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## Effects of Teacher-to-Teacher Written Praise on Teachers' Perceptions of School Community

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# Effects of Teacher-to-Teacher Written Praise on Teachers' Perceptions of School Community



**POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT INITIATIVE**

*Walk the Peaceable Walk*

Julie A. Peterson Nelson, Ph.D.

Paul Caldarella, Ph.D.



# Outline

- Literature review
- Methods
- Results
- Discussion

Literature

Method

Results

Discussion



# School Community

Research exploring school improvement and professional development suggests that teachers want to work collaboratively in professional communities.

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- Creating a strong, professional school community has positive outcomes for teachers:
  - an increased responsibility for performance
  - an increased personal commitment to work
  - a climate of inquiry and innovation that leads to greater organizational and learning effectiveness (Kruse, Louis, and Bryk, 1995)

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# School Community

Teacher relationships has been identified as a key ingredient within professional communities (Bulach, 2001; Bulach & Malone, 1994; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Sergiovanni & Sarrat, 1998).



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# Current Research

- Most PBS strategies have focused on impacting student outcomes.
- Given the positive effects of strong professional communities, interventions that facilitate teacher relationships and build school community should be explored.

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# Prosocial Interventions

Interventions should focus on designing educational systems that increase prosocial behavior

(Winette & Winkler, 1972).



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# Praise

- Praise is one intervention that has been shown to be successful in schools.
- Praise is viewed as positive reinforcement which encourages desirable behavior, while extinguishing undesirable behavior (Thomas, 1991).

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# Teacher Praise

Praise has been widely recommended as an important reinforcement method for teachers:

- builds self-esteem
- provides encouragement
- builds close relationship between student and teacher (Brophy, 1981)



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# Teacher Verbal Praise

- If delivered correctly, teacher praise increases students':
  - on-task behavior (Ferguson & Houghton, 1992)
  - motivation in the classroom (Thomas, 1991)
  - academic success (Sutherland & Wehby, 2001)

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# Teacher Written Praise Notes to Students

- Teachers in a middle school taught social skills lessons as a component of positive behavior support.
- Teachers wrote PNs to students when they effectively demonstrated these skills.
- The purpose of the PNs was to promote a positive school environment and reinforce the appropriate demonstration of social skills.
- Results showed a negative correlation between PNs and ODR, indicating that as praise notes increased, the rate of student ODRs decreased.

Nelson, J.A.P., Young, E.L., Young, B.J., & Cox, G. (2009). *Preventing School Failure*, 54(2), 1-7.

Literature

Method

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# Peer Praise Notes (PPN)

- The effects of peer-to-peer written praise was examined with socially withdrawn students.
- Peer Praise Notes (PPNs) produced distinguishable improvements in the social involvement of socially isolated adolescents.



Nelson, J.A.P., Caldarella, P., Webb, N., & Young, K.R.  
(2008). *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 41(2), 6-13.)

Literature

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# Teacher-to-teacher Written Praise

It appears that the effects of teacher-to-teacher written praise has not been explored.



Literature

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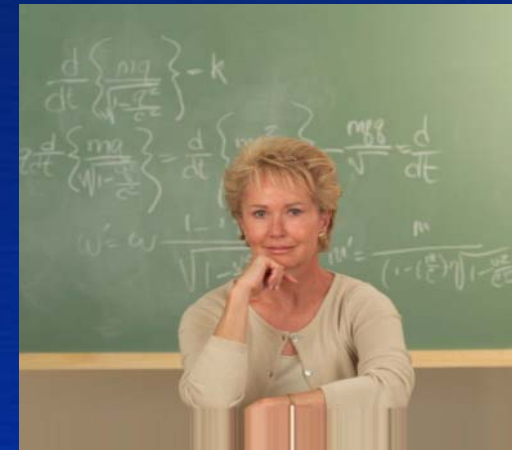
Discussion





# Research Questions

1. Will teacher-to-teacher written praise notes affect teachers' perceptions of their relationships with one another and of school community?
2. What were teachers' perceptions regarding the acceptability, importance, and effectiveness of the intervention?



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# Method

- Participants & Setting
- Measures
- Experimental Design
- Intervention
- Treatment Integrity

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## Participants & Setting

- 70 teachers from two suburban junior high schools in the western United States (35 teachers from each school)
- female (64.3%), male (35.7%)
- 84.3% were Caucasian
- average age, 42.9 years old (age range from 24-64 years old)

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# Participants & Setting

- average years teaching experience, 12.6
- average years teaching at that school, 7.4
- School A was in its fifth year of implementing school-wide positive behavior support
- School B did not have school-wide positive behavior support in place

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# Measures

- School Community Survey (Ruggiero, 2004)
- Intervention Rating Profile-15; measure of social validity (Witt & Elliott, 1985)

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- **School Community Survey** (Ruggiero, 2004)
  - 46-item, 5-point Likert-type questionnaire (revised to 34-items); never true to always true
  - Designed to assess teachers' perceptions of collaborative interactions within a community of teachers
  - Designed to measure two factors: (a) interactions which build community, (b) interactions which increase one's sense of professional competence

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# Sample SCS Items

#	Item
2	Feel free to share our true feelings and opinions about school issues
4	Respond eagerly to each other's needs
7	Are willing to help each other when problems arise
10	Appreciate each other's work
11	Work to build each other's self-confidence rather than to tear it down
20	Show genuine concern for their colleagues as people
22	Praise one another
23	Learn together
25	Make only positive statements about other teachers
26	Write notes to one another expressing appreciation
29	My colleagues and I celebrate successes together
30	My colleagues and I recognize each other for successful contributions
34	There is a feeling of mutual respect and caring among teachers



- **Intervention Rating Profile-15**; (Witt & Elliott, 1985)
  - Measure of social validity
  - Truncated to a 10-item, 5 point Likert-type questionnaire; strongly agree to strongly disagree
  - Assessed teachers' perceptions of the social importance, acceptability, and effectiveness of the intervention
  - Examples: "Praise Notes were a good way to increase a sense of 'community' among teachers", or "Praise Notes would *not* result in negative side-effects for me or other teachers."
  - Open-ended comments section

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# Experimental Design

- Wait-list control group design (pre-post design with measure of maintenance)

School A	T1	Treatment	T2	-----	T3
School B	T1	Control	T2	Treatment	T3

- Teachers at both schools completed the SCS three times
- 8-week treatment phase

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# Intervention

## Teachers:

1. signed a consent form
2. completed the SCS
3. received a brief introduction to the study: *How Full is your Bucket?*
4. were instructed on how to praise effectively: a) sincere, b) describe their behavior, c) explain why behavior is praiseworthy. Practiced writing a PN.
5. were asked to write a Praise Note to each participating teacher over the course of the 8-week treatment phase. Received a list of teachers' names.

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6. placed written PNs in the bucket placed in the faculty room. Researchers separated copies of PNs and placed original copy in a specified envelope in their mailbox.
7. received weekly feedback and reinforcement for Praise Notes written.
8. were intermittently reinforced with a note of thanks and a candy bar placed in their mailbox.
9. completed the SCS following the treatment; and again 8 weeks later during faculty meeting.

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# Weekly Feedback and Reinforcement for Praise Notes Written

- Public posting was used to reinforce the writing of praise notes
  - (i.e., a poster was hung on the wall in the faculty room graphing the number of praise notes written by all faculty that week, as well as the weekly school goal.)
- An email was sent to teachers each Monday:
  - Graphed the number of praise notes written the previous week
  - Posted the total PNs written thus far during the study
  - Praised and expressed gratitude for writing PNs; provided examples of feedback received.

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## POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT INITIATIVE

### Teacher Praise Note Study

Teachers,

We have met the half way point of our study, with only 3 weeks to go. Please notice that we have included a summary of Praise Notes you have written so far.

Thanks for writing 58 Praise Notes during week 4. If each teacher writes 3-4 Praise Notes per week, we can reach our weekly goal of 100 Praise Notes written--and our overall goal to have every teacher write a Praise Note to each teacher! Remember, you may write as many notes as you would like.

Good luck! Only 3 weeks left! Let's reach 100 Praise Notes Written for next week. We appreciate you!

Dr. Julie Nelson & associates





# Individualized Reinforcement

Teachers were intermittently reinforced, two times during the study:

1. Specific individualized feedback graph indicating Praise Notes they had personally written along with how many notes their peers had written.
2. A note expressing gratitude for their participation with a candy bar affixed.

Literature

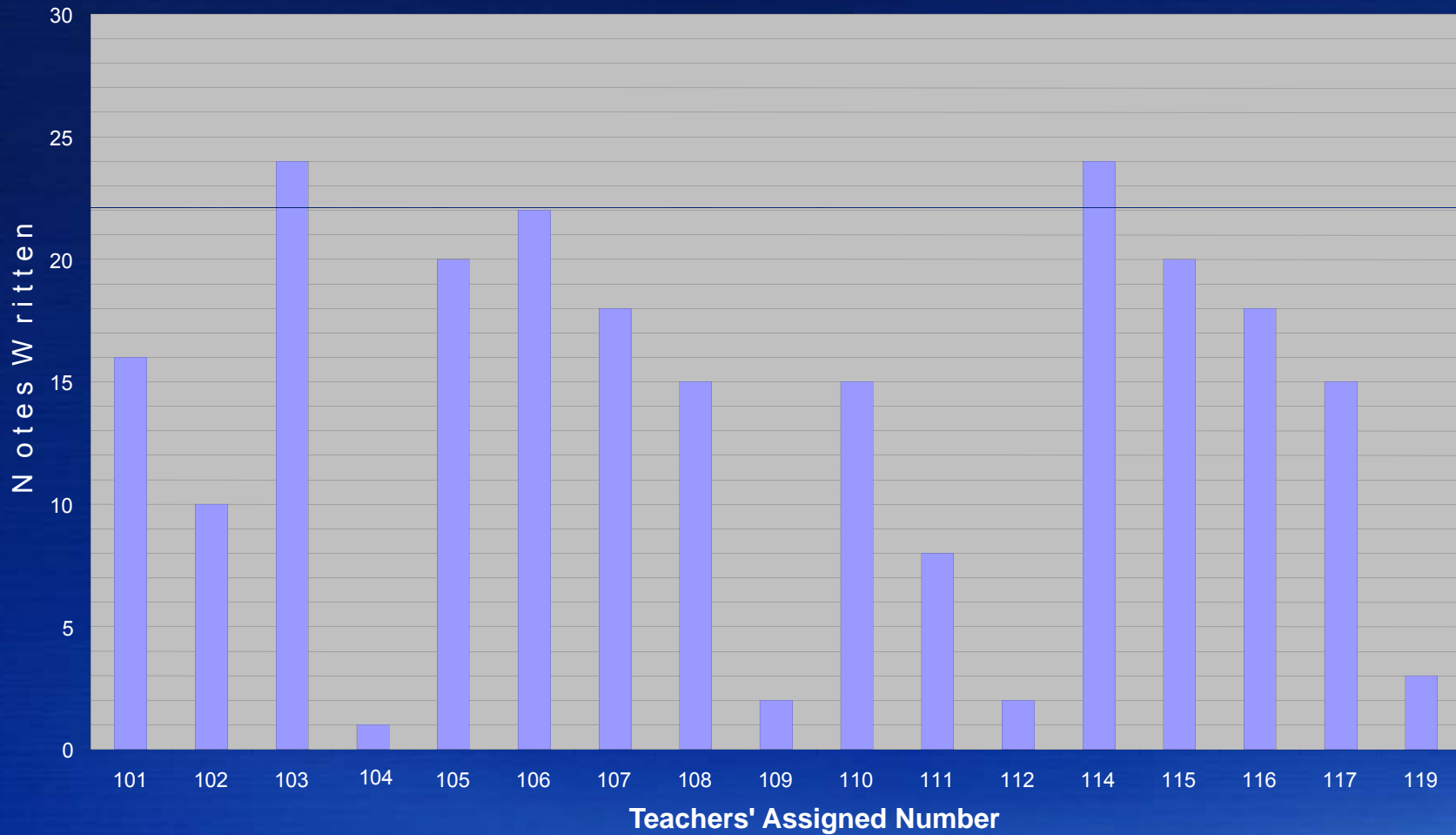
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# School A Individualized Feedback Form





## Reinforcement: Note with Individual Feedback and Candy Bar

Teachers,

We want to express our gratitude for the Praise Notes you have written! We are just completing our 4<sup>th</sup> week of the study, and we only have 4 weeks remaining!

I received an email from a teacher who has been very impressed by co-workers who are making an effort to learn about other teachers they don't know as well, so they can write them a meaningful Praise Note. Remember, it is also OK to write something like: "I don't know you very well, but would like to. What do you like to do when you are not at \_\_\_\_?", OR "We are glad you are part of our staff! I hope we can get to know one another."

Also, (the principal) commented that she was stopped in the hall by a teacher who had just received 2 Praise Notes and was enjoying the study and felt it was positive for the teachers. *Your Praise Notes are appreciated!*

We have attached a SUMMARY of the School A Praise Note Study. Notice that the graph illustrates *Praise Notes Written*. The number *you* have been assigned is highlighted (look on the charts under your highlighted number to see the number of Praise Notes *you* have written).

If each teacher writes 4 Praise Notes per week, we can reach our weekly goals---and our overall goal to have every teacher write a Praise Note to each teacher!

Good luck! Only 4 weeks left!

We appreciate you!



# Praise Note

Date: 10/27/2008

To: David M.

You are a master teacher. I really admire the way you teach your labs, and your passion for science. The students love your classes.

From: Christy N.

Adapted from How Full is Your Bucket?  
Tom Rath & Donald O. Clifton, PhD.

**Peer Praise Note**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

To: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

From: \_\_\_\_\_

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# Treatment Integrity

- A script was used by the PI to ensure the training of teachers was conducted in a consistent manner across both schools.
  - 100% treatment integrity
- The PI and two research associates jointly implemented the intervention daily.
- Permanent product data suggests that the intervention was implemented as designed.

## Example

1. Informed consent
2. Effective Praise: a) sincere, b) describe behavior, c) explain why behavior is praiseworthy. Practice writing a PN.
3. We will place blank Praise Notes in your mailbox . Please write PNs to teachers and place them in the bucket.
4. Researcher will collect PNs and place the original in an envelope in your mailbox.

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# Results

- Notes written
- Psychometric properties of the SCS
- Descriptive statistics for the SCS
- Analyses of SCS scores
  - T tests comparing SCS scores between schools
  - Repeated-measures ANOVA comparing three intervals within each school
- Social Validity

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## Notes Written

- School A: 740 (average of 92.5 a week)
- School B: 663 (average of 83 a week)
- Total Praise Notes written: 1403

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# School Community Survey Psychometric Properties

- Factor Analysis (Time 1, 2 and 3)
  - one general factor
- Reliability (34 items)
  - Cronbach's alpha:  $\alpha = .95$ ; strong internal consistency
- Analysis Type
  - Overall average score

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# Quantitative Analyses

T-tests were used to compare the SCS scores between School A and School B at  $T_1$ ,  $T_2$ , &  $T_3$ .

Literature

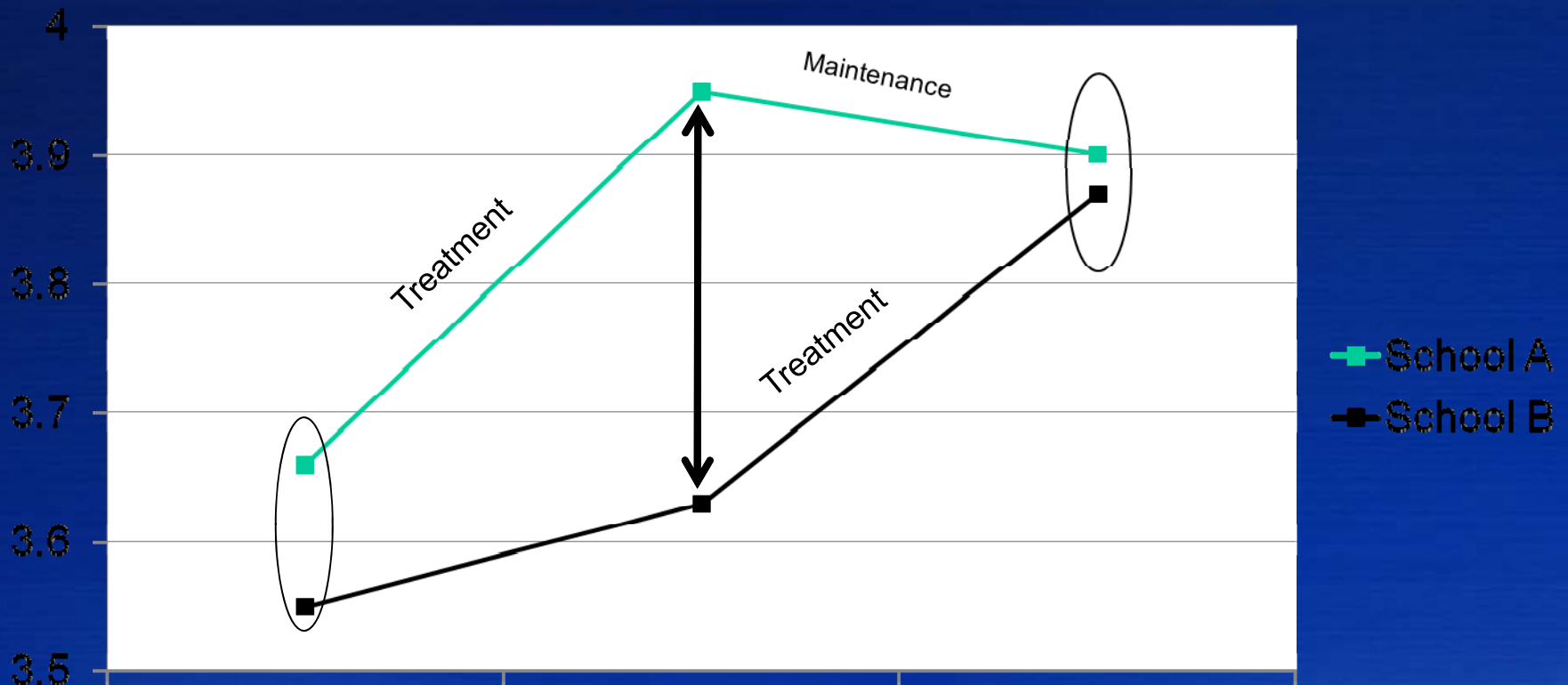
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# SCS Scores Between School A & B



Time 1                                      Time 2                                      Time 3

Not significant                      Significant difference                      Not significant

$t(68) = .96, p = .34$      $t(64) = 2.41, p < .05, d = .60$      $t(63) = .14, p = .89$



# Quantitative Analysis

Repeated-measures ANOVA was used to compare the SCS scores for  $T_1$ ,  $T_2$ , &  $T_3$  within each school.

T-tests between  $T_2$ , &  $T_3$ , for School A, provide a measure of maintenance of the treatment effect for School A.

Literature

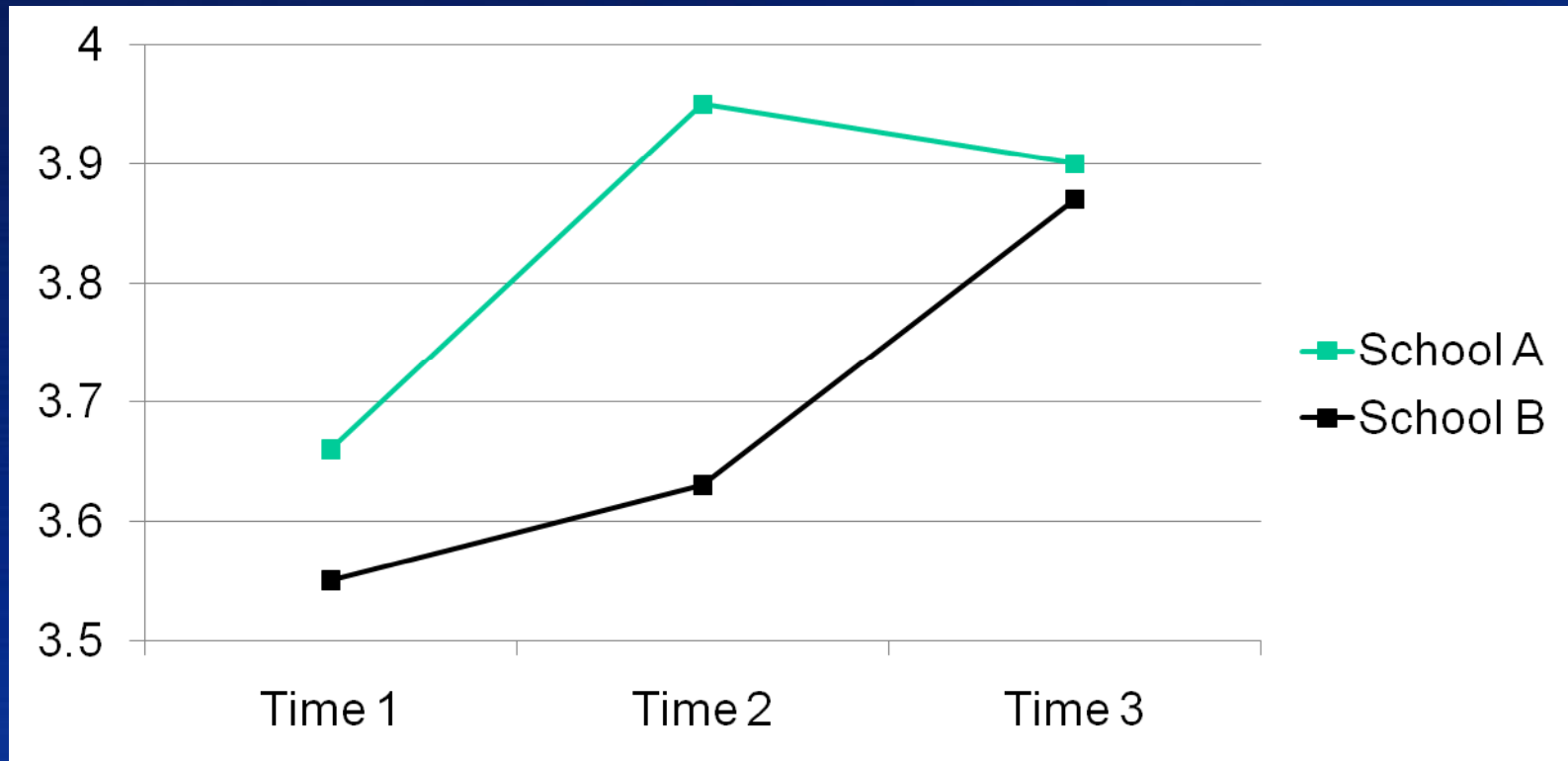
Method

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# SCS Scores School A



## School A:

RM ANOVA:  $F(2, 66) = 6.98, p < .01$

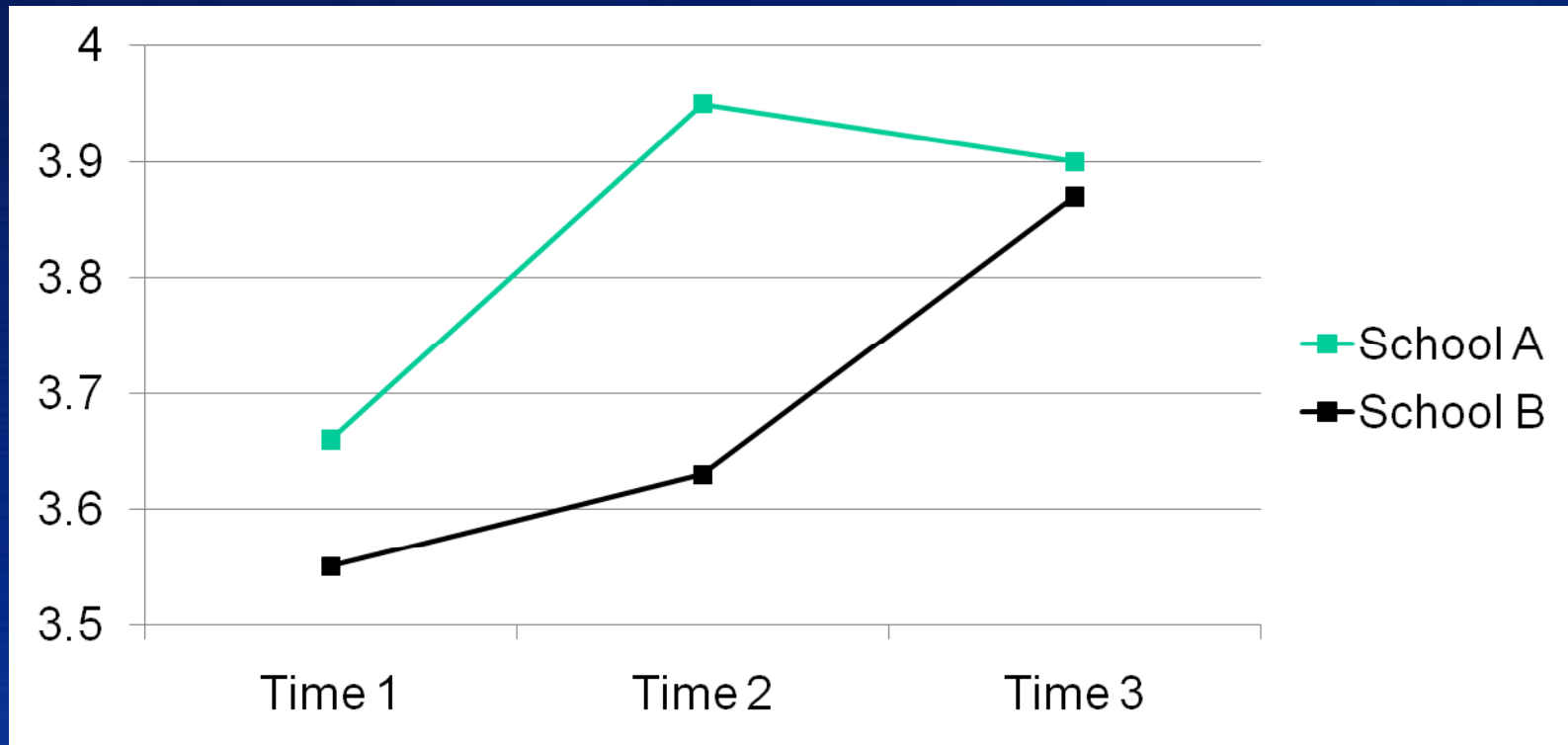
Simple contrasts:  $T_1 - T_2 F(1, 33) = 9.76, p < .01;$

$T_2 - T_3 F(1, 33) = 0.60, p = .45$





# SCS Scores School B



## School B:

RM ANOVA:  $F(2, 58) = 7.46, p < .001$

Simple contrasts:  $T_1 - T_2 F(1, 29) = 0.83, p = .37$ ;

$T_2 - T_3 F(1, 29) = 9.46, p < .01$

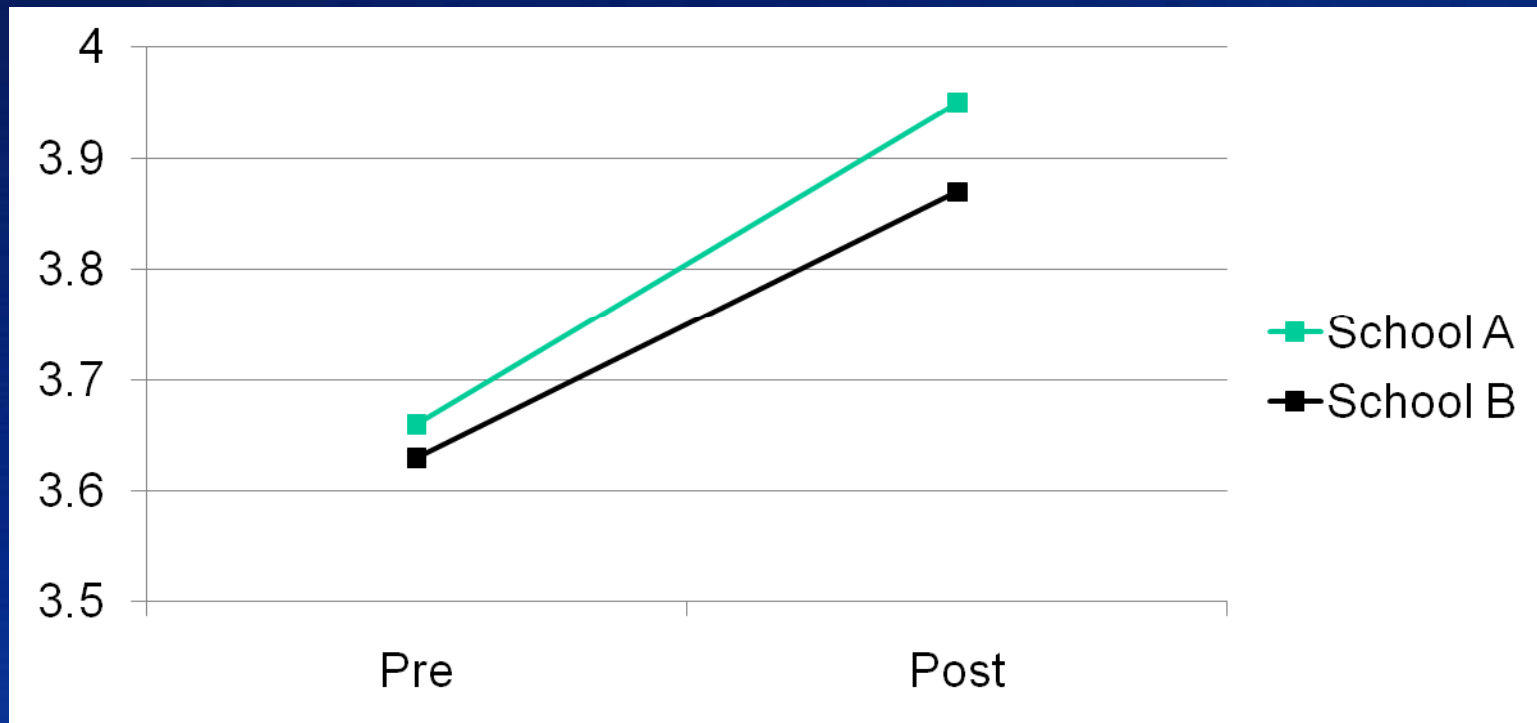


# Pre-post SCS Scores Both Schools

- SCS scores between the treatment condition and the control conditions were significant for both School A and B.



# Pre-Post SCS Scores Schools A & B



School A:  $t(34) = 3.22, p < .01, d = .55$

School B:  $t(29) = 3.08, p < .01, d = .58$



POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT INITIATIVE

# School A (Pre-Post)

#	Item	M <sub>1</sub>	SD <sub>1</sub>	M <sub>2</sub>	SD <sub>2</sub>	t	df	p
2	Feel free to share our true feelings and opinions about school issues	3.71	0.80	3.98	0.77	2.79	65	.01
4	Respond eagerly to each other's needs	4.21	0.78	4.42	0.68	2.12	65	.04
7	Are willing to help each other when problems arise	3.86	0.86	4.15	0.73	2.58	64	.01
10	Appreciate each other's work	3.89	0.83	4.15	0.73	2.24	64	.03
11	Work to build each other's self-confidence rather than to tear it down	3.98	0.80	4.18	0.73	2.20	64	.03
20	Show genuine concern for their colleagues as people	3.5	0.83	3.88	0.81	2.98	65	.00
22	Praise one another	3.69	0.87	3.97	0.77	2.15	64	.04
23	Learn together	3.15	0.88	3.39	0.84	2.02	65	.05
25	Make only positive statements about other teachers	2.11	0.99	2.97	1.31	4.89	65	.00
26	Write notes to one another expressing appreciation	3.65	0.83	3.97	0.86	2.49	62	.02
29	My colleagues and I celebrate successes together	3.59	0.81	3.95	0.68	3.03	63	.00
30	My colleagues and I recognize each other for successful contributions	3.75	0.89	4.08	0.78	3.00	63	.00
34	There is a feeling of mutual respect and caring among teachers	3.71	0.80	3.98	0.77	2.79	65	.01



# School B (Pre-Post)

#	Item	M <sub>1</sub>	SD <sub>1</sub>	M <sub>2</sub>	SD <sub>2</sub>	t	df	p
2	Feel free to share our true feelings and opinions about school issues	3.97	.73	4.28	.59	2.07	28	.05
4	Respond eagerly to each other's needs	3.70	.65	4.07	.58	2.80	29	.01
20	Show genuine concern for their colleagues as people	3.87	.73	4.20	.61	2.07	29	.05
25	Make only positive statements about other teachers	3.17	.75	3.47	.78	2.07	29	.05
26	Write notes to one another expressing appreciation	2.07	1.05	3.37	.85	5.76	29	.00
28	My colleagues and I seek feedback from one another	3.28	.84	3.69	.71	2.27	28	.03
29	My colleagues and I celebrate successes together	3.66	.86	4.10	.67	2.65	28	.01
31	Trust and openness characterize the teachers at my school	3.41	.82	3.86	.52	3.52	28	.00
32	Professional ideas are discussed in the teachers' lounge	3.26	.81	3.93	.62	3.95	26	.00
33	Teachers don't blame one another; we just try to figure out a better way	3.43	.84	3.79	.83	3.04	27	.01
34	There is a feeling of mutual respect and caring among teachers	3.72	.84	4.07	.53	2.58	28	.02



# Intervention Rating Profile-15 Social Validity

- Factor Analysis
  - One factor explains 77.7% of the variance
- Reliability
  - Cronbach's alpha:  $\alpha = .97$
- Unit of analysis: total score

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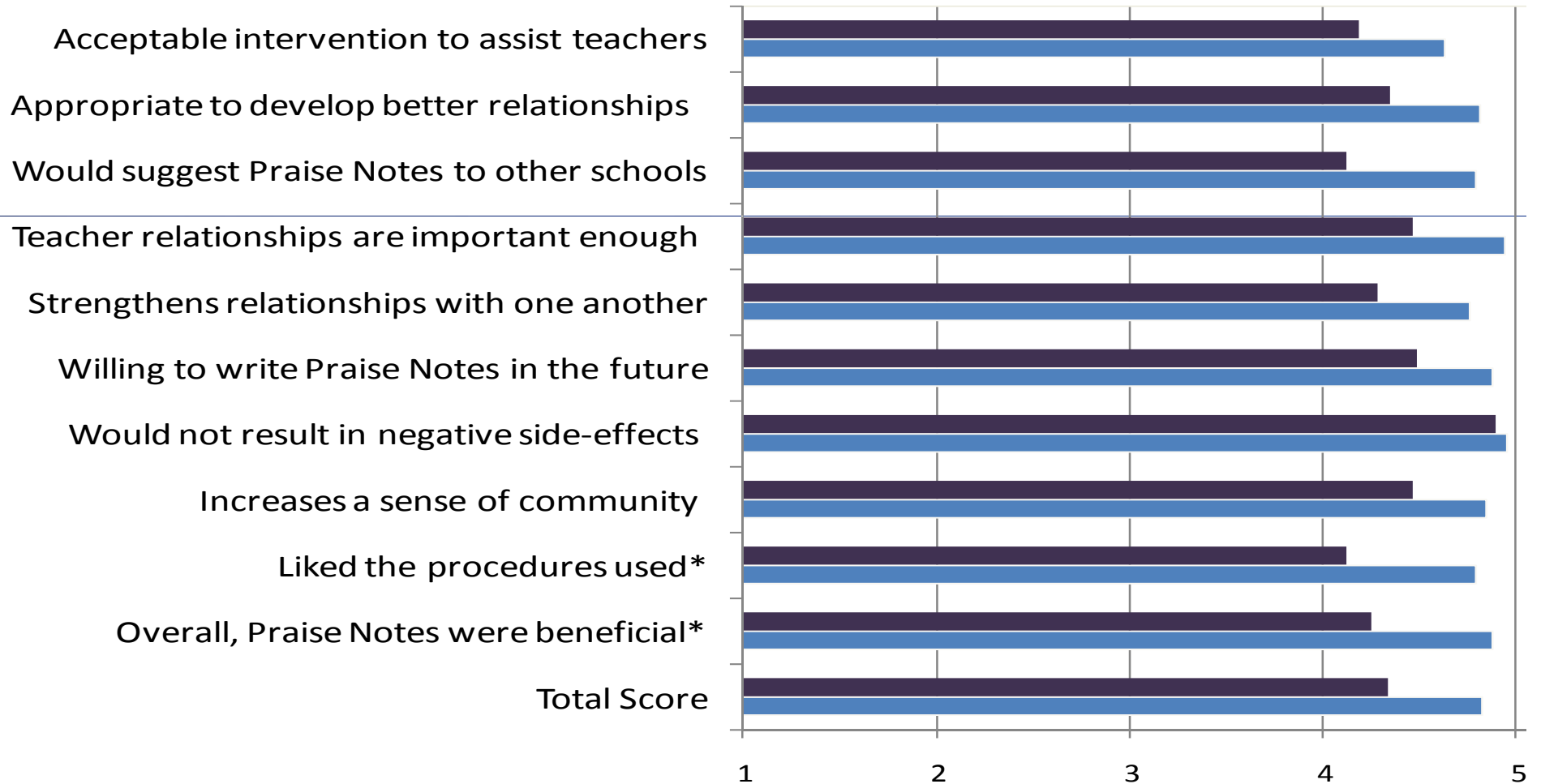
Discussion





## POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT INITIATIVE

■ School B ■ School A



**\*Significant differences between schools,  $p = .04$**

Note: School A had PBS in place, whereas School B did not.



## Teacher Comments: What Did You Like About PNs?

- It was nice to hear what I am doing 'right.' I was also interested in how I am perceived by others.
- They made my day when I got them. I also appreciated having the chance to really think about what I respect in other teachers.
- They gave me a chance to recognize what other teachers are doing.
- . . . for the teachers I didn't know well, it helped me be more aware of their contributions and I realized they noticed mine.
- They let me know that other teachers thought I was doing a great job and that put a smile on my face.
- It made me think about people I may not have thought about otherwise.
- Receiving comments from teachers I knew or worked directly with. It strengthened out relationship.



## Teacher Comments:

### Was There Anything You Did Not Like About PNs?

- It was hard writing them to teachers I have never met, so I kind of felt like I was just making stuff up, but I still think it was good.
- I felt pressured to write something about/to teachers I didn't know. I am still trying to put the correct names, faces, and teaching areas together.
- The stress of being asked to write so many each week and trying to keep up—the schedule was one more thing to do.
- It seems artificial when they are required. If they were randomly received it would seem more genuine.
- Finding time to write them.
- Allow a longer period of time to write Praise Notes.



# Discussion

- Teachers' perceptions of teacher relationships and of school community improved following the Praise Note intervention.
  - There was a significant difference in SCS scores between treatment and control conditions for both schools.
  - Maintenance of effect: SCS scores remained high.
- Teachers rated the Praise Note intervention very high in social validity—reflecting the acceptability and effectiveness of the intervention.
- Results suggest that teacher-to-teacher Praise Notes are an effective intervention to build professional communities.
- Implications for PBS

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# Limitations

- This study was conducted in a suburban area with a homogeneous sample (very little diversity) which may impact the ability to generalize results.
- Need for replication studies



# How to Implement PNs With Your Faculty:

1. Introduce and discuss *How Full is Your Bucket*: a rationale for PPN (Tom Rath & Donald O. Clifton, PhD.)
2. Instruct and demonstrate how to write effective praise notes
3. Introduce intervention:
  - a. Place “bucket” (with a locked lid) in the room
  - b. Place Praise Notes by the bucket
  - c. Encourage teachers to write PNs to other teachers and place them in the bucket
  - d. Review PPN for appropriate content, if desired, and place them in an envelope in teachers’ mailboxes
4. Establish reinforcement (e.g., group contingencies, public posting) to encourage writing of PNs), etc.
5. Decide on an outcome measure to determine whether PNs provided desired results

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## POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT INITIATIVE

<http://education.byu.edu/pbsi/>

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