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Principal Leadership Of Tier 3 School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions And Supports

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PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP OF TIER 3 SCHOOL-WIDE POSITIVE BEHAVIOR
INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS

By

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ABSTRACT

School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) is a systems-approach to teaching and reinforcing behavioral expectations within schools. Based on a three-tier public health model, SWPBIS encompasses universal, strategic, and tertiary tiers. This study focuses on early phases of SWPBIS Tier 3 implementations in five elementary schools, and seeks to examine how school principals use SWPBIS Tier 3 to effect transformative change for all students, including at-risk students. Using an ethnographic collective case study methodology, perceptions and attitudes of the participants are utilized to understand how principals use leadership to enact change in their schools with respect to SWPBIS. The conceptual framework is based on organizational change theory of John Kotter.

Principal participants in this study were interviewed using a semi-structured format to collect responses to ten probes, and field observations took place at each of the site schools. In addition, reports from previously collected data using the School-wide Evaluation Tool and Tiered Fidelity Inventory were consulted to establish multiple sources of data. Structural coding, and causation coding in the form of a SWOT analysis, as well as a member check process, were used to triangulate results.

This study shows that much future research is needed to understand effective implementation of SWPBIS Tier 3 interventions and supports. While this study was able to make connections between the conceptual framework of John Kotter's eight steps to organizational

change, if Kotter's theory is sustained long-term in initiatives such as this remains to be discovered. Two findings clearly resulted from this study. The need for professional development for stakeholders, and consistency in implementation, emerged as common themes with respect to SWPBIS Tier 3. Both of these factors are well-established in the literature with respect to SWPBIS Tier 1 and Tier 2. High-quality and ongoing professional development for teachers and interventionists is often cited as a critical feature of successful implementations of SWPBIS in schools. Also, existing research supports the idea that consistency is key when undertaking a longitudinal initiative such as the three tiers of SWPBIS.

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Doctor of Education
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In today's classrooms, many teachers are struggling with student behavior management issues far beyond their current level of expertise in intervention and de-escalation (Bambara, Goh, Kern, & Caskie, 2012; Richter, Lewis, & Hagar, 2012). Eber, Sugai, Smith, and Scott (2002) state students who demonstrate externalizing (i.e., physical and environmental aggression) or internalizing (i.e., anxiety and depression) are a proportionally minor group within a school community; however, their needs consume significant resources of school personnel, in the form of time and energy, as principals, counseling staff and teachers attempt to support these children and mitigate the destabilizing effects of these behaviors on the school environment. In literature regarding school management, school culture, and factors impacting student achievement, it is a prevalent finding that many principals, teachers, and other school personnel feel frustrated with initiatives and programs that come and go without long-term fidelity to implementation, plans for meaningful sustained monitoring and evaluation, or useful, on-going training on how to use components of such integrated programs aimed at improving all facets of student learning outcomes, including those in the social-emotional and behavioral realms (Barrett, Bradshaw, & Lewis- Palmer, 2008; Freeman, Simonsen, & Coach, 2015). This study focuses on how perceptions and attitudes of elementary principals impact their leadership of implementation of targeted supports and interventions, within a systems approach, to address chronic, negative behaviors displayed by students.

School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports

In response to growing concerns about problem behaviors among at-risk students in American schools, federal legislation includes a call for systems to be put into place to address disruptive behaviors and the resulting damaging consequences to the learning environment and positive school climate. In 1997, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) included language promoting Positive Behaviors Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in order to “ensure that all children and their teachers receive the supports and services they need to learn and develop” (Council for Exceptional Children and NAESP, 2001, p. 6). This legislation was reauthorized in 2004, and in 2015, was expanded as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA has as a prominent cornerstone, the multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) mandate, which compels school districts to adopt a differentiated approach to meeting the academic and social-emotional learning needs of every student, formerly known as Response to Intervention (RTI) (Lane, Carter, Jenkins, Dwiggins, & Germer, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2017-a). “MTSS is a proactive, prevention-oriented service delivery framework that aims to meet all students’ needs through the implementation of a continuum” of data-driven interventions (Cook, Lyon, Kubergovic, Wright, & Zhang, 2015, p. 49).

Two programs introduced in IDEA legislation which have received widespread support across many school districts in recent years are PBIS and RTI, now referred to as MTSS. PBIS is also referred to as School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS), and this acronym will be used for the purposes of this study as it is the more commonly used terminology in the research literature cited herein. These two evidence-based systems for addressing deficits in student learning are similar. For example, both may be implemented by a wide variety of key personnel within a school, such as teachers, special educators,

paraprofessionals, adjustment counselors, or administrators. Both feature identification of gaps in learning and pro-active methods to supporting learning among at-risk students. These two systems-approaches will be explored further in Chapter 2.

This study focuses on perceptions and attitudes among the elementary principals about preparedness to implement SWPBIS Tier 3 to address problem behaviors exhibited by students, across five elementary schools within one suburban school district. Lastly, manifestation of leadership capacity with regard to implementation of SWPBIS tertiary interventions is a specific focus.

The Site

The site of this study is a suburban public-school system, situated in the foothills of the Berkshire Mountains of New England. In 2013, this public school district adopted SWPBIS as a social-emotional initiative to address behavioral management issues in order to improve student outcomes in all realms of learning at the elementary level. At the time, a special education staff member was appointed SWPBIS Liaison for the district, chosen for her experience with intervention design and application, and the elementary schools embarked on implementation of the universal Tier 1 of SWPBIS. The SWPBIS Liaison position was cut in 2015 due to budget constraints, and these schools have carried on with the initiative, albeit with far less oversight in the past two years. In addition, a consultant team from University of Massachusetts-Amherst is contracted to provide training and support for the staff in the district's schools. Each year, every one of the elementary schools is assigned a graduate student who works part-time as a consultant with school administrators and SWPBIS site-based teams to individualize the roll out, progress monitoring and other implementation aspects according to the needs of each school. The

graduate student changes from year to year, but the UMass relationship remains intact, providing some support for implementation.

The site district of this study has seven elementary schools. The principal of one elementary school has recently retired and has been replaced by an interim administrator. This interim principal does not meet the criteria of having experience implementing SWPBIS Tiers 1 and 2, and so, is not a participant in this study. I am the seventh principal, and am not identified as a participant; therefore, five elementary principals comprise the participant group. The site district has, in addition to the seven elementary schools, one early childhood center, two middle schools, a high school, and a technical high school. There has been substantial turnover among the principals and other administrators at every one of these schools in recent years, as well as numerous changes to central office staff, including the superintendent in the summer of 2016. Four of the bigger schools, including mine, serve about 400-450 students each year, with each of them also housing one or more substantially separate district special education program(s). For example, my school houses two of the district's substantially separate programs for students with moderate to severe autism. The three smaller schools each have populations of 200-250.

SWPBIS Fundamentals

SWPBIS Tier 1 is comprised of high quality instruction to teach behavioral expectations in all school environments, framed in positive and developmentally-appropriate language. The secondary tier is targeted to those students who are unable to meet expectations within universal instruction. Tier 3 consists of delivering intensive, individualized supports to students identified as non-responders to Tiers 1 and 2 to address complex, chronic, or severe behaviors (U.S. Department of Education, 2017-e). The three tiers of SWPBIS work together and are intended to complement each other. As the tiers become more targeted, as with Tiers 2 and 3, the

interventions and supports of each tier builds upon the previous one, according to student need (Carter, Carter, Johnson, & Pool, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2017-b). Debnam, Pas, and Bradshaw (2012) state the two aims of the program are to reduce unwanted behaviors, which disrupt the learning environment in schools, and to build or maintain a positive school climate. Other researchers list long-term improved quality of life, increased prosocial skills, job satisfaction among teachers and staff, and better student achievement outcomes as intended benefits of SWPBIS (see Childs, Kincaid, George, & Gage, 2014; Lane et al., 2015).

A positive school climate has been demonstrated in the literature to be a singularly effective factor in high student achievement, even when coupled with low socio-economic demographics. ESSA and MTSS purposefully address the escalating struggles that schools and the educators within are reporting as deterrents to effective learning environments. Debnam et al. (2012) found that, without intentional and ongoing professional development (PD), it is very difficult for schools and school districts to find success when attempting to develop comprehensive systems to address social-emotional deficits, and in the larger picture, those factors which negatively impact learning. Sugai and Horner (2006) report multiple critical factors which improve implementation of SWPBIS:

- (a) services and programs must be integrated and coordinated;
- (b) professional development must be well-planned and well-rounded and include instruction for interventionists on how to use evidence-based programs; and
- (c) efforts toward including these factors in initiative implementation should be high-quality and sustainable.

As discussed above, in SWPBIS implementation, all students participate in Tier 1, or universal, instruction to learn developmentally-appropriate social-emotional skills which support

focused academic learning as well as enable students to enjoy a better quality of life, which may be impinged otherwise by maladaptive behaviors. Secondary, or Tier 2, interventions focus on those students who need additional instruction, support or practice with social-emotional learning outcomes through the use of data-driven behavioral lessons (McIntosh, Kelm, & Delabra, 2016; Sugai & Horner, 2006). Tertiary, or Tier 3, interventions are reserved for those students who, over time, are unable to meet behavior expectations without individualized and sustained instruction and support.

Tier 3 implementation is intended to reduce the frequency and intensity of undesirable behaviors and improve the student's overall quality of life through acquiring adaptive social skills. There is limited research to date regarding sustained implementation of Tier 3 SWPBIS (U.S. Department of Education, 2017-e). Although SWPBIS is noted specifically in IDEA as a way "that all children and their teachers receive the supports and services they need to learn and develop" (Council for Exceptional Children & NAESP, 2001, p. 6), few school districts have been able to reach a point of consistent and sustained implementation of Tiers 1 and 2, which is crucial before embarking on a Tier 3 launch (U.S. Department of Education, 2017-c).

SWPBIS and Principals

Researchers have posited that a Tier 3 implementation is likely to be unsuccessful without consistent application of Tiers 1 and 2, and so, this study includes a review of analysis of universal and secondary tiers of each school using SWPBIS research-based instruments (Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf, 2009; McIntosh et al., 2016). Research-based assessments are completed in the site schools each year, through the partnership with the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, and analyzed for fidelity in implementation. The two evaluations, the School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET) and the Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI), have already been

completed in the site schools, and the data and requisite analysis were available for review. The SET and TFI are discussed in further detail in subsequent chapters.

While it is noted in the research to be a prevalent theme in Tier 1 and Tier 2 implementations that the principal is the driving force behind a comprehensive application of a systems-approach such as this, the dearth of literature on school-wide Tier 3 implementations makes it difficult to generalize principal attitudes and how they impact success of tertiary intervention programs, such as that of SWPBIS Tier 3 (McIntosh et al., 2016; Richter et al., 2012). It has been established in the literature that implementation of SWPBIS is dependent upon the active participation by, and support of, the school principal. Cofey and Horner (2012) state the principal is “the most critical player” and holds the authority to allocate resources, communicate the vision and expectations of the initiative, and monitor progress of SWPBIS implementation (p. 408). School administrators use their leadership positions and skills to effect transformational change by engaging staff and other stakeholders to provide input with decision-making and solutions, actively pursue the objectives of the vision, and work together to positively impact school culture (Richter et al., 2012).

Statement of the Problem

Based on decades of public health research and more recent research on applied behavioral analysis (ABA) theory and practice, SWPBIS, as a system of behavioral education and interventions, requires effective collaboration just as any initiative does (Barrett et al., 2008; McIntosh et al., 2016). In order to comply with least restrictive environments (LRE) as described in IDEA legislation, and to better meet the needs of all students, school districts have turned to SWPBIS to use social-emotional learning as a method of prevention of undesirable behaviors (U.S. Department of Education, 2017-b). Tier 3 is described as

Reducing the intensity, frequency, and/or complexity of existing problem behaviors that are resistant to and/or unlikely to be addressed by primary and secondary prevention efforts by providing most individualized responses to situations where problem behavior is likely (U.S. Department of Education, 2017-e).

The preceding definition helps to understand *what* must happen in a Tier 3 implementation, but it does not tell *how* to ensure a successful roll-out. Not only must steps to be taken during implementation be determined, but there must be a systems-wide embrace of the initiative, and a thorough application of SWPBIS Tiers 1 and 2 in place, before embarking on the journey into tertiary interventions. Furthermore, Barrett, Bradshaw, and Lewis-Palmer (2008) state a successful Tier 3 program encompasses an “increased interagency partnership with a broad range of agencies and universities to provide secondary and tertiary levels of support to children with greater behavioral, social-emotional, and mental health needs” (p. 113). Zmuda, Kuklis, and Kline (2004) write “change happens within a complex system of interrelated elements” (p. 38) and “whether the system is incompetent or competent depends on how it is understood by key stakeholders” (p. 30).

Broadly, principal attitudes toward school-wide initiatives have been found to be crucial to successful implementation. There is scant empirical evidence regarding exactly how school administrators drive SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation to sustained and pervasive success, however (Richter et al., 2012). Woods and Martin (2016) found that a cooperative vision of transformation along with shared leadership among all stakeholder groups to be vital, but what this looks like in the context of SWPBIS tertiary interventions as a school-wide method for dealing with problem behaviors is yet to be revealed in depth in the literature.

The problem of practice is defined as how elementary school leaders perceive SWPBIS tiered intervention as a possible solution to negative and anti-social behaviors among students, lost instructional time due to disruptions and discipline matters, misidentification of students needing placement in substantially separate special education settings, and diminished school climate due to negative factors related to chronic anti-social behaviors. A second facet of this dilemma is how best to utilize leadership capacity toward organizational objectives, such as successfully implementing a Tier 3 SWPBIS initiative. Richter, Lewis, and Hagar (2012) discuss transformational leadership within the context of SWPBIS as being demonstrated through “shared decision making and developing school-based solutions to challenges” (p. 69).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine how school administrators prepare to launch an implementation of Tier 3 interventions of SWPBIS in elementary schools. First, this study examines how principals perceive a need for tertiary support for students. Next, principals’ perceptions and attitudes about readiness to implement Tier 3 supports and interventions is of interest to understand how such beliefs impact leadership behaviors during implementation.

Research Questions

1. What perceptions and attitudes do principals with experience implementing SWPBIS Tiers 1 and 2 have about implementing Tier 3 interventions?
2. What is the impact of principals’ perceptions and attitudes on their leadership of a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation?
3. How do principals broadly manage sustainable change in the school setting relative to SWPBIS?

Conceptual Framework

With the understanding that implementation of SWPBIS Tier 3 needs to be managed for content and process, this study's conceptual framework relies on the work of Kotter (1996, 2006) and why transformation efforts succeed or fail. Using Kotter's eight steps to transforming an organization, it is important to consider how this conceptual framework fits within the preparations for an implementation of SWPBIS Tier 3, particularly in the site of this study. It is pertinent to discover if, by using the first four of Kotter's eight steps, which are discussed in detail in Chapter 2, during planning stages of implementation of SWPBIS Tier 3 at the site schools, it may become evident whether Kotter's approach is applicable as a guide to implementation. Kotter (2006) states "establishing a sense of urgency, forming a powerful coalition, creating a vision, and communicating the vision" (p. 243) are crucial to effective transformational change in an organization. As the research questions indicate, Kotter's framework serves as a guide to analyze how the perceptions and attitudes of school principals may impact preparation and initial stages of SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation. Furthermore, returning to the problem of practice, examining how leadership is manifested to address the matters of students' lack of prosocial behaviors, time off-task with respect to learning, and making student placement decisions which are not in alignment with individual student needs, fits within the context of Kotter's collaborative and visionary template.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

There are some inherent assumptions in the design of this study, and the most prevalent is that the principals who are participants have reported accurately about their perceptions and attitudes regarding SWPBIS. The principals may have responded with subjectivity, and the member check triangulation methodology is used to minimize this. I conducted the ethnographic collective case study through interviews with my immediate colleagues. Due to the lack of

formal oversight of SWPBIS in the site district, there may be conflicting or inconsistent definitions of implementation fidelity among the principals. Added to this factor is that the participants have neither received the identical training respective to SWPBIS, nor should it be assumed that they have the same level of commitment to the initiative. There is an assumption that there may be some data which are subject to interpretation; however, triangulation methods were used to diminish subjectivity. Another concern is that the SWPBIS Tier 3 preparation for implementation has some structure and consistency across the district, but there is little previous research from which to draw best practices. These factors are also limitations. This study features five elementary school administrators in a suburban district, and generalizations to urban or rural settings or to other grade levels is limited. The scope of the study is somewhat limited as it is within one suburban school district, but with the variety of school demographics among those schools, it provides a broad range of data to consider or indicate opportunities for future study.

Rationale and Significance

As delineated by IDEA, all students have the right to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). SWPBIS tertiary intervention is a methodology designed to keep students with their general education peers whenever possible, through the use of targeted and intensive interventions on an individual level. Despite LRE's status as an important educational right afforded by IDEA and its predecessors, many students are placed in substantially separate programs for special needs every day. SWPBIS Tier 3 is "designed to focus on the needs of individuals who exhibited patterns of intense problem behavior that may disrupt quality of life across domains" (U.S. Department of Education, 2017-e). Simply stated, SWPBIS Tier 3 is meant to keep students in classrooms with their peers to the

greatest extent possible while also providing additional instruction and individualized support to help them to be successful.

With pressures and demands on already-busy school administrators growing, it is critical to find systems of student management and social emotional learning which lend themselves to efficiency and efficacy as determined by the principals involved. In the case of the school district in which this study takes place, in-district substantially separate programs that address social-emotional learning are at capacity already. In order to avoid over-crowding, and more importantly, misidentification of students who are recommended for placement in more restrictive environments, a comprehensive and successful implementation of tertiary interventions is necessary. As the body of existing literature is thin and lacks significant or empirical data upon which to draw regarding factors which contribute to a successful roll-out and sustaining efforts, this study has important implications for the future of studying SWPBIS impact on academic and social-emotional learning outcomes at all levels.

Definition of Terms

- *Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)*- a discipline of behavior intervention in which the goal of increasing the incidence of desired or prosocial behavior is sought through identification and manipulation of variables likely to change behavior (Cooper, Herron, & Heward, 2007).
- *Functional Behavior Analysis (FBA)*- “a systematic process of identifying problem behaviors and the events” and factors which appear as antecedents as well as consequences (Sugai et al., 2000).

- *Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)*- according to federal law, to the greatest extent possible, students with disabilities are to be educated alongside their non-disabled peers (McCloskey, 2016).
- *Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)*- a problem-solving model in which learning deficits are identified and interventions and supports are implemented to match and overcome the deficits (U.S. Department of Education, 2017-a).
 - *Problem Behavior(s)*- behaviors which are considered disruptive, anti-social, or failing to meet explicitly taught expectations which may lead to negative outcomes in academic and social-emotional learning (Reinke, Herman, & Stormont, 2012).
 - *School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET)*- a research-validated instrument for measuring SWPBIS practices within one school. The SET involves anecdotal data, such as observations done by an external evaluator, and short, random interviews of school personnel and students about SWPBIS facets (Barrett et al., 2008).
 - *Secondary Interventions*- Tier 2 interventions which are designed to give added support, in conjunction with tier one, for those learners who require targeted instruction and reinforcement (U.S. Department of Education, 2017-e).
 - *Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)*- curricula designed and delivered to increase students' efficacy with self-regulation methods such as coping, stress-management, etc. (McIntosh, Ty, & Miller, 2014).
 - *Targeted Interventions*- strategies which address learning deficits or problem behavior (Todd, Campbell, Meyer, & Horner, 2008).

- *Tertiary Interventions*- Tier 3, intensive and recursive learning opportunities, meant for severe non-responders who are unable to meet expectations through instruction with Tiers 1 and 2 (McIntosh et al., 2014).
- *Wraparound Services*- a team approach to coordinating and delivering interventions that may include interagency services such as mental health counseling, medical attention, as well as other family and community resources (Eber, Sugai, Smith, & Scott, 2002).

Conclusion

SWPBIS is a system of tiered instruction and interventions that teaches and reinforces foundational expectations of behavior in order to support all students toward academic and social-emotional achievement within a positive school climate. The established structures of SWPBIS include using data to guide instructional decisions meant to improve the behavior of students; using prosocial behavior modification to help students lead better and more productive lives; supporting students with disabilities to be educated in least restrictive environment; and expanding opportunities for students to be able to apply prosocial learning outcomes in a variety of environments (Weiland, Murakami, Aguilera, & Richards, 2014).

This study's aims are to identify factors that may contribute to initiating a successful SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation at the elementary school level. Of specific concern is if and how the perceptions and attitudes of the school principals impact the implementation in the beginning phase(s), including but not limited to effective leadership behaviors as defined by Kotter (1996, 2006). Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature on SWPBIS, tertiary interventions, and the

role of the principal. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and research design, why the methodology was chosen, how the methodology complements the conceptual framework, and possible limitations of methodology. Chapters 4 and 5 address data collection and analysis, and then findings, recommendations, and conclusions, respectively.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the history and evolution of SWPBIS, and foundational work by behavioral scientists and prominent authors as well as notable legislation, is presented. At the federal level, ESSA (2015) expanded upon previous legislation regarding public education found in IDEA (1997), and its reauthorization in 2004. The rationale behind SWPBIS includes many components of research-based behavioral methodologies, such as RTI and ABA. These are discussed in depth.

The idea of adopting change in how at-risk students' behavior is managed as well as how transformative change in a school culture happens is presented within the conceptual framework of this study.

SWPBIS, RTI and MTSS

School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) is “a systems-change process for an entire school or district” (U.S. Department of Education, 2017-b). The premise of SWPBIS is that learning to meet behavioral expectations must be taught just like any skill. Prevention of negative behaviors through intentional and consistent instruction of desired behaviors is the fundamental theory of SWPBIS, to promote positive social learning and extinguish maladaptive behaviors (Barrett et al., 2008; McIntosh et al., 2016). The three tiers are not intended to stand apart from each other, but instead are a layered continuum of instruction and support delivered according to student need for instruction and intervention (U.S. Department of Education, 2017-d).

Through a set of explicitly taught behavior expectations, regular data-based progress monitoring, differentiated supports for targeted at-risk groups and individuals, and a plan for

continuous regeneration, SWPBIS is used in schools as an educational framework to provide universal instruction. These expectations must be clearly defined, along with a plan to systematically teach them to students and are to be reinforced consistently by acknowledgement for compliance and discouraged when responses do not meet expectations (Cressey, Whitcomb, McGilvray-Rivet, Morrison, & Shander-Reynolds, 2014). The acknowledgements and discouragements must accompany well-articulated rules and logical consequences (Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf, 2009). Along with tiered interventions to build social skills in students, SWPBIS is aimed at increasing academic achievement and building the capacity to lead productive lives, as well as improve the school climate overall (Albrecht, Mathur, Jones, & Alazemi, 2015; McNeill, Friedman, & Chavez, 2016; Sugai et al., 2000).

RTI and SWPBIS were designed to be approaches with the goal of meeting the needs of students at differentiated or individualized levels to allow every student to meet with achievement success. The tiers, or layers of support, are meant to be integrated and overlapping for maximum opportunity to build student capacity in meeting learning expectations. The two systems are alike in foundational philosophy in that all students begin with universal, or Tier 1, core academic or social-emotional instruction. Those students who require additional re-teaching or opportunities to practice new learning beyond universal instruction are then referred for Tier 2, or strategic intervention, which provides more directed support in specific content- or skills-based learning. The small fraction of learners who need additional intervention beyond Tier 2 are referred for Tier 3, or tertiary interventions, which are specific and intensive (Barrett et al., 2008; Freeman et al., 2015; McIntosh et al., 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2017-e). Typically, approximately 80% of a population will respond to universal instruction; an additional 15% are successful when universal and secondary are combined; and tertiary interventions, when

implemented with Tiers 1 and 2, will address the needs of the 2-5% who require intensive, individualized attention (U.S. Department of Education, 2017-e).

Both RTI and SWPBIS, in essence, have the same structure of implementation; however, RTI has usually been considered an academic intervention model, whereas SWPBIS focuses on social-emotional learning. MTSS is an umbrella term meant to encompass all areas of learning. Interventionists, using such tiered supports, consider a deficit in learning and apply an intervention that is designed to specifically meet the needs of that learner. Progress is monitored, and the response is analyzed for effectiveness. Either the learning deficit is overcome, and the intervention is faded out; there is sufficient progress to remain with the current intervention for an extended period of time; or if adequate progress is not achieved, another intervention is applied in place of, or in addition to, the previous (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2010).

SWPBIS is a form of MTSS, as a problem behavior is identified and a plan of support, or intervention, is decided upon, in order to help students to meet expectations with differentiated levels of instructional assistance and positive reinforcements, coupled with data-driven decision-making at each step to measure response to the intervention plan (Barrett et al., 2008; McIntosh et al., 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2017-b; Woods & Martin, 2016). The tiered intervention model is more easily identified in Tiers 2 and 3 of SWPBIS, but even at the universal level, instruction is utilized to teach and reinforce behavior expectations for all students, and SWPBIS meets the criteria of an MTSS approach. “Providing different types of support matched to each student’s needs is referred to as multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS)” (U.S. Department of Education, 2017-e).

In SWPBIS implementation, all students participate in Tier 1, universal instruction, to learn developmentally-appropriate social-emotional skills which support focused academic

learning as well as enable students to enjoy a better quality of life. Secondary, or Tier 2, interventions focus on those students who need additional instruction, support or practice with social-emotional learning outcomes through the use of data-driven behavioral lessons (McIntosh et al., 2016; Sugai & Horner, 2006). Tertiary, or Tier 3, interventions are reserved for those students who, over time, are unable to meet behavior expectations without individualized and sustained instruction and support.

For approximately 80% of students, Tier 1, universal instruction is sufficient to prevent, pre-correct, and teach appropriate prosocial skills. It may include classroom whole group lessons, cues and rituals to learn behavior expectations in hallways or in the cafeteria, and a simple motto that encompasses the basic expectations in a mnemonic format. Tier 2 supports further target those students who require additional work in small group or individualized settings, and combined with Tier 1, meet the needs of about 95% of the population. These secondary supports may involve timed breaks with a preferred activity or a brief check in with a designated mentor, often called Check In/ Check Out (CICO). Tier 3 is reserved for the most severely challenged students who require highly specialized, long-term interventions, which may include interagency wraparound services. Candidates for tertiary supports are likely to be those students who engage in dangerous or self-injurious behaviors, suffer from ongoing internalizing mental health issues, or possess multiple risk factors which demand individualized remediation (Barrett et al., 2008; Cressey et al., 2014; Eber et al., 2002; Lane et al., 2007; McIntosh et al., 2014; Putnam & Knoster, 2015).

Foundations of SWPBIS

While this systems-approach is intended to enhance social competence for all students, and in turn, improve student achievement, it began “in particular to prevent the development of

problem behaviors and to address the educational needs of students with serious behavior challenges” (Sugai & Horner, 2009, p. 226). Thousands of schools in the United States and abroad use SWPBIS as a framework for teaching expected behaviors in classrooms and other school settings, and as a means to address non-responders by re-teaching using clear language to convey rules, providing on-going support for those students who need it, and imposing logical, known consequences for non-compliance (Matthews, McIntosh, Frank, & May, 2014). Today, faithful implementation means “a PBIS school is unified in its approach to supporting students both academically and behaviorally” (Cofey & Horner, 2012, p. 410).

Prominent Authors: SWPBIS

Sugai and Horner. Sugai and Horner authored landmark studies and implementation recommendations in their work in establishing the federal Center for Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, and their work was based on their own research in addition to that of others on ABA methodology and intervention for people exhibiting maladaptive behaviors. The purpose, as stated by Sugai et al. (2000), is to establish learning environments in schools, where prosocial behavior is taught and positively reinforced, with the objective of having the prosocial learning permeate all aspects of the students’ lifestyle (i.e., self-care, personal relationships, health, work). Each of these two researchers has published consistently throughout the body of literature on a number of sub-topics, in a variety of settings, and with varied populations, and with a wide mix of other researchers. Just as the whole body of literature is focused mainly on SWPBIS Tier 1 and Tier 2 implementations, the same is true of the work of Sugai and Horner for the most part; however, there are some areas where examples of ABA have been used in tertiary interventions and discussed in articles by Sugai and Horner. These are limited in scope and quantity to date. Sugai and Horner were with the University of Oregon and their work in

behavioral interventions was pivotal in the university being awarded the initial grant to develop a systems-approach that became SWPBIS (Johnston, Foxx, Jacobsen, Green, & Mulick, 2006). Sugai continues his work at the University of Connecticut as a Professor in Special Education, the Carole J. Neag Endowed Chair, a Research Scientist at the Center for Behavioral Education & Research, and Co-Director for the Center of Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports. Horner is listed as a Faculty Emeritus in Special Education and Clinical Sciences, College of Education at the University of Oregon. The work of Sugai and Horner is prevalent in the many pages of the U.S. Department of Education's website, *Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports* (2017), which is one of the most exhaustive resources, published and maintained by The Technical Assistance Center of the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

The Maryland Initiative. The Maryland statewide initiative to install SWPBIS universal and secondary supports in all public elementary schools is fairly well documented, most especially by researchers from Johns Hopkins University. Catherine Bradshaw appears as an author often in a number of studies, mostly focused on universal tier implementation in Maryland's public schools. She is a developmental psychologist and youth violence prevention researcher. She is the Deputy Director of the Johns Hopkins Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence and the Co-Director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Prevention and Early Intervention.

In 1998, Maryland's Department of Education teamed up with Johns Hopkins University and Sheppard Pratt Health System to "coordinate and support the implementation, training, and sustainability of PBIS on both the district and school levels" (Barrett et al., 2008, p. 106). Drawing on resources from OSEP and seminal research of Sugai and Horner, the Maryland

collaboration created a plan of implementation for the 24 school districts in the state. Barrett, Bradshaw, and Lewis-Palmer (2008) stress the importance of the systems-approach that is pervasive in Maryland's initiative, from statewide support and oversight to consistent team models at the school level. One facet used to assess ongoing fidelity during implementation is the SET, which is also used in the site schools of this study.

One study from the Maryland initiative that reaches beyond the Tier 1 level looks at school staff perceptions of principal support for SWPBIS Tier 2 and Tier 3 implementation in 45 Maryland schools. While this study offers a glimpse into some quantitative data gathered while examining implementation of Tiers 2 and 3, the primary focus was on perceptions of staff regarding administrator support for SWPBIS secondary and tertiary interventions and not objective assessment (Debnam, Pas, & Bradshaw, 2013).

Barrett et al. (2008) summarize that ongoing professional development for teachers, administrators, and school staff is important to durability of implementation. One significant gap in the Maryland initiative is that while it has been a sustained implementation, little research beyond Tiers 1 and 2 of SWPBIS has been published.

Evolution of SWPBIS

SWPBIS began as an initiative from the federal government when the issues of behavior maladjustment and its impact on school climate and student achievement were addressed in IDEA in 1997. At the time, researchers at the University of Oregon, notably Sugai and Horner, had been working with children with behavioral disorders, using ABA methodology with problem behaviors (U.S. Department of Education, 2017-c). ABA is an intervention pedagogy which uses repeated, positively-reinforced trials to teach and reinforce prosocial skills while extinguishing and replacing undesirable behaviors (Roane, Fisher, & Carr, 2016). SWPBIS as a

multi-tiered, systems-based approach was developed at the University of Oregon, with support from the National Center on Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, now run by the OSEP, part of the U.S. Department of Education. As previously stated, SWPBIS was based on the three-tiered public health model, and also was aligned with burgeoning research on tiered interventions such as RTI, (now named MTSS), which was another topic gaining widespread support in site-based applications and in scholarly research in the 1990s. Research-validated, tiered intervention systems use data-based decision making to design and implement interventions meant to target deficits in learning. Responses to the interventions are then monitored, and modifications may be made based on progress results. Such strategies combine “together high-quality teaching and assessment methods in a systematic way so that students who are not successful when presented with one set of instructional methods can be given the chance to succeed by using other practices” (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2010). This multi-tiered model is foundational to SWPBIS and to providing differentiated and multiple opportunities for students to reach and sustain healthy levels of academic and social-emotional development as prescribed in the three tiers (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The Relationship between SWPBIS, RTI and ABA.

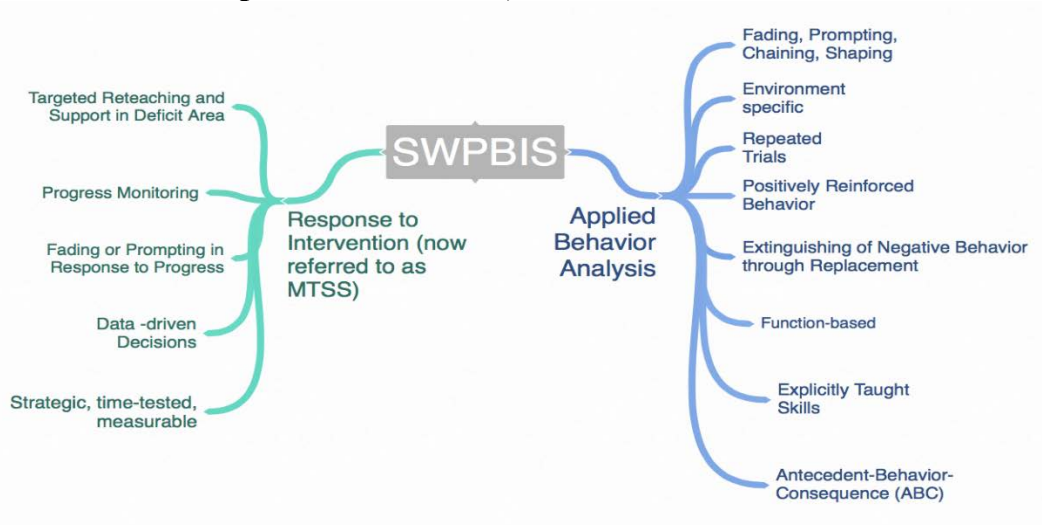


Figure 1. The relationship between SWPBIS, RTI and ABA is an interwoven set of practices based on positively reinforced prosocial instruction to address deficits and replace unwanted behaviors (Dunlap, Carr, Horner, Zarcone, & Schwartz, 2008; Hagermoser Sanetti, Dobe, & Gritter, 2012; Sugai et al., 2000).

Applied behavior analysis and SWPBIS share many core features, such as emphasis on lifestyle change, functional analysis, multi-component interventions, manipulation of ecological and setting events, antecedent manipulations, teaching adaptive behavior, building environments with effective consequences, minimizing the use of punishers, distinguishing emergency procedures from proactive programming, and social validation with a special role for preserving the dignity of the recipients of interventions (Horner, 1990, as cited by Johnston et al., 2006, p. 53).

SWPBIS and Functional Behavior Analysis

Research focused on people who engage in serious problem behaviors, and the treatment of replacing negative behavior has led to greater acceptance of ABA in the field of developmental disabilities as a methodology that aligned with positive behavior supports

described in IDEA (Johnston et al., 2006). Recommendations available on designing a successful SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation list functional behavior analysis (FBA) as a mainstay in the literature. Scott, Alter, Rosenberg and Borgmeier (2010) define an FBA as a “continuum of progressively more formal and intense procedures and practices” which is designed to define the “student’s undesired behavior in observable and measurable terms” (pp. 524-525). From there, behavior analysts and intervention team members can attempt to identify what benefit the student derives from the behavior and teach a replacement behavior which provides the same (or increased) benefit or reinforcement for the subject, while extinguishing the undesired behavior (Scott, Alter, Rosenberg, & Borgmeier, 2010). Tertiary interventions and supports require thoughtful planning, careful progress monitoring through data collection and analysis, open communication among the intervention team about decision-making, and flexibility with the best interests of the student in mind at all times. Tier 3 supports require a full or basic FBA, use of behavioral sciences to inform decision-making about intervention plans, a willingness to consider interagency servicing and to include such providers on the team, and establishing and following a behavior intervention plan (BIP) with fidelity (U.S. Department of Education, 2017-c). This comprehensive, and yet not exhaustive, list of what is necessary to implement one Tier 3 SWPBIS support plan is indicative of the human and other resources necessary for success. An FBA allows interventionists to understand the environmental factors as well as the reinforcements accompanying the undesired behavior. This is referred to as “antecedent-behavior-consequence” (ABC), meaning there is an antecedent behavior or condition, a “trigger”, which acts as a stimulus to the behavior, and following the behavior, some sort of consequence that in turn reinforces the behavior. This is the basis of SWPBIS Tier 3 interventions and supports. Interventionists must seek to understand the sequence of the

behavior, why this is happening, what is the perceived benefit for the subject, and what replacement behavior will make the negative behavior no longer rewarding. It is through this FBA process and requisite interventions that tertiary supports are effective (Carter et al., 2012). Although when components are compared, the commonalities between ABA and SWPBIS are numerous, the literature connecting the two is scant. This is concerning when one considers the importance of FBA as an integral component of SWPBIS Tier 3.

Adopting SWPBIS for Change

Adopting a schoolwide or district-wide behavior system encompasses substantial change and this must be embraced by all involved for the initiative to be successful. Change, therefore, is an essential component of a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation, and while it is important for teachers and other staff to embrace the new way of managing behavior education, it is crucial for the principal of the school to be an effective change agent (Richter et al., 2012). According to Kotter (2006), change leadership begins when a problem is acknowledged by all, or most, members of the organization, establishing a sense of urgency that something must be done in response. When learning is interrupted frequently, students and staff do not feel secure; therefore, change is needed as these behaviors are counterproductive to creating safe and supportive schools. Overall, it is not easy to achieve desired results within a systems-approach to teaching and reinforcing prosocial behaviors to enhance the learning environment for all learners without sustained, high-quality professional development and on-going support (Debnam, Pas & Bradshaw, 2012; Sugai & Horner, 2006). While the sense of urgency is likely felt by the study participants with regard to students with externalizing behaviors, such as physical aggression, particularly when there are comorbid factors like an identified learning disability, using Kotter's

framework to understand how elementary principals address that urgency is relevant to the purpose of this study.

The principal is the key influence in many important facets of educating students and in the process of running a school. As the leader for the school organization, the principal is positioned to convey the importance of needed change, in order to bring interested parties together to form a guiding coalition (Kotter, 2006). Among the many responsibilities of a school administrator, none is so impactful as when a crisis situation or untenable conditions persist, and leadership is called for to precipitate change.

Principal attitudes toward such leadership roles in schools or school districts have been found to be crucial to successful implementation. There is scant empirical evidence regarding exactly how school administrators drive SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation to sustained and pervasive success. For example, Debnam, Pas, & Bradshaw (2013) studied how teachers and other staff viewed the actions of principals toward Tier 2 and Tier 3 SWPBIS interventions and supports but did not pursue assessments that are considered objective. Molloy, Moore, Trail, Van Epps, and Hopfer (2013) discuss factors that are likely to be present in successful SWPBIS multi-tiered initiatives; however, focused examination of principal leadership behaviors was not part of their work. Bambara, Goh, Kern, and Caskie (2012) conducted a study of individualized positive interventions and supports and looked at barriers and enablers to those processes as experienced by interventionists; however, the perceptions and attitudes of the principal's leadership of such were not of primary focus, nor was this a study of overall implementation of SWPBIS Tier 3. Woods and Martin (2016) found a cooperative vision of transformation along with shared leadership among all stakeholder groups to be vital, but what this looks like in the

context of SWPBIS tertiary interventions as a school-wide method for dealing with problem behaviors is yet to be revealed, in depth, in the literature.

The purpose of this study is to determine how elementary school principals perceive a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation during the preparatory phase. Additionally, how do principals create and sustain change in their schools with respect to SWPBIS?

Lack of Application and Implementation of SWPBIS Tier 3

The current body of literature reflects many common themes, especially with regard to implementation of the universal tier, and secondary interventions, such as CICO. What is noticeably absent, as stated previously, is detailed information about implementation of SWPBIS Tier 3 and information about studies with longevity. Sugai et al. (2000) state when highly specific negative behaviors are being addressed through SWPBIS Tier 3 interventions, the complexity of all factors intensifies. This creates difficulty for schools to sustain such initiatives with fidelity. As such, there were no studies found or data available to understand thoroughly SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation and principal leadership through the use of evidence-based practices. In database searches using combinations of keywords and phrases, such as “school principals”, “SWPBIS”, “school-wide positive interventions and supports”, “PBIS”, “positive behavior interventions and supports”, “Tier 3”, and “tertiary interventions”, did not yield any studies that included data on principal perceptions and attitudes with regard to leadership and SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation. This gap indicates a high need for investigation of this topic through research. Molloy et al. (2013) point to the need to more in-depth studies about critical factors in SWPBIS implementation as a result of their findings. While there are descriptive and detailed recommendations as to how a Tier 3 implementation should be carried out, such as “The Blueprint for Tier 3 Implementation” published by the Florida Department of Education (2014),

no evidence, scientific or otherwise, is to be found regarding the effectiveness of these proposals. In addition to implementation details and sustaining SWPBIS over a span of several years, comparison of sites and sample populations (e.g., urban or rural settings, public versus private schools, etc.), outcomes in the long term for at-risk students, and implications for increasing student achievement all have yet to be studied in depth and reported.

This study focuses on the details of SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation as a first step in determining what impact the school principal, as a leader, has on implementations of SWPBIS tertiary interventions, and how their perceptions and attitudes manifest during the preparatory phase of implementation. Within the context of LRE, principals are required to ensure all students, including those with severe or multiple disabilities, are included in the vision of creating policies, protocols, and systems intended to provide the supports, as defined by the needs of individual students, according to the mandate of MTSS. As discussed previously, research shows that the school principal is instrumental in the success of implementation of SWPBIS Tiers 1 and 2, and it is reasonable to wonder if the same is true of Tier 3.

Conceptual Framework

In considering Kotter's eight steps to transforming an organization (1996, 2006) as a lens through which leadership behaviors with respect to implementation of SWPBIS Tier 3 are examined, it is critical to understand that, like the three tiers of SWPBIS, Kotter's steps ebb and flow, and are not a discrete step-by-step directive. They are neither linear, nor simple (Kotter, 1996, p. 25). In his discussion of why change efforts succeed or fail, Kotter states that in order for transformation to happen, principals must understand "how the leadership that is required to drive that process in a socially healthy way means more than good management" (Kotter, 1996, p. 16). Fullan (2014) affirms the concepts inherent in Kotter and states effective leaders are not

willing to blindly accept status quo but actively seek to identify practices that positively affect student learning outcomes. School principals who are successful change agents pursue opportunities that pave the way to increased achievement. This involves taking risks, finding ways to engage others in the process, and sometimes, foregoing “the way we have always done it” to establish new rules, procedures, protocols and practices.

Utilizing Kotter to Consider Change and SWPBIS Tier 3 Implementation

In Chapter 1, the importance of principal involvement was discussed with respect to SWPBIS Tiers 1 and 2. The research clearly shows that without consistent and positive principal support, a SWPBIS Tier 1 or Tier 2 initiative is likely to fail. It is reasonable to hypothesize the same will be true for Tier 3 implementation. Because of the paucity of research on SWPBIS Tier 3, it is reasonable to assume there will be some missteps or frustrations during this initial implementation in this district. Scott et al. (2010) discuss the need for both fidelity to “more formal and intense procedures and practices” that meet the needs of the most at-risk students. Because the site schools have not been involved or trained extensively in SWPBIS Tier 3 interventions and supports, there may be instances of interventions selected which do not result in the desired outcome and need to be modified. Furthermore, Bradshaw et al. (2012) state many states are struggling to produce the time, money, training, and other resources needed to sustain a SWPBIS initiative long term. Being able to examine what the differences are between the principals and extrapolating common perceptions and attitudes may provide possible resolutions to these negative factors as well as point to logical indicators of perceived success.

The work of Pollack and Pollack (2014) with Kotter’s eight stages of change leadership provides some support for using this conceptual framework. Drawing from studies in the business and finance realms, Pollack and Pollack expand upon Kotter’s steps with real-world

examples and applications that are useful for gauging perceptions and attitudes in this study. One of the points made is regarding the head, or in the case of this study, the principal, and the essential nature of their commitment to organizational change. “It was made clear that the success of the program depended on their involvement and drive for change” (Pollack & Pollack, 2014, p. 57). Another important vignette in the study was about an executive who appeared to lack buy-in to the change initiative, but when he was given a task to present about a facet of the initiative, his level of commitment increased substantially.

The first step in enacting change leadership, according to Kotter (1996, 2006) is replacing complacency with a sense of urgency. “Real leaders take action because they have confidence that the forces unleashed can be directed to achieve important ends” (Kotter, 1996, p. 43). While understanding the aspects of SWPBIS and its implementation are central to the study, the process by which it is successfully implemented into a school culture is equally important. Pollack and Pollack (2014) put forth the idea that there needs to be “a greater emphasis on producing research in a form that is usable by those who practice change management” (p. 52). In their study about organizational change using Kotter’s eight step process, Pollack and Pollack discuss that Kotter’s work, while much heralded in change management, is not grounded in applied or empirical research, but is more often used as a guide to either plan change initiatives or to assess them, after the fact.

Table 1. Kotter’s Eight Steps to Organizational Change.

1	Establishing a Sense of Urgency- identifying problems, opportunities, and why change is needed now
2	Forming a Powerful Guiding Coalition- calling key group members together early and often to establish and maintain commitment to the cause
3	Creating a Vision- the guiding coalition must plan for what must be done and how to accomplish the plan so that the end result can be articulated and is attainable

4	Communicating the Vision- spreading the word and getting all stakeholders involved and committed to the initiative is crucial, as are reminders throughout the implementation to remain on track
5	Empowering Others to Act on the Vision- a vital piece of buy-in involves removing obstacles which prevent stakeholders from embracing change and encouraging risk-taking and innovative thinking
6	Planning for and Creating Short-Term Wins- the guiding coalition must create and monitor benchmarks of success to recognize success, realign efforts, if need be, and reinvigorate enthusiasm for achieving the overall objectives
7	Consolidating Improvements and Producing Still More Change- building upon incremental successes and gained knowledge will increase credibility and enable change agents to make adjustments during the process to ensure continuous regeneration
8	Institutionalizing New Approaches- sustaining the transformational changes requires developing new policies and procedures, and providing structures that support developing new leaders who will build upon the vision

(Kotter, 2006, p. 243).

As noted previously, in order for an implementation to take place, there needs to be organization-wide recognition that a problem exists. In the literature, and in the schools of this study, the problem is acknowledged that severe behavior problems interfere with teaching and learning for all. This imperative is palpable among the elementary principal participants in this study as placing students in substantially separate, more restrictive placements is not often a viable solution, and principals are left to figure out how to manage student externalizing and internalizing behavior concerns on their own, which can be considered establishing a sense of urgency (Kotter, 1996, 2006). While each of the principals is responsible for his or her own building, the collegiality of the group does provide some support when student issues become challenging and seem without resolution. “A high sense of urgency does matter and needs to be targeted in a manner that mobilizes people to tackle core issues” (Fullan, 2014, p. 132). This need to tackle the core issues of at-risk students who are in need of SWPBIS Tier 3 support and interventions is apparent among the elementary principal participants of this study as well as the general population of teachers in the district. These needs were predicted in the seminal works of

Sugai and Horner (2006) when their findings called for coordination of services and programs, including thoughtful professional development for teachers, administrators, and other interventionists.

For change to occur, not only must a problem be identified and accepted, but members of the organization must be willing to work together to resolve these ongoing concerns, which is by forming a powerful guiding coalition (Kotter, 1996, 2006). Fullan (2014) wrote “The starting aim of the plan should be to focus a leadership team on the task of building a capacity for success” (p. 131). From there, leadership has to take the reins to create a vision and steps to achieve that vision, akin to creating a vision (Kotter, 1996, 2006). Concrete steps must be taken in preparation so that all stakeholders have buy-in and feel part of the initiative on a sustained level (Richter et al., 2012). It is not enough to make a plan. A leadership team, including at least one member of the school’s administration, needs to be established, complete with an attainable and easily conveyed mission, a docket of scheduled meeting times, and a means to collect and analyze data. Another facet to accomplish is there must be participation by, or at least, representation of, all stakeholders when deciding on the school-wide expectations that will be taught and expected, which is described by Kotter (1996, 2006) as communicating the vision. Fullan (2014) suggests leaders have to be able to monitor all of the tasks that need to be done as well as ensuring each is done with commitment and decisiveness. Such guidance must be coupled with clear communication of both directives to be carried out and in remediating conflicts that arise. A level of simplicity of design is required, as complicated, vague, or murky plans are rarely executable. The directives outlined in IDEA and MTSS, as well as in the body of literature (i.e., Debnam et al., 2012; Sugai & Horner, 2006) show all students, inclusive of those

with disabilities or at-risk factors, have the right to an education based on their individualized needs.

Algozzine et al. (2012) state, in schools where increased positive results with SWPBIS were achieved, several factors were key. In that study, the process of implementation was assessed for fidelity continually, and professional development was consistent, available at each stage of implementation, and offered frequently, and that the focus of the initiative was extensive throughout the organization and centered on change. In order for teachers and other interventionists to be effective with nonresponding students, they themselves must feel confident with the process steps and expected outcomes and have reasonable depth of understanding to be able to establish and maintain fidelity (p. 60-1). Reinke, Herman and Stormont (2013) found that self-efficacy among teachers with regard to classroom management skills is vital in implementing initiatives such as SWPBIS tiered interventions as “ineffective classroom behavior management practices are associated with negative outcomes for students and teachers alike” (p. 39). These findings are consistent with the eight steps of Kotter (1996, 2006) in that the leader must continually remind stakeholders of the vision and the steps being taken to achieve it.

In other words, deliberate planning through active leadership, thoughtful planning of the steps in the change process, and monitoring of the actual process of change, including making adjustments as needed and providing quality professional development throughout the implementation, are critical to successful implementation of any of the three tiers. Fullan (2014) states that trust is built inherently through intention and attention to the process by the stakeholders as small successes and consistency of applied practice are realized. This idea is echoed in Kotter’s steps that he attests occur later in the process; however, the foundation for short-term wins and empowering others is built from the beginning of undertaking

transformational change. “The marks of a change agent are relentless commitment to a cause and flexibility in how to serve that cause” (Fullan, 2014, p. 137). This study examines how the elementary principal participants effected change with respect to SWPBIS Tier 3 through identifying the need for change, communicating that need, identifying what must be done in response, how that is done, and building relationships that create teams that can address these challenges effectively.

Conclusion

In the years since it was conceptualized in IDEA, SWPBIS has been established in over 21,000 U.S. schools as a systems-based approach to teaching prosocial skills and managing chronic and intensive problem behaviors through explicit teaching of behavioral expectations, accompanied by positive reinforcement, and through use of supports and interventions for non-responders. There is much to be learned from the studies on SWPBIS Tier 1 and Tier 2 implementations as the literature demonstrates many of the tenets of SWPBIS are research-validated. However, there is significantly less known about how to implement a successful tertiary tier of intensive and individualized interventions for the neediest of our at-risk students.

With the continuing rise of maladaptive, disruptive, and violent behaviors in our schools, it is necessary to develop procedures, protocols, and appropriate responses to these concerning issues (Richter et al., 2012). As stated in Chapter 1, substantially separate programs, to which students with demonstrated or perceived inability to avoid such negative behaviors have often been referred, are at or near capacity, and there has been little research to support these increasingly restrictive placements as suitable remediation for these students and their individualized needs. In addition, some school districts are still reliant on aversive consequences, such as external suspensions, which do nothing to address the underlying functions of the

negative behaviors but do compound the problem by further excluding the individual from the active learning environment.

Teachers, school counselors, other support staff, and school administrators are represented frequently in the literature as frustrated, stressed, and discouraged about how to acquire and maintain high levels of student engagement and rigorous learning in the presence of everyday disruptions, violence, and increasing need among student populations. In American schools today, this is a crisis because at-risk students need to be supported effectively and school personnel must be able to address these needs among students with confidence. Research cited here indicates that change is needed (Bambara et al., 2012; Bradshaw et al., 2012; Childs et al., 2016). Researchers and educational leaders don't agree on how to approach these complex problems.

SWPBIS is a system of tiered instruction and interventions that teaches and reinforces foundational expectations of behavior in order to support all students toward academic and social-emotional achievement within a positive school climate. The established structures of SWPBIS include using data to improve the behavior of students; using prosocial behavior modification to help students lead better and more productive lives; supporting students with disabilities to be educated in least restrictive environment; and expanding opportunities for students to be able to apply prosocial learning outcomes in a variety of environments (Weiland et al., 2014). The gaps in the literature are notable, most especially surrounding SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation. Based on searches in published literature of the relevant terms listed previously, it does not appear that actual studies on comprehensive SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation in elementary schools have been conducted and replicated, leaving current researchers with only theoretical recommendations upon which to base a real-world implementation. Scott et al. (2010)

state “descriptions of secondary and tertiary interventions have continually focused on specific strategies and processes” (p. 514) which are “piecemeal and of limited scope” instead of being based on scientific data (p. 528). School principal behaviors and influence on SWPBIS are represented in the body of research; however, this data is limited to the universal tier, and to an even lesser degree, secondary tier implementation efforts.

Using Kotter’s framework of steps toward successful organizational change, this study examines the perceptions and attitudes of the principals toward SWPBIS Tier 3 implementations among the five elementary schools of the site. The leadership behaviors, with respect to SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation, are an important part of that focus.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In schools across the United States, incidents of physical and environmental aggression, externalized and internalized mental health issues, and other disruptions interrupt time designated for learning. Teachers and school administrators grapple with how to address these concerning events, despite little or no training in how to handle them (Bambara et al., 2012; Bradshaw et al., 2012; Cook et al., 2015). This ethnographic collective case study examines perceptions, attitudes, and leadership behaviors of one district's elementary principals as they prepare and embark on initial implementation of School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) Tier 3 to meet the needs of their most at-risk students.

The research questions for this study are:

1. What perceptions and attitudes do principals with experience implementing SWPBIS Tiers 1 and 2 have about implementing Tier 3 interventions?
2. What is the impact of principals' perceptions and attitudes on their leadership of a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation?
3. How do principals broadly manage sustainable change in the school setting relative to SWPBIS?

Setting

Five of the district's seven elementary schools are the site of this study on principals' perceptions and attitudes about initial implementation of SWPBIS Tier 3. (As mentioned prior, one school has a newly installed, interim principal who does not have experience in implementing SWPBIS at this time, nor will the participant group include the researcher, who is also one of the seven principals.) For the past four years, this district has been involved in a roll-

out of universal and secondary phases of SWPBIS, and at the same time, has established in-district substantially separate programs for students requiring more restrictive environments to foster successful learning. While these substantially separate programs have kept many students in district, the protocol for placing students in substantially separate programs has not always been consistent. According to IDEA legislation, including MTSS and LRE mandates, supports and interventions must be implemented and exhausted before moving a student to a more restrictive placement. Implementation among the site schools to embrace consistent practices for students requiring tertiary interventions and supports will likely result in higher levels of compliance and fidelity to MTSS recommendations.

Scott et al. (2010) state research on Tiers 2 and 3 has focused on packaged programs or particular strategies and not “offering clear descriptions of a conceptual framework or the development of a systemic approach in line with the multi-tiered logic” of SWPBIS (p. 514). When the universal and secondary strategies have failed to produce fast and easy results, there have been some instances where the administrators of the site schools have considered moving students to more restrictive placements due to their own frustration with failure, and lack of resources, available personnel, and training, all related to intensive intervention supports. These sentiments and patterns of decision-making are echoed in the literature as reasons for reluctance to initiate Tier 3 interventions or inability to stay the course with such an implementation; however, lack of identification, misidentification, and ineffective interventions lead to exacerbated behavioral problems, negative social consequences, and poor quality of life on the whole for at-risk students (Fairbanks, Simonsen, & Sugai, 2008; Kaufman, Mock, & Simpson, 2007; Scott et al., 2010; Westling, 2010).

Participants

The participants are five principals at the elementary level in this study's site schools. Members of the group are eager to learn about new and additional strategies and resources that may accompany a full-scale implementation of SWPBIS Tier 3. They voluntarily agreed to be participants in this study. The principals were informed of the purpose, design, methodology, risks, and questions of the study, as well as their role as volunteers. Written consent was obtained from all participants, and they were notified of their rights before signed consent was gained. Although the SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation is a district initiative, the participation of the principals in this study was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time throughout the study. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of University of New England reviewed the proposal for this study in January 2018, and approval for the exemption status was granted (Appendix D).

The five principals range in age from 34 to 61. All but one of this group are female. Not all of these school administrators were assistant principals before assuming the principal role, and the years of practice and range of experience varies widely. One principal has held her position for five years. One has been principal for four years. Another has been at the helm for nearly three years, and the remaining two are in the midst of their second year in the district but were principals for two years in other districts. Although the schools each have unique characteristics and cultures and management styles vary significantly, all face the challenges of dealing with at-risk students who present daily with aggressive tendencies and other outward manifestations of problem behavior, or with internalizing factors that cripple students with anxiety and poor coping skills.

The principals agreed to be interviewed as part of this study. Interviews were conducted on-site and individually, and I visited each school during a student lunch period for observation

purposes and to determine a context of leadership for each of the participants. Lunch time was selected by me as a period of time that was likely to have some consistency across all the sites, but that would also allow me to look for indicators of leadership behaviors connected to SWPBIS functions. This decision is supported by the work of Merriam and Tisdell (2016), who state “Force yourself to make decisions that narrow the study” (p. 197). Participants met with me a second time to review the prepared transcription of their individual interviews and the thematic categorizations I gleaned from open coding, and to clarify any gaps or vague points in the data. Safeguards to protect participants’ rights are discussed in detail in an upcoming section.

The elementary principal participants share a collegial bond and are supportive of one another professionally, but also have different management styles, philosophies of education and years of experience. The concept of shared culture can be described as a set of interconnected workings of the group, such as common or conflicting values, philosophies, and personal dynamics that define this particular participant group (Desmond, 2014). Before analysis, the group’s shared culture was considered likely to be relevant to analysis of the collected data, and in future decisions about a full-scale implementation of SWPBIS Tier 3, in that there are patterns of behavior, beliefs and language that impact decisions about chosen interventions, common usage of community and school district resources, and student placement in substantially separate settings. Desmond (2014) states using an ethnographic methodology, as will be discussed in the next section, requires a researcher to see the participants as both similar to each other, in that as part of the group they share values, beliefs, responsibilities, and roles, as well as unlike due to different passions, experiences, and positionality within the group. These factors became evident when categories or themes began to emerge during analysis, and they are discussed in Chapter 5. The outcomes of this study include documentation of how principal

perceptions and attitudes, within in the context of leading organizational change as defined by Kotter (1996, 2006), impact a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation.

Safeguards have been employed throughout to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants in this study. All participants were assigned a pseudonym for the purposes of anonymity and organization during the data collection and analysis processes. Interviews were conducted privately with individual participants. Full disclosure of methodology is within the design of this study. Disclosing identifying information about the subjects or their schools is not pertinent to the research questions.

Research Design and Methodology

The research design for this study is an ethnographic design in the form of a collective case study. Creswell (2015) writes “a case study is an in-depth exploration of a bounded system, based on extensive data collection” (p. 465). According to Creswell, a collective case study design is used to learn about specific details of something that is happening that may be indicative or part of a larger issue or problem. “Group-based studies primarily concern themselves with the habits, beliefs, behaviors, and interactions of a set of individuals culled together ... on the basis of some shared social attribute” (Desmond, 2014, p. 550). As stated above, this study examines a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation from the perspectives of elementary principals embarking on this initiative. Understanding the perceptions and attitudes of the sample group of principals toward utilizing strategic and intensive interventions for the most at-risk students is a critical piece of understanding how this multi-faceted approach might work in the environment of an elementary school. This approach may be considered one step in learning how the utilization of the tertiary tier of this systems-approach may address the incidence of lost instructional time due to time spent addressing the needs of students with

maladaptive behaviors, mental health concerns or who otherwise present with symptoms that are deemed disruptions to a safe, supportive learning environment, while also providing effective, intensive supports for those students, too (Bambara et al., 2012).

According to Yin (2013), the plethora of data resulting from a multi-participant group gives this methodology credence for this type of study. Yin states a case study method often only includes one case, and this offers limitations in that generalizations and validity may be questioned. Interviewing multiple school principals limits, to some degree, the amount of in-depth data collected from each of the participants. Because the study focuses on leadership and systems, learning how perceptions and attitudes common among the principals toward the implementation of SWPBIS Tier 3 in these schools impacts their leadership behaviors is key. The conceptual framework provided by Kotter (1996, 2006) helps to create a structure by which to examine leadership behaviors within the context of elementary principal perceptions and attitudes about SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation. A full-scale study of long-term implementation may very well include all eight stages of Kotter's theory about effecting transformational change; however, the complete process is beyond the scope of this study. The first four steps include "establishing a sense of urgency, creating the guiding coalition, developing a vision and strategy, and communicating the change vision" (1996, p. 21) and provide a template of desirable leadership capacities that align with a SWPBIS Tier 3 initiative as discussed in Chapter 5.

SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation is a process that is highly individualized. For that reason, the collective case study was chosen in order to examine cultural aspects of each school as well as those of the school district. Desmond (2014) states the objective of an ethnographic case study is to focus a lens on a small facet of a population in order to learn or understand more about

issues in society at large. This approach allowed me to develop a frame from which future examinations might stem. Desmond is careful to make the point, however, that generalizations from small and specific populations are not absolute in their application to larger contexts due to varied boundaries within organizations, fluid relationships among humans which grow and change, and other factors that may change over time. Jonsen and Jehn (2009) discuss the methodology of a study, in conjunction with being research-validated, respectful of the subjects' time, and capable of exposing concepts, themes, or ideas which had not been considered previously, must align with the goal of gleaning "a true representation of the native's view (insofar that exists)" (p. 129).

The participants' shared culture may be relevant to the implementation of the initiative in that there are patterns of behavior, beliefs and language that impact decisions about student placement in substantially separate settings, for example. Tier 3 interventions are a precursor to any such placement, and as such, decisions must often be made in concert with fellow principals. In addition, there is no one right way to implement tertiary supports, although there may be wrong ways to go about it. Because the body of literature is lacking in studies on SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation at the elementary level, it is necessary to collect information on common elements, if any, during the beginning stage(s) of implementation; consider how a principal's attitudes and behaviors may impact success of such an initiative; and if possible, determine what leadership skills positively effect a successful launch of tertiary interventions and supports at the elementary level. An ethnographic collective case study allows the researcher to analyze qualitative data that may bring to light ideas that might be formed into themes or conclusions that create new knowledge (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

Data Collection Procedures

Qualitative research has value when examining the differentiated perspectives and attitudes of a representative sample thanks to utilization of techniques that delve into personal experiences and insights, and then making sense of trends and common elements (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Using an ethnographic collective case study design provides insight into what is happening at each of the schools of the study.

Oliver-Hoyo and Allen (2006) argue less than three methods of data collection does not produce a true picture of the issues being studied and relying solely on interviews can yield misrepresentations unwittingly (p. 44). Through a combination of in-person interviews, field notes from on-site observations, and documentary review of the School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET) and the Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) for each site, data was compared to try to validate corroboration of information in order to produce a more cohesive set of data (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006).

Participant Rights

The responsibility of ensuring and protecting participant rights rests on me as the researcher. The principals who serve as the participants in this study were made aware of their rights through informed consent which includes confirmation of their autonomy as volunteers with the purpose, description, and risks explained fully. A letter explaining the purpose of the study along with participant rights was sent as a request for their participation (Appendix B). The Consent for Participation in Research form includes contact information for participants to ask questions of or communicate concerns to me and to my advisors, and requires their signature attesting to their willingness to participate (Appendix C). No participants names were disclosed, and pseudonyms were used. All responses were kept in the strictest confidence by me as I

conducted all interviews personally. All paper data collection and analysis documents were stored at my home, locked in a secure cabinet. Digital data and documents were saved on my home computer which is encrypted and password protected. All data, field notes, recorded interviews and transcription materials will either be destroyed upon completion of the study or will remain in a secure location for use in possible future studies. Any unanticipated risks have been minimized through sound research design protocols as described above. Assurances were granted to participants by me, as the researcher, that this study was guided by ethical principles for its duration. For example, it was necessary to review participants' rights at the outset of each interview and member check meeting. Miller and Bell (2012) state it is advisable to revisit consent and participant rights throughout the process as many subjects do not fully comprehend what they are agreeing to at the commencement of a study.

Interviews, field notes from observations, and SET and TFI data were compared in a triangulated design in order to depict the perceptions and attitudes of the principals with respect to SWPBIS Tier 3 as accurately as possible. Triangulation resulted from multiple sources and multiple methods of data as "the challenge is to construct categories or themes that capture some recurring pattern that cuts across your data" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 207).

Interviews. With the conceptual framework in mind, the "Guidelines for Principals: Organization" and "Guidelines for Principals: Leadership" indicators found in the publication, *Implementing IDEA: A Guide for Principals* (2001), published by the Council for Exceptional Children and NAESP, and reviewed by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), have been adapted and were used for interview purposes (Appendix A). Interview data were collected in-person and on an individual basis in approximately half hour-long interview sessions. I met with each subject individually who was

asked to respond to each of the prompts by providing responses with supporting details, explanations or other factors they deem relevant to each prompt. In this semi-structured interview format, participants' perceptions and attitudes were probed, but there was also opportunity to gather ideas, opinions, beliefs, or thoughts as well. Interviews were audio recorded by me using digital voice recognition software, and backed up with audio recording (iPhone), both of which are password protected. During the interviews, I also jotted written notes to help with transcription and used them for a secondary data set. My notes focused on words that the participants tended to repeat often, or procedural details I wanted to remember, such as participants' ability to respond to the formatting of the interview probes.

The prompts, based on language from the *Implementing IDEA: A Guide for Principals* (Council for Exceptional Children & NAESP, 2001) guidebook, are meant to extract targeted information about leadership perceptions and attitudes with regard to preparation for a SWPBIS Tier 3 launch. Each of the prompts used is matched with one or more of Kotter's steps; however, this codification was not shared with participants.

Field Observations. A field notes journal was kept by me to record observations, questions, and examples of SWPBIS Tier 3 in action as additional time on-site was spent at each of the schools during a student lunch period in order to collect anecdotal evidence regarding SWPBIS implementation. On-site visits ranged from 30 to 40 minutes and encompassed observations of cafeteria procedures, especially enforcement of SWPBIS behavioral expectations and how these expectations are communicated to students. To the best of my ability, equitable amounts of time and attention was devoted to each of the sites. It was not my intention to engage in interviews or survey-type questioning of any staff or students during the observations, but to be a passive eye to see what transpired with respect to SWPBIS practices and the principals'

leadership of such. I recorded examples of actual tangible symbols and observed behaviors by adults and students, including evidence such as charts, tangible rewards, and verbal cues, and modeling or guidance by adults with regard to rituals, routines or procedures that support student success with meeting behavioral expectations. The data were analyzed for themes regarding perceptions and attitudes of the elementary principal participant group as well as leadership behaviors and impact. How these data fit into the conceptual overview of the emergent themes is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

SET and TFI Review. Documentary review was done using the results from the previously-administered SET and TFI from each school site and labeled by me for anonymity. These data and results were used for comparison with the qualitative interview data regarding implementation fidelity. These assessments are used in the site schools for Tier 1 and Tier 2 progress monitoring. The TFI is an assessment which requires the SWPBIS team to reflect on what functions or aspects of each tier are firmly in place, which are works in progress, and which are not yet adopted. The SET is an assessment done by an external person, such as a college consultant in the case of the site district, who records answers to specific questions of randomly selected stakeholders. The participants' perceptions and attitudes about leading SWPBIS initiatives that may align with the SET and TFI data are of significant interest when analyzing the collected whole. These data are expressed in percentages, with 70% being an acceptable benchmark of measured progress with implementation of a specific tier. Together, these two assessments are believed to give a thorough and balanced picture of implementation progress (Horner et al., 2004; McIntosh et al., 2017)

Transcription

Davidson (2009) describes the transcription process as one that is often neglected by qualitative researchers but is nonetheless integral to the process. These data were recorded and transcribed using voice-to-text digital technology in addition to notes taken during the interviews to develop a naturalized representation of the conversations. When combining the digitized transcription with field notes and the member check process, an accurate rendering of each interview conversation emerged.

Coding

Once transcription was completed, I then performed what Creswell (2012) refers to as a “preliminary exploratory analysis” where data are sorted to identify recurring concepts and ideas expressed in the interviews and observed in the field visits (p. 243). This inductive process is also sometimes referred to as data-driven “open coding” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This open coding process entailed reading and re-reading the raw data, making notes, and looking for repeated ideas and concepts. Those codes were sorted again using structural coding, and then, causation coding, in the form of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis as defined below.

Structural coding is used to sort data and notes into overarching categories. The paper interview transcripts and my field notes were annotated with words and phrases which were used to identify recurring patterns of behavior, responses, or other data that describe consistencies within the context of the study’s purpose and research questions. These repeated bits of data were sorted onto sticky notes and manipulated into rows and columns over and over to ferret out relevant categories that are independent of each other and which are responsive to this study’s problem of practice and research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). “Qualitative research is

an eclectic field of study and the task of coding textual passages can be examined from many environments” (Saldana & Mallette, 2016, p. 165).

Causation coding is used “to identify significant influential factors in the environment” (Saldana & Mallette, 2016, p. 162). Saldana and Mallette (2016) purport the SWOT technique provides a unique perspective as a coding mechanism as it requires the researcher to consider data, not only on its face value, but also for extenuating impact on other facets of the study. “A multi-dimensional analysis of an environment requires multi-dimensional coding approaches” (Saldana & Mallette, 2016, p. 166).

The causation coding used in this study requires the analysis of each of the emergent themes within the scope of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. SWOT analysis has been studied as a means to plan and measure change factors within organizations for many years. Pickton and Wright (1998) put forth that, while SWOT has its detractors, the value in this process is in providing discussion points about internal and external influences within an organization. Critics of the SWOT technique find many users of this method to stop too early, after simply assigning a factor as a strength, weakness, opportunity, or threat. In this study, the SWOT method is used to consider emergent themes within the SWPBIS implementation environment. Strengths and weaknesses are considered internal factors, while opportunities and threats are seen as external factors (Helms & Nixon, 2010; Pickton & Wright, 1998). Helms and Nixon (2010) state “The differences between internal and external issues can be difficult to spot” (p. 235). How each theme figures into leadership behaviors through SWOT analysis provides thought-provoking details that support or question findings.

Member Check. A second round of meetings with the participants ensued to clarify and check for accuracy as sorting of the data commenced. Again, this was done individually by me

using the same process of recording responses as the initial interviews in addition to allowing the participants to record notes and feedback on a simple chart of the twelve thematic statements that resulted from open coding. This member check process was done by asking for confirmation of transcription and initial analysis and interpretation from the participants as this has been established in research to be a satisfactory validation technique to triangulate findings (Jonsen & Jehn, 2009). Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007) state a member check protocol helps to establish validity with qualitative research as it “increases rigor and trustworthiness of the findings” (p. 575). Jonsen and Jehn (2009) put forth that triangulation offers a “convergence of methods producing more objective and valid results” (p. 125). While triangulation methods are not new and have long been used to validate emergent themes, Jonsen and Jehn argue “using a more transformational mindset, triangulation can be used for enriching and enhancing study findings” (p. 140).

Participants were provided a copy of the transcription from their interview. Further, I allowed each principal to review the twelve initial concepts that emerged from open coding. Participants were asked to validate the data from their interview had been recorded accurately and were invited to comment on the twelve themes which emerged from early analysis. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state a member check is a critical function of verifying data is accurate and eliminating, to the degree possible, biases. Participants were asked to record notes indicating any feedback they chose on which I could take action where necessary. Again, these notes and comments were kept in strict confidence and are stored accordingly with the other raw data documents.

Analysis

One of the benefits of an ethnographic, collective case study design is that by conducting interviews and direct observations, as well as collecting anecdotal evidence in the form of notes and other related data, and then using a member check method to validate recurring themes, it is possible to develop sections on findings and recommendations for this study that are comprehensive and establish a foundation of information upon which future studies of SWPBIS Tier 3 may be conducted.

The eight steps to creating organizational change (Kotter, 1996, 2006) are used as a conceptual framework by which themes were identified and coded, and leadership behaviors are analyzed. As shown in Table 1, the first four steps: “establishing a sense of urgency, forming a powerful guiding coalition, creating a vision, and communicating the vision” are the lens through which principal perceptions and attitudes were examined. This study produced substantial data that demonstrate how the principal participants perceive that their intentional leadership actions impact the initial stages of SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation.

External Validity

Future replication of this study with similar groups of elementary principal participants will establish and strengthen external validity if patterns or similar findings are established. Firman (2008) states “Replication is key to qualitative research external validity” (p. 755). For the purposes for repeating this study, a participant sample that has like characteristics as the one in this study (i.e., suburban school district, some experience with SWPBIS Tiers 1 and 2) should be used. Coding and other analytic factors are discussed in Chapter 4 as qualitative research is content specific and aligning demographic variables is likely to lend itself to greater generalizability of study findings (Firman, 2008).

Potential Limitations

1. The limitation of the collective case study design is that there is an element of subjectivity as I am a principal whose school is part of the PBIS Tier 3 implementation.
2. There must be measures taken to identify and minimize any bias and participant reactivity that may skew results.
3. It is assumed that participants answer honestly; however, as this study aims to collect perceptions and attitudes, there may be subjectivity in interview responses that is unavoidable.
4. Another limitation is that this study is designed to be carried out in a fairly short time frame, so findings may not be generalizable to long-term implementations.
5. Because there are few research studies found that base recommendations or protocols for initiating such an implementation of SWPBIS Tier 3 on empirical evidence or real-world application, it is not known whether it is possible to determine factors that are actually impactful on initial stages of implementation.
6. This ethnographic study deals with a very small sample population, who share similar cultural beliefs. This may present as a somewhat monochromatic set of data.
7. When dealing with conceivably subjective data that are collected as interview responses or field observations, it is critical to avoid the ethical dilemma of value versus fact. Brinkmann and Kvale (2005) argue “being ethical means being open to other people, acting for the sake of their good, trying to see others as they are, rather than imposing one’s own ideas and biases on them” (p. 161).

Conclusion

Every day, school administrators lead their schools in accordance with many mandates and initiatives, not the least of which is IDEA, now renamed ESSA (2015). In original IDEA landmark legislation and reauthorizations since, including ESSA, principals are charged with the responsibility of implementing science-based practices to ensure equity in educating all students (Council for Exceptional Children & NAESP, 2001). For those students who deal with social-emotional learning deficits, mental health issues, or other socially impacting factors such as abuse, neglect, hunger, or homelessness, utilizing interventions and supports to help teach them how to meet behavioral expectations when they struggle to do so, is the duty of educators. SWPBIS Tier 3 provides the theoretical framework for school professionals to build those skills with students, and this study aims to add to the scant body of existing applied research.

“Principals play a significant role in the adoption, implementation, sustainability, and even effectiveness of interventions” (McIntosh et al., 2016, p. 100). How their perceptions and attitudes manifest into impactful behaviors when implementing systems of tertiary interventions is not established in the body of existing literature. This ethnographic collective case study sheds light on how the leadership of principals, as conveyed through their perceptions and attitudes, might be a factor in determining how the communication and vision of a SWPBIS Tier 3 initial implementation is carried out. Desmond (2014) states that although an ethnographic study is limited in many ways by the boundaries of the sample group, it also brings about fresh opportunities to view those boundaries as part of the whole. Transformational change requires modifying boundaries on many levels within the organization to create a new set of boundaries by which needs are met and objectives are achieved. By examining principal perceptions and attitudes toward initial stages of SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation, it is an aim of this study to gain

knowledge about how best to design programs and interventions that meet the needs of all students. As stated by Kotter (1996), “Because we are talking about multiple steps and multiple projects, the end result is often complex, dynamic, messy, and scary” (p. 25). Precise and mindful consideration is never wasted, but transformational change, such as in a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation, involves much more than collecting data, identifying themes and making data-driven decisions (Kotter, 1996). Fullan (2004) likens this complex leadership process of transformational change as steering a ship through calm seas *and* rough waters, and the more a leader knows about organizational systems and change, the more prepared one is to bring about such change, especially in an environment like the rapid pace of a public elementary school. In the next chapter, how the data were collected, coded and analyzed is discussed in detail, and results are presented.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The results of this study yield much to consider concerning principal perceptions and attitudes about School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) Tier 3 implementation and how they use leadership capacity to carry out such an initiative. This chapter presents the qualitative data collected through the use of participant interviews, field observations, member check procedures, and review of previously collected data about SWPBIS programmatic fidelity, including details about how the data were organized using structural and causation coding. Structural coding was implemented to determine heuristic themes from the raw data, and causation coding was done in the form of a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) categorization.

Analysis Method

The types of data collected included interviews of the participants, field observation notes, member check verification by participants, and a review of each school's schoolwide evaluation tool (SET) and tiered fidelity inventory (TFI) assessment reports. The interviews consisted of one-on-one meetings with each of the principal participants who responded to a set of ten prompts about SWPBIS and leadership, with a particular focus on preparation for Tier 3 intervention implementation (Appendix A). Once the interviews were complete, and the transcriptions created with the use of voice recognition software, each participant was able to review his or her transcription to verify the data and emergent themes for accuracy and to conduct a member check process. It was at this time that I clarified any questions regarding anecdotal data collected during field observations.

Comparing Implementation Fidelity Data

The primary focus of reviewing the SET and TFI reports for each of the site schools was to better understand how the site-based SWPBIS teams reported examples of specific leadership behaviors. While these research-based, standardized assessments are comprehensive, I chose to look only at certain sections that aligned with facets of the conceptual framework of transformational leadership according to Kotter's eight steps of organizational change. On the SET reports, two sections, "Monitoring and Decision-Making" and "Management" were relevant to this study. In the Monitoring and Decision-Making section, the central themes relate to the ways in which negative behavior incidents are defined, the ways in which this data are collected and analyzed, and the ways in which this data are then used to inform decisions by the leadership team. For the Management section, indicating concrete plans for positive change with respect to student behaviors as well as the dissemination of information to all stakeholders are two important facets.

The scores for SET Subscale percentiles for the Monitoring and Decision-Making portion range from 62.5 to 100%, and one school's SET data was missing. This may have been due to the possibility that they have not completed the SET for this year yet, have not entered the responses to generate a report, or that there was some sort of failure on the part of the data collection tool. Because the individual schools' SET data were not examined question by question, it can't be discerned to what exactly the scores indicating less than 100% implementation can be attributed. It is generally accepted that a score of 70% is the benchmark for nearly full implementation (Horner et al., 2004), and three of these four schools, whose data is available, are above the 70% mark for the Monitoring and Decision-Making section. This means all or most of the stakeholders who were involved in responding to the SET questions feel

that their schools are demonstrating Tier 1 and Tier 2 implementation with consistent fidelity. This is a critical factor to keep in mind as Tier 3 has a low likelihood of success without solid Tier 1 and 2 implementations upon which to build (Bradshaw et al., 2008; McIntosh et al., 2016).

The Management scores for the four schools whose SET data was available were all at 100%, indicating reported consistent fidelity for all aspects of implementation of SWPBIS Tiers 1 and 2. The TFI results include substantially lower levels of reported implementation fidelity, ranging from 32% to 91%. What is interesting is that historical percentages for each of the five schools is included with this year's TFI reports, and the resulting percentages of implementation fidelity vary widely over the last several years. This may be due to actual variability in implementation consistency, or it could be attributed to changing understanding over the course of multiple years as to what implementation fidelity looks like. One may also consider SWPBIS teams change in membership from year to year, and new members bring new perspectives. Lastly, in years past, it is likely the sections on Tier 2 and 3 were not scored because these tiers had not been initiated. Therefore, while it is interesting to compare these data from the TFI with the SET and other data of this study, using this set of site reports as wholly reliable and valid data for this study does not seem widely useful.

When analyzing examples that relate to the research questions and conceptual framework, the results included in the SET and TFI reports for each school provide some insight as is discussed in the next chapter, but for the purposes of this study, this method of data collection did not offer any substantial concrete results. The value of the SET and TFI data lies in their use as tools for comparison to reported perceptions, attitudes and impacted leadership behaviors in addition to observed data at each site school to better understand SWPBIS systems and related phenomena as a whole. There is value, as stated, in using them to compare, as many

questions emerge as a result which may inform leaders about perceptions and attitudes among stakeholders that differ from their own. This provides an opportunity for future research, perhaps involving a mixed-methods study to examine qualitative data such as expressed perceptions and attitudes with that of quantitative raw data that comprise SET and TFI analysis reports such as these.

Presentation of Results

Once the interviews and field observations were complete, and the SET and TFI data were reviewed, I read and reread all the pieces multiple times to enable a deep grasp of all the bits of data. They are then woven into one story that reflects immersion into the data and letting the information, both pertinent to this study and not, settle gradually into my understanding. During the interview process, my habit of keeping a research journal became invaluable as I found questions, proposed possible connections, and documented possible researcher bias. As I listened to the participants' responses, it was natural for me to make connections between what they were discussing to the conceptual framework and Kotter's eight steps of organizational transformation. However, until all the pieces of data were puzzled together and considered in their totality, it was absolutely necessary to avoid this tendency as it might create a bias that would not allow the data to speak and create new knowledge about the problem of practice. Therefore, by adhering to the methodology outlined in Chapter 3, I was able to recognize the discrete steps needed to see the data through a fresh lens, one with a concerted effort to avoid bias.

First, using "preliminary exploratory analysis," in which recurring ideas in the interview responses and my notes from field visits were collected on sticky notes, a dozen belief statements emerged (Creswell, 2012, p. 243). As defined previously, open coding allows a researcher to

make sense of the data within the context of the research questions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Multiple concepts were expressed by all participants, and others were reported by only some participants. These twelve statements, in no particular order, and the codes that led to generation of these themes follow.

Emergent Theme # 1: SWPBIS as a systems-approach is worthy of dedicated time by the school principal.

CODE: schedule time to work on SWPBIS goals

CODE: led by principal, teacher, assistant principal, adjustment counselor

CODE: consistency of tiered implementation important

CODE: concentrated effort

IN VIVO CODE: “I don’t let big problems get away from me.”

Emergent Theme # 2: A school principal must prioritize implementation fidelity for SWPBIS Tiers 1 and 2 before embarking on a Tier 3 initiative.

CODE: success of Tier 1 and Tier 2 important

CODE: follow- up, on principal’s agenda

CODE: collaboration

CODE: principal understands strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to fidelity of implementation at all tiers

CODE: regular and consistent communication to all stakeholders is key

Emergent Theme # 3: SWPBIS Tier 3 presents as an opportunity for growth for all stakeholders in the school.

CODE: no formal training district wide

CODE: faculty meetings and school-wide meetings provide effective use of time to communicate SWPBIS vision to various stakeholders

CODE: shared leadership among SWPBIS team members

IN VIVO CODE: “an area we continue to work on”

IN VIVO CODE: “a huge area of growth for everybody, including myself”

CODE: teachers and staff may feel they are being criticized if they are asked or told to use a new or different intervention with an at-risk student

Emergent Theme #4: The principal is the most skilled, or has the widest variety of expertise, with regard to behavioral interventions, due to depth and breadth of experience.

CODE: experience gained by principals in other districts brings rich perspective

CODE: preparing trainings or meetings for staff helps to keep principals’ skills sharp

CODE: understanding of leadership theory helps to coordinate efforts and delegate tasks

IN VIVO CODE: “To deal with most difficult cases, you need a big bag of tricks, and I don’t know that everybody in my school gets that.”

Emergent Theme #5: The principal makes decisions, oversees and coordinates SWPBIS tiered intervention efforts.

CODE: principals monitor and reflect on school-wide data on negative student behaviors

CODE: principals may choose to focus on singular concept for whole year, e.g., “kindness”

CODE: decision-making and consistent communication help to keep SWPBIS in forefront of principals’ minds

CODE: principals assign resources and personnel based on data and goals

Emergent Theme #6: The principal works in tandem with other staff to make decisions.

CODE: active participation in SWPBIS Tier 1 by all is goal

CODE: planning and implementation of monthly meetings are shared among stakeholders

IN VIVO CODE: “We ought to try to include more people.”

IN VIVO CODE: “If you don’t include all stakeholders, you run the risk of not having full investment.”

Emergent Theme #7: SWPBIS Tier 3 interventions and supports are necessary because negative or unsafe behaviors decrease time on learning for all.

IN VIVO CODE: “Change in delivery of special education services forced a more inclusive environment.”

CODE: students who are now in more inclusive setting are difficult to manage because they are all working on different things

CODE: individualized interventions and supports with consistent modification to meet each student’s needs

IN VIVO CODE: “Goal is for every student to like being where he is.”

Emergent Theme #8: The principal prioritizes modeling SWPBIS expectations for all stakeholders.

IN VIVO CODE: “I hope to be emulated by staff who have not had as much expertise or education as I have.”

CODE: vision

CODE: dedicated time spent on SWPBIS each day, week, month, year

CODE: posted expectations in various areas of the school

CODE: frequent communication is vital

CODE: principal provides resources, works to remove barriers to implementation

Emergent Theme #9: SWPBIS vision is aligned to the goals of the school.

CODE: inclusive practices and universal design for learning are two district-wide goals that complement SWPBIS

IN VIVO CODE: “More engagement leads to less (negative) behaviors which increases student achievement and that is the primary goal of any school, isn’t it?”

Emergent Theme #10: It is a primary responsibility of the principal to “handle” push back or resistance to staff who are reluctant to buy into SWPBIS vision.

IN VIVO CODE: “When something is not working, I make people take another look.”

IN VIVO CODE: “We need to work on this, as a school, as a district, and as a society.”

CODE: need to change the mindset of some teachers

CODE: gaining trust of reluctant teachers through consistency of message and data

IN VIVO CODE: “We have a number of staff who don’t understand what Tier 3 means until they get a Tier 3 kid in their class. They hesitate to want to change any of their specific ideas about classroom management.”

Emergent Theme #11: Ongoing professional development is important to success of SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation.

CODE: not enough time to develop site-based trainings

CODE: training at district level has been used by various stakeholders

CODE: developing behavior plans, interventions and supports with teachers helps to communicate vision and improve understanding of SWPBIS Tier 2 and Tier 3

IN VIVO CODE: “We try to figure out what people need and give PD (professional development) to meet their needs.”

IN VIVO CODE: “I try to push some onto teachers, school adjustment counselor, behaviorist, so all staff are problem solvers. I don’t want to be the only one controlling it.”

Emergent Theme #12: Parents are important stakeholders in SWPBIS Tier 3 intervention and supports implementation.

IN VIVO CODE: “Students need a lot more than what we can do during the school day.”

CODE: hard to coordinate all stakeholders, including parents

CODE: accountability on family side is often lacking

CODE: parents may be included in SWPBIS Tier 3 meetings as appropriate

IN VIVO CODING: “We need to do a better job at working to get homes involved.”

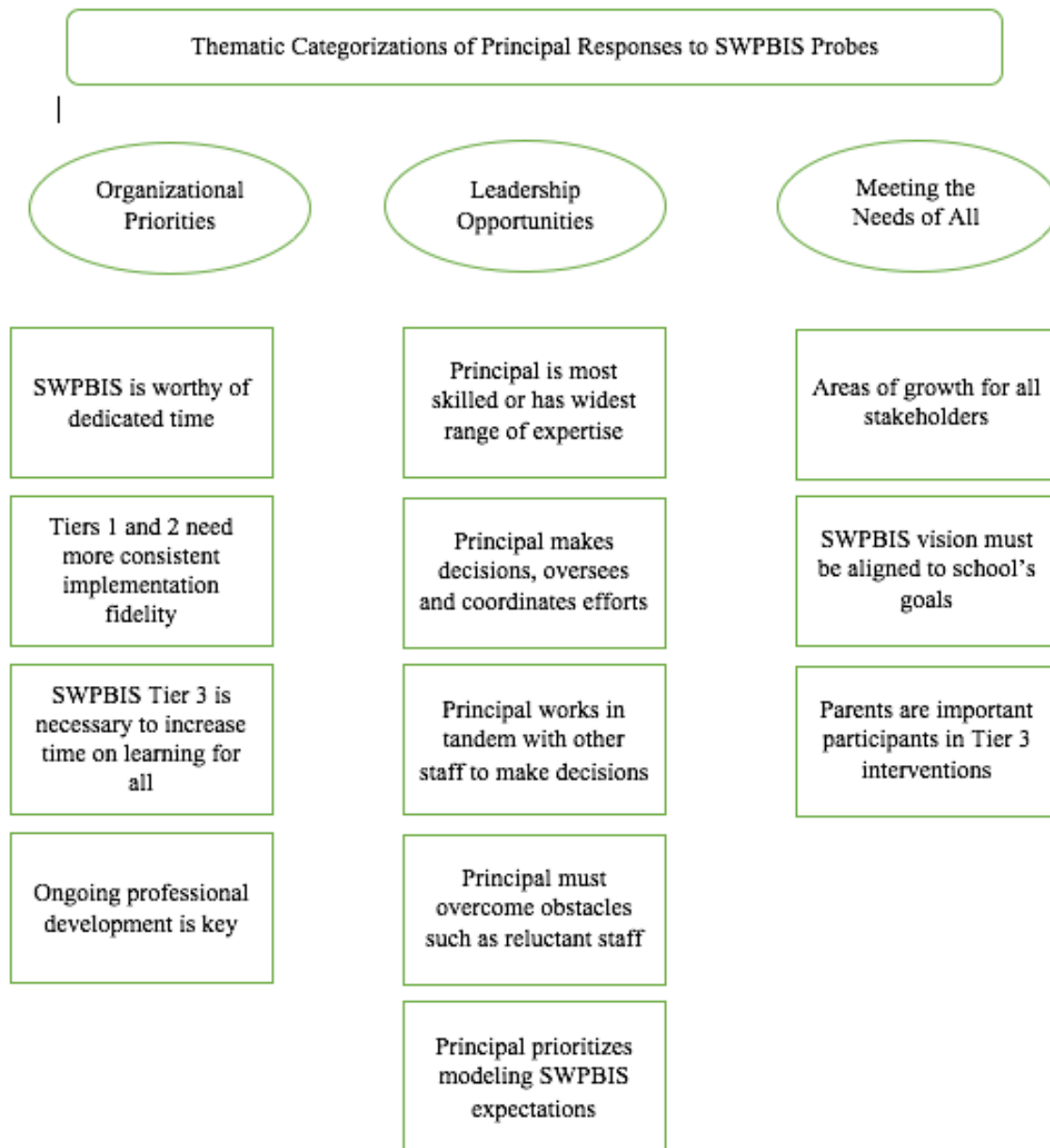
Structural Coding

Next, in structural coding procedures as described by Saldana and Mallette (2016), these twelve broad and emergent themes were sorted numerous times, and eventually, three overarching classifications became apparent with respect to SWPBIS: Organizational Priorities, Leadership Opportunities, and Meeting the Needs of All (Figure 2). Structural coding is similar to axial coding wherein categories are developed which encompass lots of apparently related data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This inductive process was primarily focused on the interview data and the field notes. The criteria for each category is intended to allow for exclusive membership for each of the emergent themes. The category, Organizational Priorities, is a classification which encompasses the philosophical or visionary components of a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation. The Leadership Opportunities category was created to group those pieces of

implementation that require the intentional leadership of the principal, including decision-making and problem-solving. Lastly, the category of Meeting the Needs of All concerns the broader organizational objectives that involve attending to the needs of the various groups of stakeholders who are part of a school community.

The SET and TFI did not yield much helpful information at this point as the reported percentages of implementation fidelity did not seem to add further to my understanding of the perceptions and attitudes revealed in participant interviews. This may be attributed to the limitations discussed above. It may also be due to the fact that the SET and TFI encompass responses from many different stakeholders in a school with respect to SWPBIS, or that the assessments themselves do not focus on the same subsets of SWPBIS as the interview probes of this study.

Figure 2. Thematic Categorizations of Principal Responses to SWPBIS Probes.



Causation Coding

After determining three categories using the structural coding method, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) method of causation coding was utilized to look at these statements for their possible environmental impact within the school as an organizational entity. Saldana and Mallette (2016) suggest causation coding be used to make sense of emergent themes as drivers within the observed environment. Pickton and Wright (1998) made the case that SWOT is only truly valuable when it is used as an analytical tool, engendering conversation about organizational characteristics or patterns within the context of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, or threats. Helms and Nixon (2010) discuss one limitation of SWOT analysis is that “it does not provide actual strategies” in response to categorization (p. 236). By listing themes in SWOT quadrants, leaders can better understand how to use strengths and opportunities to overcome weaknesses and threats. According to SWOT analysis theory, strengths and weaknesses are said to be internal factors, and opportunities and threats are external. Within the scope of this study, the concept of internal versus external requires some out-of-the-box thinking; however, when one considers the parameters of this study are to examine perceptions and attitudes of elementary principals, it is then that the concepts of internal and external can be applied to principals’ leadership of SWPBIS Tier 3. In other words, when considering each emergent theme during SWOT analysis, it is necessary to ask, “Is it internal or external to the principal as the leader?” This task was rather difficult as eliminating bias is nearly impossible due to the subjective nature of analyzing qualitative data in this manner. As Pickton and Wright stated, here is where the value lies as emergent themes in conjunction with the SWOT categorization offers rich discussion points for future decision-making. It is when the emergent themes and assigned SWOT categories are considered within the conceptual framework of

Kotter (1996, 2006) that new knowledge about the leadership perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of this study’s participants begins to take shape.

Each of the twelve statements were assigned to SWOT sections of a 4-part chart, and this did not result in clear-cut, stand-alone categorizations. Many of the twelve themes fit into more than one of the SWOT boxes (Table 2). This analysis is discussed throughout Chapter 5.

Table 2. SWOT of 12 Initial Emergent Themes.

STRENGTHS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SWPBIS as a systems-approach is worthy of dedicated time by the school principal. • A school principal must prioritize implementation fidelity for SWPBIS Tiers 1 and 2 before embarking on a Tier 3 initiative. • The principal is the most skilled, or has the widest variety of expertise, with regard to behavioral interventions, due to depth and breadth of experience. • The principal makes decisions, oversees and coordinates SWPBIS tiered intervention efforts. • The principal works in tandem with other staff to make decisions. • The principal prioritizes modeling SWPBIS expectations for all stakeholders. • SWPBIS vision is aligned to the goals of the school.
WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The principal is the most skilled, or has the widest variety of expertise, with regard to behavioral interventions, due to depth and breadth of experience. • The principal makes decisions, oversees and coordinates SWPBIS tiered intervention efforts. • Ongoing professional development is important to success of SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation.
OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A school principal must prioritize implementation fidelity for SWPBIS Tiers 1 and 2 before embarking on a Tier 3 initiative. • SWPBIS Tier 3 presents as an opportunity for growth for all stakeholders in the school. • The principal makes decisions, oversees and coordinates SWPBIS tiered intervention efforts. • The principal works in tandem with other staff to make decisions. • SWPBIS Tier 3 interventions and supports are necessary because negative or unsafe behaviors decrease time on learning for all. • The principal prioritizes modeling SWPBIS expectations for all stakeholders.

Table 2 continued
OPPORTUNITIES

- It is a primary responsibility of the principal to “handle” push back or resistance to staff who are reluctant to buy into SWPBIS vision.
- Ongoing professional development is important to success of SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation.
- Parents are important stakeholders in SWPBIS Tier 3 intervention and supports implementation.

THREATS

- A school principal must prioritize implementation fidelity for SWPBIS Tiers 1 and 2 before embarking on a Tier 3 initiative.
- The principal makes decisions, oversees and coordinates SWPBIS tiered intervention efforts.
- It is a primary responsibility of the principal to “handle” push back or resistance to staff who are reluctant to buy into SWPBIS vision.

The SWOT analysis of emergent themes provided much to weigh in the context of the conceptual framework of Kotter (1996, 2006). The comments of the participants’ which referred to distributed leadership were mixed, for example. Some felt they were the final decision-makers for SWPBIS Tier 3 data-driven decisions and others spoke of a team approach, working with one or two other highly skilled individuals. For this reason, the theme “Principal makes decisions, oversees and coordinates efforts” is the only one that is in all four SWOT quadrants. This is very complex as the principal is the leader of the school, and one who exerts strong and clear leadership skills is likely to be a strength; however, decision-making by one person is limiting, relegating it to a weakness. Further, opportunity arises because as the most skilled person to deal with at-risk students and as the person who assigns resources in a school building, the principal can utilize leadership skills to enact change, and for the same reason it is a weakness, it is considered a threat because a successful Tier 3 implementation takes the work of many hands.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to examine how elementary principals in one suburban school district perceive and conceive facets of undertaking a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation,

and how those perceptions and attitudes impact leadership behaviors with respect to enacting transformational change in their schools. Leaders of schools are at a critical juncture because federal legislation call for inclusive practices for all students to the greatest extent possible as defined most recently in MTSS mandates (ESSA, 2015). SWPBIS is a research-based, systems-approach designed to meet the needs of all students as well as support those educators, interventionists, and other school professionals who work with at-risk students.

In Chapter 4, the data and beginning categorization show that the existing body of literature, which is primarily theoretical in nature, is supported by the aggregated themes which have resulted from participant interview responses, notes taken during field observations, and to a lesser extent, a review of pertinent sections of reports from SET and TFI assessments, which were completed separately from this study.

In Chapter 5, the conceptual framework which is based on the eight steps to sustaining organizational change as defined by Kotter (1996, 2006) serves as a lens by which to analyze the themes that emerged from structural and causation coding. It is interesting to compare the examples that naturally fit into the categories of Organizational Priorities, Leadership Opportunities, and Meeting the Needs of All; however, it is also important to consider the data which seem connected but are somehow in contrast with more frequently recurring ideas. This comprehensive application of data analysis is part of the accepted methodology that encompasses an ethnographic case study. In other words, as was discussed in Chapter 3, it is necessary to flush out that which may provide answers to the research questions, but it is also vital to examine how the participants and their perceptions, attitudes, and impacted leadership behaviors are alike and unlike. The five principals who comprise the participant group of this study have similar values, beliefs, roles and responsibilities, but they also possess different professional passions, have

varied levels and types of experience, and each assumes individual positionality within the group of participant principals, as well as in the group of district administrators at large. How these factors and themes give researchers new insight into initial steps of SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation is discussed in depth in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Undertaking an initiative such as an implementation of any of the tiers of School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) requires a systematic, intentional and evolving approach if success is to be achieved and sustained. There is ample literature about SWPBIS Tier 1 implementations and best practices recommendations for the universal tier. The body of research about SWPBIS Tier 2 is not as plentiful, but there is much to be learned from those school districts and programs that have implemented secondary supports and interventions. At the tertiary tier however, the literature is nearly wholly theoretical, and suggestive in nature, with little empirical or applied science to support the theory. While this study does look at leadership capacity with respect to SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation, the data collected are from the preparatory, and very early phases of the initiative.

Five elementary principals comprise the participant group, and data were collected through semi-structured interviews and field observations at the site schools. Also considered were reports prepared by the district using SET and TFI assessments, both research-based tools used to measure SWPBIS implementation fidelity. During the interviews, it was quite evident that principals regard responding to negative behaviors from at-risk students to be of the highest priority. These students disrupt time on learning for their peers, do not experience contiguous periods of learning themselves when these behaviors surface or manifest, and take the teacher's attention away from instruction. As noted earlier, students who exhibit these problem behaviors represent a small fraction of the student population, but they exhaust a substantial portion of resources, such as time, attention, and energy from educators at any given school. Furthermore, the research shows students with externalizing behaviors have been misplaced in substantially

separate special education classrooms, denying them an appropriate placement in the least restrictive environment (U.S. Department of Education, 2017-e). These concerns are echoed in IDEA (1997, 2004) and MTSS (ESSA, 2015) with mandates, like positive behavior intervention systems, to be instituted in all schools to ensure all students have the tools for academic success.

The three overarching findings resulted from this study: Organizational Priorities, Leadership Opportunities, and Meeting the Needs of All. They lead to an interpretation that aligns well with the four steps to organizational change which are the conceptual framework of this study. The SWOT analysis provides additional insight into the very complex nature of an initiative begun by elementary school principals to address the intense needs of our most at-risk students.

An ethnographic collective case study methodology such as this one is intended to address questions about certain facets of issues that are happening in the participant group that may provide insight into a broader picture (Creswell, 2012). Triangulation is established through multiple means of data collection, coding, and analysis in order to reduce biases, set a baseline for future replication, and endeavor to develop as rich a set of results as possible (Jonsen & Jehn, 2009). In qualitative research, there are no absolutes when analyzing the data and attempting to make sense of it in the context of a conceptual framework. However, it is possible to piece together likely truisms from the patterns and coalitions of data (or lack thereof) which inform an understanding of how principals perceive and conceive a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation, and more importantly, their role their leadership behaviors play in that initiative.

Interpretation of Findings

Within the context of Kotter's eight steps to organizational change (1996, 2006), it is pertinent to understand how the elementary principal participants in this study perceive and

regard SWPBIS systems of addressing the needs of all students, particularly the most at-risk among our students. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions and attitudes of elementary principals about a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation, and to consider leadership behaviors that may result in connection to those perceptions and attitudes. Findings inform the field about how school leaders might use SWPBIS as a systems-approach to effect transformational change. From the existing body of literature, there are recommendations about what a SWPBIS Tier 3 roll-out should look like, but there is little applied research to guide the steps of this process.

Research Questions

1. What perceptions and attitudes do principals with experience implementing SWPBIS Tiers 1 and 2 have about implementing Tier 3 interventions?
2. What is the impact of principals' perceptions and attitudes on their leadership of a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation?
3. How do principals broadly manage sustainable change in the school setting relative to SWPBIS?

Data Analysis

After open coding of the transcribed interviews and the field visit notes, and review of the SET and TFI reports, the data were organized using structural coding, selecting themes that have relevance to the research questions. Three overarching categories emerged: Organizational Priorities, Leadership Opportunities, and Meeting the Needs of All. Under each of these categories, it is possible to sort and organize the twelve themes that capture the perceptions and attitudes of the principal respondents within the context of the research questions. The themes were also assigned to strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) during causation

coding. To interpret how these perceptions and attitudes manifest into leadership capacity with respect to implementing a SWPBIS Tier 3 initiative and effecting transformational change in their schools, examining participants' responses and observed behaviors and considering how these data reflect transformational change efforts are key.

Once the themes emerged and assignment of SWOT categories took place, it was necessary to answer the research questions within the context of the conceptual framework. Kotter (1996, 2006) put forth that there are eight steps to creating and sustaining transformative change in an organization. The first four of Kotter's (2006) eight steps to enacting change are "establishing a sense of urgency, forming a guiding coalition, creating a vision, and communicating the vision" (p. 243). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state thematic analysis should result in sensitive and congruent findings that provide "a conceptual overview of the landscape" (p. 213). This conceptual overview "can lead to tentative hypotheses and explanations" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 230).

Establishing a Sense of Urgency

Kotter (1996, 2006) defines establishing a sense of urgency as identifying where and why change is needed. While none of the overarching structural categories of Organizational Priorities, Leadership Opportunities, and Meeting the Needs of All, can fit completely under any of Kotter's steps toward organizational change, it is possible to make connections between some of the thematic categories and the conceptual framework of this study. One interview response that seems to directly exemplify this step of establishing a sense of urgency is "I don't let big problems get away from me." This statement demonstrates a principal's understanding that there are problems in a school, such as at-risk students who are in need of intensive interventions and supports, and these problems are an opportunity to apply leadership skills to transform the school

climate while also meeting each student's needs. In essence, being involved in SWPBIS Tier 3 intervention planning and implementation is a representation that a principal recognizes some students have concerning or intensive behaviors that significantly interfere with their ability to succeed in the classroom and with the learning environment of others, and that multi-tiered systems of support and interventions is needed to effectively deal with these matters over the long-term (FL Dept. of Education, 2014). Further, this statement by the participant indicates the principal accepts this multi-faceted responsibility as the school's leader.

The concept of "consistency" began to surface as a primary aspect in the perceptions and attitudes of the participants early on in analysis. That all of the respondents cited the need for implementation fidelity to SWPBIS Tiers 1 and 2 as necessary before undertaking a Tier 3 initiative also denotes that principals must drive the process, and not simply manage it. "Change, by definition, requires creating a new system, which in turn always demands leadership" (Kotter, 2006, p. 241). This insistence on consistent SWPBIS Tier 1 and 2 implementation fidelity is considered a strength, as well as an opportunity and a threat. It is a strength because solid Tier 1 and Tier 2 implementations support a SWPBIS Tier 3 program, and are in the best interest of students. It can be considered an opportunity because there is always room for improvement, and new students, who arrive in schools each fall or as transfers during the school year, present educators with new groups to teach and support. The threat classification is related to the amount of time and resources needed to sustain all three tiers consistently and with fidelity. As demonstrated in the body of literature, if Tier 1 efforts are abandoned, not effectively supported, or fail, it is not possible for the subsequent tiers to succeed (Nese et al., 2016). It is here that the SET and TFI data play their most prominent role. The results of the assessment of the district's SWPBIS implementation, thus far, do not reflect the same levels of confidence in consistency of

implementation fidelity with respect to SWPBIS Tiers 1 and 2 as the principal interview responses. McIntosh et al. (2017) discuss that self-assessment, such as how the TFI is administered, sometimes leads to inflated and inaccurate results. This possible limiting factor, in itself may be considered a threat, but more research on how these aspects fit together or contradict each other is needed.

Other themes that align with establishing a sense of urgency which fit into multiple quadrants of the SWOT analysis also show that, although some factors may be considered strengths, some of those same themes can also be considered weaknesses or threats. For instance, “The principal is the most skilled, or has the widest variety of expertise, with regard to behavioral interventions, due to depth and breadth of experience” is a strength and a weakness. A principal who has a profound understanding of applicable interventions and how to utilize them is an asset and is a valuable resource for a team who is embarking on a plan to better meet the needs of intensely at-risk students. One participant responded that it is important “to be emulated by staff who have not had as much expertise or education.” However, when the success of the implementation rests solely on one person, it is difficult or impossible to sustain. Kotter (2006) states “just getting a transformation program started requires the aggressive cooperation of many individuals” (p. 240).

Forming a Guiding Coalition

Of the four of Kotter’s eight steps to organizational change (1996, 2006) which are the focus of this study’s conceptual framework, perceptions and attitudes that may be related to forming a guiding coalition are probably the most clearly established from the data collected in this study. To varying degrees, each of the participants spoke of distributed leadership when implementing tiered interventions and supports. Every site school has a SWPBIS team that meets

at least monthly, but the Tier 2 and Tier 3 team structure is not consistent among all the site schools. The schools all report they have Tier 2 and Tier 3 teams, but how and when data are reviewed in order to analyze results and make decisions varies across the sites.

One of Kotter's (2006) defining points for the second step in organizational change, forming a guiding coalition, is that a leader must put together a team with "enough power to lead the change effort" (p. 243). In a corporation, this may include chairmen, presidents, vice presidents, and managers; however, in a school, there is no such hierarchy of power. The principal has the bulk of responsibility for leading the school solely on his or her shoulders. This is an important distinction because Kotter (2006) argues "efforts that don't have a powerful enough guiding coalition can make apparent progress for a while. But, sooner or later, the opposition gathers itself together and stops the change" (p. 244).

On the SWPBIS teams, the importance of including teachers, school counselors, and other interventionists is a common thread in the data. Often when principals talked about the make-up of the teams or the work they carry out, the responses were about the collective, such as "we ought to try to include more people" and "we need to work on this, as a school, as a district, and as a society." The participants expressed attitudes that implementation of SWPBIS is a collaborative effort, and that Tier 3 implementation requires multiple team members who have varied but specialized skills and knowledge. In practice, the participants listed themselves, assistant principals (if they have one), adjustment counselors, and behaviorists on staff as the members of the Tier 3 team. One response portrays a principal's thoughts on this, "I try to push some onto teachers, school adjustment counselors, the behaviorist, so all staff are problem solvers. I don't want to be the only one controlling it."

Thematic analysis shows planning and implementation of monthly meetings are shared among stakeholders in many of the site schools, but this is more in regard to SWPBIS Tier 1 efforts that deal with universal, preventative instruction for all students in the school. It does appear, from the data, that although the participants are relying on the SWPBIS Tier 1 teams to keep the initiative to implement subsequent tiers fresh, there is less democratic decision-making about Tier 3 implementation than for the other tiers. This is likely explained by multiple bits of data that indicate principals perceive decisions about intensively at-risk students must be made by highly trained, experienced individuals, such as themselves. The emergent themes that discuss the perceptions that the principal is the most skilled and is the most experienced due to levels of education and expertise, and that the principal makes decisions, oversees and coordinates SWPBIS tiered intervention efforts, indicate that while the principal has the ideal of shared leadership, it is not yet in place for the Tier 3 initiative. This is not surprising when one considers that this implementation is in the beginning phase, and there has not been professional development offered to large groups of stakeholders.

The lack of professional development to date is noted as an obstacle to be overcome in order to carry out a consistent implementation of SWPBIS Tier 3. Kotter (2006) lists two critical components to forming a powerful guiding coalition that are “assembling a group with enough power to lead the change effort” and “encouraging the group to work together as a team” (p. 243). On the SWOT analysis, the theme of “Ongoing professional development is key” is noted as a weakness and as an opportunity. SWPBIS Tier 3 was expressed by participants to be “a huge area of growth for everybody, including myself”, which points to the idea that even the principals, who describe themselves as the most skilled at working with at-risk students, need more professional training and sustained support. Recommendations in the literature state

“training staff to support students with severe behavior problems” is a process that involves many complex factors and barriers. “To have new practices implemented with fidelity and sustained, it is important to have knowledge of the factors impacting how organizations (i.e., schools and districts) and individuals (i.e., educators) accept and apply new strategies” (Florida Department of Education, 2014, p. 29).

The thematic data are interesting because they show that, while the principals look to the SWPBIS site-based team for input and coalition-building, decisions concerning Tier 3 implementation are primarily the responsibility of the principal at these early stages. The study regarding SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation published by the FL Department of Education (2014) states that comprehensive professional development trainings are key, due to the “higher level skills required for serving students with severe and complex behavior challenges” (p. 16). This statement echoes existing research that professional development must be consistent, and each stage of a multi-phase initiative must be addressed through trainings and support (Algozzine et al., 2012; Barrett et al., 2008; Sugai & Horner, 2006). It does seem that the data show the participants of this study understand the necessity for high-quality and sustained professional development if a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation is to be successful. One principal stated, “We try to figure out what people need and give PD to meet their needs.”

As discussed in Chapter 1, the site district partners with the University of Massachusetts, who provide some training offerings, in the form of topical seminars, and consultation each month. The trainings are based on broad SWPBIS implementation topics and are not meant to focus on leadership aspects of such an initiative as the attending group often includes a variety of personnel from participating schools in the site district and of surrounding communities. The consultation aspect is elemental in nature, in that graduate students visit the schools for a few

hours each month to offer suggestions, discuss concerns, or answer questions. The topical seminars provide resources and information about implementation, but they are a few hours once a month. This minimal commitment does not reflect the training and support needs recommended by the existing body of literature (Algozzine et al., 2012; Barrett et al., 2008; Sugai & Horner, 2006), and raises an important question: if the principals are not receiving adequate, ongoing training and supports themselves, how is it possible for them to develop PD for their staff? The data and literature seem to imply that forming a coalition is, on the one hand, fairly easy, but it is the valuable “guiding” facet that may be the stickler. Without comprehensive and sustained professional development, how can the coalition know what it does not know?

As Wheatley (2006) states,

Individual behaviors co-evolve as individuals interact with system dynamics. If we want to change individual or local behaviors, we have to tune into these system-wide influences. We have to use what is going on in the whole system to understand individual behavior, and we have to inquire into individual behavior to learn about the whole (Kindle Locations 2121-2123).

In other words, at both the site level and around the district, principals leading transformative change through a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation must consider individual *and* organizational behaviors within their school in addition to their own leadership behaviors as part of a guiding coalition for the whole district. Wheatley’s point can be understood within the scope of this study in that it is critical for leaders who embark on a SWPBIS Tier 3 initiative to avoid getting entrenched in their individual or “local” behaviors and problems so that they lose sight of the systems-approach initiative that intends to bring about positive outcomes for at-risk students and overall transformative change. It is pertinent to remember that one of the themes in the body of

literature regarding why few schools reach a point of implementing a SWPBIS Tier 3 initiative was the difficulty in sustaining a consistent level of fidelity of implementation across all three tiers, which is critical for success.

A recommendation discussed in a subsequent section, is that the principals from the study site district consider forming a guiding coalition amongst themselves in order to understand the difficulties of producing transformational change, while also learning about the intricacies of SWPBIS Tier 3.

Creating a Vision

Kotter (2006) defines a vision as “something that helps clarify the direction in which an organization needs to move” (p. 244). The data show the principal participants of this study understand the need for SWPBIS Tier 3 interventions and supports to meet the needs of all students. For example, one principal stated “More engagement leads to less (negative) behaviors, which increases student achievement, and that is the primary goal of any school. Isn’t it?” Another participant expressed “the goal is for every student to like being where he is.” A third point made in an interview is “Inclusive practices and universal design for learning are two district-wide goals that complement SWPBIS.”

What also appears to be common in the interview data is that all stakeholders at each school do not yet share a common vision. The SET data shows high levels of consistent implementation reported in the two categories of focus: Decision-Making and Management; however, it is also interesting to note TFI data seem to conflict with data from the SET. Data from the TFI reports, measuring fidelity of implementation, include a range from 32% to 91%, with the mean being 62.8%. This seems to support the data gathered at site visits which indicate consistent implementation of SWPBIS may not be firmly rooted in the school culture just yet.

Field observation visits of student lunch periods showed that the principals and the SWPBIS teams have designed and implemented many procedures, systems and concrete reminders of behavioral expectations for all students. In some schools, posters with cafeteria expectations that matched the school's SWPBIS motto (i.e., ROAR stands for Respect, Ownership, Achievement, Responsibility) were posted. Whether the expectations were posted or not, it was apparent from observing the students that expectations had been taught, modeled, and reinforced throughout each of the site schools. This is not to say the reinforcement was necessarily positive across all sites, however. Some examples of positive reminders and reinforcement are "Lunchboxes are to use. We keep them by our sides" and "Grade four, you deserve a big compliment for clearing all your trash without being reminded." These data imply the cafeteria staff who made these statements did adhere to a SWPBIS vision, but other non-examples indicate a lack of adherence to a SWPBIS vision. In some schools, data were collected that were non-examples of expressing behavioral expectations in a positive frame, such as "Watch out, _____", "I still hear talking, _____," or "It is not fair for others to have to clean up after you." From the structure of these field observations, it is impossible to know if the students to whom these statements were directed are Tier 3 students, but these negative directives are contrary to SWPBIS basics of reinforcing positive behaviors and ignoring undesired behaviors to avoid inadvertently reinforcing unwanted behaviors by providing adult attention. It is necessary to teach students to clean up after themselves, for example, and SWPBIS procedures would favor "please be sure to take all your wrappers and leftovers to the trash bin" instead of a statement meant to induce guilt-driven compliance. Once the expected behavior is emitted, reinforcement of that behavior occurs, and that behavior is more likely to occur in the future.

Kotter (1996) states there are the vital keys to a proper vision. An appropriate vision to effect organizational change first must inform members of what is the end point of the entire process. For SWPBIS Tier 3, that end point would likely be akin to meeting the needs of all students and empowering all stakeholders to be active participants in that initiative, as this sums up the problem of practice within context of creating a vision. Secondly, a vision is motivational. It provides all members of the group with inspiration and drive to work toward achieving transformational change. Lastly, a clearly understood vision defines roles and responsibilities, as well as expected contributions of stakeholders. In this study, it appears that this is a work in progress. Some principals responded with visionary statements, like the examples cited above, but others did not. From the field observations however, it seems that the embracing of a vision concerning SWPBIS Tier 3 among school staff is inconsistent. This could be due to a lack of vision, but it may also be attributed to the newness of the SWPBIS Tier 3 initiative; the lack of experience by an individual principal regarding planning and delivering professional development on SWPBIS tertiary interventions and supports; or that the time allotted to or structure of the site visits were not adequate or appropriate to capture fully aspects of staff behaviors that would demonstrate their understanding and dedication to a SWPBIS vision. These possibilities will be discussed in the Recommendations for Further Study section below.

The findings concerning creating a vision are also applicable to Kotter's (1996, 2006) fourth step to organizational change, communicating the vision, as it is difficult to separate out perceptions and attitudes to determine if there is a vision or not, if it simply has not been communicated effectively. One principal states "If you don't include all stakeholders, you run the risk of not having full investment", and this response concisely displays the idea that all members of the school community need to possess a clear understanding of the vision of the

SWPBIS Tier 3 initiative, and know how the vision will be achieved in order to be invested in its success.

Communicating the Vision

As stated, steps three, creating a vision, and four, communicating the vision, are two distinct parts of the change process, but they are critically interdependent. Collaborating with team members to carry out implementation of any of the SWPBIS tiers is key, but a recurring theme shared by the principal participants was the idea that time dedicated to SWPBIS, and especially getting Tier 3 established, is time well-spent. “SWPBIS is worthy of dedicated time,” is an Organizational Priority that is labeled a strength. At each school, there are examples of how principals use faculty meeting, and for some, school-wide meeting times, to work on SWPBIS implementation. Because Tier 3 typically targets 2-5% of the student population, and the interventions and supports are highly individualized, it seems principals feel that they need to take a different approach to communicate the vision for SWPBIS Tier 3 than for Tiers 1 and 2. Their perceptions and attitudes appear to be two-pronged:

1. The vision must be communicated to and understood by all in order for SWPBIS Tier 3 to be effective in meeting the needs of all;
2. Because the interventions and supports are so individualized and require high levels of behavioral expertise, it is not something that can be covered in a one-day workshop with a large group of staff.

In other words, the vision is likely in place in each of the principal’s minds, and is discussed and communicated with key stakeholders, who comprise the core of a guiding coalition, but there is much work to be done toward achieving consistent belief in SWPBIS Tier 3, as a systems-approach to effect transformational change, among the stakeholders at large.

It is no small task to begin a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation. As principals stated in the interviews, the success of SWPBIS Tier 1 and 2 is crucial to a successful launch of Tier 3, and further, Tiers 1 and 2 require sustained attention and resources if they are to continue to be effective. Hence, that theme was considered a strength, opportunity, and threat. “Regular and consistent communication to all stakeholders is key” was a strong theme as were “concentrated or concerted effort” and “consistency of implementation is important.” Because the implementation is so multi-faceted, it is impossible for one person, such as the principal, to continue to be the decision-maker, trainer, communicator, cheerleader, and so on. This distribution of responsibility requires communication of the vision, and for key stakeholders to be brought on as members of the guiding coalition, or risk failure.

Kotter (1996) discusses that a powerful way to share the vision is to lead by example. This seems to be the most prevalent way the principal participants communicate the vision at this early phase of SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation. The idea expressed by one principal who states she acts (with respect to at-risk students) so that her expertise and approach may be emulated by other adults with less experience is testament to Kotter’s theory.

Kotter (1996, 2006) puts forth that “everyone can’t be put through the same experience as the guiding coalition,” meaning that the key players and early adopters of an initiative are likely to have the advantage due to more experience and training by virtue of being part of the initiative longer and in more contextual ways; however, when more stakeholders listen to, and are able to discuss the vision, even in casual or informal and unplanned conversations, that valuable communication of the vision that can effect powerful results. Open communication provides a forum for people to get questions answered, fears allayed, and misconceptions clarified. Returning to the idea that ongoing, high quality professional development is key to the success of

a SWPBIS Tier 3 initiative, during two-way discussions about the facets of implementation, it is probable that topics or ideas that are shared by many in the group will emerge, helping school administrators to understand where professional development resources should be prioritized.

A benefit, according to Kotter (1996), of communicating the vision clearly and frequently is that it builds trust and credibility. “Transparency” is a relatively newer term for this concept and being open and honest about SWPBIS Tier 3 as a systems-approach for effecting change, and the process involved in implementing it, strengthens the path for change.

One area that offers an opportunity for growth is including parents in the SWPBIS Tier 3 process. Principal participants agree on the idea that parents are important in the quest toward meeting the needs of all students, but the respondents listed several obstacles during the interviews, included in such statements as, “accountability on the family side is often lacking”, “it’s hard to coordinate all stakeholders, including parents,” and “students need a lot more than what we can do during the school day.” A principal attested, “We need to do a better job at working to get home involved.” Parents who are reluctant to participate or are uninvolved in their child’s education may have myriad reasons for these feelings. This is far too broad a topic to include in this study, but the comments by the principals show that having parents as part of a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation is within their conceptualization of the vision. Perhaps when the guiding coalition members feel more confident with the implementation of SWPBIS Tier 3 as it goes on, a natural and logical way to introduce parents into the process will be revealed. How parents impact a SWPBIS implementation is certainly a rich topic for future research.

Implications

The ways in which perceptions and attitudes of this study’s principal participants about SWPBIS Tier 3 impact the implementation of the initiative are numerous. As shown in the

thematic categorization of interview responses, three overarching concepts emerged: Organizational Priorities, Leadership Opportunities, and Meeting the Needs of All. These categories are all substantial responsibilities of a school leader, and it is easy to see that adopting a systems-approach to address intensive and chronic negative behaviors among students is no small feat. This is stated in the body of existing literature as a probable reason that there is a dearth of research on SWPBIS Tier 3 implementations (Fairbanks et al., 2008; Kaufman et al., 2007; Scott et al., 2010; Westling, 2010).

There are two prevalent ideas that can be applied to most aspects of the SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation. The first is the idea that consistency is crucial. Fidelity of implementation with SWPBIS Tiers 1 and 2 must be present, and this integrity must be maintained through an undertaking with respect to Tier 3. Further, the principal must be consistent in his or her communication of, and dedication to, the vision. This includes working to support key team members and early adopters, as well as meeting the challenges of overcoming obstacles presented by reluctant staff. School leaders must also be consistent in their pursuit of growing these implementations as school populations and staff change, as well as when new challenges threaten continued success.

A second implication of importance is that of sustained professional development as a critical element of a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation. Without meaningful and intentional training by highly skilled and supportive instructors, evolution of a culture of effective data usage and problem-solving to meet the needs of all students is not probable. One method to achieve this is through instructional coaching, and this is discussed in more detail in a later section.

Broadly Managing Change through SWPBIS Tier 3

It appears the principal participants of this study have engaged some of the eight steps to organizational change as defined by Kotter (1996, 2006) already in action. They each acknowledge the need for change, and work diligently to establish a sense of urgency, in order to more effectively meet the needs of all students, including those most at-risk. Secondly, there is, in every one of the site schools, staff who are actively implementing tertiary interventions and supports for those students who need them. These folks form the backbone of a guiding coalition and serve as ambassadors toward achieving organizational goals and bringing more members into the fold, as the implementations gather steam and continue. Creating a vision is the third step of where principals were observed to be working to effect transformational change in their own schools, and almost mirror each other's efforts in striving to meet the needs of all students. The interview responses include discussion about students being happy to be part of a school community, improving student achievement, being better partners with families, and supporting staff to be well-trained problem-solvers. Finally, the fourth step, as defined by Kotter, communicating the vision, is in the infancy stage as developing the vision itself, and how to begin to work toward achieving it, are just taking shape among the participants and their guiding coalitions during this beginning stage.

Without having explicit background knowledge of the conceptual framework, it is apparent that the principal participants of this study are following the eight steps of transforming an organization through change agency as defined by Kotter (1996, 2006). The emergent themes and SWOT analysis show the progression that Kotter theorizes is present. This applied research evidence supports the conceptual framework within the context of leadership and SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation.

Recommendations for Action

This study focuses on how the perceptions and attitudes of one group of elementary principals impact their leadership of an implementation of targeted supports and interventions within a systems-approach to address chronic, negative behaviors in at-risk students. Cook, Lyon, Kubergovic, Wright, and Zhang (2015) describe how school teams need to be able to establish an implementation of a continuum of interventions to diminish unwanted behaviors, build a positive school climate, increase a sustained better quality of life, increase prosocial skills, improve levels of job satisfaction among school employees, and improve student achievement outcomes. It is clear from the literature and the data analysis that solid consistency of implementation among SWPBIS Tiers 1 and 2 is very likely necessary for success with a Tier 3 initiative. The principals assert their belief in and accept their responsibility for oversight of ensuring consistency. These perceptions and attitudes are bolstered by Cofey and Horner (2012) who state SWPBIS is dependent on active participation by school principals, and by Richter et al. (2012) who found principal leadership is a primary driving factor in implementation of SWPBIS tiered systems.

While there is still little applied research to understand how to best implement a SWPBIS Tier 3 initiative, it is possible to use the literature about SWPBIS Tier 1 and Tier 2 to attempt to forge a roadmap, or as the FL Department of Education (2014) has published, a blueprint. The prominence of consistency, as a prevalent element, is found in the existing literature regarding SWPBIS and in the data from the principal interviews (i.e., Algozzine et al., 2012; Sugai & Horner, 2006). This element was discussed in Chapter 1 as a layered continuum in which the three tiers work in concert to support all learners (Carter et al., 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2017-b). Furthermore, consistency aligns with the recommendations of Kotter (1996,

2006) who urges leaders to identify problems, enlist key players in the cause, gain understanding what must be done and how change will occur, and provide members of the organization with information and reminders about the change process. As Kotter discusses, establishing a sense of urgency, forming a guiding coalition, creating a vision, and communicating the vision, in addition to the remaining four steps that are not included in the focus of this study, require an iterative process (1996, 2006). By consciously revisiting each of the steps during a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation, while also attending to sustaining fidelity of implementation to Tiers 1 and 2, consistency can be a positive driver in the quest for transformational change.

In the site schools, instructional coaching, in the form of a SWPBIS Liaison, was in place at the start of the SWPBIS Tier 1 implementation as discussed in Chapter 1, but this position was cut due to budgetary demands. The document published by the FL Department of Education (2014) states “Instructional coaching generally involves professionals with expertise in a particular area who then work closely to enhance instruction and support practices with the ultimate goal of positively impacting student achievement” (p. 35). This coaching would need to address the professional development needs of the principals as well as they have received little training, especially regarding SWPBIS Tier 3 interventions and supports. Principals would need to use their leadership skills to make sure professional development learning is applied in the classroom and other areas of the school, and to allocate resources toward procuring quality professional development over the long term.

One previously mentioned recommendation is that the principals of this study site district consider forming their own guiding coalition as a professional learning community (PLC) to support each other and collaborate in order to further develop problem-solving skills and a richer understanding of Organizational Priorities, Leadership Opportunities, and Meeting the Needs of

All. Because the literature on best practices to implement a SWPBIS Tier 3 initiative is primarily theoretical in nature, using a PLC process to identify common elements, trends, and obstacles may provide school leaders with a forum that can support their efforts in real-time. A PLC focused on SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation may also offer an opportunity for the principals to share resources, and to create “one voice” to facilitate effecting change on a larger scale.

Referring to the discussion in Chapter 3 that an ethnographic collective case study examines a shared culture, a school leadership PLC focusing on SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation may offer opportunities for long-range and multi-faceted study. This important recommendation to create a leadership guiding coalition PLC would be in addition to district committee and site-based SWPBIS tiered team meetings, and should complement, not take the place of, directed and intentional professional development on SWPBIS Tier 3 topics. A primary objective, for instance, of a principal guiding coalition PLC might be to make collective decisions about how to best use a SWPBIS instructional coach, (if the position were to be reinstated), across the district to establish and sustain consistency through all the site schools.

Recommendations for Further Study

As has been reiterated several times throughout these chapters, much more research and attention need to be focused on implementation of SWPBIS Tier 3 in the near future. News headlines that tell us about violence in schools and, in some cases, extreme negative, anti-social behaviors concern school personnel and community stakeholders alike. SWPBIS as a systems-approach is designed to meet the needs of students along a continuum with targeted, and sometimes intensive and individualized interventions and supports. Future implementations of SWPBIS Tier 3 efforts will hopefully provide data on best practices, and so, it is recommended that researchers and educators continue to work on learning more about SWPBIS in general, but

especially how to make tertiary interventions and supports work within a school environment.

Two prominent areas that offer rich opportunities of future research include continuous regeneration of SWPBIS initiatives and cultural proficiency as aspects of SWPBIS. Additional opportunities for future study include

1. researching perceptions and attitudes about SWPBIS Tier 3 with respect to change leadership in a longitudinal study;
2. researching if the perceptions, attitudes, and resulting leadership behaviors are found among principals of other elementary schools who are embarking on a SWPBIS Tier 3 initiative;
3. researching if the perceptions, attitudes, and resulting leadership behaviors are mirrored in middle and/ or high schools with respect to SWPBIS Tier 3;
4. studying if a principal group that comprises a guiding coalition affects SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation success;
5. understanding if Kotter's eight steps to organizational change (1996, 2006), in their entirety, are effective in guiding transformational change in schools;
6. researching if there are improved student achievement outcomes that can be attributed to SWPBIS efforts;
7. learning how to best develop and deliver sustained and high-quality professional development for all school staff involved in a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation;
8. studying how parents and families impact a SWPBIS Tier 3 systems-approach in elementary, or other, school settings;
9. and, replicating this study in whole or part to establish external validity.

Limitations

It would be remiss to fail to include some other information that was presented as challenges during the course of this study. As was discussed earlier, subjectivity may have played a role in the data collected. The semi-structured interview format allows the participants to provide information as they saw fit in response to the ten interview probes. It did not appear that the principals were anything short of forthcoming, but it is natural to assume the responses included some data that was affected by the priorities and levels of understanding regarding SWPBIS Tier 3 of each of the participants. However, as this study examined perceptions and attitudes, and the impact thereof with respect to leadership behaviors, this is acceptable and in keeping with the intent of this study. The interview probes themselves proved unwieldy at times as they are wordy, declarative statements. Some participants responded easily to the prompts, and others seemed to struggle with the format. Whether their struggles were due to the level of comfort with being interviewed, the subject matter, the probe format, or some other factor, is unknown.

There seems to be conflicting definitions of implementation fidelity when one looks at the SET and TFI data, in comparison to observed SWPBIS behaviors and procedures, in some of the site schools. This leads me to believe that the SET and TFI data, as it has been prepared in this district's reports, may be inconclusive regarding implementation fidelity and progress. Perhaps these assessments are not being utilized properly when SWPBIS teams are reporting on presence or absence of certain aspects of SWPBIS tiered systems, or maybe these reports are not highly congruent with the purposes of this study. It was disappointing that these two research-based tools were not of more analytical value in this study, but as the SET and TFI deal with quantitative assessment of implementation, and this study focuses on perceptions and attitudes

on a qualitative basis, it may be simply that more research needs to be done to understand how all these facets may work together to better inform understanding of a complex process.

As with the prominent finding that high-quality and ongoing professional development is critical to the success of a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation, it is not possible to understand how the dearth of formal and consistent training of these principals, and their site-based, newly-forming guiding coalitions, may have influenced their responses that comprise the data about the perceptions, attitudes and resulting leadership behaviors concerning transformational change.

Conclusion

Because the body of existing literature about SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation is theoretical in nature, it was necessary to identify common elements among the leadership behaviors of the participants in this study to understand how they perceive initiating a SWPBIS Tier 3 systems-approach to effect transformational change in their school organization and for all members of the school community. These common elements resulted in twelve themes that were then categorized as Organizational Priorities, Leadership Opportunities, and Meeting the Needs of All. The themes were also applied, using causation coding, to a SWOT analysis to better understand what each of these themes means within the context of a school-based SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation.

Chronic and intensely negative behaviors that plague our students result in lost instructional time due to disruptions and discipline issues; misidentification and placement of Tier 3 students in substantially separate special education programs when their needs are better met by individualized, targeted, intensive interventions and supports; and diminished school climate. SWPBIS Tier 3 compels school leaders to create new boundaries that better meet the

needs of all stakeholders through prioritizing organizational objectives and utilization of effective and intentional leadership meant to effect transformational change.

The significance of this study has been implied in several points throughout these chapters. This study offers a glimpse of perceptions and attitudes of a group of five elementary principals as they set out on a journey with a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation. There also is much information gathered and presented herein that supports both the theoretical recommendations of SWPBIS Tier 3 literature, such as that of the FL Department of Education (2014), and the organizational change theory put forth by Kotter (1996, 2006), which was used as the conceptual framework of this study. SWPBIS fits the mandate of MTSS, part of federal legislation now known as ESSA (2015), and as such, school leaders across our country can benefit from applied research on aspects of leading implementations of these systems of interventions and supports.

The work of Kotter (1996, 2006) is not specific to SWPBIS, but the data analysis shows the first four of the eight steps to organizational change do complement and align to the initial stages of SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation. Because of the complexity of undertaking a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation, inclusion of the leadership skills and processes that best facilitate such transformational change management is recommended, and should be included in professional development about, and assessment of, SWPBIS Tier 3 implementations in a school setting.

The most important outcome to this study it is that principals who lead, and teachers and interventionists who administer Tier 3 supports, need their own multi-tiered systems of support in order to carry out a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation with consistent fidelity. To that end, a guidebook to facilitate PLC groups involved in SWPBIS Tier 3 initiatives has been developed in conjunction with this study (Appendix F). School leaders and early adopters who comprise a guiding coalition must have high-quality, ongoing professional development themselves in order

to provide it for those who take on these new methods to address maladaptive behaviors directly with at-risk students in our classrooms. This may also include consultation of recommended guidelines, such as the FL Department of Education Blueprint (2014) and other theoretical research based on SWPBIS Tier 1 and 2 best practices, to forge a long-range implementation vision that seems likely to sustain Tier 3 efforts. In addition, school leaders who take on this challenge with SWPBIS Tier 3 must find ways to support each other and develop their own systems of support. For these principals who lead the schools involved in this study, and those who follow, it seems advisable to plan with conscious intention to collaborate and support each other throughout the early stages, and perhaps beyond, by continuing to utilize leadership capacity, as described in the conceptual framework based on the eight steps to transforming an organization (Kotter, 1996, 2006). It is fitting to say that those who are embarking on SWPBIS Tier 3 in their schools, as part of a layered continuum of interventions and supports for students, will be the creators of new knowledge about this complex, but urgently needed, systems-approach.

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APPENDIX A. Interview Prompts

The Interviewer will read aloud each of the prompts and allow the participant to respond. Participants are asked to provide perceptions or explanation for their responses. The interviewer will work individually with principals to gather response data, will record (audio) responses, and will take notes, and the interviews will be transcribed by the interviewer to prepare for coding and analysis.

	Prompt to Participant: As each statement is read, please respond to include your perceptions and attitude toward the particular facets of SWPBIS and school leadership.
1	The principal exhibits leadership in SWPBIS tier three intervention processes and supports ongoing tier one and tier two efforts.
2	The principal provides leadership in SWPBIS tier three intervention development and implementation.
3	The principal is knowledgeable about MTSS requirements and effective SWPBIS tiered intervention practices.
4	Beliefs, mission statements, and goals of SWPBIS clearly address all children, including children with disabilities.
5	The principal ensures that all staff are knowledgeable about MTSS requirements and demonstrate effective SWPBIS tier three practices for children with disabilities.
6	The principal ensures that all children, including children receiving SWPBIS tier three interventions, are full participants in the school community.
7	The principal inspires everyone in the school community and provides leadership with SWPBIS tiered interventions based on an inclusive vision for the school.
8	The principal assures that goals for SWPBIS tier three interventions complement the mission and translate into practice.
9	The principal develops decision making processes and procedures that enable and encourage all staff to share ideas and solutions for improving SWPBIS tier three interventions to increase the achievement of all children.
10	The principal develops a personal network of groups and agencies that provide information concerning effective leadership with respect to SWPBIS tier three intervention implementation.

(Council for Exceptional Children and NAESP, 2001, pp. 46-53).

APPENDIX B. Letter of Request for Consent

January 2018

Dear (Colleague Name),

As an elementary principal involved in preparing to lead an implementation a School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) initiative in your school, I am writing to invite you to participate in an ethnographic collective case study to examine elementary principal perceptions and attitudes about implementation and leadership of SWPBIS Tier 3. Your input is very valuable as the body of literature shows a lack of research focused on Tier 3, especially with respect to principal involvement and leadership. This study will hopefully benefit our school district, other educators who seek to implement SWPBIS beyond the universal tier, and future researchers who may elect to study SWPBIS Tier 3. The following information is provided for your review in considering participation in this study.

Project: Principal Leadership and Tier 3 School- wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports

Purpose: This qualitative study is designed to be an ethnographic collective case study to learn how elementary principals perceive, prepare for, and lead an initiative of SWPBIS Tier 3 interventions and supports within their school.

Procedures: Participation in this research study is completely voluntary, and your participation can be withdrawn at any time before or during the study. The study will consist of two interviews (one primary interview and another to follow up on questions and for clarification as a member check), field observations at each school, and a review of each school's School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET) and Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI) data, collected by the district. Interviews and field observations will be done solely by the researcher. This study will run from February through April, 2018.

Confidentiality: Privacy of all participants will be safeguarded during and after the conclusion of this study. The researcher is bound to rules of confidentiality and to meeting all ethical and professional standards as required by law and in accordance with the University of New England's *Policies, Procedures, and Guidance on Research with Human Subjects* (March, 2010/Rev. August, 2010).

Questions: Questions about this study and/or your participation may be directed to the researcher directly via email at ckennedy5@une.edu or via phone at 413-427-0557, or you may contact Dr. Michelle Collay, Research Coordinator for the Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership, at mcollay@une.edu or via phone at 207-602-2010. Your participation in this research study is greatly appreciated. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Cynthia M. Kennedy, Principal Investigator
University of New England Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX C. Consent Form

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Project Title:

Principal Leadership of Tier 3 School- wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports

Principal Investigator(s):

Cynthia M. Kennedy, M.Ed.

University of New England

Doctoral Candidate, Ed.D.

Advisor(s): Dr. Grania Holman, Lead Advisor, University of New England

Dr. Corinna Crafton, Secondary Advisor

Sarah Boudreau, LABA, Affiliate Committee Member

You have been invited to participate in a study on how elementary principals perceive, prepare for, and lead an initiative of SWPBIS Tier 3 interventions and supports within their school. In this study, six elementary school principals will comprise the participant group.

The objective of this study is to learn how perceptions and attitudes of elementary principals may contribute to their leadership during beginning stages of an implementation of SWPBIS Tier 3 initiative. How these perceptions, attitudes, and leadership behaviors impact the implementation will be examined as well.

The purpose of the interview phase is to gather your responses to prompts about SWPBIS in your school to understand how you, as the principal and leader of the school, perceive, prepare for, and conduct an implementation of tertiary interventions and supports.

Please read this form carefully and completely. You may ask that the form be read to you. The goal of this form is to provide you with information about this research study, and if you consent to participate, it will serve as documentation of your consent. Please feel free to ask any questions that arise about this study, at any time during, or after the project is complete, by contacting the principal investigator, Cynthia M. Kennedy.

Please keep in mind the following at all times:

- You can elect to participate or you may decline. Please provide me documentation of your decision within two weeks of receipt of this invitation.
- Your participation is voluntary, and your responses are confidential.
- Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University of New England or your employer.

- If you decline to participate, no penalty shall ensure nor will you lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You may withdraw from this research study at any time, and are not compelled to provide a reason for doing so.
- If you choose to withdraw from the research, no penalty will ensure nor will you lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- During the interview phase, you will be presented with ten prompts about SWPBIS and leadership thereof. You can withdraw your consent to participate at any time, and you may decline to respond to any prompt with which you are not comfortable.
- Your name, institution's name, and all identifying information will be removed, in accordance with Federal Laws surrounding student records. No individually identifiable information will be collected.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Transcription will be done using voice recognition software and note-taking by the researcher. All notes and recordings will be securely locked and only accessible to the researcher. At the conclusion of this research, all recordings and transcripts will be destroyed.
 - Please note that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of New England may request to review research materials.
- No risks or hazards to your participation in this study, or as a result of your participation in this study, are anticipated.
- The location of each interview shall be mutually agreed upon, and will be selected to provide privacy for each participant.
- Your participation will not result in any direct benefit to you; however, it is hoped that the study will include findings relevant to leadership of SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation in elementary schools as well as opportunities for future study.
- The results of this research will be used for a doctoral research study at the University of New England. It may be submitted for further publication as a journal article or as a presentation.

A copy of your signed consent form will be maintained by the principal investigator for at least three years after the project is complete before it is destroyed. The consent forms will be stored in a secure location that only the principal investigator will have access to and will not be affiliated with any data obtained during the project.

If you would like a copy of the completed research project, you may contact the principal researcher directly.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may contact.

Olgun Guvench, M.D., Ph.D.
Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board
(207) 221-4171
irb@une.edu

You will be given a copy of this consent form.

Participant's Statement

I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.

Participant's signature/Legally authorized representative

Date

Printed name

Researcher's Statement

The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

Researcher's signature

Date

Printed name

INTRODUCTION

An elementary school teacher stands up from her work with a small group of boys and girls, as a student rips his peers' work from a bulletin board, crumples it, and throws the paper balls across the classroom. He then goes to a shelf where materials have been arranged with care for the day's math learning centers, and with a swipe of his arm, clears the shelf, sending the markers, math manipulatives, and folders flying. His classmates line up quickly and nervously at the door, preparing to evacuate to the library again, while the principal makes her way down the hall to attempt to de-escalate the situation one more time this week.

In another classroom, a high school student sits, fists clenched at her temples with teeth gritted, staring at a math assessment in frustration. Unable to quiet her rising anxiety, she gets up, utters an expletive toward the teacher, and walks out of class for the third time this semester. Scenarios such as this take place in thousands of classrooms across our country every day. Students with mental health issues such as emotional dysregulation and crippling anxiety, for instance, present regular challenges for educators and fellow students, and require intensive and individualized intervention to address this ongoing crisis in our schools (Eber, Sugai, Smith, and Scott, 2002). Certainly, when one considers the myriad interruptions to time on learning, and the residual effects such trauma inflicts on both the subject and the others in these classrooms, it is easy to define this problem in our classrooms as a crisis.

Legislation included in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA), its reauthorization in 2004, and its successor, the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA),

emphasizes that research-based methods must be adopted by school districts to address growing concerns over social-emotional dysregulation and problem behaviors in classrooms across the country. For more than two decades, behavioral researchers have used Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) with people who are defined as non-responders to traditional methods of behavior intervention (U.S. Department of Education, 2017-c). Much of this research is foundational to what is known today as School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS). While the federal government does not require schools to use SWPBIS specifically, it is the only approach that is mentioned in IDEA. In 2015, ESSA was put into effect, with a major component being multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). Because of its three-level structure, SWPBIS is an example of a multi-tiered system of support. It follows what is often referred to as a response-to-intervention (RTI) model. An RTI model is one in which a problem is defined, an intervention is implemented to overcome or correct the problem, and the response by the student is monitored for diminishment of the original problem (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2010). In an MTSS model, a teacher might use different strategies for various students for the same concept or skill based on their levels of readiness, learning styles, or need for support. This is pedagogically sophisticated, meant to meet each learner where he or she is, and requires a high level of skill and substantial planning and preparation time on the part of the teacher if it is to be done with program integrity. It also requires the consistent support of both site-based administration and that of the district as a whole.

In this dissertation entitled *Principal Leadership of Tier 3 School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports*, principal leadership of preparation and early phases of SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation was researched. This study focuses on how principals perceive an implementation of tertiary interventions for their most at-risk students, how they exert leadership behaviors within the context of such an implementation, and how principal leadership behaviors effect transformative change to positively impact student learning outcomes and improve school climate overall. This guidebook is designed for school administrators and other interventionists who embark on a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation within a school setting. In this study, principal participants were interviewed, field observations were conducted, and SWPBIS assessment reports completed separately, the School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET) and the Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI), were used as data sources. From these data, twelve themes emerged. These themes were then further grouped into three categories based on structural coding criteria. As stated in Chapter 4 of this study,

The category, Organizational Priorities, is a classification which encompasses the philosophical or visionary components of a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation. The Leadership Opportunities category was created to group those pieces of implementation that require the intentional leadership of the principal, including decision-making and problem-solving. Lastly, the category of Meeting the Needs of All concerns the broader organizational objectives that involve attending to the needs of the various groups of stakeholders who are part of a school community (p. 62-63) .

The guidance and recommendations provided in this guidebook are based on the twelve themes of the aforementioned study.

This guidebook is designed to be a resource for educators who seek to use SWPBIS to help provide at-risk students with the supports they need to be successful, to improve school climate by restoring peaceful learning environments that meet the needs of all students, and to empower all stakeholders to be part of the solution that includes data-based problem-solving. It includes a format that allows for professional learning community (PLC) discussions for school administrators, interventionists, and teachers with questions and problem-solving protocols for each module. PLC discussion points and topics are provided throughout.

The Structure of SWPBIS

SWPBIS is a systems-approach of tiered interventions and supports designed to meet the needs of all students in a school (Council for Exceptional Children and NAESP, 2001). It is based on the well-established public health model of universal, secondary, and tertiary levels, or tiers, of intervention. Tier 1 is the universal tier, and it is meant to be preventative in nature. In a school, a Tier 1 implementation would include lessons for all students to learn and practice school-wide and/ or classroom behavioral expectations. The secondary level is for those students who need differentiated instruction to learn the expectations, more time to practice, or alternative reinforcement to be motivated to comply. Tier 3 is for those high-risk students with intensive needs for targeted intervention in order to succeed (U.S. Department of Education, 2017-e).

More than 21,000 schools around the world utilize SWPBIS, and there is much quantitative and qualitative research to support its adoption. The U.S. Department of Education's

Office for Technical Support maintains the pbis.org website, which is an exhaustive resource of information about PBIS, tiered intervention, implementation, assessment and evaluation, and linked websites. Tier 1, and to a lesser degree, Tier 2 are represented in empirical and applied research abundantly, but there is very little information known about the best practices that support a Tier 3 implementation. The tiers are dependent upon one another for success. A Tier 2 implementation needs a solid Tier 1 to be consistently in place to expect success, for example, and likewise, Tier 3 requires a sound implementation of Tier 2. They are said to comprise a layered continuum of supports for students (Cook, Lyon, Kubergovic, Wright, & Zhang, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2017-d).

About 80% of a student population will respond to universal Tier 1 methods. Another approximately 15% will adopt the expected behaviors through a combination of Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports. It is only the most severely at-risk 2-5% who are candidates for tertiary interventions. This 2-5% is a small group, proportionately, who use up a large ratio of resources such as time, energy, and manpower to deal with these crisis situations day in and day out (U.S. Department of Education, 2017-e).

Principal Leadership and SWPBIS

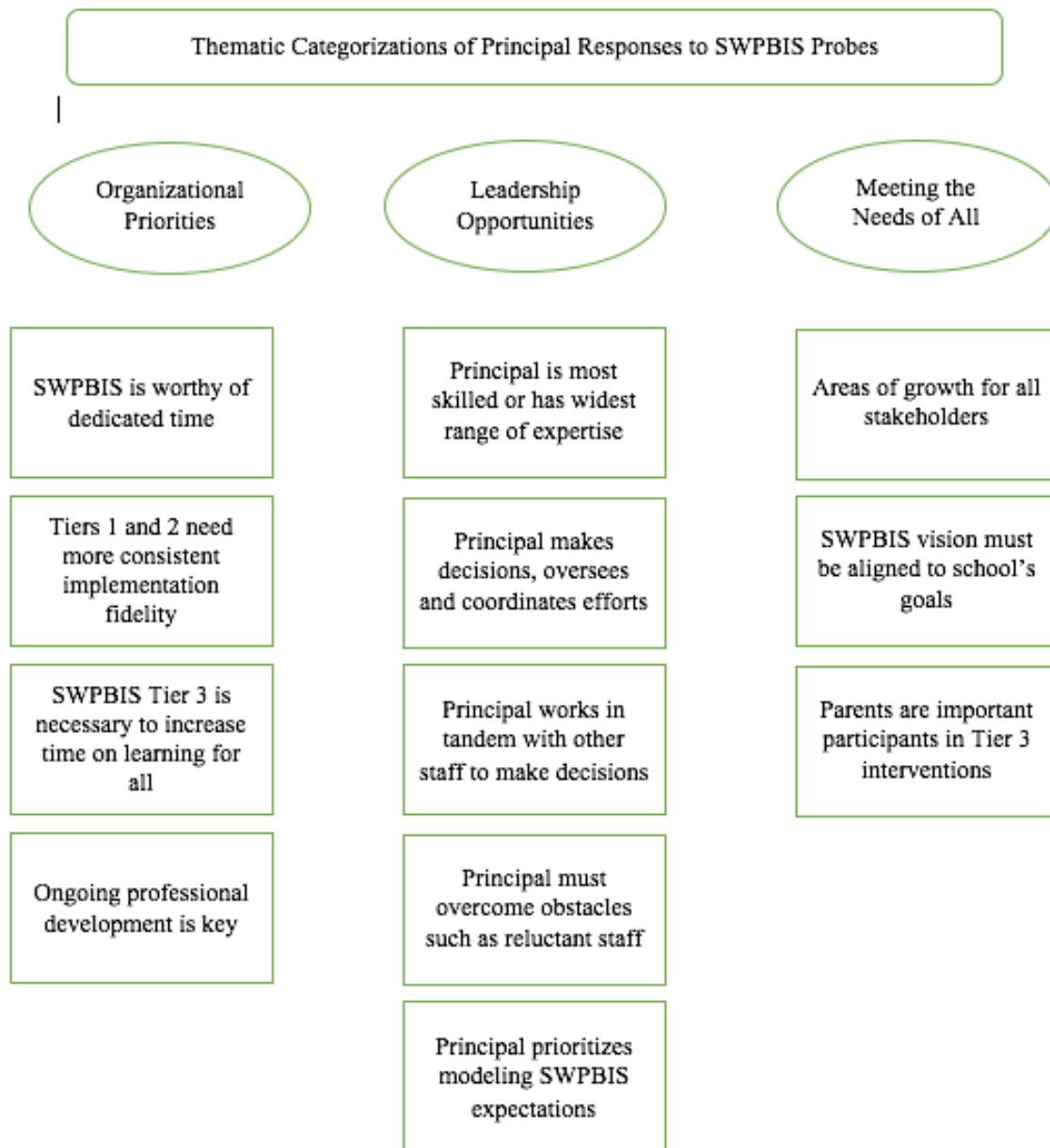
Through the interviews, field observations, and to a lesser extent, the SET and TFI reports, it was found that the principal participants utilize discrete leadership behaviors when leading an initiative, such as SWPBIS Tier 3. This study used a conceptual framework based on the eight steps to organizational change (Kotter, 1996, 2006). Because of the limited time frame

of the study and the early phases of the SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation of the site, only the first four of Kotter's steps were considered. The study shows these four foundation steps, "establishing a sense of urgency, forming a guiding coalition, creating a vision, and communicating the vision," were present among the participant group with respect to implementing SWPBIS Tier 3 (Kotter, 2006, p. 243). It is critical that school administrators and SWPBIS teams keep these factors in mind as you work through the three modules of the twelve themes. Involved and intentional leadership is crucial!

Modules

The modules have been created, as stated previously, to provide guidance for establishing a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation, and PLC questions and discussion points based on the twelve emergent themes of the study. Each module represents one of the thematic categorizations, but none of the themes are represented in any particular order. Teams using this guidebook should critically analyze, along the way, which of the modules and included themes require more time, attention, efforts, and resources based on the individual needs that have been assessed for a particular school. On the next page is Figure 2, from the study, which depicts each of the themes and the assigned category.

Figure 2. Thematic Categorizations of Principal Responses to SWPBIS Probes.



Module 1: Organizational Priorities

These themes address the philosophical components of leading a SWPBIS Tier 3 initiative and provide the foundation for creating and communicating the vision.

Theme: SWPBIS as a systems-approach is worthy of dedicated time by the school principal.

- In order to be successful, SWPBIS tiered interventions need to be implemented with consistency across time, methodology, and analysis of data. This is often referred to as “fidelity.”
- Not only do interventions need to occur according to a plan, but organizational meetings must take place to monitor implementation efforts, and make data-driven decisions. These are all factors in maintaining fidelity.
- Research has shown that without intentional leadership by the principal, a SWPBIS Tier 1 or 2 initiative is likely to fail (Cofey & Horner, 2012). This dissertation study shows the principal participants who were interviewed agree this is critical for a Tier 3 implementation as well.

Theme: A school principal must prioritize implementation fidelity for SWPBIS Tiers 1 and 2 before embarking on a Tier 3 initiative.

- As a layered continuum, the tiers of SWPBIS must complement each other and weave together to provide, if necessary, more targeted supports and interventions to at-risk students who are unable to meet behavioral expectations with universal,

Tier 1 instruction (Cressey, Whitcomb, McGilvray-Rivet, Morrison, & Shander-Reynolds, 2014).

- This can be difficult to sustain, as once a school takes on a subsequent tier, such as Tier 3, it is still necessary to sustain all of the workings of SWPBIS Tiers 1 and 2. Without the foundation of the pre-requisite tier, more intensive tiers are likely to fail (U.S. Department of Education, 2017-c).

Theme: SWPBIS Tier 3 interventions and supports are necessary because negative or unsafe behaviors decrease time on learning for all.

- Strong classroom management and ability to apply tertiary interventions and supports with facility increases the flow of learning for all students in the classroom.
- A school principal who must attend to evacuating a classroom due to an aggressive student, for example, has less time to be the instructional leader of his or her building.

Theme: Ongoing professional development is important to success of SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation.

- A major component of this study's findings and recommendations echoes the theoretical body of literature which advises that consistent and ongoing professional development is absolutely critical if SWPBIS is to succeed (Debnam, Pas, & Bradshaw, 2012; FL Dept. of Education, 2014; Sugai & Horner, 2006).
- Literature on SWPBIS Tier 3 lacks empirical or applied research, at this time, upon which professional development might be based. However, it was a strong recommendation of this study that principals form their own guiding coalition

amongst themselves as a PLC to analyze data trends, support each other with implementation questions and concerns, and pool resources to develop professional development that best meets their specific needs. This guidebook is intended to provide a scaffold for PLC such as this.

Module 1 PLC Questions and Discussion Topics

If your school is embarking on or considering a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation, teams for Tiers 1 and 2 must have established procedures and protocols, along with dedicated members who understand the vision for the initiative and are able to communicate it clearly in a few, brief sentences.

1. Establishing a sense of urgency means a problem has been acknowledged and must be resolved. What specific problem(s) does the team consider top priority?
2. Not all stakeholders will adopt the sense of urgency at the same time and in the same way. How will your team overcome fear and complacency to make data-driven decisions that result in consistent implementation?
3. What is your team's vision statement with respect to SWPBIS Tier 3?
4. How are your team members communicating this vision to all stakeholder groups?

Module 2: Leadership Opportunities

The Leadership Opportunities themes address those components of implementation that include intentional leadership of decision-making and problem-solving.

Theme: Principal is most skilled, or has widest range of expertise, with regard to behavioral interventions, due to depth and breadth of experience.

- Because a school principal is likely to have worked multiple venues which has included experiences with different populations of students, the principal is seen as having a broader repertoire of supports to suggest with regard to an at-risk student.
- The principal also may have a network of school administration superiors and principal colleagues, who may be consulted for guidance.

Theme: Principal makes decisions, oversees and coordinates efforts.

- This theme seems to work in conjunction with the previous, as it is the principal who is ultimately responsible for decision-making and allocation of resources concerning SWPBIS Tier 3 efforts.
- As the site-based manager of a school, the principal is responsible for exerting leadership to facilitate achievement of the organizational goals of the school (Cofey & Horner, 2012).

Theme: Principal works in tandem with other staff to make decisions.

- As a leader and active member of the SWPBIS teams, the principal must seek and weigh input from other stakeholders who have specific knowledge or skills or a differing perspective in order to make informed decisions and to allow the members of the guiding coalition to feel valued.

Theme: Principal must overcome obstacles, such as reluctant staff.

- As stated prior, not all stakeholders will acknowledge the sense of urgency and accept the SWPBIS Tier 3 model as a reasonable resolution at the same time.
- Kotter (1996) states “Real leaders take action because they have confidence that the forces unleashed can be directed to achieve important ends” (p. 43).

Theme: Principal prioritizes modeling SWPBIS expectations.

- A school leader must “walk the walk, and talk the talk” in order to be credible and for followers to believe in the vision.
- When a principal models what she expects, it demonstrates the “how” to go about achieving objectives, and also sends the message that this work is important.

Module 2 PLC Questions and Discussion Topics

These questions specifically address how the principal acts as a change agent to transform the school environment in positive ways.

1. In what ways does the principal use his expertise to empower others to increase their capacity regarding the SWPBIS Tier 3 initiative?
2. List explicit ways the SWPBIS Tier 3 vision is communicated to stakeholder groups.
What are communication methods the team would consider as strengths on this list?
What would be the next steps? Are there any ways on the list that the team would think of as weaknesses?
3. How can modeling be used by the SWPBIS team, acting as a guiding coalition, to further communicate the vision?

4. Create a list of data-based decisions the principal has made recently with regard to SWPBIS Tier 3. Which of these might be delegated to team members in the near future?

Module 3: Meeting the Needs of All

While SWPBIS is intended to address the behavior learning needs of students in our schools, in order to implement such an initiative, it is necessary for a school leader to consider how to meet the needs of all stakeholder groups.

Theme: SWPBIS Tier 3 presents as an opportunity of growth for all stakeholders in the school.

- SWPBIS Tier 3 is not only an area of potential growth for stakeholders in a particular school, but in general, as there is little research to accompany theoretical recommendations (McIntosh, Kelm, & Delabra, 2016; Richter, Lewis, & Hager, 2012).
- Principals must recognize that consistency in the form of implementation fidelity as well as high-quality and targeted professional development are critical factors in a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation (Debnam et al., 2012; Sugai & Horner, 2006).
- Students who are involved in tertiary supports and interventions must be given ample time to demonstrate new learning with respect to behavioral expectations.
- Parents must also be informed of what SWPBIS Tier 3 is and how it works, most especially if their child is an at-risk student who receives Tier 3 services (McIntosh et al., 2016; Sugai & Horner, 2006).

Theme: SWPBIS vision is aligned to the goals of the school.

- Multi-tiered systems of support work best when they reflect the values of the school community, and are designed to meet the organizational objectives of the school as delineated by the school's vision statement.

Theme: Parents are important stakeholders in SWPBIS Tier 3 interventions and supports implementation.

- The principal participants of this study agreed that it is important to find ways to get more parents involved, and also, that having involved parents who are active supporters of tertiary interventions for their at-risk child is extremely challenging.

Module 3 PLC Questions and Discussion Topics

For this module, it may be helpful to make a chart of all stakeholder groups involved in a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation, so as to facilitate discussions that may become multi-faceted when considering many groups.

1. As there is little empirical or applied research on SWPBIS Tier 3 upon which to plan professional development, how might the team begin to assess needs among various stakeholder groups? Who will manage this body of data as it increases over time? How will the team monitor progress in meeting professional development needs?
2. Make a chart of the critical components of the school's vision. How are these beliefs and objectives reflected in the vision for SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation?
3. What measures will the team take to ensure adherence to the vision is sustained?
4. Consider creating a survey to get parent and family input with regard to SWPBIS Tier 3. It may be helpful to have an information night for families about tertiary interventions, to publish a brochure, or to provide links to websites focused on SWPBIS and other social-emotional education resources.
5. What methods will be used to communicate progress toward achieving the vision to stakeholder groups?

Conclusion

This guidebook is intended to be supplementary to the dissertation document as well as a stand-alone resource for school principals and SWPBIS teams beginning a Tier 3 implementation. Just as no two schools are alike, no two teams will conduct a SWPBIS Tier 3 implementation in exactly the same manner. The recommendations herein are designed to be just that, and like SWPBIS itself, this guidebook has been written in a way that is meant to encourage differentiation of application as needed. Please consider using this guidebook in a recursive manner, as once a team works through the three modules, it is recommended to begin again at Module 1 to continue the conversation within the context of the transformative change that is hopefully occurring.

As stated previously, an exhaustive set of resources can be found at pbis.org, which is maintained by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs.