, teachers create routines, relationships, and support students' needs.

Wennberg et al. (2018) investigated how interventions, teacher consistency training, and

daily time management in a homeroom setting would increase student success for students with

ADHD. This study was conducted with 38 general education students and 38 students on

medication for ADHD between the ages of nine and fifteen for 24 weeks. Wennberg et al. (2018)

discovered that not only do students with ADHD benefit from a teacher who has gone through

consistency training and the addition of a homeroom setting but all students who were in the

control group had increased student success.

Methodology

Research Question

Organization is essential to a student's success in and out of school. Implementing

student planners in a school setting with educators provides students with the skills needed to

prioritize, organize, and create routines that will help the student be successful not only in school

but also in life outside of school. This study analyzes the impact of students using planners to

help with their schoolwork. Quantitative data collection and analysis of other schools' methods

are reviewed to answer the following question.

- **Does the use of student planners in school help reduce the number of missing assignments and also increase students' academic success?**

Research Site

This action research study will occur at the Maquoketa Middle School in Maquoketa,

Iowa in rural Eastern Iowa. This is a public sixth- through eighth-grade building in the district.

The study will be conducted for four weeks, from September 11, 2023, through October 6, 2023,

during school hours. Student data is collected daily, tallying the number of missing assignments

for each student. This study was conducted with students from two science classes, both classes

have twenty-three students.

Participants

The total number of students at the Maquoketa Middle School is 394 students. The

student body consists of 73.2% White, 12.1% Hispanic, 0.3% Native American, 4.7% Multi-

Racial, 6.6% African American, 0.5% Pacific Islander and 2.5% Asian students. There are 204

male students and 190 female students.

The Department of Education provides a summary of each school's student achievement

using results from the ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) descriptors. Below are ratings for the

Maquoketa school district:

- Cardinal Elementary (K-2): Proficient, (no support required)

- Briggs Intermediate Elementary (3-5): Targeted (improvement is required)

- Middle School (6-8): Targeted (improvement is required)

- High School (9-12): Targeted (improvement is required)

Our average school achievement in English language arts is under the 50% benchmark at

47.07% (Maquoketaschools.org, n.d.). Our achievement in mathematics is low as well: we

scored 46.66% out of 50 as a district. These scores indicate why we are rated as targeted in three

of the four schools in the district. More time, resources, and effort are needed to help students

become more proficient in reading and math as we are below the state average.

The Maquoketa Community School District's composite ratings, which allow us to

compare our school with other schools, are as follows (Maquoketaschools.org, n.d.):

- All Students: 45.9% compared to the state average of 49.27%

- Low Socio-Economic: 43.28% compared to the state average of 45.99%

- Students with Disabilities: 48.62% compared to the state average of 48.65%

When it comes to comparing achievement from 2021 to 2022, progress has been gained

in English language arts and lost ground in math. In 2021, the percentage of students proficient

in ELA was 68.95%, and in 2022 the amount proficient is 70.84. In math the percentage

proficient was 65.21% in 2021 and 64.97% in 2022.

Intervention

The intervention is to re-implement the use of student planners to help raise achievement

scores. Right now, our school is looking at an estimated 1.5 million dollars in less revenue next

year due to declining enrollment, hence the reason for not ordering student planners in recent

years. Nevertheless, it is vital that student planners are again purchased and used by the students

and the staff to increase student learning.

This action research study will be conducted with two seventh-grade science classrooms.

Both science classes have 23 students. All participants are either in the control group of students

not using student planners or an independent group of students that will use school-supplied

student planners. Experienced teachers will role-model and support expectations that students

will write assignments in student planners.

IRB Educational Exemption

An IRB educational exemption was requested for this action research project. No parent

or student interviews were conducted during this study. This research project poses no harm or

discomfort to the human subjects and involves everyday educational practices. The Northwestern

College Institutional Review Board in Orange City, Iowa approved the study and granted the

IRB exemption.

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Data Collection

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Qualitative data will be collected daily on the number of missing assignments every

student has in the control group and the independent group. The data will be collected and

analyzed to determine which group of students is more successful based on the least number of

missing assignments. Missing assignments are a combination of practice work or tasks

completed in class that a student might have missed if they were absent. Planners can help

students prioritize their work, leading to fewer missing assignments and increased learning. The

effects should be reflected in school assessment data.

Data Analysis

At the end of each week, an online grade book system captured and listed the number of

missing assignments for each student. The report showed each student's number of missing

assignments for the week. The data was collected and organized in a spreadsheet indicating how

many missing assignments each student had accrued each week (see Table 1). At the end of the

four weeks, the total number of missing assignments was calculated for each student indicating

how many missing assignments each student had over the four-week period. Next, for each class

the students' four-week totals were added together for a total number of missing assignments per

class for the four weeks. Lastly, the total number of missing assignments was divided by 23 (the

number of students in the class) to arrive at a class average.

Table 1

Weekly Missing Assignments by Individual Student

| | | | | | Number of assignments in a 3-week period | | | | | | |
| | | | | | Not the same students - Two different classes of the same size, subject, and number of assignments | | | | | | |
Control Group No Planner	Week 1 9/11-9/15	Week 2 9/18-22	Week 3 9/25-9/29	Week 4 10/2-10/6	4 Week Total	Class with Planner	Week 1 9/11-9/15	Week 2 9/18-22	Week 3 9/25-9/29	Week 4 10/2-10/6	4 Week Total
Student 1	10	11	8	9	38	Student 1	0	4	2	1	7
Student 2	0	0	0	1	1	Student 2	10	5	4	2	21
Student 3	9	12	5	7	33	Student 3	0	0	0	0	0
Student 4	10	6	7	7	30	Student 4	0	2	1	0	3
Student 5	2	4	5	4	15	Student 5	3	1	0	1	5
Student 6	8	10	8	10	66	Student 6	0	2	1	1	4
Student 7	7	10	6	5	28	Student 7	5	4	3	1	13
Student 8	10	5	6	8	29	Student 8	5	5	4	3	17
Student 9	0	0	0	0	0	Student 9	0	4	2	1	7
Student 10	5	7	6	6	24	Student 10	8	6	4	5	23
Student 11	3	5	4	4	16	Student 11	4	6	3	3	16
Student 12	5	2	0	3	10	Student 12	0	0	0	0	0
Student 13	0	0	2	1	3	Student 13	6	2	1	1	10
Student 14	3	4	4	3	14	Student 14	5	3	1	0	9
Student 15	7	2	5	3	15	Student 15	7	4	2	2	15
Student 16	10	5	7	3	25	Student 16	0	0	0	0	0
Student 17	3	4	3	2	12	Student 17	4	5	3	1	13
Student 18	2	2	1	2	7	Student 18	0	2	0	1	3
Student 19	6	4	5	2	17	Student 19	2	2	2	0	6
Student 20	9	7	7	6	29	Student 20	1	4	3	1	9
Student 21	8	6	5	3	22	Student 21	6	5	6	4	21
Student 22	8	9	8	10	35	Student 22	3	7	3	2	15
Student 23	5	4	6	5	20	Student 23	5	2	1	1	9
Average Missing Assignments per Student: 489/23=21.3						Average Missing Assignments per student: 226/23=9.8					

Discussion

Summary of Major Findings

The action study results strongly suggest that student planners increase student success. The control group, who did not use a student planner, had an average of 22 missing assignments per student in a four-week time period. The class of students who used a planner had an average of 10 missing assignments in that same four-week time period. These numbers indicate that student planners helped decrease the number of missing assignments by 65% thereby increasing student success.

Through direct instruction and modeling from the researcher, the participants utilized planners, organized their priorities, had fewer missing assignments, set goals, and kept track of their day-to-day tasks. Overall, student planners help students stay organized and build life skills they will use in school and outside of school. A school-provided planner for all grades in middle school also provides a home-to-school bridge. Students are able to communicate to home important school events and happenings as well as everyday school work.

Limitations of the Study

In this study, students using student planners had fewer missing assignments. There are potentially other factors that could have impacted the results. In this study, it is the same assignments between groups, but it is not the same students between groups. Another factor that may limit the results is follow-through and support at home. Some students may have parents/guardians who are actively inquiring and holding the student accountable for missing work and inquiring about what the student needs to get accomplished or has coming up, while others may not. Regardless of these limitations, with a 65% decrease in missing assignments, the results strongly indicate that the use of a daily planner helps increase student success.

Further Study

The next step will be to implement this action research at other grade levels at the

Maquoketa Middle School. Teachers will be presented with the findings and analysis of the

results to encourage other 6-8 grade teachers to use student planners with students for another

four-week time frame. Having data from other subjects and grade levels is likely to validate the

results, indicating that student planners are needed for student success in middle school.

Another future step will be to implement a digital planner as students are becoming more

connected digitally. Offering students different platforms of planners allows students to pick a

platform of their choice. Some students will always prefer a paper version but a digital platform

may better suit other students' lifestyles. Once this study has been duplicated in other grades and

subject areas, teachers plan to present the data to the administration in hopes of bringing back

school-purchased student planners.

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Conclusion

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This study provides support for students using a student planner to help increase student

success at school. Using a school-provided student planner along with consistent and dedicated

staff members who practice and require the use of a daily student planner will support student

success. The 23 students participating in this action research benefited from the engaging four-

week student planner intervention to help reduce missing assignments. The results of this study

indicate that this type of class-wide intervention helped decrease the number of missing

assignments by 65% thereby increasing student success.

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