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Homebase Curriculum and its Importance in Middle Schools

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Homebase Curriculum and its Importance in Middle Schools

An Action Research Report by Kevin Schmitcke

Homebase Curriculum and its Importance in Middle Schools

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HOMEBASE CURRICULUM AND ITS IMPORTANCE

Abstract

The research conducted focused on a revised homebase curriculum and the effects that it had on middle school students. A homebase curriculum focusing on relationship and team building was implemented with eighteen eighth-grade students. Data collection was focused on student attitude and demeanor towards school throughout the curriculum implementation process. Data sources included student feedback sheets, student attitude surveys, parent feedback sheets, student conferences, and teacher observation. Results from the data collection showed that having a meaningful and organized homebase curriculum can build upon relationships in homebase and improve student attitudes toward school. These results led to a better overall school experience for these students. Going forward, an organized and meaningful homebase curriculum will be a priority within our school day.

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Imagine learning how to run without first learning how to walk. This void of walking is what our school systems would be like without middle schools. If elementary schools allow students to crawl, then middle schools allow students to walk. Middle schools serve as a bridge for students between elementary and high school. Middle schools encompass characteristics of both elementary and high schools in order to try and ensure the success of adolescents. Middle schools allow students freedom in traveling from class to class throughout the day while middle school teams allow for students to still be grouped into a smaller setting. One of the most important parts of the middle school concept are the advisory programs or homebase. Homebase serves as a place and time for students to develop relationships and be a part of a school “family.” Without homebase, a major aspect of middle school is missing.

In recent years I have noticed my school’s homebase program losing attention and effectiveness. Many new initiatives in my school district have caused teachers and staff to turn their attention to other aspects of education. Recently, our school’s staff was required to take a survey on several aspects of our school. One of the areas that was included in the survey was advisory programs. As a staff, we scored ourselves very low in this area. The results of this survey were disturbing. Upon thinking about the results, I realized that we had swept an effective homebase curriculum under the rug. As a result, the students and staff in our school have failed to understand any benefits in homebase. Many students and staff no longer look forward to homebase. Recently, there have been a lack of relationships built because of the lack of interest and buy-in towards homebase.

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A survey administered by John Huss and Shannon Eastep (2011), reported that seventy percent of surveyed teachers noted that there were not any organizational arrangements that encouraged long-term relationships between students and teachers at their respective middle schools. Also, eighteen percent of the teachers surveyed said that the organizational pieces that once existed to support teacher-student relationships, were not currently in place (Huss and Eastep, 2011). Why is it that these key aspects of a middle school are not being addressed in so many settings? There are a number of reasons why, but new initiatives and educational trends seem to be at the heart of the problem.

In recent years, we have seen many new middle school initiatives. Lounsbury (2009) points out that No Child Left Behind fostered an obsession with testing and eroded attention to anything that was not perceived as directly related to achieving acceptable test scores. According to Lounsbury, it now seems that the public and much of the profession has become resigned to letting the temporary acquisition of information as measured by paper and pencil tests define education (Lounsbury, 2009). This conclusion was confirmed in the Huss and Eastep study mentioned earlier, in which teachers were asked about their perceptions on of the effects of high-stakes testing and accountability on the use of time in their schools. The teachers surveyed said that advisory programs had been negatively effective by high-stakes testing (Huss and Eastep, 2011).

What are they key responsibilities of middle schools in the overall development of adolescents? What things should be addressed and answered by the middle school philosophy? Mariko Carlisle (2011) addresses a few of these issues in *his* article on relationships and developmental assets in middle school students. Carlisle states that the

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problem that many middle school students face is that they do not demonstrate positive behaviors that would lead to stronger relationships with peers and educators in school. In *his* setting, this led to difficulties with building a positive school environment for all members of the school, especially those students who did not have positive peer relationships (Carlisle, 2011). This is where advisory programs can have a real effect on students. The solution to the problem that Carlisle addressed was solved largely as the result of an introduction of classroom activities to build healthy relationships (Carlisle, 2011). These activities were appropriately incorporated into an advisory program. Carlisle also began an advisory mentoring program on healthy relationships and conflict resolutions. The result of the measures was that the number of students not meeting social responsibility, or not acting in a socially appropriate way, dropped by twenty-five percent (Carlisle, 2011). Eighty-three percent of students strongly agreed that they had a healthy relationship with their peers following the implementation of the advisory program, which was an increase of ten percent (Carlisle, 2011). There was also a significant decrease in school wide student behavior referrals.(Carlisle, 2011).

The development of functional social skills and positive relationships are vital to adolescents. Donna Marie San Antonio (2006) says that, “after more than thirty years of teaching and counseling early adolescent students, I believe that we cannot accomplish our academic goals without a purposeful and thoughtful focus on social development” (p. 6). This social development includes the building of relationships between not only peers but their teachers as well. When asked by researchers, multiple studies have shown that students desire personal relationships with their teachers. Students desire caring teachers

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that listen to them, are concerned about their grades, and about their lives outside of school (Steinberg and McCray, 2012).

One of the major aspects of the middle school concept is the implementation of advisory programs. With all of the new initiatives that were discussed above, combined with little direction given to administrators and teachers, the quality of these programs may become compromised. These advisory programs are rooted in what is the mission of middle schools that distinguish them from junior high schools (Galassi & Gulledge, 1997). Broadly defined, advisory programs are configurations in which an adult advisor meets regularly during the school day with a group of students to provide academic and social-emotional support (Shulkin & Foote, 2009). A study done by Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, looked at one hundred and sixty exemplary middle schools nationwide. Over ninety percent of these schools had all of the following characteristics: interdisciplinary teams, or a team of teachers from each core subject that students share throughout the day, flexible scheduling of classes and/or block scheduling, a focus on students' personal development, and a home-base or advisory program (Galassi & Gulledge, 1997). One of the biggest objectives of a successful advisory program includes team building or trust games. Students surveyed by Shulkin and Foote (2009) had two reoccurring themes: First, the advisory groups are similar to families. Strong relationships were formed among the members of the advisory groups. Second, the advisory groups help students bond together.

Ultimately, what is a middle school advisory program supposed to look like? What are these programs supposed to focus on? Cindy Wilson (1998), who is the executive director of the Indiana Middle Level Institute, shares her experience of middle

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school advisory programs. She discusses a particular student that she refers to as John. John was a kid who was lacking social skills that prevented him from developing positive relationships. This is where the established advisory program took over. Wilson claims that the required group activities and just the fact that John had an advisor there for him throughout the school year completely turned around John's outlook on school. Wilson believes that these factors allowed for John to not "fall through the cracks." Not all middle school teachers support advisory programs. There is a fear from some teachers that these advisory programs will force them to act as counselors.

Wilson (1998) says that this should not be a worry:

Advisors are not expected to be counselors. They offer a kind presence in a new and changing environment, and they have the responsibility to get to know their advisees very well, both academically and socially. Advisors are the contact person for the home and the advocate for their advisees on the team and in the school. The school counselor is always available to provide services to students who require more than a friendly presence, and the advisor is often who can alert the counselor to a student's possible needs. (p. 101)

The adolescents that are attending middle schools throughout the country are at a critical stage in their lives. There is plenty of literature that discusses the idea that these students need more than just a focus on academics. These students need help with social development. This is where the advisory programs in our middle schools can be very beneficial. These programs do need to be implemented by using expertise and direction. The advisory programs need to be beneficial to the students who are in them. This will in

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the end, lead to greater student success and a better sense of community within the school or interdisciplinary teams.

As can be seen, there is a large amount of research on the importance of middle school advisory programs, or homebase. I decided to take a look at how important homebase is to middle school students. I took a look at the question: What effect does an organized homebase curriculum focusing on team-building and relationship building have on the overall attitude of the students toward school on an interdisciplinary team? To answer this question I implemented a homebase curriculum with my eighth grade homebase students. A total of eighteen students participated in this curriculum and provided feedback.

Description of Research Process

To determine what effect a homebase curriculum has on relationship building and team building on middle school students, I first administered a student feedback form. The purpose of this feedback was to get the initial feelings of my students on the previous homebase curriculum or lack thereof. In my view, the original homebase curriculum lacked both direction and purpose. It was comprised of study days and random activity days. This student feedback form allowed me to determine the aspects of homebase that students liked and disliked. It also allowed me to determine the types of relationships that students currently have with peers and their homebase advisor. Along with the student feedback form, students were asked to fill out a student attitude scale. While the student feedback form focused on what students thought about homebase and the

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activities of homebase, the student attitude sheet focused on what students thought about the general school experience, relationships with the peers, and the relationship with their homebase teacher. This attitude scale that I developed was to get an understanding of student attitudes towards homebase and school in general. The student attitude scale included important aspects of student attitude and demeanor. Both of these data sources were re-administered at the end of the curriculum implementation process in order to compare student responses prior to the curriculum implementation and post-implementation.

After the initial student feedback form was filled out, I then began to implement the actual homebase curriculum in my homebase. In our school we have an open-ended homebase setting. Each interdisciplinary team is allowed to develop their own homebase curriculum and activities. Homebase meets every morning for thirty minutes to begin the school day. A typical homebase week consists of a tutor day, current event days, and activity days. The new curriculum consisted of a variety of activities that focused on building relationships and team building within my homebase. With the structure of homebase in my school, students participated in these activities two days per week over a four week period. The rest of the three days were set aside for various "housekeeping" items, tutor time, and other activities that are required of us. Although the other three days a week are not directly related to the homebase curriculum, homebase students are still together each of the five days.

The first activity students participated in was a simple "ice-breaker" activity. This activity was done on the third day of homebase. Students were given a sheet of paper with nine squares on it. Students were asked to put their name in one box and then

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fill in the other boxes with different aspects of their life. The directions were very open-ended but without setting specific details of what they had to write down; this allowed students to put the aspects of their life that they viewed as important. Students then communicated with one another to find peers who had similar things written down. This activity allowed students to see some similarities and differences that they have with other students. After the allotted time, students who did not have spaces that were signed by other students shared the content of those spaces to the rest of the class.

The next activity that my homebase students participated in also focused on students getting to know each other. During the second week of school, students performed peer interviews. Each student interviewed two other homebase classmates. On day one of the activity, I randomly assigned students partners to interview in order to ensure that students interviewed peers that they might not usually have conversations with. On day two of the activity, students were again randomly placed with a different classmate. The result was students interviewing two peers that they may not know a lot about. The interview questions were simple and included questions about student's hobbies, favorite television shows, music, and other preferences they have. Questions were easy to answer and were not too revealing, so it made it easy for students to answer the questions.

During these first couple weeks of homebase activities, I was partaking in observations. These observations were done every day in which the activities were being done by students. During these observations, I answered five questions. First, are all members of the homebase actively participating in the activity? Second, are the students being respectful to one another? It was important to make sure that all students were

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respectful before continuing to the next activity. The third and fourth aspects I was observing was how students were communicating with one another. It was interesting to see the amount of quality communication. The communication between students was abundant and productive, rather than students just doing the bare minimum of communication. Also, were students communicating with a wide variety of students or just a couple of particular students? For the student interview, I was looking at how they interacted with the partners they were assigned. The final question in my observation tool considered the quality of interaction between myself, the instructor, and the students in my homebase. When considering the quality of interaction I was looking at whether or not students were respectful to one another. This is often an overlooked but very important part of the homebase setting as it is equally important to the relationships between students.

The next activity that students participated in was very informal. Students were given a day of "free" time. During this time, students had about ten minutes towards the end of the homebase time after other scheduled activities to do either visit with another, work on homework or have an open gym period. This was another day in which I used my observation forms to document the communication amongst students as well as what types of relationships were being formed. This day allowed me to observe how comfortable students were in communicating with me as well.

Following the activities that were done with our homebase, students participated in activities that were whole interdisciplinary team activities. These interdisciplinary teams consist of a group of teachers that all see the same group of students throughout the day. This allows teachers to collaborate with each other. For one hour of each day, this

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group of teachers meets to discuss student concerns, upcoming events, and other school related items. Each one of these teachers is assigned a homebase made up of students that are also members of the team. These homebases make up the team. Each of these homebases share the same homebase curriculum. For the next activities, the entire interdisciplinary team met in the gym so that we were all together. First, students participated in a team mixer. During this team mixer students were given a sheet of paper with a list of characteristics or hobbies. Students were asked to collaborate with other students to find out which students could match with a characteristic. For example, one statement read, "plays football." Each student had to find someone who played football and sign off on their sheet. This activity was done in order to get students within our interdisciplinary team to get to know each other.

The next set of whole team activities that students performed was a variety of relays. These relays were set up so that each of eight homebases within our team were competing against one another. These relays allowed students in each homebase to work with one another to develop strategies and teamwork. For example, each student in the homebase had to move a "hula-hoop" around a cone and back while rolling it like a tire. Again, teacher observations were done during this activity using an observation sheet.

At this point in the homebase curriculum implementation, I once again administered both the student feedback data sheet as well as the student attitude scale data sheet. By getting feedback both prior to, and after the implementation of the homebase curriculum, I was able to see the perceived impact that the curriculum had on the students. Both the feedback data sheet and the student attitude scale was the same as the data sheets given in the beginning to the research.

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The student feedback form was used to get an understanding of what students thought about homebase and the activities that occur in homebase. Students also completed the student attitude sheet to determine how they felt about school and the relationships that they had developed. I also administered the parent question sheet and the teacher observations throughout the implementation of the curriculum. At this point, the final data sources were administered. Another data source that was used was a student interview. This student interview provided very valuable information. The student conference allowed me to ask students more open-ended questions and allowed students to give real feedback on what they thought of the new homebase curriculum. The interview questions asked students to describe their feelings toward homebase. The value in the student conference was that students were able to elaborate on the good and bad of homebase, and their overall school experience.

The final data source was the parent questionnaire. This is a unique but important data source. This questionnaire was sent home with students. I asked students and parents to have a discussion about the activities that were done in homebase. This data source did two things. It allowed me to get some parent suggestions based on what their son or daughter says at home. It is always important to communicate with parents as they often hear the truth from their kids about what is happening at school. This data source also intends to create conversations at home between parent and their students about what is happening at school. Parents were able to participate in the child's education and parent involvement is key in any level of education.

This homebase curriculum along with the data that was collected gave a good understanding of students' thoughts about homebase and school. Each one of the data

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sources served a different but valuable role in the understanding of students' approach towards homebase.

Data Analysis

After implementing the homebase curriculum that I developed and administering the data collection tools, I was able to analyze the data that came from the action research. Data showed that the implementation of a homebase curriculum based on relationship building and team building can have a positive effect on the overall demeanor and attitudes of students towards school. As the results will show, an effective homebase curriculum can lead to a better middle school experience for students.

When beginning the analysis of the data, I first looked at the student feedback surveys. One of these surveys was given at the beginning of the school year and a second student feedback sheet was handed out at the end of the implementation of the homebase curriculum, or about four weeks later. On the student feedback sheet, 100% of the students in my homebase stated that the activities implemented in homebase were either "above average" or "excellent" in quality. That is important as it showed that the curriculum had student buy-in.

The next portion of the student feedback sheet that I looked at was how students felt about their relationships between their peers as well as their homebase teacher. Figure 1 shows how students perceived the relationships that were formed in homebase. Ninety-four percent of the students said "yes" when asked if they had developed a positive relationship with their homebase teacher after the curriculum implementation. This was compared to the 67% of students that said they had a positive relationship with

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their homebase teacher before they went through the homebase curriculum. One hundred percent of these students stated that they had developed positive relationships with their peers in homebase. This was up from the 56% of students who indicated that they had developed positive relationships with their homebase peers before the implementation of the curriculum.

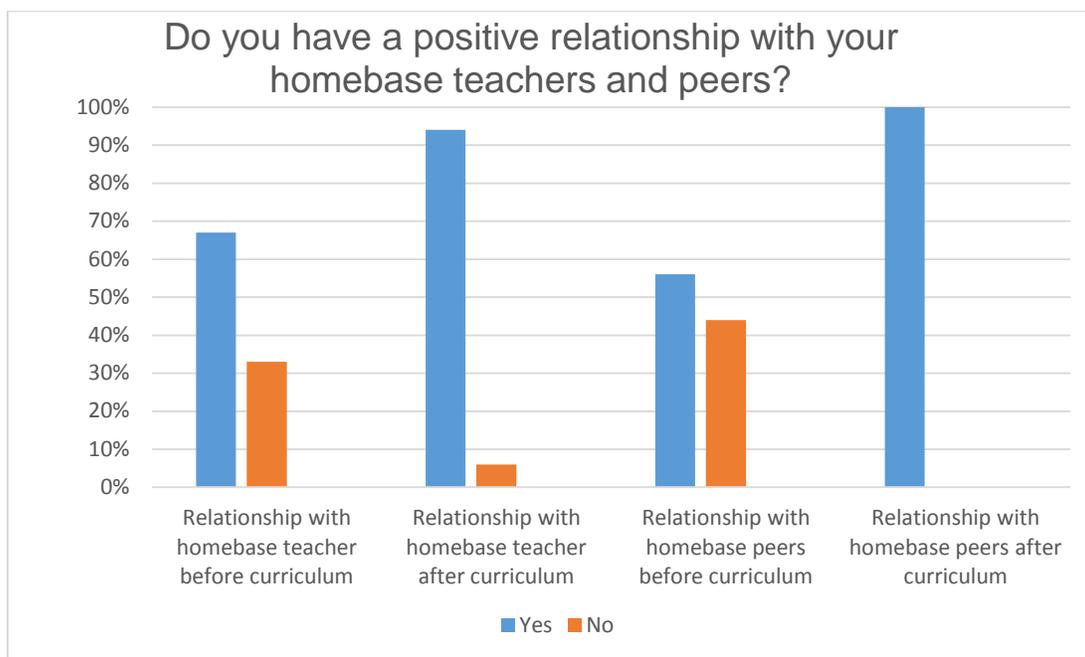


Figure 1. The percentage of students that indicated they had positive relationships with their homebase teacher and peers.

What may be more telling was the students' responses to the question on whether or not students thought that the homebase activities led to the development of these relationships. Seventeen of the eighteen students asked stated "yes": The homebase activities that they participated in had helped develop the relationships that they had with their peers and their homebase teacher. Furthermore, when students were asked about what they liked most about their homebase experience, every one of the eighteen students

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surveyed stated that they either enjoyed the activities or spending time with their peers and homebase teacher.

After sorting through the student feedback sheets, I then took a look at the student attitude scale. This scale was administered in the beginning of the school year, before the homebase curriculum was implemented. It was administered again at the conclusion of the curriculum implementation. This data source was used to determine what affects homebase had on student's attitudes towards school. Figure 2 shows the results of the student attitude scale prior to and after the implementation of the homebase curriculum.

Of the eighteen students that took the attitude scale, fifteen of them agreed that they enjoyed coming to school each day at the beginning of the school year. That number increased to seventeen on the attitude scale taken after the implementation of the homebase curriculum. That is an increase from 83% to 94%. Furthermore, at the beginning of the school year 50% of students agreed that they enjoyed spending time with their homebase peers and homebase teacher. The other 50% of the students indicated that they "somewhat agreed" that they enjoyed spending time with their peers and teacher. Following the implementation of the homebase curriculum, 83% of students stated that they agreed they enjoyed spending time with their peers and teachers. 11% said that they "somewhat agreed" and 5% or one student indicated that they disagreed with the statement.

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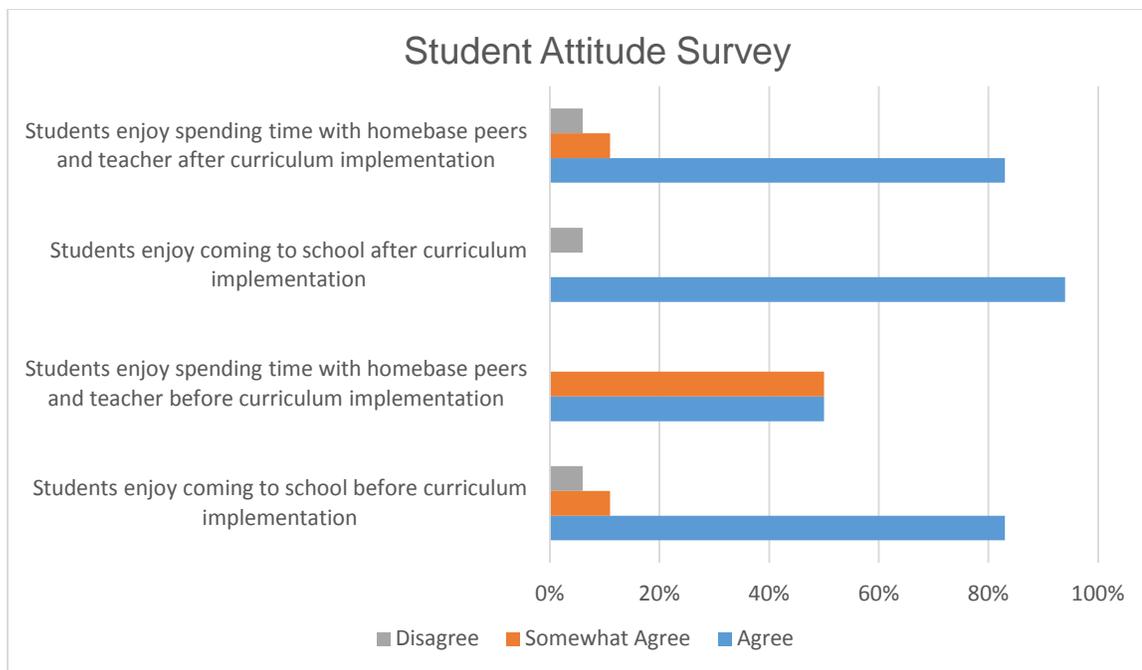


Figure 2. Percentage of students that enjoy coming to school as well as pending time with their homebase teacher and peers.

Students were also shown a couple statements related to how much they felt cared about while at school from both teachers and peers. First, students were given the statement, “I feel that my homebase teacher cares about me and the events in my life.” All but one of the eighteen students selected either “agree” or “somewhat agree” with that statement. This was up from the twelve students who selected “agree” or “somewhat agree” prior to the implementation of a homebase curriculum. Seventeen of the eighteen students also selected “agree” or “somewhat agree” with the statement, “I am confident that I am entering a safe and caring environment when I come to school.” It is interesting to note that in each statement one student selected the option “disagree.” For each statement, it was a different student that selected “disagree.” Prior to the homebase

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curriculum being implemented there were two students that selected “disagree” for each statement.

The next data source that I used was the student interviews. These interviews were done in a one-on-one situation. This was done one time after the implementation of the homebase curriculum. This interview allowed students to answer more open-ended questions. These questions allowed students to give more specific answers about what they liked or disliked about homebase and school. Students were asked questions and I recorded their answers as they were given.

The first of the five questions that were asked was simply, “What are the things that you like about homebase”? All eighteen students in my homebase answered that they liked the activities that were done in homebase. Fourteen of those kids also pointed out that they enjoyed the relationship that they had with their homebase teacher. One student said, “I like that we have a great homebase teacher and I really like the activities that we do from day to day.” Another student added, “I think that we have a lot of people in our homebase that our fun to work with during the activities.”

The second question that students were asked was, “What are some things that you would change about homebase”? Ten of the eighteen students answered that there was not really anything that they would change about homebase. Four other students stated that they would like to do more of the homebase activities that they had been doing. There was one student however that said the homebase activities could be modified some. That student said, “I wish that we could learn more, I don’t feel like we learn anything in homebase.” There was also one student who indicated that he would like different homebase activities but the student did not give any suggestions as to what

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she would like to see different. None of the students interviewed stated that they didn't have good relationships with their peers in homebase.

During the third part of the student conference, students were asked to describe the relationships that they had with their peers in homebase. There were a large range of answers in describing the peer relationships of homebase. Many students pointed out that they were able to communicate well with their homebase peers even if the other student was not considered a friend. A few of the students pointed out that the student interviews had helped to open up communication with students with whom they would not usually converse. One student said, "I do not have many friends in homebase but I feel like I know everyone and I can talk to all of them." One student stated, "The other kids in our homebase have been great to work with. I feel that I developed good with relationships with everybody in homebase even if they are not my friends." In addition, not one of the students stated during the conference that they had negative relationships with their peers.

The final part of the student conference allowed students to describe their overall school experience for the current school year. Students were allowed to express how they felt about their school year. Once again, the responses of the students were almost all positive. Numerous students specifically referenced last year's school year. Eight of the eighteen students specifically said that they were enjoying this school year over last year's school year. One student responded, "I love school so far this year, the experience this year has been great and much better than last year." There was however one student who said that they have not had a good school experience this year. When asked why, the student responded, "I just don't like school very much."

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Students were also asked to get their parents involved with the homebase conversation. Students were given a parent questionnaire sheet. Each of the students were told to take the sheet home and discuss the sheet with their parents. The first part of the assignment required students to discuss three things that they had done in homebase with their parents. They were then asked to discuss with their parents why the activities were done. Parents then signed off on the sheet if they participated in a conversation with their son or daughter. 67% of the students listed the student interviews and their importance on their sheet. One student mentions, "The student interviews were a good activity because it allowed us to get to know other students in our homebase."

The other aspect of the homebase curriculum that was mentioned frequently were the relay competitions that the students participated in. These relay competitions were filled with a variety of fun tasks that each student had to take their turn at completing. Fifteen of the eighteen students mentioned that the relay competitions were an important part of homebase. A student commented that "The relays were a way that we had to work as a team and I think it helped us build relationships with other kids in homebase." There was also a suggestion area on the parent question sheet. There were not any students who gave negative feedback. There were however a handful of students who suggested to keep doing more of the homebase activities that had been implemented.

The final source of data that was used was an observational data sheet. This sheet contained five specific areas that were observed throughout the activities that the students were participating in. The first aspect that was being observed was whether or not students were actively participating. At the beginning of the school year, students were actively participating "sometimes." This aspect improved as the homebase

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curriculum progressed. By the end of the data gathering period, students were “mostly” actively participating. There was still not 100% participation in any of the activities that occurred but participation did improve throughout the homebase curriculum time period.

The next three aspects on the observational data sheet were somewhat related to one another. In this section I was looking to see how students were communicating with each other. It was important to see if students were collaborating in a positive and collaborative way. Throughout all of the homebase activities, I selected “always” for the collaboration aspects of the observations. One thing that I did observe however, was who students communicated with. In the beginning part of the school year students communicated with only a certain group of other students. It seemed as if they were comfortable with only a select few students. On the first observation that was done, “seldom” was selected when referring to students communicating with a wide range of students. By the end of the implementation period students were still collaborating but they were collaborating with a wider range of their peers. The collaboration with a wide range of peers really began when students were conducting the student interviews. Students were assigned different students to interview and they began to be comfortable collaborating with one another. On the final two observation sheets, “mostly” was selected for this aspect. This communication and collaboration always seemed to be respectful and welcoming to all students.

The final observational area that was considered was the interactions that students had with their homebase teacher. Were students comfortable approaching me during the homebase period? From the beginning of the school year to the end of the homebase curriculum implementation, this aspect increased from “sometimes” to what I observed as

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“mostly.” I made a note that during the time period in which the relay competitions were performed is when students began to be more comfortable around me. It was during this period that the overall comfort level of students increased. The results of the observations are shown in Table 1.

Table 1				
<i>Homebase Observational Data</i>				
<u>Observations</u>	<u>Observation 1</u>	<u>Observation 2</u>	<u>Observation 3</u>	<u>Observation 4</u>
Students Participating	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Mostly</i>
Students are respectful to one another	<i>Always</i>	<i>Always</i>	<i>Always</i>	<i>Always</i>
Students Collaborate	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Always</i>	<i>Always</i>	<i>Always</i>
Students Collaborate with a wide range of students	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Mostly</i>	<i>Mostly</i>
Positive interactions with teacher	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>

Table 1. Represents the observations that were made by the teacher during the homebase curriculum activities.

Action Plan

Based on the homebase curriculum that was implemented and the data that was collected during the process, my results support that homebase is an important aspect of middle

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school. Having an effective homebase curriculum that focuses on relationship building and team building lead to students having a more positive attitude and overall demeanor towards school.

Homebase or any middle school advisory program allows students to collaborate with other students. Homebase allows students to develop a close relationship with one teacher that they have contact with every day. This teacher becomes the "go to" person for that student's concerns and needs. The relationships that are formed with both peers and homebase teacher give many students a sense of belonging. This sense of belonging and comfort level leads to students having something to look forward to each day at school.

Results showed that a homebase or advisory program is more effective when there is an organized and meaningful curriculum. Homebase needs to have structure to be truly beneficial for students. That means that each activity should have a specific purpose and should be done in a sequential order. Whatever the homebase curriculum is based on, it needs to be well thought out.

As a result of the findings during this research, I am able to understand better just what students look forward to in homebase. In the past, there has been a lack of direction and purpose in homebase. It was not difficult to sense the lack of excitement that students had when they entered homebase each day. Strong relationships amongst peers, as well as student-teacher relationships, were lacking. This did not bode well for positive student attitude towards school.

This research shows the importance of the homebase curriculum having a direction. As the leader of our interdisciplinary team, one of the responsibilities that I have is developing homebase activities. When developing homebase activities with the interdisciplinary team,

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extra effort and an emphasis needs to be put into developing a plan with an end result in mind.

In the past, it seemed that we were planning for homebase just a day or two in advance and as a result, not much thought was being put into it. The activities had no real direction and were often meaningless to students. My research experience will lead to more high-quality homebase activities. I now understand how homebase activities need to be implemented and can effectively use activities to benefit students.

So, how will this affect student learning? Through this research I learned that student's attitudes can be improved upon. One way of doing so is by using a well-planned out homebase curriculum. An increase in positive student attitudes will hopefully lead to an increase in student learning.

The homebase curriculum that was implemented during this research was designed to develop relationships among students, their peers, and teachers. This curriculum resulted in an increase in positive relationships and overall student demeanor. Thus, students had a better attitude towards school.

The next aspect that is important to students is having a safe and caring learning environment. This safe and caring environment is once again affected by the relationships that students had. During and after the implementation of the homebase curriculum, students commented on the relationships that they had with their homebase peers and how the collaboration that they had among them was both positive and rewarding. Students gave feedback on how they enjoyed spending time with and collaborating with both their peers and their homebase teacher. These are characteristics of students feeling like they are in a safe and caring environment.

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This research has led to many other questions. There are a number of future action research ideas and possibilities that arose during this process. First, how would students receive this homebase curriculum if it were later in the school year? Would the homebase curriculum have the same effect in January as it did in September? Teachers often refer to the first month or so of school as a "honeymoon" period. During this time, students seem to be very receptive to many of the new ideas and programs that they experience. It will be interesting to see how this curriculum affects students moving further into the school year.

The next question that arose when administering this research is what type of an effect would there be on student performance. It would be interesting to monitor student progress throughout the homebase curriculum period. Would there be a noticeable difference in the academic performance? Would there be a correlation between student demeanor and attitude towards school and the academic performance that they display? Research like this would give us even more of an understanding on just how important homebase is in the middle school setting.

The final question that came to mind was how much of the success of the homebase curriculum was teacher driven. How different would the results be if different teachers implemented the curriculum? This curriculum could be implemented across the entire interdisciplinary team. It would be interesting to see if each teacher would have similar results. Was it possible that this curriculum that was implemented was beneficial for only a certain teaching style?

Again, the research that was performed showed the benefits of implementing a well-structured and sequential homebase curriculum. This research will allow me to maintain an

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effective and valuable homebase for the students in my class. There is, however, further research to be done to find out the consistency of the homebase curriculum effectiveness.

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Appendix A

Student Attitude Scale:

This student attitude scale will allow me to get a gauge on how students are feeling towards their home-base and overall school experience. This information will remain confidential.

1.) I enjoy coming to school each day.

Agree Somewhat Agree Disagree

2.) I enjoy spending time with my home-base teacher and home-base peers.

Agree Somewhat Agree Disagree

3.) I feel welcome in my home-base by all of my peers.

Agree Somewhat Agree Disagree

4.) I have positive relationships with my peers.

Agree Somewhat Agree Disagree

5.) I have positive relationships with my teachers.

Agree Somewhat Agree Disagree

6.) I feel that I my home-base teacher cares about me and the events in my life.

Agree Somewhat Agree Disagree

7.) I feel that our school team works with my success in mind.

Agree Somewhat Agree Disagree

8.) I am confident that I am entering a safe and caring environment when I come to school.

Agree Somewhat Agree Disagree

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Appendix B

Student Feedback:

This student scale will give me measurable data about the feelings that students have in regards to home-base and relationships that exist within the team. The survey will allow me to gain specific answers to specific questions. This information will remain confidential.

1.) What have you enjoyed the most about you home-base experience?

2.) How would you rate your overall home-base activities?

Excellent Above average Average Below average Bad

3.) Do you feel like you have developed a good relationship with your home-base teacher?

Yes No

4.) How would you rate your overall relationship with your home-base teacher?

Excellent Above average Average Below average Bad

5.) Do you feel like you have developed positive relationships with peers in your home-base?

Yes No

6.) How would you rate your overall relationships your peers in home-base?

Excellent Above average Average Below average Bad

7.) How would you rate the home-base activities that you have participated in this year?

Excellent Above average Average Below average Bad

8.) Have these home-base activities helped develop home-base relationships?

Yes No

9.) Has your home-base experience improved your overall school experience this year?

Yes No

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Appendix C

Observational Data:

This data sheet will be used to observe the behavior of students within their home-base setting. This observation sheet will be used once per week during activities throughout the implementation of the home-base curriculum.

Home-base members are actively participating

Always Mostly Sometimes Seldom Never

Notes:

Home-base members are respectful to one another

Always Mostly Sometimes Seldom Never

Notes:

Home-base members collaborate with one another

Always Mostly Sometimes Seldom Never

Notes:

Home-base members collaborate with a wide range of students within the home-base

Always Mostly Sometimes Seldom Never

Notes:

Students have positive interactions with the home-base instructor

Always Mostly Sometimes Seldom Never

Notes:

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Appendix D

Parent Questions:

This will allow me to get a different perspective on how students are viewing home-base curriculum. I will also be able to get a feel on the overall attitude that students have towards school.

Tell your parent or guardian three things that happen in Home-base and discuss why you think that we're doing that. Parent and child, what is one question or suggestion you have for continuing to improve our home-base curriculum and experience?

Three things that have happened in home-base and why?

Question or suggestion:

Parent/Guardian Sign Here _____ if discussion happened

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Appendix E

Student Conference:

This survey will include more open-ended questions to allow students to express more detailed answers that they have in regards to their home-base, home-base teacher, and interdisciplinary team. This conferencing will be done weekly.

What are things that you like about your home-base?

What are some things that you wish you could improve upon in your home-base?

Describe your relationship with the peers in your home-base.

Describe the relationship with your home-base teacher.

Describe your overall school experience this year.

