

The Learning Recovery Opportunity: Meeting Student Needs One Session at a Time

By Dr. Susan Mowrer Benda



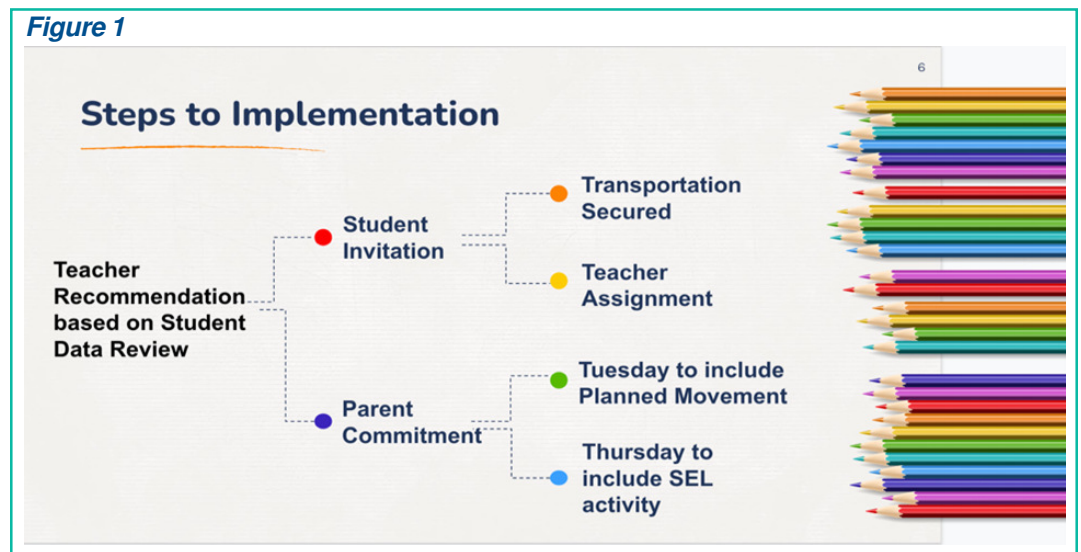
About the Author: Susan Mowrer Benda, Ed.D., serves as the Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment for the Pleasant Valley School District in Brodheadsville, Pennsylvania. For 33 years, she has served in various roles and levels of responsibility in public schools, including the elementary principalship, director of elementary education, assistant superintendent and acting superintendent.

Long before the onset of COVID-19, the Pleasant Valley School District (PVSD) pondered ways to create a K-12 after school learning program that would be socially enticing and enable the enhancement of student proficiency and achievement. In the past, the district has supported summer learning programs for primary and intermediate students and credit recovery for middle and high school students but often wondered how we could best increase student actual learning, (measured growth and proficiency) as well as their 'will' (self-motivation) to learn through the use of supplementary learning opportunities. As they say, "every cloud has a silver lining," and with the support of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding, our district created a *Vision* for an after-school program that would provide students the opportunity to benefit from additional, face-to-face student support and resources to increase academic achievement and educational confidence as well as bring out the educational best in our district instructional team.

A recent study from the University of Missouri (Consiglio, 2022) touts the benefits of a learning environment that is founded on strong relationships between teachers and students. These relationships not only support student learning but increase instructional prowess as well. With this in mind, the Learning Recovery Opportunity (LRO) began with the idea to merge student academic needs with social and emotional learning and planned movement after completion of the school day in a small group, rotational setting.

Our first step was to identify key details for implementation including the eligibility of students; the academic and behavioral needs of eligible students; availability of teacher leaders for instruction; the delivery model of instruction; the location and timing for instruction; and opportunities for student transportation and nutrition during learning. The next step focused on instructor support and included the creation of the LRO Teacher Handbook, the establishment of Google and SeeSaw Tools for Communication between classroom and LRO teachers, parents and guardians and the planning for data-driven, student-centered instructional design and delivery. The district sought teacher participation by grade level, content, special education and nursing certifications to best meet the needs of our K-12 students. To this end, we are able to run the program concurrently in all four district school buildings for students K-12. (See Figure 1 below.)

Figure 1



Students invited for participation were identified using real-time data indicating jeopardy of not attaining academic proficiency during the quarterly reporting period. LRO is offered to K-12 PVSD students, at no charge, for English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics at Pleasant Valley Intermediate and Elementary Schools, and all core content areas at

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Pleasant Valley Middle and High Schools. Our goal was to pre-emptively bolster students who may demonstrate a need for additional skills support before the need for credit recovery becomes a reality. LRO is held twice weekly after school during the school year and is offered to students who have not achieved mastery (2 or lower on the report card in grade K-2, 60% or lower grades 3-12). Selection for the program begins at the mid-quarter point when progress reports are assigned. The program runs quarterly and provides students the opportunity to gain proficiency for the course/subject chosen (of the most recent quarter only) by completing this grade-level, content-specific, student-centered, *just-in-time* academic recovery opportunity.

Every session of LRO begins with student *social time* where they meet to share their snack and the events of the day. It is during this time students prepare for the learning to come by identifying their personal learning needs. At the high school level, students collaborate with LRO teachers during *social time* to determine their academic need for the day's session and what will be accomplished. Additionally, during this time, LRO teachers also collaborate to accommodate student cross curricular needs and what materials and resources may be needed.

Students work fluidly during LRO time often moving between teachers, content areas and classrooms to gain the 1:1 attention needed for work completion, elevation of self-esteem and providing opportunities for planned movement. At the close of LRO sessions, students come together to participate in social emotional learning lessons that are modeled by their teachers. Each lesson is designed to build understanding, acceptance and empathy among all LRO students and teachers through focused dialogue and expression.

Our target audience for this program included teacher-nominated students in need of academic and social and emotional support, as well as those volunteered by their parents and guardians. Participation is fluid from quarter to quarter based upon student need. LRO instructors are PVSD grade level and content certified and use the school board-approved ELA, mathematics, science, social studies and social emotional learning curriculum during instruction. Transportation is provided as well as a healthy snack. Students are also required to utilize their district-provided Chromebook as an additional resource.

This program began in November of 2022 and has doubled in size in terms of student participation and instructors. In particular, participation in the high school program has also been highly sought after by students who seek to enroll themselves taking responsibility for their own learning and personal development.

A key component to its success is the ability of district teachers to respond to student learning needs through ongoing communication and collaboration between daily classroom and LRO teachers and parents/guardians regarding student academic, social emotional and behavioral needs. Communication is both verbal and written, ensuring accurate and weekly response to student needs and pro-

gress. This communication and collaboration provide for the timely completion of work assignments as well as skills review and an increase in student self-motivation and self-confidence.

Early data provides 80% of participating students from PV High School and PV Middle School have raised their achievement to a minimum of 65% proficiency level. Students at PV Elementary and PV Intermediate Schools have elevated their skill, proficiency and independent learning path levels as identified in their middle of the year ELA and math diagnostic testing results. Behaviorally, students enrolled in the LRO program have shown a marked decrease in disciplinary referrals as tracked by the district Student Information System. Teachers of the Learning Recovery Opportunity program continually 'sing its praises' for the meeting of student needs, including the opportunity to build key relationships that are paramount to academic and behavioral success. In the words of Rasheed Ogunlaru, "Just as the sun knows; even the sky is not the limit." For this program, we are 'shooting for the stars.'

For additional information, please contact the author at mowrerbenda.susan@pvbears.org

Reference

Consiglio, B. (2022, March 7). *Positive teacher-student relationships lead to better teaching*. College of Education & Human Development, University of Missouri. <https://education.missouri.edu/2022/03/positive-teacher-student-relationships-lead-to-better-teaching/>