

TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF PBIS AS A SCHOOL-WIDE  
DISCIPLINE APPROACH

A Dissertation  
by  
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December 2018

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## **Abstract**

### **TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF PBIS AS A SCHOOL-WIDE DISCIPLINE APPROACH**

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With the increased focus on high stakes testing and accountability, school and district leaders are compelled to examine ways to increase and maximize instructional time. Leaders are constantly looking at schedules, routines, processes, procedures, and any factors that decrease instructional time. Based on research, discipline is a factor that diminishes instructional time for many students both directly and indirectly (Luiselli, Putnam, & Sutterland, 2000). Discipline issues prevent students from being able to benefit from the instructional time provided to them as well as interfering with the instructional time of all the members of the class. Discipline issues also interfere with the teacher's ability to accomplish the instructional goals for the skill, lesson, class, day, week, month, and year. Administrators are often times called away from their role as instructional leaders because they need to resolve discipline referrals throughout the day. As a result, schools and school districts need to research approaches, methods, practices, and procedures that will support them when

dealing with discipline issues that hinder student growth. In response to the detrimental effects that discipline issues have on the school community, schools and school districts are encouraged to explore school-wide discipline approaches such as PBIS.

This case study was an investigation of teachers and administrators' experiences and perceptions of the need for, the implementation of, and the sustainability of PBIS as a school-wide discipline approach. The results of their perceptions indicated teachers and administrators felt there was a need for a school-wide discipline approach and PBIS seemed to be a good choice. Participants felt that the initial training and staff development were helpful. Creating norms and expectations for the common areas of the school helped establish the climate and initiated staff buy-in. During the first three years, the school experienced decreased behavior issues, increased academic achievement, and decreased teacher turnover rate. However, sustainability was an issue. In order to sustain PBIS; the staff indicated a need for intensive training for new staff members as well as yearly refresher training and support for all staff members. Teachers also indicated a need for more support and feedback from administrators when addressing discipline issues and consequences for staff members not using PBIS. The case study results demonstrated a need for local school districts to provide yearly intensive training for all staff members at PBIS schools and to better prepare and train new teachers in the area of classroom management.

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To my children, Corey, Jamey, and Christy and their spouses Lisa, Gretchen, and Jonathan, thank you for prayers, support, and understanding during the times when I had to make sacrifices and reschedule a family gathering or event in order to meet a deadline. After celebrating each of your graduations with you, I am fortunate to have you celebrate mine with me. It is a memory that I will cherish forever.

To my grandchildren, Mary, James, Caitlyn, Bella, Jillian, and Blair, thank you for your support and love. I hope that my journey has taught you to follow your heart and to never give up on your dreams and goals. You are never too old to achieve them. Being a first generation college graduate, education has always been important to me, and I hope it will be to you.

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## **Dedication**

It is hard to believe that I am finally coming to the end of a long journey. It is with great pride that I dedicate this work to the people who mean the most to me.

To my husband, Brent, for believing in me and continually pushing me forward, you are my best friend and the love of my life.

To my parents, James Gray and Mary Louise Beasley Guynn, you instilled in me the desire to want more and to never give up on my goals and dreams.

To my children and their spouses, Corey and Lisa, Jamey and Gretchen, and Christy and Jonathan, your love and support sustained me when my schedule was overwhelming, and your encouragement helped me to stay focused.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

With an increased focus on twenty first century learning, high stakes testing, and accountability, schools are mandated to examine all components of the school community and all facets of the instructional day. There is a constant push to maximize instructional time and academic success as educators continually look for obstacles that decrease academic time on task. Interrupting classroom instruction to deal with behavioral or classroom management issues can take away valuable instructional time from students. According to Ratcliff, Jones, Costner, Savage-David, and Hunt (2011), student behavior is directly related to academic achievement and has been identified as one of the main threats to effective use of instructional time. Swafford, Bailey, and Beasley (2014) further add that a safe and orderly environment of respect and cooperation helps create a productive learning environment for students. Discipline issues and time out of class are major concerns for leaders, schools, and school districts; and principals are being held accountable for the academic growth and safe learning environments for all students (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). To address the implicit link between the learning environment and academic success, district leaders and administrators must examine and establish school-wide discipline approaches and practices that maximize instructional time for all students.

Disruptive behavior, a major source of difficulty for school systems, is encountered daily by teachers and school personnel and can impede learning by creating disruptions in the school day and impacting student achievement and growth (Sugai et al., 2000). According to Luiselli, Putnam, and Sutterland (2002), classroom disruptions not only affect the learning of the disruptive student but also hinder the education of all students. Callison (1998) noted that

disruptive students interfere with the ability of all students to stay on task and limit the amount of instruction a teacher provides. The amount of time that students are out of the classroom for discipline referrals can also contribute to low student performance. Research studies such as Scott and Barrett (2004) and Allen and Ballay (2005) show students lose an average of 20 minutes of instructional time with each office referral. With one discipline referral each day during the year, a student would miss approximately 12 days of instruction. For repeat offenders, academic progress is negatively impacted. Since student disruptions result in lost instructional time and decreased academic engagement (Gunter, Jack, DePaepe, Reed, & Harrison, 1994), teachers are less effective in improving academic outcomes (Ingersoll, 2002). Due to these well-established links between student behavior and academic achievement, educators must implement best practices and effective methods of preventing and/or responding to student misbehavior (Slavin, 2009).

In the past, schools have used traditional or punishment-based disciplinary measures which include the use of discipline referrals or other disciplinary actions such as verbal warnings, removal from class, detention, and in/out of school suspension. These actions can negatively impact students and schools which can lead to repeat offenses that increase in severity (Lewis & Sugai, 2017; Turnbull et al., 2002). Reactive disciplinary practices can also cause students to perceive school as a hostile environment and may lead to feelings of resentment causing further disciplinary and behavioral problems (Bear, 2010). The use of punitive measures indicates time allotted to be used for instruction is spent on discipline issues and can eventually isolate students (Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, & Feinberg, 2005; National Association of School Psychologists, 2008). The school's atmosphere can influence student behavior and negatively affect school climate as well as hinder a student's connection

to the school (Bear, 2010; Hyman & Perone, 1998).

More schools are implementing school-wide discipline approaches in response to increased accountability and the need to maximize instructional time. School and district leaders need to be aware of the factors that will ensure the effective implementation of a school-wide discipline approach as well as understand those factors that may hinder implementation.

Even though there are many school-wide discipline approaches to help improve student behavior, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is often recommended as an effective approach for positively impacting school climate as well as creating and sustaining effective support for students and academic achievement (Bradshaw, Leaf, & Debnam, 2007; Parr, Kidder, & Barrett, 2007; Putnam, Horner, & Algozzine, 2006; & Luiselli, et al., 2005). PBIS is a positive, proactive, whole-school approach that seeks to reduce the number of office discipline referrals while increasing student engagement and academic performance (Cohn, 2001). It can be effective for students with relatively minor behavioral problems such as tardiness, inappropriate language, and dress code violations as well as for those with more severe disciplinary problems such as bullying, destruction of property, and fighting (Carr, et al., 1999; Conroy, Dunlap, Clarke, & Alter, 2005). In addition to decreasing problem behaviors, PBIS can have a lasting effect on behavior choices by providing students with strategies that can be applied to future situations or issues (Cohn, 2001; Conroy, et al., 2005).

### **Research Problem Statement**

PBIS emphasizes school-wide systems of support that include proactive strategies for defining, teaching, and supporting appropriate student behaviors to create positive school

environments and is a positive and effective alternative to the traditional approach of discipline (Bear, 2010). PBIS is effective for a wide range of behavioral issues while positively impacting academic achievement. Much of this effect is immediate, and many schools see positive effects after only one year (Frank, et al., 2009; National Association of School Psychologists, 2008; Safran, & Oswald, 2003).

Although many research studies indicate that PBIS has a positive effect on school-wide discipline, some teachers and stakeholders express negative viewpoints about PBIS and its usefulness in their schools (Hunsaker, 2016; Liebig, 2016; Marshall, 2015; Terrell, 2013). This leaves a gap or a discrepancy between what the research says about the effectiveness of PBIS schools and the negative feelings of educators, parents, and community members. If blogs, posting boards, and local newspaper articles are accurate, for every successful story about PBIS implementation, there is an unsuccessful one. In my own district, some schools were trained, but never successfully implemented the approach. How can some schools have successful implementation while other schools abandon implementation even when the core PBIS teams at various schools in the district are trained by the same district office trainers in the same staff development session? What was different about their implementation processes? It is important to determine why some school districts, schools, teachers, and parents feel that PBIS is successful while others do not.

Given the gap between what the research literature says about a successful implementation of PBIS and how some educators feel about PBIS, it was important to study a school that completed the implementation process and continues to use the PBIS approach. The staff members who work at schools with PBIS have knowledge of both the positive and negative factors that affect the implementation process, and their perceptions regarding the

implementation process and sustainability of PBIS can be valuable. Because PBIS focuses primarily on the interaction of internal and external causes of behavior, it can be personalized for different settings, types of problems, demographic differences, and various behavior problems. This study investigated how a school utilized and implemented this type of information to customize a PBIS approach to best serve its unique population.

### **Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this study was to identify school characteristics and practices during the implementation phases of PBIS (pre-implementation through full implementation and sustainability) as perceived by teachers and administrators in the case study school. It explored the staff's perceptions of PBIS and the sustainability of PBIS as a school-wide discipline model, as well as the impact on student growth. This study focused on the factors that hindered the implementation of PBIS as well as those factors that supported it. This case study examined the pre-implementation phase, the implementation phase through three tiers, and post implementation with fidelity checks and sustainability. The study concentrated on one school's processes and procedures for the implementation of PBIS in order to aid other schools that want to follow these steps for implementation and improve student behavior and growth.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of the research questions was to explore and better understand a school staff's perceptions about PBIS implementation, the factors (strengths and barriers) that affected the implementation, the satisfaction and sustainability of the approach, and the approach's impact on student behavior and student growth. This case study of one elementary school explored the beliefs, values, and measures that its staff members perceived

as supports and barriers in the implementation process. In addition, this study also examined the effects of the implementation of PBIS on teacher retention, student behavior, and student growth through individual interviews and examination of various data.

As qualitative research pursues what and how questions to get to a deeper understanding of an observed phenomenon, this approach offered the best avenue for this case study of PBIS implementation at an elementary school. It was useful to determine if the staff perceived PBIS implementation was beneficial; and if so, what they believed supported or would support sustainability. The research questions that guided this case study were:

- 1. How do the staff members at an urban, Title I, K-5 elementary school with a diverse population located in the southeastern United States perceive and describe the need for a school-wide discipline approach?** This question provided a broad overview about a school-wide discipline approach and how it affected the school community, not only in terms of discipline, but indirectly with student growth, teacher satisfaction, teacher retention, and school climate.
- 2. How does the implementation of PBIS, as a school-wide discipline approach, in this elementary school affect staff satisfaction, teacher retention, student behavior, discipline referrals, and student growth? How does the administrative team feel about PBIS? How do the staff members feel about PBIS? What does the school data say about PBIS?** The aim of this question was to have respondents share their opinions and beliefs about PBIS through their own stories and experiences since its implementation. This question allowed the researcher to gather the opinions about the implementation of PBIS from a wide range of stakeholders in the school. The researcher examined the different roles

of the staff members to see the commonalities, or lack of them, in the day-to-day operations of the school. The question encouraged interviewees to express their feelings about PBIS at their school. Their responses also indicated whether or not they feel the school is giving enough support to sustain the PBIS approach.

- 3. What are the barriers and supports for implementing PBIS in an elementary school as evidenced in this case?** This question asked respondents to share their beliefs about factors that were helpful in implementing PBIS as well as factors that they believed constituted obstacles to the implementation process. This question served as a means to gain information about approaches that could facilitate or impair the sustainability of PBIS.

### **Significance of the Study**

The intent of this case study was to contribute to the overall knowledge base about best practices to use in an elementary school when implementing PBIS as a school-wide discipline approach. The case study started at the pre-implementation or planning stage and continued through full implementation as the collected data suggested barriers and supports as well as ways to embrace or change obstacles that occurred during the process. Every member of the school community is vital to the implementation process. Therefore, all staff members need to buy-in and support PBIS in order to achieve full implementation and future sustainability of the approach. Without buy-in for the approach, PBIS may not experience future sustainability.

Because PBIS involves participation and buy-in of all stakeholders, collaboration is imperative to ensure effective implementation (Wasilewski, Gifford, & Bonneau, 2008). In place of lectures and workshops, training involves discussions of real-life, school-wide



problems and situations, setting goals, developing rules and routines, consistently implementing strategies, evaluating data, and managing interventions while collaborating with administrators, faculty, and parents. As teachers, administrators, and other staff members are important stakeholders in the PBIS implementation process, it is crucial that they support the approach. Sugai (2013) suggests that PBIS schools with reduced referrals and discipline issues have better teacher retention and higher satisfaction. Research suggests that PBIS can be an effective behavioral intervention approach (Horner, Freeman, Nelson, & Sugai, 2007; Palovlich, 2008); however, there is limited research on how staff members perceive this approach, how PBIS impacts staff motivation and satisfaction, how staff perceptions affect the sustainability of the approach, and how PBIS affects student growth. By focusing on the staff's perceptions about PBIS implementation, the factors (strengths and barriers) that affect implementation, the satisfaction and sustainability of the approach, and the impact on student behavior and student growth, this case study may help other schools and districts implement PBIS with greater sustainability.

### **Conceptual Framework**

According to Maxwell (2005), when preparing to conduct a research study, the researcher must design a conceptual framework for the study that provides explanations about the things that will be studied as well as the ideas, beliefs, and existing theories that relate to the research uncovered in the study. The conceptual framework guiding this case study was based on the examination of the implementation phases of PBIS and their effect on student behavior, student growth, school culture, and teacher retention as perceived by the staff and the school data which includes the Teacher Working Conditions Survey (TWCS), School-Wide Information System (SWIS), Education Value Added Assessment System

(EVAAS), and the End-of-Grade (EOG) Test. A successful implementation of PBIS may contribute to the sustainability of the approach and may decrease student office discipline referrals (ODRs) which can increase teacher satisfaction and student growth. The study examined the interrelatedness of the experiences and perceptions of the staff members before, during, and after the implementation of PBIS as well as the sustainability of the approach. Using concept mapping as a visual representation of the research design, Figure 1 illustrates the concepts and relationships examined in this study (Maxwell, 2005).

<b>Before Implementation</b>	<b>During Implementation</b>	<b>After Implementation</b>
<b>School Characteristics</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No School-Wide Discipline Approach</li> <li>• Student Misbehavior Soaring</li> <li>• Low Academic Growth</li> <li>• Teacher Frustration</li> </ul>	<b>School Characteristics</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PBIS as a School-Wide Discipline Approach</li> <li>• Decrease in ODRs</li> <li>• Increase in Academic Growth/Achievement</li> <li>• Teacher Satisfaction</li> </ul>	<b>School Characteristics</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School-Wide PBIS Sustainability</li> <li>• Maintain ODRs</li> <li>• Good Student Growth</li> <li>• Positive School Climate/Low Teacher Turnover Rate</li> </ul>
<b>School Practices</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PBIS School Core Team Selected</li> <li>• PBIS Staff Development and Training</li> <li>• PBIS Routines and Procedures Established</li> </ul>	<b>School Practices</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PBIS Launch</li> <li>• Students Trained</li> <li>• PBIS Rules Referenced and Reinforced Daily</li> <li>• Monthly Training for Implementing Strategies</li> </ul>	<b>School Practices</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PBIS Refresher for Staff and Students Each Year</li> <li>• Periodic Training and Role Playing for Implementing Strategies</li> <li>• Periodic Data Review</li> </ul>
<b>Data</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EVAAS/EOG</li> <li>• TWC Survey</li> <li>• Teacher Retention Survey</li> <li>• PowerSchool Discipline Records</li> </ul>	<b>Data</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EVAAS/EOG</li> <li>• TWC Survey</li> <li>• Teacher Retention Rate</li> <li>• SWIS</li> <li>• PBIS Fidelity Checks</li> <li>• PBIS Minutes</li> </ul>	<b>Data</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EVAAS/EOG</li> <li>• TWC Survey</li> <li>• Teacher Retention Rate</li> <li>• SWIS</li> <li>• PBIS Fidelity Checks</li> <li>• PBIS Minutes</li> </ul>

Figure 1. School Characteristics, Practices, and Data during PBIS Implementation Stages

Teachers' feelings about discipline are influenced by staff development, implementation strategies, procedures, and their confidence that they can handle discipline issues that arise in their classrooms. Understanding PBIS and its practices may aid teachers in maintaining control of their classrooms.

As an assistant principal, I must be ready and willing to handle any discipline matter that arises during the school day. My experience with PBIS began with a pilot project that I conducted a few years ago. During the pilot project, I discovered that teachers who are equipped with the skills they need to address discipline problems will not contact the office and request help with every discipline issue. They have a toolbox of strategies to help them make decisions. I also became interested in the influence of PBIS and how teachers perceive it as a discipline approach. The current study examined how teachers perceive the implementation of PBIS and how that information may be used to help schools implement PBIS as a school-wide discipline approach.

### **Context of the Study**

This research study was conducted in the district where I am employed. Although I am acquainted with some of the employees at this elementary school, I am not a member of the staff. This case study school located in an urban area is in the fourth largest district in one of the Mid-Atlantic States. The study highlighted a K-5, Title I, urban elementary school with a diverse population of students. From 2012 - 2017, this school maintained a consistent student population (459, 457, 426, 467, 499) with a small drop in 2014-2015. The demographics remained constant for the 2012-13, 2013-14, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 school years with a population consisting of 14% white, 55% African-American, 28% Hispanic, and 3% multiracial. In 2014-2015, the district had a population consisting of

67.5% white, 27.1% African American, and 12.6% Hispanic with a poverty rate of 22.1%; and in 2017-2018, the district had a population consisting of 40.2% white, 28.5% African American, 24.5% Hispanic, 4.0% multiracial, 2.5% Asian, and < 1% American Indian or Native Hawaiians/Pacific. The school's demographics are quite different from the district, having a much higher percentage of African-American and Hispanic students, and a lower percentage of white students. The school's demographics remained constant while the district's changed. The poverty rate of this school is also much different from the district with 100% of the students on free or reduced lunch. The attendance rate for students has also remained consistent and slightly higher than the district over the past five years: 94.9%, 95.14%, 94.52%, 95.1%, 94%. The number of teachers employed in the school over the last six years has also been steady (45, 45, 43, 40, 41, 42). In addition, the school has a stable number of Highly Qualified Teachers (100%, 100%, 100%, 100%, 100%) and Teachers w/Advanced Degrees (36%, 42%, 42%, 39%, 38%). The consistency in both student and teacher numbers allow the school to develop and maintain a good relationship with students and parents.

Seven years ago, the elementary school in this research study struggled with the number of ODRs, the amount of time that students were spending out of class because of a discipline issue, and the lack of teacher expectations for student behavior in classrooms and common areas of the school. The school also struggled with insufficient student academic achievement and/or growth, and wanted to educate students about appropriate behavior and good manners. As school leaders discussed the problem and how they could address the situation, the state encouraged the district to implement PBIS as a school-wide discipline

approach. In response, the district hired district level PBIS coaches to train schools and assist with the implementation process.

### **Overview of the Methodology**

A qualitative case study approach for this study was chosen for the following reasons. Qualitative methods are especially useful in discovering the meaning that people give to events they experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Qualitative methods also allow the researcher to explore phenomena, such as feelings or thought processes that are difficult to extract or learn about through conventional research methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this study, I explored participants' perceptions and experiences (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006) about the implementation and sustainability of PBIS. Qualitative research methods are the best approach when studying phenomena in their natural settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) and when striving to understand social processes in context (Esterberg, 2002). This case study focused on why this particular school continued to implement PBIS when many other schools have failed to sustain the approach and discontinued the use of PBIS. As a researcher in this setting, I sought to develop an in-depth understanding of the case study school by collecting multiple forms of data such as minutes of meetings, PBIS Fidelity Checks, SWIS data, interviews/audio recordings, Teacher Working Conditions Survey, and EVAAS data (Creswell, 2005). Through this data, I explored the beliefs, values, and measures that the staff members perceived as the supports and barriers in the implementation process of PBIS, and I examined the effects of the implementation of PBIS on teacher retention, student behavior, and student growth.

Glesne (2011) describes qualitative research as focusing on people and seeking to understand their perspectives. Qualitative research contextualizes issues in a particular

cultural setting. Given my purpose, a qualitative design was appropriate because my goal as a researcher was to explore and examine how staff members at one elementary school perceived the benefits and barriers of implementing PBIS (pre-implementation through full implementation and sustainability), its effect on student discipline, and its effect on academic achievement and growth for students. The participants were empowered to tell their stories because they have an opportunity to influence the way PBIS is implemented in the district.

This qualitative case study design employed multiple data collection strategies in order to examine the staff's perceptions as well as other factors for PBIS implementation and sustainability. Individual interviews and direct researcher observations as well as numerical data collected from various sources were used to accomplish method triangulation and produce replicable findings. During individual interviews, study participants were given opportunities to respond to the interview questions. Collected data sources were analyzed for emergent themes and concepts from the data that was gathered and sorted. The following section describes the definition of terms that are of significance to the study.

### **Definition of Terms**

There are some terms associated with behavior in the reviewed literature that may require further explanation.

**Academic achievement.** This is the status of students who pass the standardized state assessment examination and perform at grade level academically (Gratz, 2010).

**Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA).** Applied behavior analysis is the design, implementation, and evaluation of environmental modifications to produce socially significant improvement in human behavior (Shaping Behavior, 2011).

**Discipline.** This word can have more than one meaning. It can refer to control gained by enforcing obedience or order. Discipline is orderly conduct or self-control. It can also mean rules and consequences governing conduct in the classroom or while the student is with the teacher. Discipline is training that corrects, molds, or perfects the moral character (Merriam-Webster, 2017).

**Discipline Referral (DR).** This is a written document that describes a problem behavior violating a school policy observed by a school staff member (Sugai et al., 2000).

**Disruptive student behavior.** Disruptive student behavior is any act that distracts teachers and students from learning (Cooper, 1996) and any and all non-academic behaviors that block students' participation in learning activities or get in the way of the learning process (Garner & Hill, 1991).

**Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS).** EVAAS is a customized software system for K-12 which assesses and predicts student growth performance with precision and reliability. It examines the impact of teachers, schools, and districts on student learning in specific courses/subjects and grades (NCDPI, 2018).

**Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA).** This assessment involves the organized and systematic collecting of information that identifies the function of a problem behavior as well as the events leading up to the problem (Sugai et al., 2000). FBA analysis addresses what happened immediately before the behavior occurred, what the behavior was in measurable terms and what the consequence of the behavior was, or what the behavior provided the student. FBA is a multimethod strategy which involves observations, interviews, and a review of student behavior and consequences. The main goal of FBA is to determine environmental conditions that are associated with problem behavior. This tool

leads to the designing of behavior intervention or support plans to teach a replacement behavior (the functional equivalent) and designs a reinforcement schedule to help a student learn and generalize the replacement behavior and extinguish the maladaptive behavior (Gresham, Watson, & Skinner, 2001; Skinner, 1953; Sugai et al., 2000; Witt, Daly, & Noell, 2000).

**Office Discipline Referral (ODR).** Office discipline referrals serve as documentation of a discipline infraction in which a student violated a specific school or district rule and the location. Teachers or staff members recorded the incident and any events surrounding the incident. Referrals also documented the consequence assigned by an administrator (Sprague, Sugai, Horner, & Walker, (1999).

**Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS).** PBIS is used interchangeably with School-Wide Positive Behavior Intervention Support (SW-PBIS). This three-tiered, research-based framework designed by each school, containing fundamental elements for increasing positive behavior and decreasing negative behavior, is a systematic approach to establish the social environment and positive behavioral school climate for a school to be an effective learning environment (Sugai et al., 2000).

**Response to Intervention (RTI).** Response to Intervention refers to a process that emphasizes how well students respond to changes in instruction. It provides academic and behavior interventions in a three-tiered approach, using research-based interventions and data-based decision making. Even though RTI refers to academic and behavior systems, the academic system is often referred to as RTI and the behavior system is referred to as PBIS. The essential elements of an RTI approach are: the provision of scientific, research-based instruction and interventions in general education; monitoring and measurement of student



progress in response to the instruction and interventions; and use of these measures of student progress to shape instruction and make educational decisions (National Association of School Psychologists, 2009).

**School-wide discipline.** School-wide discipline requires active participation by the entire staff and could require changes in classroom management procedures for some teachers. The emphasis is on discipline as a preventative measure in an environment that requires a uniform system of rules and consequences governing student conduct throughout the school building ensuring that students feel safe and secure in an environment conducive to learning (Protheroe, 2005).

**School-Wide Information System (SWIS).** This is a web-based application system developed by and maintained by the University of Oregon to assist school personnel in entering and tracking office discipline referral data. The data generated from SWIS is used for making decisions regarding student interventions as well as for school-wide interventions. The SWIS program indicates the dates and times of when behaviors occurred as well as the specific locations. The SWIS program also has the capability of identifying the behavior of one specific student and groups of students. This allows school personnel to devise appropriate school-wide interventions to best meet the needs of the students both academically and socially (New York PBIS Technical Assistance Center, 2017).

**School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET).** This evaluation measures the fidelity of a building PBIS team infrastructure and interventions from year to year. It is done by a trained external evaluator such as the district coach. The evaluator visits the school and completes the tool through interviews and interactions with the staff and students as well as artifact

collection. The process takes three to four hours to complete (Wisconsin Positive Behavior Support Network, December, 2010).

**Student growth.** It is the amount of academic progress that students make over the course of a year in a specific grade level. It is the difference between the end-of-grade scale score from one year to the next (NCDPI, 2017).

**Teacher retention.** This refers to the teachers who stay in the same school from one year to the next or teachers who stay in the teaching profession (Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2008; Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005; Luekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2004).

**Teacher Working Conditions Survey (TWCS).** The North Carolina TWCS is an instrument that is completed by the school staff every two years to provide school leaders and education policy makers with current data which is used for continuous school improvement (North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, 2016).

**Title I schools.** Title I (Part A) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards (U. S. Department of Education, 2018).

## **Overview of the Dissertation**

In this chapter, the dissertation was introduced through the research problem statement, the purpose of the research, the research questions, the significance of the study, the conceptual framework, the context of the study, an overview of the methodology, and the definition of terms relevant to the study. Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature for disruptive behavior, including the legal, political, and institutional context of the issue, as well as the historical trends and findings in education. The literature review focuses on PBIS

including its characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses or misconceptions, as well as its alignment to RTI, academic achievement, and social justice. The theoretical framework includes the origins, assumptions, and theories of behaviorism; behaviorism as a framework for understanding and analyzing PBIS; and a critique of behaviorism as an educational inquiry. Chapter 3 defines the philosophical foundation for this qualitative case study, the research design, the research site, the participants, data collection methods and analysis, limitations, and ethical concerns. Chapter 4 discusses the findings for this study, and Chapter 5 provides the implications of this study's findings and recommends directions for future research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Discipline has always been an important factor in the success or failure of a classroom. I remember vividly the day that I realized how important discipline is to an entire school. It was my first day as an assistant principal. Up until that time, I had thought of discipline in terms of the classroom and not on a larger scale. A few years ago, I left my job as a curriculum coordinator to embark on a new and exciting journey in administration. I started the job full of enthusiasm, confidence, and dreams. However, it did not take me long to realize that I was in a new world and completely outside of my comfort zone. It was a world consumed by discipline issues and discipline referrals which came into the office at an alarming rate. It was difficult for one person to process discipline referrals as well as oversee buses, observe teachers, attend meetings, address parent questions and concerns, and walk through classrooms on a daily basis. Submerged in discipline issues in order to maintain a safe and orderly school, it was challenging to find the time to monitor the teachers, the curriculum, and other components related to maintaining an effective and positive school community. I worried that the students were out of the classroom for extended periods of time and that this would impact their educational achievement. This led me to question how much discipline training students, staff members and bus drivers actually receive. According to Fixsen, Naoom, Blasé, Friedman, and Wallace (2005), teachers need varying levels and types of supports in the classroom. I soon learned that many staff members were dependent upon the administration for handling discipline matters and some teachers needed help in dealing with discipline issues. These teachers needed to develop a deeper toolbox of strategies to use when addressing behavior problems in their classrooms. Some teachers

were using behavior management plans while others were not. No two teachers managed discipline issues in the same manner. The lack of a school-wide discipline approach led to inconsistencies among teachers and classrooms and confusion for students. Historically many discipline or classroom management methods have been introduced and tried; however, schools and school districts continue to search for the perfect method (Martella, Nelson, Marchland-Martella, & O'Reilly, 2012).

### **Legal, Political, and Institutional Context of the Issue**

Classroom management has been a major concern of teachers throughout the history of education, and the systematic study of effective classroom management is a relatively recent phenomenon (Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2003). In his study of classroom management, Kounin (1970) identified several critical dimensions of effective classroom management. Brophy and Evertson (1976) reported the results of a study in which classroom management surfaced as one of the critical aspects of effective teaching. Much of what they found supported the earlier findings of Kounin's study. Brophy and Evertson (1976) added that classroom management skills are essential, crucial, and fundamental in determining teaching success and concluded a teacher who has inadequate classroom management skills will probably not accomplish much instruction with the students.

A series of four studies by Emmer, Evertson, and Anderson (1980); Anderson, Evertson, and Emmer (1980); Evertson and Emmer (1982); and Sanford and Evertson (1981) were conducted at the Research and Development Center for Teacher Education in Austin, Texas, and marked a milestone in the research on classroom management. These studies identified that teacher actions were associated with student time on-task and disruptive behavior, and Kounin's earlier findings were strongly supported. A major conclusion from

these studies is that it is critical to establish behavior expectations and procedures for the year (Marzano et al., 2003). The third and fourth studies (1981 and 1982) examined the impact of training in classroom management techniques based on findings from the first two studies (1980) and showed that if interventions occurred at the beginning of the school year, there was improved teacher behavior and student behavior. These studies set the stage for research and practice in classroom management for the late 1980s through the 1990s (Marzano et al., 2003).

Brophy and Rohrkemper's classroom strategy study (1988) was another major study addressing classroom management. The findings indicated effective classroom managers tended to employ different types of strategies with different types of students, but ineffective managers tended to use the same strategies regardless of student type or situation. One study recommendation was that teachers need to develop a set of helping skills to employ with different types of students (Brophy, 1996; Brophy & McCaslin, 1992).

Disruptive classroom behavior which has been a concern of educators for decades is considered to be anything (sleeping, talking, cheating, verbal attacks, physical attacks, throwing objects, or weapon usage) that causes the teacher to stop teaching because a student is not on task or not behaving appropriately (DiGrazia, 2011). According to Snell and Volokh (2005), disciplinary concerns have expanded over the years. In the 1950s, the top three discipline problems were chewing gum, talking out of turn, and making too much noise. In the 1960s, discipline concerns included talking without permission, disrupting class, running in the hallways, or smoking behind the gymnasium. In the 1970s, dress code violations were added to the original concerns, and fighting was included in the 1980s. The presence of gangs evolved in the early 1990s and contributed to the use of weapons, drugs,

school violence, and bullying. Although the 1990s experienced frequent school shootings, it was the late 1990s that brought more serious acts of violence such as the 1999 Columbine Shooting which resulted in fifteen casualties that included twelve students, one teacher, and two shooters. The Columbine incident was followed by four major school shootings, the Amish School House in 2006, Virginia Tech University in 2007, Sandy Hook Elementary in 2012, and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in 2018 (American Legal Law Library, 2000; Ballotpedia, 2018; Duplechain & Morris, 2014; National School Safety Council, 2009). The escalation of disruptive student behavior resulted in the implementation of zero tolerance policies.

According to the National School Safety Council (2009), with the increase of school violence, schools rushed to implement anti-bullying laws with zero tolerance measures and employed school resource officers. Schools were also required to report incidents previously viewed as minor infractions. Discipline was closely monitored and schools revisited disciplinary handbooks to align appropriate consequences for behavior infractions. As a response to alleviate school violence, state and national organizations were established to provide support to families, schools, and youth in order to equip them with the necessary skills to combat bullying. These organizations provided trainings, printed material, videos, and contact resources so that students could make confidential reports of potential violence (National Children's Alliance, 2009).

With research to indicate that behavior affects academics, amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004 referenced a number of concepts including functional behavioral assessments (FBAs) and positive behavior supports (U.S Department of Education, 2015). This moved school-wide discipline approaches into policy

and practice with discipline, classroom management, and behavior management a concern for every school in America. These requirements in the context of IDEA represented an important effort to improve the quality of behavioral support planning for students with disabilities (Sugai & Horner, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Before IDEA called for behavioral support, North Carolina was already working to increase academic achievement for students.

In 1996, the North Carolina State Board of Education developed a statewide accountability system known as the ABCs of Public Education. With this model, schools focused on the curriculum, data-driven decision making, alignment of the curriculum and instruction with a final test in an effort to increase student achievement. This accountability program sets annual performance and growth standards and emphasizes high educational standards for each school in the state in order to measure the growth in academic performance (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], 2015). Even with this accountability model in place, North Carolina students were not performing well on achievement tests and were not able to meet the federal goals set by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) initiative in 2001 (U. S. Department of Education, 2016).

With NCLB, policy makers hoped to close the gaps in educational achievement that have persisted in the United States for decades between minority and non-minority students. NCLB created a new way to look at academic progress. Schools began to use research-based practices to teach students reading, writing, and mathematics. NCLB had three major components: (a) develop content standards to determine what students need to know, (b) administer assessments to measure whether students are meeting those standards, and (c) institute accountability mechanisms to ensure that all students attain proficiency standards



(U.S. Department of Education, 2016). With NCLB, all states were required to test students on a regular basis and provide annual yearly progress reports (Hursh, 2005, 2007). Based on this requirement, if students failed to meet academic and behavioral standards and the school districts failed to address the needs of all students, there were negative effects and consequences (Hamilton & Stecher, 2004). Students considered at-risk were divided into subgroups: low socio-economic students, minority students, students with disabilities, and students whose primary language is not English. Schools that failed to meet proficiency on the annual yearly progress report for their student population or any of their subgroups were susceptible to monetary and bureaucratic sanctions (Hursh, 2005). In addition, NCLB required “Persistently Dangerous Schools” be identified by states. With accountability for academic achievement as well as behavior, school districts and school administrators began to implement school-wide discipline programs as a way to help control disruptive behavior and to increase academic achievement (Gresham, 1991; Sugai & Horner, 1999; Walker et al., 1996).

## **PBIS**

During the 1980s, researchers at the University of Oregon responded with a series of applied demonstrations, research studies, and evaluation projects. Findings from these research and evaluation studies indicated more attention should be directed toward prevention, research-based practices, data-based decision-making, school-wide systems, explicit social skills instruction, team-based implementation and professional development, and student outcomes (Biglan, 1995; Colvin, Kame’enui, & Sugai, 1993; Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010; Lewis & Sugai, 2017; Mayer, 1995; Sugai & Horner 2002). Their initial

work became the foundation for the Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) approach and eventually led to the creation of the PBIS Center.

Originally, PBIS was known as PBS (Positive Behavior Support) and was established to create a positive school-wide climate. However, later research and articles in the PBIS organizational newsletters expanded this claim to not only include behavior as an outcome but also to enhance student achievement (Lassen, Steele, & Sailor, 2006; Nelson, Martella, & Marchand-Martella, 2002). PBIS programs provide a comprehensive process for teaching socially appropriate behaviors in order to optimize academic achievement for each student. Therefore, PBIS implementation is one way to impact the learning environments in all schools in order to support high academic performance and to reduce behavior problems. PBIS is now considered to be a school-wide approach or intervention that improves behavior and student achievement (Reynolds, Irwin, & Algozzine, 2009).

PBIS is not a packaged program for districts to purchase. Instead it is a framework or approach that helps schools to identify the key tasks in developing preventative positive behavior measures tailored to their school. PBIS is defined by the following core design components: outcomes, data, practices, and systems (Fairbanks, Simonsen, & Sugai, 2008). With PBIS, schools develop a common language, common practices, and consistent application of positive and negative reinforcement at a school-wide level by (a) teaching appropriate behavior to all students by intervening early, (b) using a multi-tiered model, (c) monitoring student progress often, (d) using data to make decisions, and (e) using assessments to screen, diagnose, and monitor progress (Fairbanks, Simonsen, & Sugai, 2008). The Core Principles of PBIS at the primary level make it proactive rather than

reactive. PBIS emphasizes the prevention of problem behaviors before they happen in order to increase the opportunity for learning by keeping students in their classrooms.

Schools with PBIS report decreases in inappropriate behavior (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010; Sprague et al., 2002), and these statistics continue to motivate more and more schools to implement PBIS for their students. PBIS impacts the learning environment in schools by supporting student performance, reducing behavioral problems, and improving the academic success of students (Lassen et al., 2006; Nelson et al., 2002). Research studies indicate that implementing a proactive behavior management system will create processes that minimize the time students are out of the classroom (Lassen et al., 2006; Luiselli, et al., 2005). In two separate three year longitudinal studies, Luiselli et al. (2005) and Lassen, Steele, and Sailor (2006) reported that with a behavior management system in place, student time out of the classroom went from 45 minutes to 20 minutes per office referral. Lassen et al. (2006) found students referred to the office for a discipline referral missed an estimated 659 hours of instructional time, and Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, & Feinberg (2005) found an average two-year net gain of 29.5 days with a behavior management system in place. The gain of instructional time is crucial because students cannot learn while sitting in the office. Also, students with behavioral issues are more likely to drop out of school, fail at a higher rate compared to students with no behavioral issues, and have a reduced chance of attending a secondary or post-secondary school (Kauffman, Davis, & James, 2001; Tobin & Sugai, 1999). Discipline is a concern because more and more students are spending time outside the classroom which ultimately affects academic achievement (Martin & Sass, 2010). Disruptive student behavior is not a recent issue, and PBIS can be traced back to its behaviorist roots.

## **Theoretical Framework**

**Behaviorism: origins, assumptions, and theories.** Disruptive student behavior is not a recent issue. In early American classrooms, punishment for misbehavior was swift and harsh. The goal was to stop undesirable behavior through the use of traditional discipline or corporal punishment which may have included striking students or rote discipline such as writing sentences (Colvin et al., 1993). It was not unusual for a teacher or principal to engage in a fist-fight with a student (Danforth & Smith, 2005). Practices and reinforcement of rules and behavioral expectations were inconsistent and punitive, and students were not given an opportunity to learn or to practice social skills and self-management. Behavior interventions were reactive rather than preventative (Colvin et al., 1993). Predictable reactive/punishment-based responses associated with short-term solutions for misbehavior were used in schools for many years. However, over time reactive responses can create a false sense of security because punishment-based responses do not help create safe and positive climates and do not increase teaching time and learning opportunities (Sugai & Horner, 2002).

During the nineteenth century, psychologists began a scientific study of learning using a process which leads to a potential or permanent change in behavior by viewing learning as a means of adapting to the environment (Good & Brophy, 1990). With this learning process, people alter the way they perceive their environment, the way they interpret the incoming stimuli, and the way they interact or behave. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a school of thought known as behaviorism dominated psychology and explained the learning process. Behaviorism was a major change from previous theoretical perspectives. John Watson (1878-1958) was known as the Father of Behaviorism and was

the first to study how the process of learning affects behavior. He believed that the behaviorist view is a purely objective experimental branch of natural science with a goal to predict and control behavior (Good & Brophy, 1990; Phillips & Soltis, 2009). Behaviorism focuses on the idea of observable behavior and how behaviors can be trained, learned, changed, and measured. According to behaviorists, behavior is related to the environment in which it occurs and serves a purpose. Environmental variables can be manipulated to affect changes in behavior and learning while measuring student outcomes and learning (Sdorow, 1998). Behaviorists look at learning as an aspect of conditioning and advocate a system of rewards and targets in education. Strict behaviorists believe that all behaviors are acquired through and are the result of conditioning; and regardless of background, personality traits, and internal thoughts, anyone can be trained to act in a particular manner given the right conditioning (Cherry, 2015). Because behaviorism allows researchers to investigate observable behavior in a scientific and systematic manner, it is easy to quantify and collect data and information when conducting research (Sdorow, 1998).

In the late 1890's Edward Thorndike (1874-1949), an American psychologist, added to the research by studying the relationship between actions and consequences. His results led to the development of the Law of Effect which states that a behavior followed by a satisfying state of affairs is strengthened while a behavior followed by an annoying state of affairs is weakened. Based on the practice by which behaviors are instrumental in producing certain consequences, the process became known as Instrumental Conditioning (Sdorow, 1998).

The behavioral perspective descended from behaviorism with B. F. Skinner as its leading proponent. In the 1930s, Skinner introduced his concept of operant conditioning, the

process of learning in which the probability of an occurring response is increased/decreased due to reinforcement/punishment. He renamed instrumental conditioning operant conditioning because animals and people learn to operate in the environment to produce desired consequences instead of responding reflexively to stimuli as in classical conditioning (Iverson, 1992).

Based on the learning theories of Skinner, a behavior modification framework developed which focused on the association between behaviors and their consequences and controlled consequences to change unwanted behaviors (Sdorow, 1998). Skinner studied the relationships between behaviors and their consequences which he called behavioral contingencies: positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, extinction, and punishment (Lattal, 1995). Like Watson, Skinner urged psychologists to ignore mental processes and to limit psychology to the study of observable behavior. In contrast to Watson, Skinner stressed the role of consequences for behavior, rather than environmental stimuli, in controlling behavior. He felt that both animals and people tend to repeat behaviors followed by positive consequences (Sdorow, 1998). Skinner developed a distinct kind of behaviorist philosophy known as radical behaviorism. He also found a new version of psychological science, which he called behavior analysis or the experimental analysis of behavior. About sixty years ago, B. F. Skinner published *Verbal Behavior* (1957), his most important book. However, a shattering review by Noam Chomsky (1959), a young linguist, challenged Skinner's main arguments as he rendered Skinner's interpretation of language doubtful and seemed to put an end to behaviorism (Hunt, 1982). Chomsky faulted Skinner for extrapolating principles from the experimental laboratory with nonhumans to human language, a domain that was in his view taboo for a behavioristic analysis. Behaviorism was intended to make psychology a

natural science; however, Chomsky's accusations were a major factor in ending the control of behaviorism in psychology and paving the way for a return of cognitive psychology (Schlinger, 2008). Schlinger (2008) further added that other people feel that the death of verbal behavior and behaviorism has been greatly exaggerated. Studies indicate that behaviorism (now referred to as behavior analysis) has undergone a slight but steady growth over the past 20 years. Verbal Behavior and behaviorism remain vital because they have generated successful practical applications (Schlinger, 2008).

### **Applied Behavior Analysis**

Several educational approaches such as applied behavior analysis (ABA), progress monitoring, modeling, and reinforcement emerged from behaviorism (Sdorow, 1998).

Applied behavior analysis, one of three fields of behavior analysis, is an applied natural science devoted to developing and analyzing procedures that produce effective and beneficial changes in behavior (Baer, Wolf, & Risley, 1968). ABA is the process of systematically applying interventions based upon the principles of learning theory to improve socially significant behaviors and to demonstrate the interventions that are responsible for improvement in behavior (Baer et al., 1968). ABA which attempts to change behavior by assessing the functional relationship between targeted behavior and environmental factors replaced behavior modification because behavior modification did not clarify the relevant behavior-environment interactions (Mace, 1994).

Behavior Analysis is deemed useful in changing maladaptive or harmful behaviors in children and adults, and behavior analysts focused on the observable relationship of behavior to the environment (Thompson, 1984). With behavior analysis, learning is the acquisition of a new behavior through the following: 1. Classical or respondent conditioning is when a

behavior becomes a reflex response to an antecedent stimulus (Discovered by Ivan Pavlov, this form of conditioning considers learning to be the same in both animals and humans). 2. Operant conditioning is when an antecedent stimulus is followed by a consequence of the behavior through a reward (reinforcement) or a punishment. A reward increases the likelihood of the behavior recurring. A punishment decreases its likelihood. 3. Social learning theory is when an observation of behavior is followed by modeling. These three theories form the basis of applied behavior analysis which uses analyzed antecedents, functional analysis, replacement behavior strategies, data collection and reinforcement to change behavior (Myers, 2008).

**ABA and RTI.** With conceptual and empirical foundations in ABA, Response to Intervention (RTI), a problem solving framework, initially appeared as policy in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). RTI attempts to prevent academic and behavioral failure by using a universal screening, early interventions, progress monitoring, and intensive research-based instruction or interventions for students having difficulty. This approach to academic and behavioral interventions provides early, systematic, and appropriate intensive assistance to students who are at risk or below grade level standards (Ysseldyke et al., 1983).

RTI, originally a special education term, broadened into a general education academic framework with research-based instruction and interventions, regular monitoring of student progress, and use of data over time to make a variety of educational decisions including specific learning disability eligibility (National Association of State Directors of Special Education [NASDSE], 2015; Stewart, Martella, Marchand-Martella, & Benner, 2007). Vital to the RTI process is the application of scientifically based interventions that have been



demonstrated to work in randomized controlled trials. A goal of RTI is to apply accountability to educational programs by focusing on programs that work rather than programs that look or sound good.

In the RTI process, service delivery is typically divided into three tiers of support with the intensity of interventions increasing with each level (Gresham, 2004; Stewart et al., 2007). According to the NASDSE (2015) and Hale (2006), all three tiers of services with RTI were intended to be a supplement to the regular education curriculum. All students receive core classroom differentiated instruction that utilizes strategies and materials that are scientifically research-based. Approximately 80% to 85% of the general student body should meet grade level norms without additional assistance with Tier 1 instruction.

RTI proponents claim that when interventions work, fewer children, particularly minority children, are referred for special education, and that the RTI model acts as a safeguard to ensure children are not inappropriately given a disability label. However, critics express concern that in attempting to eliminate unnecessary referrals, RTI may also delay or eliminate necessary referrals (Farstrup, 2007).

**Cautions concerning ABA.** Although PBIS has roots in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), Black (2016) argues against using behavior modification and ABA. Behavior modification through ABA takes a great deal of one-on-one time with the student to ensure it is effective. This can be a challenge for teachers in classrooms filled with many different learners and situations. Time is always a factor in teaching, and teachers may not always have time to implement a strategy.

In theory, behavior modification never fails. However, there can be problems with the application, and many variables can cause failure. The primary variable leading to failure

of behavior modification is incorrect application of techniques. Behavior modification techniques must be extremely consistent for the treatment to work. Letting an undesirable behavior slide every now and then sends mixed signals and causes huge setbacks in treatment. Behavior modification can also fail if treatment is too extreme. Employing an unnecessarily harsh punishment for an undesirable behavior or failing to take relevant pre-existing conditions into consideration when planning negative and positive reinforcement schedules can cause behavior modification to fail (Black, 2016).

One of the main views of behavior modification theory is that behavior frequency can only be increased by positive reinforcement. However, research conducted by Albert Bandura showed that behavior is greatly influenced by modeling. Children observe modeled behavior and imitate the behavior they observe. Bandura agreed with the behaviorist classical conditioning theory and operant conditioning theory. However, he supplemented two important ideas. He said that mediating processes occur between stimuli & responses and that behavior is learned from the environment through the process of observational learning (McLeod, 2011). According to Black (2016), this research casts doubts on the principles of behavior modification by showing that behavior can increase without any direct reinforcement.

Even though many studies have been published on ABA's success, there are also cons. ABA programs require time and funding. Qualified therapists are difficult to find. Students tend to have robotic behaviors. They are not taught to think independently and may lack natural skills and thoughts. ABA instruction is geared towards Special Education disabilities (McGarvey et.al., n. d.).

**ABA and PBIS controversy.** Although there is some controversy about PBIS being a type of ABA, Horner and Sugai (2015) provided an overview of the PBIS framework indicating the influence of ABA in its development, foundations, practices, and observable behaviors in conjunction with data collection and analysis to inform decision making. In the overview, Horner and Sugai (2015) summarized the contributions of ABA in shaping the content and implementation of the framework. They indicated that behavior analysis was important in the evolution of PBIS with its emphasis on: operational definitions of behavior and intervention elements; an empirical logic model used to select, progress, monitor, and modify interventions for changing staff and student behavior; and a commitment to the measurement of both implementation fidelity and the impact of PBIS on student achievement.

Horner and Sugai (2015) suggest there are two major themes that define PBIS. First, the themes are using the whole school as a unit of analysis and intervention. Second, the framework's development and implementation is tied to at least three tiers of support intensity. They further added there are four lessons to be learned through experiences implementing the PBIS framework for behavior analysis. First, there needs to be a strong emphasis on core components and evidenced-based strategies. Second, it is important to establish and implement systems that support and sustain effective practices with fidelity. Third, data collection systems need to be developed so staff can collect meaningful data that can be used for decision making. Finally, the process of implementation (selection of core practices that the teams need to achieve functional effects, the stages of adoption, the development of drivers and data systems that allow effective practices to flourish, and the

selection and installation of evidence-based practices within the multi-tiered framework) is critical.

**Summary/critique of behaviorism as an educational inquiry.** Behaviorism, as a theoretical perspective, focuses on how environmental stimuli bring about changes in behavior as well as how behaviorist concepts and principles help students acquire productive behaviors for use in the classroom. Over the years, the environment molds or conditions the unique characteristics and ways that students behave in the classroom. Thus, students' behaviors are a result of their experiences and environmental stimuli. Behaviorist ideas help teachers to understand how to help students acquire behaviors that are more complex, productive, or prosocial for use in the classroom. By changing the classroom and school environment through the use of a school-wide discipline approach, teachers can change how students respond to stimuli. Students are more likely to learn and exhibit behaviors that bring about positive consequences or reinforcement (Ormrod, 2011).

The behaviorist approach focuses on the teacher as the center of control and order. The teacher-centered approach leans toward the authoritarian leadership style that directs control from the top down (Gallagher & Goodman, 2007). Therefore, in agreement with behaviorist psychology, it is important that teachers describe, demonstrate, and model the behaviors which students need to learn, and it is important to make sure that all students regularly receive reinforcement for desired behaviors. Teachers should administer reinforcement consistently until a desired behavior occurs at a desired rate. Once a behavior is well established, students are gradually weaned from the extrinsic reinforcement. Monitoring student progress is important to determine whether or not the interventions are yielding the desired results (Ormrod, 2011).

Behaviorism also has several effective therapeutic techniques that are useful in changing unwanted behavior (Good & Brophy, 1990; Phillips & Soltis, 2009). ABA, one of the educational approaches, uses behavior modification techniques to address social and psychological problems and works well with students because they know exactly what is expected of them. Consistent use of reinforcements for appropriate responses gives a clear message about which behaviors are acceptable and which are not. Traditional ABA focuses on changing response-reinforcement contingencies to bring about appropriate behavior. More recently, theorists suggest that educators consider the purposes or functions that students' inappropriate behaviors may serve. This functional analysis involves collecting data regarding the specific conditions in which students tend to misbehave and the consequences that tend to be used with the misbehaviors.

PBIS takes the process one step further using the RTI framework, a problem solving model, used to assign students to alternate tiers when differentiated interventions need to be developed and used. After identifying the purpose that the inappropriate behaviors may serve, the teacher or team develops, enforces, and monitors a plan that targets a student's specific misbehaviors to encourage appropriate behaviors (Ormrod, 2011). Early intervention is critical to preventing problems from getting out of control, but data should drive the decisions that are made. Once research-based interventions are implemented, progress monitoring must be incorporated to inform instruction.

Using behaviorist theory in the classroom can be rewarding for both students and teachers. Behavioral change occurs for a reason; students work for things that bring them positive feelings and for approval from people they admire. They change behaviors to satisfy the desires they have learned to value. They generally avoid behaviors they associate with

unpleasantness and develop habitual behaviors from those that are repeated often (Parkay & Hass, 2000). The entire rationale of behavior modification is that most behavior is learned. Because behaviors can be learned (Standridge, 2002), behaviorist techniques are used in an educational setting to promote desirable behavior and to discourage undesirable behavior.

**Behaviorism as a framework for understanding and analyzing PBIS.** PBIS uses a combination of principles, theories, assumptions, and conceptual frameworks to focus on minimizing problem behaviors and increasing the students' success in the classroom (Weiss & Knoster, 2008). Using elements of the behaviorist theory, specifically ABA, the PBIS framework concentrates on structuring the environment to reinforce desired behaviors and to extinguish undesirable ones (Ormrod, 2011). Initially, PBIS was created in order to assist schools in fostering a positive school-wide climate. It was later expanded to include PBIS programs designed to positively shape the learning environment in schools in order to support student performance and academic achievement (Lassen et al., 2006; Nelson et al., 2002). Because PBIS is considered to be a proactive approach to increase students' time in the classroom and students' time on task, many schools implement the PBIS model to create a positive school environment that will foster increased student achievement for everyone (Sugai, 2008). According to researchers, a proactive behavior management system such as PBIS puts processes and procedures in place that result in maximized instructional time in the classroom (Lassen et al., 2006; Luiselli et al., 2005). Research indicates that implementation of school-wide PBIS is associated with a reduction in office discipline referrals and suspensions and improvements in academic performance (Horner, Sugai, Todd, & Lewis-Palmer, 2005; Nelson et al., 2002).

One of the main benefits PBIS gets from behaviorism is the ability to investigate observable behaviors in a scientific and systematic manner and to quantify and to collect data and information when conducting research (Good & Brophy, 1990; Phillips & Soltis, 2009). A core component includes measurable goals and data for decision making as well as evidence-based interventions and strategies to support understanding and to help set expectations. The integration of school-wide discipline and classroom management and strong instructional practices help to create a positive and safe school community for all students. The PBIS Model can be easily adapted for each school depending on its needs and culture. In order to promote success, the PBIS model encourages schools to define expectations, model expectations, teach the expectations, and reinforce the appropriate behaviors associated with the expectations (Sugai, 2008).

Although PBIS is derived primarily from ABA with a framework from RTI, PBIS research and practice incorporates evaluative methods, assessment and intervention procedures, and conceptual perspectives associated with a number of additional disciplines (Dunlop, Carr, Horner, Zarcone, & Schwartz, 2008). PBIS emphasizes the features of ABA, and the two work to create a positive behavior approach that improves student behavior and increases student learning. ABA focuses on changing the behavior of individuals while PBIS operates from a person-centered value base and recognizes the individuality of each person. PBIS interventions begin with a comprehensive functional assessment and PBIS promotes positive reinforcement. Both are essential to ABA. PBIS and ABA also work toward meaningful outcomes through comprehensive assessment and multifaceted research-based interventions. However, the measure of success for a PBIS intervention is the extent to which it produces change, and the main goal of ABA is to change behavior. The

intentionality of PBIS involves well-planned practices with specific goals. System level interventions have long been a feature of ABA with services delivered in the classrooms, and PBIS is a systems-level perspective focusing on interventions. This involves making decisions and using procedures derived from policy, problem solving in the context of a team, stakeholders, and the environment (Anderson & Freeman, 2000; Carr & Sidener, 2002). Through behavioral theory, PBIS supports the social and emotional needs of students and maintains behavior is learned and can be manipulated. PBIS incorporates procedures and strategies found in ABA and uses empirically tested assessments and interventions to incorporate a proactive behavior management system in order to maximize instructional time in the classroom (Sugai, 2008).

As a combination of behavioral theory, behavior analysis, positive behavior supports, and prevention and implementation science, PBIS improves how schools select, organize, implement, and evaluate behavioral practices for all students (Sugai et al., 2000). School personnel rely on the PBIS/RTI framework to implement and organize research-based interventions that are believed to enhance students' social behavior. PBIS and behaviorism rely on the same principles which include universal screening, progress monitoring, data-based decision making, and the implementation of evidence-based interventions. As a school-wide discipline approach, PBIS changes the environment or climate of the school just as behaviorists believe that unwanted behaviors can be changed. With this approach, teachers are trained to teach and model school-wide expectations, reinforce appropriate behavior, increase the ratio of positive interactions to negative interactions with students, and to positively influence classroom management (Horner, et al., 2005).



## **Characteristics of the PBIS Model**

PBIS is a framework that creates a positive school culture through: (a) a predictable school environment with a common language, common vision, and common experiences; (b) a positive school environment with regular recognition for positive behavior; (c) a safe school environment where violent and disruptive behavior is not tolerated; and (d) a consistent school environment where staff members have similar expectations. With PBIS, teachers alter the environment, teach appropriate skills, and reward appropriate behavior. Undesired behavior is replaced with new behavior skills. Behavior and academic success are directly related, and inappropriate behavior can severely hinder academic achievement (Fleming, Harachi, Cortes, Abbott, & Catalano, 2004). Therefore, the goal is to educate students, especially those with challenging behaviors. Because of the emphasis on continuous, data-based improvement, each school individualizes its implementation of PBIS. The adoption and sustained use of effective leveled-practices is central to PBIS, and there is a strong emphasis on systematically teaching behavior using effective instructional methods, approaches, and practices (Reynolds et al., 2009). With the three-tiered model of PBIS, service delivery is divided into three tiers of support, and educators systematically teach and reinforce social behaviors. The use of school-wide methods to increase productive behavior while decreasing the problem behaviors of all students is emphasized at Tier 1. Targeted interventions benefit at-risk students at Tier 2, and individualized and intensive services assist students at Tier 3 (Horner et al., 2005). PBIS incorporates effective practices for working with students' challenging behaviors (Hawken, Vincent, & Schumann, 2008). Within each tier, responsive students require less support and resources through behavioral or academic interventions (Cheney, Flower, & Templeton, 2008).

**Alignment of PBIS to RTI.** PBIS is a team-based framework for schools that borrows elements from RTI, an intervention that uses diagnostic data to develop personalized learning plans for all students. Consistent with the RTI approach, PBIS is characterized by a continuum of behavior support practices and systems to enhance students' social behavior (Sugai & Horner, 2009). PBIS utilizes the same principles that are characterized in academic RTI procedures: universal screening, continuous progress monitoring, team-based data decision making, implementation of evidence-based interventions, explicit monitoring of implementation fidelity, and local content expertise and fluency. Within each principle, students are taught effective strategies that are essential for supporting teaching and learning (Sugai & Horner, 2009).

The three tiers of PBIS are aligned with the three tiers of RTI. These three tiers of scientifically research-based interventions of increasing intensity help ensure the academic growth and achievement of students. According to McIntosh, Chard, Boland, and Horner (2006) and Lewis and Sugai (2017), combining behavior and academic systems together to create a three-tiered model that promotes a school-wide system of interventions, and resources provide students with a foundation for success. McIntosh, et al. (2006) said that combining these models: (a) provides students with universal interventions, (b) screens students to determine which services are needed, and (c) delivers a continuum of services matched to the level of support indicated by the screening and assessment of students. Each PBIS tier uses a continuum of support, and students are assigned to a tier on the continuum based on behavioral data and recommendation of the PBIS team. Most students are assigned to the primary level of support which describes the general school context. If students

struggle with the behavioral expectations of the model, they can move toward levels that provide more support.

The first level in PBIS, like RTI, is the universal level or Tier 1 which offers support for all. This refers to the school-wide expectations that are defined and taught to all school staff in each of the settings within the school. These expectations are developed by the team and taught to all students by the entire school staff and administration to prevent incidences of problem behaviors that the entire school would like to change. School staff members target the behaviors by positively reframing disrespectful behaviors into respectful behaviors as part of their behavioral expectations for students. Along with the expectations, there needs to be a system of acknowledgement and reinforcement of expected behaviors. The fidelity of the expectations will be determined by the continuous collection of data (Dixon, Eusebio, Turton, Wright, & Hale, 2010). Progress monitoring uses universal screening assessments to show individual student growth over time and to determine whether students are progressing as expected (Sugai, 2008). About 80 to 85% of the students will meet the goal for this level and will not need additional support.

Although the primary level is taught and reinforced with all students, about 15 to 20% of the students will need additional interventions with the at-risk behaviors indicated by the data. Students who consistently do not perform within the expected level of performance through Tier 1 instruction are provided additional supplementary interventions through small group instruction at the Tier 2 level. Core instruction is still delivered by the classroom teacher, but small groups of similar instructional levels may work together under a teacher's instruction and/or guidance. These behavioral interventions are taught by specialized staff including special educators, school psychologists, behavior interventionists, counselors, or

literary support teachers for struggling readers. This type of targeted instruction is typically for 30 minutes per day, two to four days per week, for a minimum of nine weeks.

Supplemental interventions may occur within or outside of the regular education classroom, and progress monitoring occurs at more frequent intervals. The main purpose of progress monitoring is to determine whether interventions are successful (Sugai, 2008).

Tier 3 was designed to support one to five percent of the students who do not respond to Tier 1 or Tier 2 services. As a result, Tier 3 strategies are more intensive in delivery. Within Tier 3, educators conduct an intensive Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) for students in which the results of the assessment are used to compose Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP) for the students. This individualized plan of support includes: (a) New skills to replace problem behaviors, (b) Reorganization of triggers or current environment, and (c) Procedures for monitoring, evaluating, and reassessing the plan. In order to have success in a Tier 3 intervention, both Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions must also be in place. Instructions and expectations are designed to meet the specific needs of the students so they can build strategies that exhibit positive behaviors. To aid students throughout this process, educators use various evidence-based interventions when intervening with behavioral concerns (Hughes & Dexter, 2011). Support for students with behavioral issues must be conducted in a comprehensive and collaborative manner, tailored to the students' specific needs, and include multiple interventions. The goal at this level is to diminish problematic behavior and increase adaptive skills (Sugai, 2008).

PBIS practices refer to the evidence-based curriculum, instruction, interventions, and strategies implemented within the school in order to create a common and shared understanding of expectations (Stage, Cheney, Lynass, & Mielenz, 2012). The forming of

systems is a crucial component of the PBIS model. PBIS requires a review team of educators with buy-in from across the school and strong administrative support to design and enforce the systems within the PBIS model at each school. The team is a representative group of all of the staff. In a secondary school, students could also be included as part of this team. The team creates the systems that will be employed with the staff and the students they serve (Collins & Halverson, 2009).

When analyzing data, the team considers trends in numbers, location of problem occurrences, specific classroom occurrences, and individual students involved (Sugai, 2008). PBIS data is used for all levels of decision making (Paris & Paris, 2001). Through the data, schools take stock of their current situation, pinpoint areas for change and/or improvement, and evaluate the effects of current and future interventions (Sugai, 2008). Practices are introduced through the PBIS team after a review of the data (Stage, Cheney, Lynass, & Mielenz, 2012). The goals created by the team must be measurable and the result of implementing the PBIS Model (Howard, Hourcade, & Blum, 2011). The academic and behavior goals are defined and supported by the students, families, and teachers in order for the program to be successful (Bol, Kaplan, & Piskin, 2010). The main goal of the school community is improved student behavior (Howard, et al., 2011). Outcomes of a successful PBIS implementation can be measured in both behavior data and academic achievement of the students in the school (Bol et al., 2010).

**PBIS strengths in the body of scholarship.** PBIS is a behavior intervention system implemented to provide an environment which will promote a positive and proactive setting while keeping students in the classroom and focused on learning (Sugai, 2008). Not only do teachers alter the environment, teach appropriate skills, and reward appropriate behavior;

they ensure that undesired behavior is replaced with new behavior skills. With behavior and academic success directly related and with inappropriate behavior severely hindering academic achievement (Fleming, et al., 2004; McIntosh, Chard, Boland, & Horner, 2006), it is difficult for students to be disruptive and engaged in the learning process at the same time. Because teacher actions in the classroom have twice the impact on student academic achievement (Marzano & Marzano, 2003), students need to stay in the classroom to maximize instruction and learning. PBIS emphasizes the prevention of problem behaviors before they occur to increase the opportunity for appropriate classroom behavior to keep students in the classroom focused and learning (Sugai, 2008).

Effective classroom management and discipline are essential for teaching and learning. PBIS emphasizes the integrated use of classroom management and school-wide discipline strategies coupled with effective academic instruction to create a positive and safe school climate for all students. Because research indicates that punishing students inconsistently without a positive alternative is ineffective and only offers short-term solutions and modeling and rewarding positive behaviors are more effective, the goal of PBIS is to establish a positive school climate. To do this, a continuum of behavior support is established. It is applied at the school or primary level for all students, at the secondary level for small groups of students, and at the tertiary level for individual students (Barley et al., 2002; Barth et al., 2008). The instructional aim for all students with the PBIS program in the school setting is to foster independence, build self-esteem, take pride in their culture, and strive for academic success (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012).

PBIS school-wide programs have been found to be effective in schools. Since the 1980s, there have been a number of studies documenting the positive effects of PBIS as a

school-wide approach (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2004). Bradley, Doolittle, Lopez, Smith, and Sugai (2007) conducted a research study with more than 7,400 schools nation-wide using PBIS. They found that classrooms using PBIS saved up to 20 hours of instructional time per week for students who usually missed class for behavioral issues.

In a study conducted by Lassen et al. (2006), multiple schools in a low income, inner-city area were observed over a three-year period. During this period, PBIS was implemented. According to Lassen et al. (2006), instructional strategies, student motivation, and student test-taking skills are essential in determining academic outcomes. However, over the three-year period when PBIS was put in place, standardized test scores in math increased significantly. In a similar study, Luiselli et al. (2005) selected an urban community with an elementary school consisting of kindergarten through fifth grade with approximately 630 students. The study concluded that office discipline referrals and suspensions affect academic achievement. The study further indicated that student performance and academic achievement can benefit from PBIS. In this study, reading comprehension scores increased by 18% and math scores increased by 25% (Luiselli et al., 2005).

Sugai and Simonsen (2012) reported over 16,000 school teams had been trained in PBIS. Of those teams, three states had more than 60% of schools using PBIS, nine states had 40% of schools using PBIS, and 16 states had 30% of schools using PBIS. More than 80% of students and staff indicated improvement in behavior, and 70-80% of students experienced reduced discipline referrals. Currently, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) reports there are 25,911 schools implementing PBIS (OSEP Technical Support Center, 2018).

The literature indicates there are many factors such as student behavior,

socioeconomic issues, birth size, overall health, school climate, home life, social adjustment, teachers, parents, school staff and administration that affect student achievement, and various studies have been done with these factors (Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995; Brown & Evans, 2002; Crosnoe, Johnson & Elder, 2004; Dupper & Myer-Adams, 2002; Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001; Lee & Bryk, 1989; Marsh, 1992; McNeal, 1995; Stewart, 2008). However, for years, the literature indicated that classroom management is one of the critical ingredients of effective teaching (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993). There is a strong connection between classroom management, student behavior, and academic achievement (McIntosh, et al., 2006). Behavior and academic success are directly related, and inappropriate behavior can severely hinder academic achievement. To help with discipline issues, teachers have access to many discipline programs from which to choose. Schools that appear to be conducive to learning are those at which teachers may have a better understanding of classroom management because the students are taught what is expected of them by the school community (Stronge, 2012). Time spent away from the classroom due to office discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions is time away from instruction and the learning processes, which highly correlates with poor academic achievement (Bodovski & Farkas, 2007; Canady & Rettig, 2008).

According to the research, PBIS creates a positive school culture in a consistent environment with similar expectations by all staff members because there is a common language, a common vision, and common experiences (Scott & Barrett, 2004). The school environment is safe and positive, disruptive behavior is not tolerated, and there is consistent recognition for positive behavior (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Because teachers alter the environment, teach appropriate skills, and reward appropriate behavior, undesired behavior is



replaced with new behavior skills (Fleming et al., 2004; McIntosh et al., 2006). Since PBIS was introduced in the 1980s as a school-wide discipline approach, it has been studied and researched in connection to reading scores, math scores, school culture, office discipline referrals, lost instructional time, academic proficiency, and academic and discipline data for specific ethnic groups. Numerous research studies indicate that appropriate classroom management strategies help to eliminate or decrease student disruptions within the classrooms (Smart & Igo, 2010).

A strong school-wide discipline program such as PBIS is crucial to the preservation of instructional time. With the effective implementation of a school wide discipline program, everyone is a member of a team that follows the same path, and there are no discrepancies about what is expected. A sense of strong teamwork and shared responsibility are valued (Protheroe, 2006). Everyone in the school has the same rules and consequences in the common areas. Every instructional minute is important, and inappropriate behaviors can sacrifice instructional time as well as hinder the academic growth of students.

***PBIS and academic achievement.*** Academic performance and behaviors are often combined when it comes to school success. According to Skiba and Sprague (2008), suspensions can affect dropout rates, academic quality, school climate, and standardized achievement tests. Davis and Jordan (1994), Skiba and Rausch (2006), and Skiba and Sprague (2008) found that research indicates schools with higher suspension/expulsion rates have lower standardized achievement tests scores regardless of student socioeconomics and demographics. Therefore, it is crucial for referrals, detentions, and suspensions to be minimized in order for all students to experience success in school. Several studies found a link between behavioral problems and academic performance (Lassen et al., 2006; McIntosh,

2005; Tobin & Sugai, 1999). Most educators believe it is difficult to find a student with behavioral problems who does not also have academic troubles. In Florida, 80% of students identified with severe behavioral problems experienced academic problems (Sandomierski, Kincaid, & Algozzine, 2007).

Because studies indicated improvements in student behavior and school climate are related to improvements in academic outcomes (Horner et al., 2008; McIntosh et al., 2006; Nelson, Colvin, & Smith, 1996; Wentzel, 1993), PBIS is one behavior intervention system that is being implemented to provide a positive and proactive environment that will keep students in the classroom and focused on learning. A goal of PBIS is to instill proactive systematic processes that will foster and create a safe environment. Consistent systematic processes help create a culture of learning that will lead to academic success. Schools instituting behavior management interventions systems such as PBIS have found a drop in suspensions (Bohanon et al., 2006; Dunlop et al., 2008; Lassen, et al., 2006; Luiselli et al., 2005; Warren et al., 2006).

A multiple school implementation study of PBIS by Lassen et al. (2006) revealed a decrease in office discipline referrals and suspensions and an increase in academic achievement. While reading test scores did not change significantly, math scores increased from the baseline to year three. According to Lassen et al. (2006), instructional strategies, student motivation, and student test-taking skills are essential in determining academic outcomes. Students will not receive appropriate instruction if they are not in the classroom. In a similar study, Luiselli et al. (2005) concluded that office discipline referrals and suspensions affect academic achievement as reading comprehension scores increased by 18% and math scores by 25%. Luiselli et al. (2005) concluded that the PBIS intervention

approach benefited the students' academic performance. By following PBIS interventions, teachers alter the environment, teach appropriate skills, and reward appropriate behavior in order to replace undesired behavior with new behavior skills and increased student achievement.

Time spent away from the classroom due to office discipline referrals (ODRs), suspensions, and expulsions means time away from instruction and the learning processes which has a high correlation with poor academic achievement (Bodovski & Farkas, 2007; Canady & Rettig, 2008). Scott and Barrett (2004) implemented school-wide PBIS in an urban elementary school. During the two year study, ODRs decreased by 562 and suspensions by 55 annually. This is directly linked to instruction time because the authors estimated that ODRs took the student away from 20 minutes of instruction and suspension removed them from school for one day. After the implementation of PBIS, school-wide instruction increased an average of 29.5 days for ODRs and 50 days for suspensions (Scott & Barrett, 2004). Putnam, Handler, and O'Leary-Zonarich (2003) did a similar pre-and-post PBIS implementation study in a low-performing urban school. Their semester results revealed a 169 day increase, school-wide, in instructional time versus the semester prior to implementation.

Horner, Sugai, Eber, and Lewandowski (2004) analyzed academic achievement scores for schools in Illinois that implemented PBIS versus those schools that had not. They examined scores from the Illinois State Achievement Test Reading Standard for the third grade. The results showed that 62% of third graders met the state standard for reading in the 52 schools studied that fully implemented school-wide positive behavior support. In contrast, 47% of third graders met the state standard for reading in the 69 schools studied

that had not implemented school-wide PBIS (Horner, Sugai, Eber, & Lewandowski, 2004).

Horner, Sugai, Todd, and Lewis-Palmer, (2005) executed a district-wide study of 19 elementary schools. Of these schools, 13 implemented PBIS school-wide between the 1997-1998 and 2001-2002 school year. The researchers compared 1997-1998 and 2001-2002 state reading tests for third graders in all 19 schools. Ten of the PBIS schools, or 77%, showed an improvement in reading test scores from 1997-1998 through 2001-2002. The improvements were from 2% to 15%. Only one of the non-PBIS schools or 16% showed improvement in reading test scores over the same period of time. The researchers also noted that the improvement for the PBIS schools was significant because most were low-performing schools before they implemented the intervention.

***PBIS and social justice.*** Some researchers suggest that the demographic location of students has an impact on behavior. Students that reside in low income, high crime areas tend to be at a greater risk of demonstrating negative classroom behavior resulting in school suspension and office discipline referrals (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). McLloyd (1998) stated that race and socioeconomic status are related, and low socioeconomic status is a significant factor for disciplinary sanctions, particularly school suspensions.

Our nation continues to face the challenges of closing the achievement gap for minority students and their counterparts because minority students are subject to a disproportionate rate of school discipline. Arcia (2006) reported that schools' disciplinary actions include ODRs, in and out of school suspension, detention, and expulsion. Although students that are removed from the classroom are not learning, Arcia (2006) contends that a school's primary discipline tactic is exclusion or removing the student from the classroom. This exclusion disproportionately affects African American and Hispanic students. Gregory,

Skiba, and Noguera (2010) stated that excluding students from the classroom may be contributing to the gap in academic achievement. Fenning and Rose (2007) agreed that the disproportionate consequential disciplining that minority students receive is linked to the achievement gap. For many years, researchers have reported that minority students, particularly African American and Hispanic, have been suspended or expelled in disproportionately larger numbers than their Caucasian counterparts (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2010). School climate has been linked with improved academic achievement and reduced discipline problems, and thus is often a target for school improvement initiatives (Mitchell, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2010). Raffaele-Mendez and Knoff (2003) concluded that suspension has been found to be a predictor of student dropout or not graduating on time. In addition, discipline sanctions resulting in exclusion from school may damage the learning process in other ways as well. Suspended students may become less bonded to school, less invested in school rules and course work, and less motivated to achieve academic success (Gregory et al., 2010).

The concern for the disproportionate racial rate was first brought to the nation's attention in 1975 by the Children's Defense Fund. Over the years, national studies indicate that African American students were suspended at least two times more than other students (Gregory et al., 2010; KewelRamani, Gilbertson, Fox, Provansnik, 2007; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987). Research by Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rauch, May, & Tobin (2011) compared middle school African American and Caucasian students referred to the office for negative classroom behavior. The research concluded that although there was no difference in the severity of the negative behavior, African American students were referred more often than Caucasian for minor infractions such as disrespect. Skiba et al. (2011) also reported that

Hispanic students at the secondary level were suspended at least 10% more than Caucasian students, and Native American students had a higher chance of being suspended than Caucasian students, but less likely than other minorities. In regards to gender, all male ethnicities received more disciplinary actions than females.

Although there are multiple factors that contribute to classroom disruption, researchers indicated that some conflicting classroom behaviors are a result of cultural differences (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Gregory et al., 2010; Morrissey, Bohanon, & Fleming, 2010). Students of different cultural backgrounds who physically show their emotions in the classroom may experience conflict between peers and the facilitator. A teacher's job is to recognize that the students' home environment represents their culture and language, and it may not be valued in the school. Therefore, the teacher needs to create lessons that make connections between the home and school experience (Au, 2006; Dutro, Kazemi, Balf, & Lin, 2008). The majority of teachers are Caucasian females which can lead to cultural barriers and stereotypes between the student and teacher (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). Researchers suggested that emotions or social interactions by students in the classroom may be interpreted as negative classroom behavior and lead to disciplinary action by the teacher (Ferguson, 2001; Townsend, 2000). An increased number of suspensions and expulsions are found to be associated with a decrease in academic learning and student achievement as well as poor student and teacher relationships (Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rauch, May, & Tobin, 2011). Removing students from the school environment because of ODRs, suspension, or expulsion increases the risk factor for future negative behavior, dropout rates, and student involvement in the juvenile justice system (Skiba & Rauch, 2006).

Skiba et al. (2011) explored racial and ethnic disparities in ODRs and administrative

disciplinary decisions from a subsample of 4000 elementary and secondary schools nationwide during the school years of 2005-2006. The data was obtained from the School-Wide Information System (SWIS). This system summarized ODRs by race and/or ethnicity for the following: African American, Asian, Native American, Hispanic, and Caucasian students. The results revealed that African American students in kindergarten through sixth grade were overrepresented. They received ODRs at least two times more than Caucasian students. African American students in sixth through ninth grade received ODRs at least three times more than Caucasian students. Hispanic students were also overrepresented in sixth through ninth grade with ODRs compared to Caucasian students; however, Hispanic students in kindergarten through sixth grade were underrepresented with ODRs. In addition, the results at the administrative level indicated there was a significant difference in school discipline in regard to the disproportionate representation of African American and Hispanic students. Study results support the assertion that students of different races and ethnicities are disciplined differently.

In 2002, the Haycock study reported that over the past 20 years the achievement gap has widened because of lack of educational resources, an increase in dropout rates, low expectations, nonqualified teachers, and the poor academic achievement levels of African American students and students who reside in low income areas (Wells, Griffith, & Kritsonis, 2007). They further added that poor resources and school environments that exhibit student behavior problems continue to interfere with student learning, and the gap continues to widen. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (2007) stated the academic progress of student success declines and the academic achievement gap widens among African American students and their Caucasian counterparts during middle school.

Contemporary theorists Palumbo, Sanacore, and Rothstein reported that the achievement gap remains stagnant at the middle school level, and a majority of these low academic achievers are African Americans students who reside in low-income areas (Palumbo & Sanacore, 2009; Rothstein, 2004).

Lassen et al. (2006) and Luiselli et al. (2005) examined the question of whether positive culture created through behavior interventions can achieve academic success. Lassen et al. (2006) found that: (a) the school's level of adherence to PBIS principles and procedures was associated with reductions in problem behaviors and improvement of school functions, (b) improvements were observed in standardized achievement test scores, and (c) there was a positive relation between achievement test scores and problem behavior.

The most effective method to determine whether positive behavior programs impact student achievement is to analyze standardized achievement test data. While this is not the only factor to analyze, research suggests that one of the most significant factors to affect achievement is problem behaviors (Lassen et al., 2006). As noted by Lassen et al. (2006), disruptive behavior typically results in lost instructional time and compromised learning. Interventions can help maximize instructional time by keeping students in class and producing improvements in academic areas. The report on preliminary descriptive data by Horner et al. (2005) suggested a relationship between school-wide PBIS and changes in academic performance. PBIS is one initiative schools are using to close the achievement gap and to create a productive school-wide environment through a behavior intervention system.

### **PBIS in North Carolina**

The North Carolina PBIS (NC PBIS) Initiative is a prevention and early intervention strategy supported by the Exceptional Children's Division of North Carolina Department of



Public Instruction through IDEA of 2004. It is the vision of the NCDPI that all schools in North Carolina implement PBIS as an effective and proactive process in order to improve social competence and academic achievement for all students (Reynolds et al., 2009). NCDPI provides leadership, professional development, resources, and on-going support for schools to successfully implement PBIS. NC PBIS sites work to integrate Safe Schools' Plans, character education programs and strategies, and discipline efforts to make schools caring and safe communities for learning. At the end of the 2011-2012 school year, 1,154 state schools were trained in or implementing the PBIS model. This represents 46% of North Carolina's 2,512 schools (NC PBIS, 2015).

According to Reynolds, Irwin, and Algozzine (2009), beginning in 2007-2008, schools participating in the NC PBIS Initiative could be recognized for implementation achieved by documenting ongoing administrator participation, by creating an active PBIS team, by appointing an in-school coach, and by providing evidence of implementation progress. Three levels of implementation are: (a) PBIS Green Ribbon Schools - Green Ribbon schools have completed Module 1 team training and have begun PBIS implementation. They have attained at least a Level 1 on the Implementation Inventory and 80% total on the School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET); (b) PBIS Model Schools - Model schools have completed all of the requirements for Green Ribbon Schools and have completed Module 2 training. They have also achieved a Level 2 on the Implementation Inventory and 90% total SET score, and (c) PBIS Exemplar Schools - Exemplar schools have completed requirements for Green Ribbon and Model Schools and have completed all three team training modules. They have scored a Level 3 or higher on the Implementation Inventory and 95% total on the SET. These schools also have at least two consecutive years

of required behavioral, attendance, and academic data showing improvement and at least one additional documented data element such as a self-assessment or climate survey tracked as a team.

**Fidelity of implementation.** The success of the implementation of PBIS is affected by the fidelity associated with the implementation of PBIS. Fidelity can be influenced by a number of factors which include preplanning, program characteristics, training and technical support, program/approach integration, organizational characteristics, and implementer characteristics. During preplanning, the reasons for implementing an approach often influence its success or failure. Within an organization, approaches implemented based on the needs indicated by the data yield higher results (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2002).

With program characteristics, implementation can be affected by features such as complexity and structure related to the approach. Goals and specific procedures must be clear and easily understood because they are necessary to the success of the approach/program. A curriculum with relevant, attractive, and easy to use activities enhances the use of the approach/program (Mihalic, Fagan, & Argamaso, 2008).

Fidelity is affected by training and technical support. Training influences the knowledge, skills, and desire to successfully implement an approach or program. In order for a program/approach to be successful, the training needs to create enthusiasm and reduce resistance. Research indicates trained teachers are more successful because they are more prepared, more likely to implement with fidelity, and produce better student outcomes. Once staff members are trained, teacher turnover can interfere with fidelity of implementation. To ensure support and commitment to the program/approach, retraining must continue each year. Without support over time, teachers may discontinue use of a program/approach or fail

to implement as it was intended. Retraining and additional training or feedback will help rejuvenate and get everyone back on track (Mihalic, Fagan, & Argamaso, 2008).

With the integration of the approach, success is more than choosing an appropriate program/approach for a school. Training must continually link the program/approach to the goals and mission of the school, make the approach part of the culture, and be planned and delivered by trained personnel using engaging materials and procedures. The culture and attitude of the staff must be receptive to the new approach. Teachers need to agree on the need for a change, relevance of the implementation, and be involved in the planning (Fagan & Mihalic, 2003).

The organizational characteristics/factors that affect implementation are positive climate, agency stability, shared decision-making, community support, and interagency linkages. The success of a program depends on the support of a strong administrative team because they team motivates by keeping communication lines open and expressing a clear vision. Active leadership is displayed by setting priorities, providing resource allocations such as time, changing policy to accommodate the program/approach, scheduling and integrating the approach, and becoming personally involved. Administrative support and implementation quality are important for success (Durlak & DuPre, 2008).

Implementer characteristics such as staff support, motivation, and buy-in are critical to implementation success. Success is cultivated by staff members who execute an initiative and share high morale, good communication, and sense of ownership. Buy-in is nurtured when teachers are included in the planning process, training and support are provided, and regularly held meetings are scheduled to discuss problems. It is important to select a

program coordinator who supports the approach and guides its operations (Fagan & Mehalic, 2003).

There are two perspectives (profidelity and adaptation) about fidelity. Supporters of profidelity believe in strict adherence to the original model. Deviations will result in a lessening of effectiveness (Elliott & Mihalic, 2004). Supporters of adaptation believe in modifying an approach to fit their needs. The flexibility with this model promises greater program effectiveness and longer program life (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978). PBIS would fall under adaptation because the approach is modified or tailored to fit the needs of the school. Professional development for the implementation of PBIS is designed specifically for individual school communities.

***Train-the-trainer model.*** Educators need ongoing professional development to implement district initiatives and curriculum changes, and PBIS is no different. Professional development is important to the success of PBIS. The initial PBIS Team is trained for an entire year prior to the implementation of PBIS. Once the initial team has completed the required training, the school relies on the Train-the-Trainer Model to provide professional development to the rest of the staff. The model has pros and cons. The Train-the-Trainer (TTT) Model has proven to be effective in staff development because it involves training a person or persons from the school to train other people at the schools. By using teachers as trainers for other teachers, there is a reduction in costs, increased communication, and improved school culture. However, one of the main benefits of the model is that it can assure fidelity to an approach or strategies by having each trainer prepare materials in exactly the same way. This adds consistency to the message that is being delivered. On the reverse side, by using a script that targets a specific purpose or need with the Train-the-Trainer Model, the

needs of schools may differ and the script may not be as relevant for one school as it is for another. TTT is not flexible and does not always allow for differentiation which can be troublesome for PBIS which needs to be tailored to individual schools (Bennett, 2017).

### **Limitations of PBIS**

Even though there is research to support the benefits of PBIS, many people say there are issues that can reduce its effectiveness. Chitiyo and Wheeler (2008) acknowledge that problems with PBIS include insufficient time and an uncertainty with what to do with collected data. Kincaid, Childs, Blasé, and Wallace (2007) identified difficulties which included team training, barriers with data, team functioning, communication, staff buy-in and reward systems. A lack of support and training for teachers, complex strategies, and a weak administration can jeopardize the effectiveness of the program (Metzler, Biglan, Rusby, & Srague, 2001). George Sugai, co-director of the PBIS Center, stated that with some schools too much time is spent on reacting to negative behavior and positive behavior is not taught (Bogen, 2009).

**Technical Assistance Center.** Since 2007, PBIS has spread through thousands of schools in every state due to the efforts of the federally funded Technical Assistance Center on PBIS. The Technical Center representatives have visited hundreds of schools to teach the PBIS practices. The center estimates that the research-supported strategies are currently used in nearly 20,000 schools nationwide, with a well-documented impact on school safety, student behavior, and academics (Samuels, 2013).

According to Samuels (2013), these are complaints that Robert H. Horner, a co-director of the PBIS center, has heard numerous times. He said the center website has a page which includes the history, defining features, and misconceptions about PBIS. This is where

it addresses the perception that it provides a specific model for schools to follow. Samuels (2013) further added that the work of the center is a shift from packaged programs. It asks schools to adopt core educational and behavior support features. The center says that all schools need to create a small set of school-wide social expectations, but how school administrators choose to implement that work is up to them (Samuels, 2013). The center's work has its critics. George Bear, a professor in the School of Education at the University of Delaware in Newark, says the center's focus on student behavior does not offer enough focus on helping students develop intrinsic motivation. It encourages students to respond to praise or rewards (Samuels, 2013). The token economy system associated with behavior modification has also been criticized by educators as a form of bribery and is not characteristic of everyday life (Black, 2016).

In addition to his concerns that the center's work is seen as an official implementation model, Mr. Knoff says there is a screening issue. He has concerns with practices he believes are harmful to students, such as steering students who need more support to interventions before validating the results of the screening tools designed to identify them. Also, he believes that students who are identified as requiring more support need to have fast access to diagnostic assessments to ensure that the interventions are the right ones, rather than guessing what to use.

**PBIS misconceptions.** Although much of the research suggests the positive aspects of implementing PBIS, some misconceptions or weaknesses have been identified. PBIS is not an intervention or practice. It is a framework or an approach. As a framework or an approach, PBIS provides the means for selecting, organizing, and implementing evidence-based practices by focusing on: (a) clearly defined and meaningful student outcomes, (b)

data-driven decision making and problem solving processes, and (c) systems that prepare and support implementers to use these practices with high fidelity and durability. PBIS is composed of research-based behavioral practices and interventions designed to improve students' social behavior and their academic achievement (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012).

Another misconception shared by some educators is that PBIS emphasizes the use of tangible rewards which can negatively affect the development of intrinsic motivation. The framework of PBIS contains practices that generate feedback to students about the use and accuracy of their social skills and behaviors. There is a need for more teacher and external feedback systems when students are acquiring more difficult social skills (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). External feedback systems are decreased and replaced by a more natural environment and/or self-managed feedback systems when students become more fluent in their use of social skills (Akin-Little & Little, 2009). It is difficult to conceptualize and measure intrinsic motivation. However, there is little evidence to support that the use of positive reinforcement, rewards, and recognition have negative influences on academic and social behavior growth (Cameron, 2005; Cameron, Banko, & Pierce, 2001; Cameron & Pierce, 2002).

The next misconception about PBIS is that it was designed for students with disabilities (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). The phrase Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports was first used in the reauthorization of the IDEA (2004); however, the practices, principles, and systems associated with PBIS have been discussed and used since the early 1960s and 1970s (Carr, 2007; Sugai & Horner, 2002). PBIS is a combination of behavioral theory, behavior analysis, ABA, positive behavior supports, RTI, and prevention and implementation science which was developed to improve how schools select, organize

implement, and evaluate behavioral practices to meet all student needs (Sugai et al., 2000).

The fourth misconception is PBIS focuses on behavior while RTI is for academics. RTI serves as a framework for developing and implementing multi-tiered systems for not only academics, but also behavior support (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). RTI consists of a universal screening component as well as a continuous progress monitoring component. RTI also provides a continuum of evidence-based practices and includes team driven decision making based on data. The implementation fidelity evaluation is also an important component of RTI (Sugai & Horner, 2009). The PBIS framework hinges on the application of RTI principles in order to improve the social behavior outcomes of all students. PBIS is frequently referred to as the behavior side of the multi-tiered continuum of RTI; however, this is considered to be a misrepresentation of the integrated supports offered to foster behavior and academic growth (Sugai, Horner, Fixen, & Blase, 2010).

**Educators/teachers/community.** Although there are not yet many studies that explain the negative aspects of PBIS, there is a great deal of activity on the internet with teacher and parent blogs, newsletters, and newspaper articles that raise some relevant questions about perceptions of PBIS. According to Jessica Terrell (2013), a writer for The Orange County Register, Santa Ana teachers were instructed by their district to implement PBIS as a discipline approach because it would reduce suspensions, elevate academics, and strengthen student-teacher relationships. Instead of being a positive step for Santa Ana Schools, teachers became frustrated and student disrespect and violent behavior doubled. Implementation at 41 schools at one time, too little training, and too little buy-in made it difficult for it to work. It takes time to build relationships with staff and students. The county's PBIS trainer said for successful implementation there needs to be good training,



clear goals, and expectations for policies to work. She said it takes about 80% faculty support to get past the pessimists. She further added that strong principals are important to bringing teachers on board. Teachers said they were told to use PBIS without clear consequences for inappropriate behavior. Their only direction from the district was that implementing PBIS would reduce suspensions.

According to Marshall's monthly newsletter and blog (2008), teachers do not believe PBIS is a good practice because it rests on the idea that students need something tangible to change behavior. They feel PBIS is another case of using a misguided approach based on external agents to promote responsible behavior which is an internal decision. Because rewards can change motivation and foster narcissism, rewarding young people for appropriate behavior fosters narcissism and encourages students to ask what they will be given for following the rules. Teachers added that PBIS is based on a misguided approach of external agents to promote characteristics that are necessary for a democratic society. PBIS is based on Skinner's positive reinforcement approach called behaviorism. Because this worked on rodents and other species, it was projected that the same reinforcement would work on humans. However, it completely rejects any kind of internal motivation. PBIS as a "one size fits all" approach is totally unfair and unrealistic (Marshall, 2008).

A conversation about PBIS on a posting board initiated by The Vent (2015) was very similar to the newsletters and blogs. Teachers indicated that rewards turn good behavior into work, lead to entitlement, cheapen the intrinsic motivation to behave, and lead to the need for more and more rewards. They maintain good behavior can be its own reward because it offers students self-respect, confidence, and the wonderful feeling of belonging to a classroom that needs and appreciates them.

A blog started by the College of Education at the University of Florida (2014) noted that Cognitive Science, the new generation of research in psychology, and the research that bridges cognitive science and neuroscience largely reject the behaviorists' approach to behavior modification. They feel it is dated and claim that while there are some benefits of using rewards and punishments with caution in the classroom, it is more important to teach students how to think in order to improve their own behavior. When teachers use cognitive-behavior interventions (CBI), they help students control their own behavior rather than use external reinforcements to solve the problem. Students are taught how-to-think rather than what-to-think and operate using self-control (University of Florida College of Education Educator's Blog, 2014).

Some people feel that PBIS is based on the use of rules that are meant to control, not inspire. If a rule is broken, the natural tendency is to enforce it. Without even realizing it, teachers who depend on rules soon become preoccupied with policing or enforcing rules. In addition, establishing rules to have teachers reward students is counterproductive to the goals of the system. A critical factor that the developers of the approach do not realize is that rewards aim at obedience, but obedience does not create desire. Rules do not foster values of character education such as responsibility, integrity, honesty, empathy, or perseverance (Marshall, 2015). The supporters and non-supporters of PBIS continue to express their opinions about the approach. Each group seems to believe it is correct in its position on behavior management, and both sides claim to have the best interest of the student in mind when making decisions.

### **PBIS Gaps/Weaknesses in the Body of Scholarship**

There is research to indicate schools that implement PBIS as a school-wide discipline

approach are successful at decreasing office discipline referrals, decreasing time that students are out of the classroom, increasing academic achievement, and creating a positive environment for learning. Because PBIS is a school-wide behavior support system, common expectations are established for the entire school. One weakness in the literature is that there is no indication of how this allows for teacher autonomy. This information is crucial because teachers bring their own strengths, weaknesses, and skill sets to the classroom.

With any new initiative in schools and districts, teacher buy-in is essential to the success of the initiative. A review of literature does not indicate how to initiate buy-in with staff members other than the initial PBIS core team. It is important for the literature to provide information about how teachers feel about PBIS before it is implemented, shortly after implementation, and years after implementation. Buy-in is essential to any successful implementation because teachers establish the expectations for behavior and learning. The literature needs to provide information to district and school leaders about factors that support or hinder teacher buy-in in order to have a more successful implementation.

Resources and funding are always a consideration when a school is considering a new initiative. Another weakness in the literature is there is no information to suggest the cost of implementing or sustaining PBIS for a school or district. Not only is the financial cost of PBIS not addressed, there is little information to suggest the vast amount of planning that needs to take place prior to implementation. Schools and districts needs to be aware of how far in advance they need to start planning for implementation and the amount of work that goes into a successful implementation.

Even though PBIS schools have reward systems in place, a common concern is providing rewards for appropriate behavior sends the wrong message to students. Many

educators feel students do not need to be rewarded for using appropriate behavior. They feel students should behave because it is the appropriate action to take and because they want to make the right choice. The research does not address this issue adequately.

Low performing schools appear to have reaped the benefits from the implementation of PBIS. There needs to be more information about the implementation of PBIS in non-Title I schools. It is important for school districts to know if all types of schools would benefit from PBIS. It is also essential to know if PBIS interventions and strategies transfer with the students from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school. Most research focuses on elementary schools. It is important to know about the implementation of PBIS in middle and high schools. There needs to be research to track these students.

In order for schools to successfully implement PBIS, it is important to know the factors that support success and the factors that hinder success. The literature does an accurate job of telling us about the benefits experienced when PBIS is implemented. However, there is not information to inform schools and districts about the obstacles that hinder the success of PBIS

Educators must take into account that today's students enter the classroom with various backgrounds. In IDEA (2004), specific provisions were made to address the disproportional and poor outcomes of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. These students are a part of many American classrooms; however, research reports an increasing trend in which African American, Native American, and Hispanic students are suspended at higher rates than their Caucasian classmates. Research is needed to educate teachers on how to handle cultural and linguistic diversity in order to keep students in a positive environment where they can experience academic success.

Absent from the research is inquiry into the impact of the principal's role in the implementation of PBIS as a school wide discipline program. Research is needed to examine the connection between leadership styles of school principals and the implementation of PBIS as a school-wide discipline program. It is important to know how and why the implementation was or was not successful so PBIS teams can use the information to successfully implement PBIS in other schools in the future. Public school principals are on the front lines of those being held accountable for the educational progress of all students and for maintaining safe school environments (Davis et al., 2005). It is important that other educators hear their stories and benefit from their successes in order to increase academic achievement for all students.

Another gap in the literature is that there is limited research on how staff members perceive PBIS as a school-wide discipline approach, how implementation impacts their motivation and satisfaction, how they perceive the success and sustainability of the approach, how it affects teacher retention and job satisfaction, and how it affects student discipline and student growth. Although many research studies indicate that PBIS has a positive effect on school-wide discipline, many stakeholders express negative feelings about PBIS (Hunsaker, 2016; Liebig, 2016; Marshall, 2015; Terrell, 2013). This results in a gap between the research and the feelings or perceptions of the stakeholders.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Introduction to Qualitative Study

Telling stories is a natural part of life. People usually have a story to share about their experiences, and it is interesting to see how different people experience and interpret the world around them (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009).

People live storied lives. They tell stories to share their lives with others and to provide their personal accounts about classrooms, schools, educational issues, and the settings in which they work. When people tell stories to researchers, they feel listened to, and their information brings researchers closer to the actual practice of education. Thus, stories reported in qualitative narrative research enrich the lives of both the researcher and the participant (Creswell, 2008, p. 151).

To discover the meaning that people give to the events they experience is one of the reasons why I chose a qualitative approach for this study. Qualitative researchers argue that all meaning is situated in a particular perspective or context. Because different people and groups have different perspectives and contexts, the world has many different meanings with no meaning more valid or true than another. While qualitative researchers do not start with a hypothesis, they do not enter a research setting without any idea of what they intend to study (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). The purpose of this study is to discover the meaning that the staff members at one school give to their experiences with the pre-implementation, implementation, and sustainability of PBIS as a school-wide discipline approach.

Qualitative research is helpful when a complex problem involves deep exploration through both description and theme data analysis and/or is conducted to empower individuals to share their stories, to hear their voices, and to minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in the study (Creswell, 2005). Qualitative research using how or what questions is one way to help participants communicate their

stories or explore their experience with in-depth understanding of what happened (Patton, 2002). Stake (2005) and Yin (2003) add that the case studies best suited to research are the ones that ask how and why questions. To thoroughly explore the staff members' experiences with the implementation of PBIS as a school-wide discipline approach, I used nine how or what questions during the individual interview process.

A qualitative study also empowers participants to share their voices and allows the researcher to explore the participants' feelings and thought processes which are normally difficult to capture through conventional research methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Creswell (2005) maintains that qualitative researchers rely on the perceptions of the participants and collect data saturated that is saturated in the participant's words or text. Qualitative research can provide rich insight into human behavior (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This study explored the participants' perceptions about the implementation and sustainability of PBIS as a school-wide discipline approach.

The qualitative method emphasizes the researcher's role as an active participant in the study (Creswell, 2005). According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), the qualitative researcher views social phenomena holistically, systematically reflects on who he/she is in the inquiry, is sensitive to his/her personal biography and how it shapes the study, and uses complex reasoning that is multifaceted and interactive. To minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study, I was the researcher for the data collection as well as the interpreter of the data findings.

Qualitative research is a good approach when studying phenomena in their natural settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and when striving to understand social processes in context (Esterberg, 2002). Marshall and Rossman (2006) maintain that qualitative

researchers are fascinated by the intricacy of social interactions expressed in daily life and by the meanings that the participants attribute to these interactions. These interests take qualitative researchers into natural settings, rather than laboratories, and foster pragmatism in using multiple methods for exploring a topic. Thus, qualitative research is pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Qualitative research is educational research in which the researcher bases information on the views of the participants; asks broad, general questions; collects data consisting of text from participants; describes and analyzes their words for themes; and conducts the inquiry in a subjective, biased manner (Creswell, 2007).

### **Philosophical Foundation Assumptions**

Researchers make assumptions with their choice of qualitative research. Creswell (2005) maintains qualitative researchers rely on participant perceptions and collect data based on the participants' words. Creswell (2003) feels assumptions involve a stand toward the nature of reality (ontology), how the researcher knows what he/she knows (epistemology), the role of values in the research (axiology), the language of research (rhetoric), and the methods used in the process (methodology). The ontological issue relates to the nature of reality and its characteristics. When studying individuals, qualitative researchers conduct a study to report multiple realities. This includes the use of quotes with the actual words of different participants and offering different perspectives from the participants. Creswell (2003) further adds that the epistemological assumption of conducting a qualitative study means the researcher tries to get as close as possible to the participants being studied. The researcher conducts studies in the field where the participants live and



work because these are important contexts for understanding what the participants are saying. The longer researchers stay in the field the more they know what they know.

The axiological assumption for qualitative research is that all researchers bring values to a study. However, qualitative researchers like to make those values explicit and position themselves in the study by admitting the value-laden nature of the study and reporting the value-laden information gathered from the field as well as their values and biases (Creswell, 2003). Rhetoric for the dissertation of qualitative research has developed over time. They tend to use writing that is personal and literary in form. For instance, they use metaphors, refer to themselves as I, tell stories with a beginning, middle, and end, or use narrative research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Qualitative researchers also use terms such as credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability or validation (Angen, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985)). There are also words such as understanding, discover, and meaning (Schwandt, 2001). The language of the researcher is personal and literary (Creswell, 2003).

The methodology or procedures for qualitative research are inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher's experience in collecting and analyzing data. The logic is inductive from the ground up rather than handed down from a theory or from the perspectives of the inquirer. Occasionally, questions change in the middle of the study to better understand the research problem. If this happens, data collection strategy needs to be modified. During data analysis, the researcher follows a path to analyze the data and develop a detailed knowledge of the topic (Creswell, 2003).

These five assumptions reflect the stance that researchers make when they choose qualitative research. After choosing qualitative research, researchers shape their research by bringing the inquiry paradigms or worldviews which are a basic set of beliefs that guide

action (Guba, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). These paradigms have also been called philosophical assumptions, epistemologies, and ontologies (Crotty, 1998), broadly conceived research methodologies (Neuman, 2000), and alternative knowledge claims (Creswell, 2003). Multiple paradigms may be used in research if they are compatible (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

**Epistemology.** The epistemology that best frames this qualitative research is social constructivism. In this paradigm, individuals seek understanding of the world where they live and work through subjective meanings (varied and multiple) of their experiences. Instead of narrowing down these views, the researcher looks for complexity of views. Their goal is to rely on the participants' views of the situation. These are formed through interaction with others and through historical and cultural norms in the participants' lives. The researchers do not start with a theory. Instead, inquirers generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Schwandt, 2001; Neuman, 2000).

With social constructivism, the questions are usually broad and general so the participants can construct meaning from the situation. Open-ended questions are better because the researcher can listen carefully to what the participants say and do in their setting. Researchers often focus on specific contexts where people live and work to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants. Researchers must recognize that their own background shapes their interpretation so they position themselves in the personal, cultural, and historical experiences. Because the researcher must make meaning about how others see the world, qualitative research is often called interpretative research (Creswell, 2003).

Throughout this case study, I immersed myself into the school where the participants worked. It is important to become part of the school, climate, the staff, and the students. According to Guba and Lincoln (1988), a good researcher needs to minimize the distance between the researcher and those being researched. It was important for me to develop a close bond with the participants so that we developed more of a collaborative interaction rather than an interviewer/interviewee relationship. Having been through the PBIS staff training and implementation process at my own school, I have a good knowledge base of PBIS. This allowed me to focus more on the participants and their thoughts and feelings.

### **Research Design**

A case study approach was used to explore staff perceptions and satisfaction with the implementation of PBIS in a K-5, Title I elementary school, with a diverse population of students, located in a low-income urban area of the southeastern United States. It also provided a good option to explore the implementation of the PBIS approach and allowed the collection of detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over time. For this study, the phenomenon under investigation was the implementation of PBIS to change student behavior and increase student growth as well as how the perceptions and satisfaction of the staff members affected implementation and sustainability of the approach. Case study researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained time period. This case study involved collecting data through in-depth interviews, documents such as PBIS minutes, SWIS data, PBIS Fidelity Checks, the Teacher Working Conditions Survey, and EVAAS or EOG Data (Stake, 1995).

There are five components of effective case study research design: research questions; purpose of study; unit analysis; logic that links data to propositions; and criteria

for interpreting findings (Yin, 2009). As a researcher, I am interested in how staff members perceive PBIS, why PBIS has been successful, what effect it has on student behavior and academic growth. The best research questions for this qualitative case study are how and why questions. The second component is the purpose statement. My purpose in this case study was to understand the perceptions of the staff members' experiences throughout the implementation and sustainability process of PBIS. The third component is the unit of analysis described as the area of focus that a case study analyzes (Yin, 2009). In this case study, the area of focus was the implementation of PBIS as a school-wide discipline approach. The unit of analysis in this case study which directly relates to the research questions was the K-5 elementary school chosen for the study (Merriam, 1988). The fourth component is to connect the data to propositions. This connection was made following the data collection phase as themes emerged. As data was analyzed, I looked for patterns and themes that helped answer the guiding research questions. The fifth component is the criteria for interpreting findings. Before developing the themes, I coded the data and attempted to extract meaning from the findings (Yin, 2009).

This case study investigated the impact of the implementation (training, content, resources, and support) of PBIS as a school-wide discipline approach and the effect of PBIS on student behavior and growth as perceived by the members of the staff. The implementation of a school-wide discipline initiative provided support to improve student behavior. The administrative staff and the Core PBIS Team collaborated to provide the training and staff development, to communicate the expectations and procedures to collect and examine the monthly SWIS data and PBIS minutes from each meeting, and to complete and communicate the fidelity checks. By using the data collected from SWIS, the core PBIS

team provided the needed staff development and gave specific feedback to individual students who were struggling. The staff members received training, provided positive interactions with and feedback to students, and helped define the SWIS data by referring office managed behaviors to the office and/or handling classroom managed behaviors in the classroom. Through these changes, buy in from staff members contributes to a positive school environment where students will be in a safer environment with a reduction in discipline office referrals. However, one of the main effects of a sustainable implementation is increased instructional time in the classroom which can lead to increased academic growth.

### **Research Site**

The K-5 Title I case study school with a diverse population of students is located in an urban setting in the fourth largest district of one of the Mid-Atlantic States. The elementary school chosen for this case study was selected based on specific criteria. Before the implementation of PBIS, this school was struggling with behavioral issues as well as academic weaknesses. When PBIS was implemented, the case study school appeared to move through the implementation process quickly. It is important to note that the school does not control the movement through the tiers. The school has to complete and pass fidelity checks each year in order to move to the next tier of training and implementation. The school began the PBIS pre-training for the initial PBIS Team and staff training in 2011-2012 and the Tier 1 implementation for students in 2012-2013.

From 2012 - 2017, this school maintained a consistent student population (459, 457, 426, 467, 499) with a small drop in 2014-2015. The demographics remained constant for the 2012-13, 2013-14, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 school years with a population consisting of 14% white, 55% African American, 28% Hispanic, and 3% multiracial. In 2014-2015, the

district had a population consisting of 67.5% white, 27.1% African American, and 12.6% Hispanic with a poverty rate of 22.1%; and in 2017-2018, the district had a population consisting of 40.2% white, 28.5% African American, 24.5% Hispanic, 4.0% multiracial, 2.5% Asian, and < 1% American Indian or Native Hawaiians/Pacific. The school's demographics are quite different from the district, having a much higher percentage of African American and Hispanic students, and a lower percentage of white students. The school's demographics remained constant while the district's changed. The poverty rate of this school is also much different from the district with 100% of the students on free or reduced lunch. The attendance rate for students has also remained consistent and slightly higher than the district over the past five years: 94.9%, 95.14%, 94.52%, 95.1%, 94%. The number of teachers employed in the school over the last six years has also been consistent (45, 45, 43, 40, 41, and 42). In addition, the school has a stable number of Highly Qualified Teachers (100%, 100%, 100%, 100%, 100%) and Teachers w/Advanced Degrees (36%, 42%, 42%, 39%, 38.1%). The consistency in both student and teacher numbers allow the school to develop and maintain a good relationship with students and parents.

Seven years ago, the elementary school in this research study was struggling with the number of office discipline referrals, the amount of time students were spending out of class because of a discipline issue, lack of teacher expectations for student behavior in classrooms and the common areas of the school, insufficient academic achievement and/or student growth, and a desire to educate students about appropriate behavior and good manners. As school leaders discussed the problem and what they needed to do, the state encouraged the use of PBIS as a school-wide discipline approach; therefore, the district hired district level PBIS coaches to train schools and assist with the implementation process.

## **Participants**

The selection of a participating school for this case study was a joint effort between two of the district PBIS coaches and the researcher. Selection of participants to interview was based not on a concern for equal representation among stakeholders, but was purposeful in an attempt to answer the research questions grounded in the implementation and sustainability of PBIS. The intent of this study was not to generalize the findings to other settings, but instead, to provide a rich description of stakeholder meanings, values, beliefs, and behaviors in relation to PBIS from stakeholders who have been part of the school community through the whole implementation process.

The selection of participants for this study was based on a strategy referred to as purposeful selection which denotes a selection strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that cannot be gotten as well from other choices (Creswell, 2005). The selection was based on each staff member's potential to add to the understanding of the processes and procedures used to collect data. In order to achieve a thick, rich descriptive for the case (Esterberg, 2002; Merriam, 2002), it was important to include all administrators and administrative team members in the building as well as various members of the school community. The interviewees included three administrators and five teachers. One of the teacher interviewees was the school's PBIS coach. In total, eight participants were interviewed. For more information about the participants, see Appendix A.

Thoughtfully selecting which stakeholders to interview not only helps uncover the emerging themes, but also shows exceptions to the pattern. This type of sampling allows the researcher not only to see the breadth of experiences of faculty at school, but also the depth

of those experiences. There are no set rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry because the process is dependent on unique situational factors including when the researcher finds the answers to questions and when the resources run out. Therefore, this data was not used until the research was completed (Maxwell, 2005).

The researcher presented a consent form to each adult participant in the study. Participants were given time to read and review the consent form and to ask the researcher questions before agreeing to participate. Participation was voluntary. Once a staff member agreed to participate, he/she signed a consent form. Confidentiality of data will be maintained by disassociating participant identity from collected data. Individual respondent names were not used in data collection. Each participant was assigned a number. There were no known risks for participants who participated in the study. A staff member's decision to participate or refuse to participate did not have any adverse effect on employment. Rather than focusing on individual responses, the research investigated school-wide PBIS and identified strengths and weaknesses relating to implementation and sustainability of the approach.

### **Data Collection**

One of the main strengths of the case study design is the ability to bring different types of evidence together as data sources. For this case study, I used multiple sources of data such as interviews (a primary source of case study information), documents (written material such as memos, letters, meeting agendas, and PBIS minutes; written reports and evaluations such as PBIS fidelity checks or SET Evaluations; TWCS; data from SWIS and EVAAS, and publicity that was relevant to the study such as EOG Data or School Report



Card. Multiple sources of data increase the credibility of the data that reflects the participants' responses (Tellis, 1997).

**Interviews.** Interviews can lead to rich, insightful data and allow the researcher to focus on a particular issue or topic in-depth. Interviews allow respondents to reply in an anonymous and confidential setting. As Gibbs (1997) explained, individual interview settings allow respondents to express freely the personal meanings, values, and beliefs they associate with the research topic.

Interviews were the primary data source for this case study. Their purpose was to gather information about participants' thoughts and perceptions. Patton (1987) said interviewing people helps to find out those things that cannot be observed. Qualitative interviews are helpful when studying people's understanding of the meaning in their lived world (Kvale, 1996). Interviews result in thick descriptions of the subject being studied that enable readers to make decisions about transferability of study results (Merriam, 2002). Finally, interviews allow for triangulation of information obtained from other sources and increase the credibility of study findings (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Merriam, 2002; Stake, 1995).

The individual interviews for this case study took place after the school day ended in a comfortable and convenient environment for the respondents. Confidentiality and purpose of the research were explained to all interviewees. Confidentiality terms were made clear, the format and length of interviews were explained, and contact information from the researcher was supplied to the respondent. The researcher explained the format with the opportunity for open-ended responses and follow-up questions to probe for clarity and shared that the interview was anticipated to take approximately one hour, depending on length of

responses. Sessions began with an explanation of the research by the researcher and encouragement to answer questions completely. Then, the respondents were asked if they had any questions before interview questions were asked. All responses were recorded. Interviews were audio-recorded for accuracy and were transcribed to provide the researcher access to the data. Non-verbal responses and cues were recorded along with respondent answers.

**Interview questions.** Respondents were asked nine interview questions and given time to elaborate on their responses in order to provide information on PBIS sustainability.

**Question 1: Thinking back over your career as a teacher, describe your thoughts about discipline in a school community. Is it important? How does it impact the school community?**

**Rationale:** This opening question oriented the interviewee to the topic of discipline. It also encouraged the interviewee to think back over his/her entire career to answer the question. This question gave the interviewer insight into how each interviewee felt that discipline relates to or impacts a school community and if it is a factor worth considering. (I hoped the interviewee would include something about teacher retention and school climate in his/her answer without me having to ask additional questions).

**Question 2: How has discipline impacted this school community in the past? Has discipline been a problem in the past? If so, how? Is discipline a problem in your school today? If so, how?**

**Rationale:** This question gave the interviewer an idea of how the interviewee viewed discipline in this school community prior to and after the implementation of PBIS. The interviewer was able to compare these answers to other questions to get more ideas about the

impact that discipline and PBIS have had on this school. (Again, I hoped that the interviewee would include something about teacher retention and school climate in his/her answer without me having to ask additional questions).

**Question 3: Describe PBIS at your school. How do you feel about the initial PBIS training the staff received? The follow up trainings?**

**Rationale:** The aim of this question was to have respondents share their opinions and beliefs about PBIS through their own stories and experiences since its implementation. This question also allowed the researcher to gain more specific information about PBIS at the case study school. The researcher was able to compare the answers from questions 3 and 4 to get a deeper understanding of PBIS at this school. It was another way to get interviewees to express their perceptions/feelings about PBIS at their school.

**Question 4: What factors facilitated the implementation of PBIS? What barriers/issues have hindered the implementation process?**

**Rationale:** This question asked respondents to share their beliefs about those factors that were helpful in implementing PBIS as well as those things that were obstacles to PBIS implementation.

**Question 5: How often is the staff updated/refreshed on practices and procedures?**

**SWIS data? Strategies for classroom use?**

**Rationale:** The question was another way to gain information about approaches that could facilitate or impair the implementation of PBIS. It also indicated whether or not the school was giving enough support to sustain PBIS.

**Question 6: How do you perceive the make-up, role of, and characteristics of the PBIS Team? Role of and characteristics of the administrative Staff? The success or failure of PBIS?**

**Rationale:** This question was another way of gathering information from staff members about things that help or hinder the implementation of PBIS. Is it the approach, the people, or a combination of things that help to sustain PBIS at this school? The answer from this question was also compared to the answers from questions 5 and 6.

**Question 7: How has PBIS implementation impacted the day-to-day operations of this school? Your job/classroom? Student behavior (expectations/consequences)? School climate? Your use of incentives? Your number of discipline office referrals? The number of school discipline office referrals? The way you and/or your school track data? The communication between the PBIS team and the teachers and students?**

**Rationale:** This question allowed the researcher to gather the opinions of a wide range of stakeholders in this school about the day-to-day impact of PBIS. The researcher looked at all the different roles of the staff members and was able to observe commonalities or lack of them in the day-to-day operations of the school.

**Question 8: What factors such as economics, politics, power dynamics, or relationships affected the success of PBIS?**

**Rationale:** This question was another way to find out about the things that helped facilitate or hinder the implementation of PBIS. However, this question targeted the people and their interactions rather than the actual approach.

**Question 9: What suggestions do you have that could contribute to successfully maintaining and/or improving your PBIS model over time?**

**Rationale:** The question was geared to gather information from the stakeholders based on their experiences about what was needed as the school moved forward. This question was also an indirect way of asking about the hindrances and supports to implementation and sustainability of PBIS.

These open-ended questions, along with probing and/or follow up questions to encourage participants to respond freely and openly were used throughout the interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Esterberg, 2002; Kvale, 1996). A crosswalk indicating the correlation between the questions and data methods is listed in Appendix B.

Interviews were conducted, audio-taped, and transcribed into word documents. To ensure transcript accuracy, I reviewed each transcript while listening to the audiotapes. After data was compiled, it was color coded for emergent themes and patterns.

**Documents.** Various documents were examined. Data about implementation processes and procedures were also collected through minutes of the past and present PBIS Team meetings. Yearly PBIS Fidelity Checks were examined to evaluate implementation progress. EVAAS Data was also examined for student growth and progress over the last seven years. The Teacher Working Conditions Survey and teacher retention rate for the school were inspected to highlight teacher satisfaction since the implementation of PBIS.

With the implementation of PBIS, school discipline data was no longer collected by the school. Data is collected through the use of School-Wide Information System (SWIS) software package. SWIS is a web-based information system used to improve the behavior support in schools. School personnel collect ongoing information about discipline events in their school, and enter this information through a protected, web-based application. SWIS

provides summaries of this information for use in the design of effective behavior support for individual students, groups of students, or the whole student body (May, et al., 2003). All identifying information was removed from the SWIS data prior to being viewed by the researcher, insuring anonymity of all students within the school.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative research studies include a constant interaction with data collection and data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Therefore, I began to analyze data as soon as possible after the first interview in an attempt to identify patterns and to assist with the data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). All interviews were recorded and transcribed for easier reading and coding. Data analysis is a creative process of making meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). A qualitative study benefits from ordinary ways of making sense. Stake (1995) indicated that there is not one moment when data analysis begins. Analysis simply means taking something apart and understanding the ways administrators use and make sense of building-level data, as well as identifying and defining the patterns that emerged from that meaning making process. Qualitative data analysis gives meaning to first impressions and final compilations. It is analysis that tells the story of administrators' intentions to make informed decisions that define and guide student success.

According to Creswell's (2009), there are six steps during the data analysis process. They are as follows: 1. Organize and prepare the data for analysis. This was accomplished by reviewing audio tapes from interviews and transferring the information into word document transcripts. 2. Read through the data. This involved getting to know the SWIS data, EVAAS data, TWCS data, and fidelity checks data and reflecting on the overall meaning to gain a general sense of the information and ideas that the participants conveyed.

3. Begin detailed analysis with the coding process. The material was organized into segments by taking the text data and segmenting sentences into categories and labeling those categories with terms based on the actual language from the participants. 4. Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories for these for analysis. Codes were generated for the descriptions which lead to generalizing a small number of categories or themes. The emerging themes were analyzed to gather the various cases into a general description for this bounded case. 5. Describe how the description of the themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative. The emergent themes were woven into narrative passages, so that the findings emerged logically from the participants' responses. 6. Interpret the meaning of the data. Creswell (2008) recognizes that a researcher's own background plays an important part in the meaning making process. During my own interpretation process, my experience as a school administrator informed my understanding of the participants' stories. To convey the participants' perceptions of their experiences accurately, I focused on what they are saying, the conclusions they drew, and their intentions for future practice. The themes that emerged from this study came directly from my awareness of the healthy tension between my own biases and the participants' own meaning-making processes.

After interviewing the selected teachers and documenting the responses, the researcher analyzed the written documents. This process required reading the interviews many times and noting themes or patterns that emerged from the data. The researcher also analyzed the notes, descriptions, and observations collected during the interview process and throughout the study. Afterwards, a detailed analysis was written using the collected data. Esterberg (2002) further suggests that the researcher gets close to the data and studies the

interview transcripts in order to become familiar with the collected data. Creswell (2009) suggests using the traditional approach in the social sciences which allows the codes to emerge during the data analysis. Once the data from this research was examined thoroughly through the open coding process, codes were reviewed for emerging themes in the data.

### **Triangulation**

Triangulation is a process used to analyze the data collected in a study. The purpose of triangulation in educational or social science research is to increase the credibility and validity of the results. According to Cohen and Manion (1986), triangulation is an attempt to describe the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint. By incorporating implementation interviews, observations, fidelity checks, EVAAS data, SWIS data, PBIS and SIT meeting minutes, and the Teacher Working Conditions Survey, the research data can verify the results. Triangulation indicates that two or three types of data need to be used to check results. To combine multiple sources of data such as observations, processes, and materials gives the researcher some assurance on the results. When using triangulation, the researcher feels more confident about the results because all of the processes show the same results. This helps the researcher overcome the weaknesses or biases of the results.

According to Denzin (1970), there are four types of triangulation: data, investigation, theoretical, and methodological. For this case study, data triangulation (gathering data through different sampling strategies so that data is collected at different times and in social situations as well as on a variety of people) was used. It is important to understand how school administrators, teachers, and other staff members maintain PBIS as a positive behavior management system and provide rich descriptions of stakeholder meanings, values,



and beliefs about the PBIS approach. Triangulation of individual interviews, site observations, PBIS Meeting minutes, TWC survey, SWIS data, and EVAAS data produced results that reflected the perceptions and sustainability of PBIS at this school and minimized the possibility of error. Triangulation uses multiple investigators and sources of data or data collection methods to confirm emerging findings.

Multiple sources of data were used for the triangulation of evidence in this research study. In the context of data collection, triangulation serves to corroborate the data gathered from other sources and increases the credibility of the data that reflects the participants' responses and understandings and the process of gathering it (Tellis, 1997). Yin (2009) and Stake (2000) concur that triangulation is crucial to performing a case study with reliability.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Before the research began, the required documents were submitted to the review board at Appalachian State University. After permission to proceed was granted, I met with, and submitted the necessary paperwork to the Director of the Department of Research for the district in order to receive permission to continue this study. The staff members, selected to participate in study, were also given an informed consent form which provided the purpose of the study and how the results would be used. The form also explained that the participants and the school would remain anonymous and that all notes and recordings obtained during the interviews would be destroyed once the dissertation was completed.

### **Validity**

Triangulation helps with reliability and validity of the research study. It was important to get a good sampling of staff members to interview. This included people with a variety of jobs so that all the stakeholders were represented in the data. Participants were

people that have been at the school for the entire implementation process in order to share their stories and views about the before, during, and after implementation process.

### **Limitations**

As with all research, there are limitations and potential weaknesses in this design. This single school case study design intentionally utilized a small sample in order to fully examine the ways in which perceptions, values, and beliefs contribute to PBIS sustainability. There are possible limitations to this case study. I asked questions that require participants to reflect over a seven to eight year period. Responses rely on the participant's memory which could be incorrect, incomplete, or reflect bias. There is also the possibility that a staff member might not have been completely honest in the interview.

Before I began each interview, I reiterated that all responses are confidential and will remain secure in a private location until they are destroyed. No one will ever know what another individual said. I strived to make everyone as comfortable as possible and to never give any indication that I agreed or disagreed with a comment. By indicating that I was willing to listen, I hoped that they would feel comfortable sharing their experiences and perceptions.

It is possible that the views and opinions of those who did not choose to participate in the PBIS implementation will differ from those who were included. Therefore, this data may not reflect the views of everyone. Observations can also be biased if people behave differently because they know they are being observed.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), qualitative research has actual settings, and the researcher is the key instrument. It is clear that the primary instrument for data collection and analysis in case study research is the researcher. Qualitative research assumes that the

researcher's biases and values influence the outcome of any study (Merriam, 1998). To assist the qualitative research audience and to evaluate the validity of conclusions drawn from the data, researchers need to neutralize their biases by stating them explicitly (Altheide & Johnson, 1994).

### **Implications/Significance/Contributions**

Findings from this analysis can be conveyed to this particular school district. However, results may prove useful to other districts with similar demographics. The information gathered about teacher perceptions in relation to PBIS implementation will help implement PBIS so schools can avoid the barriers and pitfalls that arise when a new approach is implemented. School leaders and district leaders may use the findings from this research helpful when planning similar implementations or when evaluating existing approaches.

### **Contribution to Educational Practice**

Limited research exists on staff members' perceptions of PBIS and how the program impacts motivation, satisfaction, and sustainability (Horner, et al., 2007; Palovlich, 2008). Through surveys, interviews, data collection, and observations, additional information can be gained in these areas. Using this information, administrators and teachers may be able to implement PBIS more effectively and ensure that students learn appropriate positive behavior that can improve the overall climate of their school.

## Chapter 4: Research Findings

### Introduction

Research indicates that PBIS can be an effective behavioral intervention approach (Horner, Freeman, Nelson, & Sugai, 2007; Palovlich, 2008). However, there is limited research on how staff members perceive PBIS as a school-wide discipline approach, how PBIS impacts their motivation and satisfaction, how their perception and acceptance affect the success and sustainability of the approach, and how PBIS affects student growth.

The purpose of this research study was to examine administrators' and teachers' perceptions, experiences, and satisfaction with the implementation of PBIS and to contribute to the overall knowledge base about the best practices to use in an elementary school when implementing PBIS as a school-wide discipline approach. The study focused on the pre-implementation or planning stage and continued through full implementation while discussing barriers, supports, and ways to embrace or change obstacles that occurred during the process.

For this study, the phenomenon under investigation was the implementation of PBIS to change student behavior and increase student growth as well as examining how the perceptions and satisfaction of staff members affected implementation and sustainability of the approach. The research study was informed by the following research questions:

**Question 1. How do the staff members at an urban, Title I, K-5 elementary school with a diverse population located in the southeastern United States perceive and describe the need for a sustainable school-wide discipline approach?**

**Question 2. How does the implementation of PBIS, as a school-wide discipline approach, in this elementary school affect staff satisfaction, teacher retention, student**

**behavior, discipline referrals, and student growth? How does the administration team feel about PBIS? How do the staff members feel about PBIS? What does the school data say about PBIS?**

**Question 3. What are the barriers and supports for implementing PBIS in an elementary school as evidenced in this case?**

The research findings in this chapter come from the analysis of the case study school's recorded data including: School-Wide Information System (SWIS) Data, PBIS School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET) Data, Performance/Student Growth, PBIS Meeting Minutes, and Teaching Working Conditions Survey (TWCS). This information informed the questions addressed in the interviews with eight faculty members. The results of those interviews are addressed below.

#### **Study Findings: Recorded Data**

**SWIS.** SWIS data indicated that discipline and office referrals decreased the first three years. In fact, there was a significant decrease the first two years. During the fourth year, discipline began to increase and continued to increase in year five. For more detailed information about the SWIS Data, see Appendix C.

**School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET).** According to Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd and Horner (2005), the SET is a research-validated instrument that is designed to assess and evaluate the critical features of school-wide positive behavior interventions and support across an academic school year. The SET was designed to determine the extent to which schools are already using PBIS to determine if training and technical assistance efforts result in fidelity of implementation when using PBIS and to determine if use of PBIS procedures is related to valued change in the safety, social culture, and violent behavior in schools. By

answering each evaluation question within the seven feature areas, the information gathered from the SET can be used to assess features that are in place, determine annual goals, evaluate on-going efforts, design and revise procedures, and compare year to year efforts in the area of PBIS. Information is gathered through multiple sources including a review of school records, direct observations, and staff and student interviews. The SET is one means of evaluating a school's fidelity of implementation on school-wide discipline practices and systems. Its intended use is in conjunction with other measures to create a multi-perspective of school status of PBIS (Todd, Lewis-Palmer, Horner, Sugai, Sampson, & Phillips, 2012). The SET data is recorded once a year and is based on whether or not expectations are defined, taught, and rewarded as well as staff members responding to violations, monitoring and decision making, management, and district level support for the school. The first year the school scored 89% with the defining and teaching of expectations and monitoring and decision making being the areas of concern. The second year the score was 95% with defining and teaching expectations, again, being the lower areas. The third year the score was also 95% with defining expectations (a third year in a row) and responding to violations being areas that needed to be targeted. The fourth and fifth years boasted scores of 100% on the SET Data. For more information about the SET Data, see Appendix D.

**Student growth/performance.** EOG scores for grades three through five are reported two ways, growth and proficiency, for English Language Arts, Math, and Science (fifth grade only). School growth is calculated using a value-added growth modeling tool known as Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS). EVAAS is a customized software system for K-12 that assesses and predicts student growth performance with precision and

reliability (NCDPI, 2018). Each school meeting the data requirements is designated as exceeded expected growth, met expected growth, or did not meet growth.

EOG scores are also reported by proficiency. There are five levels of performance on the EOG. These levels range from Level 1 to Level 5. Grade Level Proficiency (GLP) for each school is based on the number of tests scored at Level 3 or above. These students are demonstrating readiness to move to the next grade level. College-and-Career Ready (CCR) Proficiency is the number of tests scored at Level 4 or above. These students are on track for being prepared to attend college. The school year 2016–17 was the fifth year of the implementation of assessments aligned to college-and career-readiness (CCR) content standards, and it was the fourth year that the academic achievement standards have been reported as Level 4 and above. To report student performance since 2012–13, the first year the tests were implemented, CCR in 2012–13 (Level 3 and above) 2013–14 and beyond (Level 4 and above) must be compared to CCR the following year (NCDPI, 2016).

School performance for the case study school was reported using student EOG data for grades three, four, and five. School performance and student growth data indicate that the year before PBIS implementation the school did not meet expected growth for students. In the first year of implementation, the school met expected growth and exceeded expected growth in year two. However, the school peaked at year two. In years three and four the school met expected growth, but year five shows that growth was not met. Although it was not a significant jump, there was a continued increase in reading proficiency from the year before implementation (22.6%) to year four (36%). However, year five fell to 31% proficiency. For more information about student growth/performance, see Appendix E.

An interesting data point was the teacher turnover rate. As reported on the School Report Card, the teacher turnover rate was the lowest in year three of implementation (2%), but the highest in year five (14.6%). The teacher turnover rate went up in year two (11.10% - which was relatively high for the school) before starting a downward trend in year three. For more information about the teacher turnover rate, see Appendix F.

**PBIS minutes.** Because of the way minutes were recorded and stored, I was not able to get all of the minutes from the meetings. The copy of every meeting was not sent to central office. This was a glitch in communications, and the district did not have them stored. However, because each PBIS Team member received an electronic copy from the PBIS secretary after every meeting, I did obtain a sampling from each year from a member who had not deleted all the emails. From the sample, I determined that the team assigned PBIS Team members roles/jobs. The team also scheduled meeting dates and met regularly, set the dates for beginning of the year and middle of the year K-2 and 3-5 pep rallies, discussed needed staff development, planned celebrations and raffles for students, targeted problem areas in the school, and discussed how to keep the PBIS Wing Store running efficiently when volunteers were unable to help. These areas are all important to effective PBIS implementation. It is imperative that the PBIS Team meet on a regular basis so they can address problem areas immediately and plan celebrations and incentives to ensure that students are provided incentives and rewards for appropriate behavior.

It was essential to introduce PBIS to students new to the school. When new students came in during the year, the school had a plan in place for them to learn about and become acquainted with PBIS. According to the staff members, this seemed to work well. However, a plan for new staff members was not in place, and this problem was not addressed until the



fifth year. There was also a discussion of how to get PBIS support and coverage for the PBIS Wing Store. Normally, volunteers cover the store; however, when volunteers were not available, the team put a plan in place for classrooms to shop in pairs so students could continue to attend the store and shop for incentives. One team watched the classes, and the other teacher ran the store. The team felt it was important for students to continue to receive incentives on a regular basis.

The minutes reflected that the team discussed the SET data. The SET data revealed that the staff members felt an area for improvement was consequences from the administrative staff for student misbehavior. Even though a fourth of the staff did not think that consequences for student behavior were in place and being given by the administrative staff, the minutes did not indicate whether or not this issue was addressed.

One area that could have been discussed further or referenced more was the SWIS data. There was no documentation to support that SWIS data was discussed and used with fidelity. The PBIS minutes indicated that there were discussions about the noise level in the cafeteria, the need for more structure on the playground and during recess activities, escalation of physical aggression in the classroom, and the number of office referrals from second grade classrooms. Even though these areas would show up in the SWIS Data, the minutes did not indicate there was any evidence that the SWIS data was being referenced in the discussions.

Based on the minutes, the team discussed physical aggression as being a problem in the classroom and decided that teachers needed to help students become better at solving problems. The solution was that the guidance counselor would send teachers ideas and suggestions that could be used in the classroom. However, there was no information

indicating if the action steps were implemented and used in the classroom. Without access to all the minutes, it was unclear as to whether suggestions or plans were followed through with fidelity. It is important to have checks and balances in place to monitor follow through so that the fidelity of the implementation is not jeopardized.

The team had some good incentives and celebrations in place for students. One incentive was the Eagle Bucks which students received for following directions and doing what was expected. Every few weeks, Eagle Bucks could be used to shop at the PBIS Wing Store or to participate in a basketball game or a movie experience. Girls could buy a visit to the spa for nail care. Eagle Bucks could also be used to buy raffle tickets for a chance to have pizza with the principal or to be assistant principal/principal for the day.

**TWCS.** The North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey (TWCS) is an instrument that is completed by the school staff every two years to provide school leaders and education policy makers with current data which is used for continuous school improvement. Teaching and learning conditions significantly impact teacher retention and student learning (North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey Website, 2018).

According to the TWCS for the case study school, the TWCS has a clear relationship to the SWIS data. As office referrals decreased, the areas of time, managing student behavior, school leadership, and an overall feeling that the school is a good place to work had positive and increasing results through the 2013-2014 school year. With the 2015-2016 school year (the fourth year of implementation and office referrals began to increase), a downward spiral began for all areas of the TWCS with the exception of two. The staff still felt that students at the school understood expectations for their conduct and that the school

environment was a safe place to work. For more information about the TWCS Data, see Appendix G.

### **Interview Participants**

The case study also examined data from the interviews. The following sections describe the interview participants and the results of the interviews.

The participants in this study consisted of three administrators and five teachers from the case study K-5, Title I elementary school with a diverse population of students, located in a low-income urban area of the southeastern United States. Interviewees included one principal, two assistant principals, one teacher in grades 3 -5, one teacher in grades K-2 with third grade experience at the school, one specialist teacher (K-5), one past PBIS coach with K-2 experience, and one present PBIS coach with K-5 experience. The PBIS coach with K-2 experience was the PBIS chair during the initial PBIS implementation and continued in the position for three years. The PBIS Committee asked her to come back this year and be a part of the committee. She does not represent a grade level, but is merely a voice on the team. One interviewee was male and seven were female. The participants indicated their experience ranged from 15 to 30 years. In addition to English, two participants speak other languages. Two participants have EC experience, one teacher has prekindergarten experience, and one teacher worked as an English as a Second language (ESL) teacher.

All of the participants except the assistant principals were employed by the case study school before the implementation, through the implementation process, and after the implementation of PBIS. Six of the eight interviewees are currently employed in the case study school. The principal began his administrative career at the school as the assistant principal and moved into the principal's position. Currently, he has 17 years in

administration and left the case study school at the end of the 2016-2017 school year to become principal at another elementary school in the district. Three assistant principals served the case study school during the pre-implementation, implementation, and sustainability phases. The first assistant principal served at the school for three years before implementation. She left to become a principal at another Title I school that was implementing PBIS at the same time as the case study school. The second assistant principal was at the school during the training year for the PBIS Committee. The third assistant principal participated in an administrative internship at the school during the implementation year and the following year began serving the school in the capacity of the assistant principal. During the following years, she has also served as the PBIS Coach.

Interviewees contributed various amount of information to the questions depending on the depth of their answers. Some spoke at length about one theme while other participants spoke more about other themes. During extensive interviews, participants described their perceptions and experiences with PBIS, how they used data collection and analysis to make decisions, and the sustainability of PBIS in their school.

### **Interview Questions**

Questions asked during the interview targeted the same research questions as the data (SWIS, SET, and TWCS) and minutes of PBIS meetings:

- 1. How do the staff members at an urban, Title I, K-5 elementary school with a diverse population located in the southeastern United States perceive and describe the need for a sustainable school-wide discipline approach?**
- 2. How does the implementation of PBIS as a school-wide discipline approach in this elementary school affect staff satisfaction, teacher retention, student behavior,**

**discipline referrals, and student growth? How does the administration team feel about PBIS? How do the staff members feel about PBIS? What does the data say about PBIS?**

**3. What are the barriers and supports for implementing PBIS in an elementary school as evidenced in this case?**

For the purpose of this case study, the participants will be identified as Administrator 1 (A1), Administrator 2 (A2), Administrator 3 (A3), Teacher 1 (T1), Teacher 2 (T2), Teacher 3 (T3), Teacher 4/Coach 1 (T4), and Teacher 5/Coach 2 (T5).

### **Study Findings: Interviews**

Based on each research question, interview responses were categorized according to the individual perceptions of the administrators and/or the teachers and reported in three distinct phases of PBIS implementation. Within each of the three phases, the themes generated from the data are reported, organized, and discussed by headings.

- Phase 1: What are the participants' perceptions and experiences with the need for a school-wide discipline approach before PBIS implementation?
  - Importance of discipline and its connection to academics
  - Need for a school-wide discipline approach
  - Staff morale/school climate
- Phase 2: What are the participants' perceptions and experiences with the implementation of PBIS?
  - Procedures and rules for common areas
  - Staff trainings
  - PBIS Committee

- Administrative team
- Incentives
- School climate/staff morale
- Data
- Phase 3: What are the participants' perceptions about the factors that facilitate the implementation of PBIS, the barriers that hinder the implementation process, and suggestions that might improve the process?
  - Factors that facilitate the implementation of PBIS
    - Administrative Team
    - PBIS Committee
    - Refresher trainings
  - Barriers/areas for improvement
    - Administrative Team
    - PBIS Committee
    - Use of incentives
    - Buy-in from the staff

### **Themes Generated From Data During the Pre-implementation Phase**

Based on each research question, interview responses were categorized into themes according to the individual perceptions of the administrators and/or the teachers during the pre-implementation phase. In most areas/themes, the teachers' responses are summarized first and the administrators' responses are next. The common themes in the pre-implementation phase include perceptions about the importance of discipline and the connection between academics and behavior, the necessity of a school-wide discipline

approach to help solve discipline issues, and staff morale/school climate.

**Importance of discipline and its connection to academics.** Interviewees felt discipline is important in the school community, and that there is a direct correlation between behavior and achievement. Teachers said that discipline in a school community is extremely important because no matter how well a teacher's lesson plans are devised if students are not attentive or are off task, they are not going to learn. Teachers agreed there is a correlation between behavior and learning or behavior and academics. T1 compared behavior and student achievement to the chicken and the egg and which came first. Even though she believes there is a correlation between behavior and learning, she wonders if students misbehave because they are low achieving or if they are low achieving because they misbehave. She has witnessed students misbehave and miss important academic instruction and knows the result can be low achievement. However, she also believes some low achieving students misbehave to hide their lack of knowledge.

Teachers also added that before the implementation of PBIS, discipline did not seem to be the main concern for the school, but it significantly impacted their school, school community, and the success of their students. They noted that discipline affects and impacts a student's ability to participate in class and retain knowledge, so student success is tied to discipline. T4 said that discipline has always been important in her classroom, and she tries to set the tone for the year by constantly discussing and using discipline techniques the first month of school. While teaching academics, she also teaches expectations and rules and feels it is important to model expectations for the students in the classroom and throughout the school. She strongly believes that once the students know the rules and expectations, learning will become easier and academics will improve.

T3 and T5 stated that throughout their careers, discipline has had its ups and downs, but it absolutely impacts learning and makes it hard for the teacher to teach because of spending too much time correcting behavior. It is important to address behavior in the classroom so it does not carry over to lunch, recess, specials, or wherever the student goes next. They said that discipline affects and impacts a child's ability to participate in class and retain knowledge, and student success is tied to discipline. T5 compared the ups and downs with discipline to a rollercoaster ride. When there are shining moments, she feels the school is starting to get discipline under control. Then, "shoom" student discipline slides backwards and everything comes tumbling down. She added that for every five feet the school moves forward, it slides ten feet backwards.

T2 recalled that during her first 10 years of teaching, she never referred a child to the office. Even though she worked at a Title I school with 32 students in a classroom, she dealt with every student and parent issue. She never worried about discipline and used classroom management and character education to effectively manage her classroom. Students came into her classroom to learn, and her job was to put together a classroom environment where things functioned effectively, procedures were in place, consequences were given, parent communication was established, and behavior was managed. She taught problem solving, decision making, and anger management to address classroom management issues, and it worked for her. During her teaching career, T2 feels the student discipline has grown out of control and consumed schools. Therefore, it is a safety issue in schools today.

The administrators also agreed that discipline impacts the school community, is a key factor in the amount of success in the school community, and is important to a healthy school environment. They believe classrooms need to have clear expectations and rules for good



behavior, and appropriate behavior needs to be constantly modeled to set the stage for learning. A3 learned early in her teaching career to be a strong disciplinarian and have good classroom management because it is important for students to stay focused on their academics. Inappropriate behavior creates problems for students academically because it takes them away from learning. If there is a behavioral problem, the students are not fully focused or engaged in learning what the teacher is teaching.

A3 further noted that discipline affects how much learning takes place in the classroom and ultimately impacts instruction in a classroom. More learning takes place in a classroom where there are clear expectations and rules and where appropriate behavior is modeled. She noted that it is important to have strong discipline management in the classroom as well as in the common areas of the school. In common areas there is a tendency for things to get out of control and impede learning later in the day.

Administrators constantly worry about students missing instruction when they are misbehaving in the classroom or out of the classroom for a discipline referral to the office. A1 indicated that when students have difficulty controlling and managing their own behaviors, it can lead to loss of instructional time. When teachers have to focus on classroom management/discipline issues, minutes of valuable instructional time are lost. Students need every minute of academic instruction to help prepare them for the End-of-Grade Test which defines the school's growth and proficiency for the year.

**Need for a school-wide discipline approach.** All interviewees felt a need for a structure or process which would help control discipline issues for the school. Both teachers and administrators noted there have been many factors that affected discipline issues and referrals over the years including a change with teachers, assistant principals, and now

principals; however, some students are not taught expectations at home, are not taught manners, and are not taught how to react appropriately to situations. T5 feels that a school-wide discipline approach is a chance for the staff to take control of the school environment. Even though discipline should be controlled in each classroom, she feels that a school-wide discipline approach helps everyone to focus on the same things, be on the same page, celebrate the same successes, and deal with discipline issues. She added that students need order, structure, stability, and consistency that a school-wide discipline approach would provide. T1 added that with PBIS things are more concrete, more black and white, and there are no gray areas when addressing discipline issues. With a school-wide discipline approach, all teachers and students would have the same expectations for the classroom as well as the common areas.

The administrators felt that a school-wide discipline approach creates the guidelines that keep students focused and learning so they can be successful. Because many students come to school not knowing about manners or how to conduct themselves, as well as not knowing what is and what is not appropriate behavior, A3 stated it becomes the staff's job to explain, review, model, and teach appropriate behavior. She feels there is value in consistently reviewing, explaining, and modeling appropriate behavior. She added that a school-wide discipline approach allows school personnel an opportunity to model that appropriate behavior; to model what it looks like to go into a cafeteria and sit down and use manners; and to model etiquette so they will know how to handle themselves in the world in which they live.

A1 said the school needs to have a framework with common expectations that helps teachers, students, and parents accept and use the approach. When there are guidelines and

rules in place, it is easier for students to be successful. Students need to follow rules and procedures even when no one is around to remind them of the appropriate expectations. A school-wide discipline approach allows for consistency in the school from grade level to grade level and establishes norms for the school so everybody understands the guidelines and what is expected. Many teachers have never taken a classroom management course, and struggle with handling discipline issues. It is especially hard on new teachers and specialists. The school's test scores caused A1 to question how much time the teachers were using to redirect or manage behavior and how much they were using to teach. With the number of discipline issues at this school and the decline in test scores, A1 felt there was a need for a school-wide discipline approach.

A2 and A3 agreed that schools need a discipline framework with common expectations to help staff members manage discipline. This helps students transition from grade level to grade level within the school. It is a tough transition for students to go from a third grade classroom where there is one set of expectations to a fourth grade classroom where there is a different set of expectations. One teacher might expect students to walk in a line with no talking in the hallways, but another teacher might not require that expectation. The school needed to eliminate the possibility of different expectations from teachers so all students would have the same rules, procedures, and consequences. A3 further added that there needs to be a discipline model that will help average, marginal, and brand new teachers that really do not have experience with classroom management. With these reoccurring problems, the school needed to implement a school-wide discipline approach in order to set common expectations so all teachers would have the same expectations in the common areas

of the school and would support learning. She said it would enhance the school environment and would give everybody a toolbox that they could use.

**Staff morale/school culture.** Both teachers and administrators view staff morale/school culture as being affected by discipline issues in the classroom and school. T4 stated that she has been at this school for 15 years and believes discipline has gotten worse over time because not all teachers use the same approach when it comes to handling discipline issues. She believes that discipline has affected this school's climate as well as academics and safety for all students. Having taught at the school for more than 15 years, T2 agreed that students who see the students misbehave without consequences begin to question how the system works. T3 felt that a couple of teachers left the school because the climate and morale had gotten worse over the years. They did not feel supported with discipline. T2 agreed that morale was low and felt the teachers needed more support. T5 said that discipline impacts the school's climate and staff morale, and student success is connected to discipline. She added that teachers tend to talk with each other about discipline issues and support with discipline. Because discipline was out of control, it was impacting the school's climate as well as staff morale. Some teachers were frustrated. T4 said that the school climate seems to fluctuate. During the pre-implementation phase, staff morale was not good because teachers were tired of dealing with discipline issues. After implementation, morale improved as discipline referrals decreased. However, after a couple of years, discipline referrals increased and morale declined.

Administrators noted that strong discipline within a school or classroom creates a culture that represents an environment that is conducive to and fosters learning. If there is a school where there are no expectations for discipline or no processes in place for discipline,

the staff morale may not be good. Therefore, A3 feels a discipline framework is a necessity for a successful school. A1 said that before the implementation of a school-wide discipline approach, there was no time for academics, walkthroughs, and classroom visits. Test scores suffered, and the administrators constantly dealt with discipline issues. A3 added that teachers felt discipline was a big issue and were tired of dealing with discipline.

### **Themes Generated From Data During the Implementation Phase**

During the implementation phase, the themes generated from the data included perceptions about procedures and rules for common areas, staff training(s), the PBIS Committee, the role of the administrator, incentives, school climate, and data.

**Procedures and rules for common areas.** Teachers and administrators agreed that before PBIS implementation, teachers had individual and different expectations for the various locations in the school. After PBIS implementation, teachers had the same expectations in all the common areas. Norms and rules were put in place for common areas such as the hallways, bathrooms, assemblies, buses, specials, and cafeteria. T4 recalled that the implementation impacted student behavior by giving expectations and consequences, two important pieces that are needed for a school-wide discipline approach, and helped everyone have a common language and purpose. T1 added that it helped with common expectations in the classroom, cafeteria, hallway, specials, and on the buses. Students know what to expect because there are no gray areas. In a school with a common language, it is acceptable for teachers to speak to students in other classes because everyone has the same expectations.

Administrators added that in a Title I School with a high poverty level, students do not always come to school using appropriate behavior and manners. Unfortunately, it is left up to the staff to convey that information to students. PBIS gave them a framework with

norms to be used each and every day from the time the school doors open in the morning until they close for the night. It helped to norm the school and helped to increase data for the school. Their growth data went from not making growth to making or exceeding growth. A3 said that because PBIS is a “finely greased and oiled machine” that works well in all areas, the processes and procedures support teachers who are strong classroom managers as well as those who are not. Teachers who were new to the profession, or had struggled with classroom management in the past, were experiencing success in managing their classrooms.

A1 said that with PBIS, everyone has a common language that indicates how appropriate behavior looks, what is working, what is not working, and how to make changes to ensure success. There are expectations for the common areas including the hallway, bathroom, cafeteria, and assemblies. These expectations and norms are very specific with transition times and travel routes, and the common language, norms, and expectations are continually discussed and reviewed.

**Staff trainings.** All interviewees seemed happy with the initial training provided prior to the implementation of PBIS. However, it appeared to have more of an impact on the teachers, and they had several positive comments about it. When the school implemented PBIS, T5 contended the initial training was good; and everyone seemed to be on board with the approach. All the interviewees that were on the original PBIS Committee said the initial training, which took place the year before implementation, was good, and that during the initial discussions, there seemed to be buy-in from the majority of the staff. The timing was right. The staff was ready to follow the school-wide discipline and use the process. Every year there is a big kick off the first day of school which is followed by two weeks of intense training for all the students. The teachers focus on one common area each day and

continually review the rules. She added that last year there were many new staff members, and there was no formal training for them. A few of the new teachers started saying negative things about PBIS and the administrative team. She believed it was because they did not know how to implement PBIS in their classrooms, and discipline was uncontrollable in their classrooms. Because new teachers did not understand PBIS and how to use it effectively, they thought it did not work. She also noted that it is important for the administrative team to back PBIS. The best PBIS Committee with the best intentions needs the support of the administrative team.

T2 was one of the members of the initial PBIS Team. She stated the initial training was to empower the school and the representatives to develop their own model by looking at the school's issues. She thought it was a good honest attempt to bring together the different behavior issues at the school. However, the team did not always listen to the problems that people had about the lack of intrinsic motivation and the way that PBIS was developed. Even though it was mandated to the staff, she felt people had a decent attitude about implementing PBIS.

T4 noted that the follow up trainings were great because they reminded the staff about approaches such as behavior charts and brain breaks that they had used in the past, but might have forgotten or not used recently. Sometimes teachers insist that they have not used an approach recently, but are willing to give it another try. She added that a teacher can be great at PBIS and classroom management, but sometimes it is good to have a reminder about best practices. T1 added that refresher trainings are especially beneficial to new teachers. According to T5, the trainings this year have been very intensive. The team felt the initial training was good, but trainings had tapered off and needed to be renewed. The committee

spent much of the summer reworking norms, policies, and procedures. The committee wanted to revive PBIS to its original form as an approach that is good for students and staff members. The school year started with a mini boot camp training led by the PBIS Committee that included all the updates about office and classroom managed behaviors, a bathroom schedule, and a new improved handbook. She further added that is important that the members of the PBIS Committee want to be on the team, have a positive attitude, and be willing to put in the effort to implement PBIS. This committee that represents the whole school is vital to the success of PBIS. T4 added that the committee leadership (PBIS School Coach) is also essential to the success of the committee.

Administrators felt the training was very comprehensive and provided good information. It gave the school direction and a plan for changing the way staff members address discipline issues. There was a great deal of collaboration about what needed to be implemented, how it would look, how to teach it, how to model it, how to review it, and how to sustain it. The most important concern was how to ensure buy-in from the staff. Valuable information was provided throughout the implementation. Once the training was completed, staff members felt as if they had a toolbox of skills as well as district and school coach who could be a valuable asset in managing classes or classrooms.

**PBIS committee.** Both teachers and administrators believe that the PBIS Committee is an essential piece of the implementation process. Most interviewees stated that the initial PBIS Committee was high energy and had a positive attitude. This core group of people who creates the foundation for the implementation of PBIS is composed of one representative from each grade level, one support staff, one specialist, one EC person, one ESL person, one guidance counselor, the instructional facilitator, and the administrative team. The team



members represent and report back to their individual subgroups. Each member is also responsible for communicating information to his/her team members. Teachers are responsible for reporting back to students, and teachers and the administrative staff are responsible for reporting back to parents. PBIS Team members rotate off the committee every two years.

They agreed the PBIS Team is responsible for helping to implement PBIS so that it best addresses the needs of this school. This includes creating norms, procedures, rules, and strategies in place for the common areas. They feel the role of the PBIS team is to make sure that everyone is following the norms and expectations set for the entire school so students know what is expected of them every day in every area. The team helps figure out the expectations for common areas so that everyone was speaking a common language as well as posting and using school-wide expectations.

They further added that the team also provided a PBIS Handbook with detailed expectations for all the common areas, teacher/classroom managed behaviors, office-managed behaviors, dress code violations, disruptive transitions, fire drills, lockdowns, and strategies to all staff members. The group indicated that the handbook explains PBIS including implementation procedures and expectations for the assemblies, dismissal procedures, cafeteria, hallway, bathrooms, and other common areas in the school. The handbook also includes behavior management procedures and expectations enclosed. Teacher-managed behavior and office managed behavior examples are listed with consequences. Everything is broken down with definitions, examples, and response strategies. There are flow charts of processes and procedures and examples of PBIS forms and how to complete them. There is also a section explaining the incentive program such as

bucks, raffles, and the store. Other areas addressed are verbal redirection, conferencing with students, how to make parent contacts, and what happens after six PBIS write ups. Most interviewees feel the handbook is a valuable toolbox. A2 further added that PBIS provided expectations for the common areas, enhanced the school environment, and gave the teachers a toolbox to use when addressing discipline issues.

T1 and T4 said that the PBIS Committee is also a decision-making team and supports everyone in the school. Therefore, everyone in the school needs to be supportive of the team. T5 compared the PBIS Committee to superheroes who serve as the core or anchor for the school. If teachers have a question, they can email the chairperson and the committee will respond. T1 added that the committee is there to support everyone in the school.

A2 further added that the PBIS committee represents all the different stakeholders in this school community and talks about the processes and procedures; what they believe will work and what will not work; and the things needed to be able to create a school community that is inclusive and supportive of learning. The PBIS Team provides an opportunity for all the stakeholders to come together and share in the development of these processes, priorities, and procedures. It is also a great opportunity for people to grow as teacher leaders and to help create best practices. A3 said it is important to have people on the committee that are committed to the meeting times in order to ensure that all stakeholders are represented and the information is being forwarded to everyone by the representatives. A2 added that committee members also report out about strategies and data in the staff meetings. A1 felt that the PBIS Committee was excellent at communicating with the staff. Not only did representatives report back to their subgroups, the chairperson of the committee sent out

frequent emails. They also created videos illustrating the procedures for the hallway, bathroom, cafeteria, assemblies, etc. for students and staff to view.

**Administrative team.** Teachers felt that the administration team is a crucial element because it is the glue that holds the school community together. Because the administrative team makes decisions and helps shape the school, it is important that the administrative team supports and enforces PBIS. The attitude of the administrative team is extremely important for buy-in from the staff. However, there were mixed feelings about the appropriate way to address discipline. Some teachers felt that the administrative team was not as quick to handle discipline issues and suspend students as they felt was appropriate. T3 added the role of administrative team is to not only address discipline problems but to implement consequences and follow up with resources when necessary. Because of a lack of classroom management training, T5 felt that it is the mindset of some teachers to send students to the office expecting them to be suspended because the teachers believe suspension is the only acceptable consequence for dealing with a behavior issue. She also noted the PBIS Committee can only achieve so much without the backing of the administrative team.

Administrators felt that they were appropriately addressing discipline issues that came to the office. A3 felt her role was to be open to the concerns and listen to possible solutions before making decisions about how to address the concerns. However, sometimes she has to say, this is how it is, and how it is going to be.

A1 said the administrators need to have time to go to grade-level meetings and observe teachers without constantly dealing with behavior issues. A1 feels it is important to be consistent when discipline comes to the office. For example, when PBIS forms come to the office with six write ups in one week, it is important to have a system in place so the

teacher does not feel as if nothing was done to address the issue. He added that they gave teachers the option of doing after school detention with their students, but it did not go over well. He added that teachers want help with discipline, but they want someone else to deal with it. A3 said that PBIS is an expectation of all staff members at school. She feels that it is important to let staff members know this and always announces in the spring that the transfer fair is coming and that the use of PBIS is an expectation for staff members who plan to return to the school. If someone can not endorse or use PBIS, he/she is welcome to go to the job fair. She stated that the number one most important thing about the implementation of PBIS is the administrator.

**Incentives.** Teachers and administrators agreed that PBIS at this school rewards students for positive behavior by giving individual students bucks to use in PBIS store and by giving class merits to classrooms to earn class rewards. Incentives teach students to be responsible with money. They learn that one cannot walk into a store and expect to be given the items they need. Money is important for purchasing what one wants. The positive reinforcement has affected behavior management in the classrooms. Most of the teachers and administrators interviewed felt that PBIS works better for K-2 students. T3 thinks PBIS has impacted the discipline in the school, but the PBIS bucks seem to be more successful with K-2 students. Many of the 3-5 students are not as motivated by the bucks. It is also harder for specialists to build a relationship with 3-5 students when they see them for forty minutes a week. T3 felt that the incentives helped to keep students on track and making the right choices. The students, especially K-2 students, would work to earn Eagle Bucks that could be redeemed for prizes in the Wing Store.

Although T3 feels very positive about PBIS, there are some people who view it negatively. Some teachers feel it is not realistic to be rewarded for using the correct behavior. It does not depict real life. Adults do not get rewarded for making the right choices. T2 was one of the teachers who views PBIS negatively. She felt that when PBIS was adopted, everything became an external motivation. The longer the school uses PBIS, the more it is externalized. This caused students not to take responsibility or ownership for their behavior and to expect rewards for everything including using good manners. She does not give incentives to students who say good morning, please or thank you to the cafeteria staff. She teaches and expects those behaviors to be common courtesy.

T1 noted students can use their Eagle Bucks for raffles such as a spa day or sports' day. She added that because of the discipline issues on the bus, they have added Bus Bucks that can be earned on the bus for following the rules. This has been a positive step for bus behavior and has given the students something to work towards. One of their business partners gave each student in the school a plastic container where they could keep their Eagle Bucks and Bus Bucks organized and safe.

Administrators felt incentives have been beneficial. Students shop in the store every three to five weeks as a reward for making good choices. Discipline referrals have decreased significantly according to the SWIS data. Currently, A2 said they are working on more incentives for buses because of the rise in discipline referrals. They are announcing the names of buses that have no incidents or discipline referrals. Other incentives that they use are spa day, sports day, pizza parties, lunch with the principal, principal for a day, assistant principal for a day, and curriculum coordinator for a day. A1 and A2 agreed that they need a bigger budget to supply the Wing Store with incentives for purchase. To help stock the store,

they sponsored a yard sale and staff members donate items to the Wing Store. A1 and A2 said that they had reservations about paying students to be good and did not buy into the approach in the beginning. However, after seeing PBIS work, A1 feels better about the approach. At the beginning of each school year, about the third week of school, someone pushes around a traveling store to inspire interest and give the students a little incentive to collect Eagle Bucks. Volunteers help the staff members get the store ready and run the store for students to shop. A1 added that the Wing Store is the biggest headache associated with the implementation of PBIS. Purchasing the inventory, soliciting volunteers, setting up and pricing items are all time consuming or costly when students are allowed to go to the store every three to five weeks. However, it has been worth the time and effort.

**School climate/staff morale.** There was a mixture of responses about school climate from teachers and administrators. Teachers felt the climate has improved because the staff and students know what to expect each day. There are specific rules and consequences. There are no gray areas or fear of the unknown. Students and staff members understand the rules and the consequences. Any staff member can speak to any student in the school about his/her behavior because all expectations are the same. T1 added that parents also know what to expect because they are kept informed on a weekly and sometimes daily basis. With PBIS forms going home on a weekly basis, parents are continually involved. T4 said she had a positive view of PBIS when it started, but has come to worry about how effective PBIS is. T2 is adamant that morale is low, and many people want to leave. She feels that this is partly, but not completely, due to PBIS. She feels PBIS was forced on the school, and there was a lack of support from the administration, lack of ownership from the students, and a lack of consequences for office referrals. She does not feel discipline issues improved with

PBIS because it is based on external extrinsic motivators that are primarily managed and enforced in the classroom with very little parent support or administrative support. She maintained that when a teacher sends a student to the office, there needs to be a phone call or an email to the teachers telling the outcome of the visit. She feels there are no consequences for making the wrong choices. She saw a student threaten to kill another student because he broke in line, a student threw tennis balls at another student, a student threw objects at a substitute teacher, and a student brought a toy gun to school. T2 said none of the students received a punishment or consequences, so she began to question if she should continue to send students to the office. She feels there are no suspensions or after school detentions because no one wants to do them. However, teachers are encouraged to do their own after school detentions. She feels the climate is demoralizing to teachers because of lack of support for them. T3 added that she felt two unhappy teachers left the school. She was not sure if it was because of a dislike of PBIS or a combination of factors involving discipline issues and support. T1 added that until recently the school had relatively little turnover, but could not confirm if PBIS was a factor.

Talking with the administrators, A3 confirmed that PBIS creates a strong culture that represents learning and strong discipline. She added this supports a positive school climate even though there are a few staff members who do not buy-in to the use of PBIS. She further added that the TWCS is a good indication of how the staff members perceive PBIS. Staff member have expressed their concern that in the past discipline issues were high and students were not always held to the standards and rules set by the school. They want all students held to the same standards and consequences. However, she did reiterate that sometimes

they have to revisit the student's consequences. A3 firmly believes that even teachers who are good classroom managers have room for growth in that area.

A1 stated that during their first and second years of PBIS implementation (2012/2013 and 2013/2014) discipline issues and discipline referrals dropped. There was more time to focus on academics, and attitudes and morale were great. However, 2016-2017 was not a good year for the school. Discipline issues were up, and test scores were down. Suspensions and after-school detentions were extremely high. One of the new teachers had a particularly hard time, and a great deal of time and effort was spent in that classroom. Teachers were tired, frustrated, and upset with the consequences. Climate and morale were down.

**Data.** Teachers and administrators felt it was important to share data often because it directly correlates with what is happening with discipline issues in the building. With data, administrators seemed more focused on the big picture and what happened in the school over time. By drilling down into the SWIS data, administrators can help the staff see the problem areas in the school, the types of problems, the times of day with the most referrals, the grade levels with the most referrals, the teachers with the most referrals, and even the students with the most referrals. One of the biggest concerns this year (2017-2018) was the number of bus referrals.

Teachers utilize data differently. They are more focused on the day-by-day discipline referral data. T1 keeps up with her data and documentation on a regular basis. Because PBIS forms that are sent home need to be returned to school, she makes a phone call and sends another copy to the parent if the form is not signed and returned the following day. T2 said that she is faithful about taking her PBIS forms to specials so specialists can document the behavior that is exhibited during specials. T3 said that documenting inappropriate



behavior on the PBIS forms does not work as well for grades 3-5 as it does for grades K-2 in her classroom. T3 and T4 added that they feel this is because K-2 teachers do more with PBIS than 3-5 teachers.

All administrators agree that SWIS data is shared with the staff on a regular basis during faculty meetings. It is important for this data to be discussed with fidelity so that all staff members are aware of the existing data and how to interpret it. Administrators find it more beneficial if there is a norm for how all staff members handle and use data. A3 added that on the occasions when discipline does increase, there is usually an extenuating circumstance. On one occasion, there were two teachers with high numbers of discipline referrals. Because of the SWIS data, the district coaches came to the school and assisted the teachers with their classroom management. The teachers were also able to observe other teachers and attend PBIS help sessions. Buses can also be targeted and supported. When there are high numbers of bus tickets, the buses can be identified and measures can be taken with those buses. Because of the SWIS data, A2 has been able to see a documented drop in office discipline referrals from the time PBIS was implemented until the time she arrived at the school. She said it had dropped about 75%, and her job has definitely gotten easier with the drop in discipline referrals.

A1 spoke about two kinds of office referrals. There were automatic office referrals for students who were fighting, disrespectful, initiating a fight, or violating a safety issue. The other office referrals were for students who had seven PBIS write ups in one week. PBIS forms travel with students from one teacher to another so everyone is participating in the collection of data. According to A3, specific incidents are given suspension from school and other incidents are given after school detention. Only the office referrals are recorded in

SWIS. Students with less than seven PBIS write ups in one week are not recorded in SWIS Data and are not on the PBIS Team's Radar. A3 said that data and response strategies need to be shared out frequently. Because she has faculty meetings every two weeks, A3 believes that is the best time for sharing and collaborating with the staff.

### **Themes Generated From Data During the Post Implementation/Sustainability Phase**

The common themes for the post implementation/sustainability phase were compiled. They included perceptions about the factors that facilitate the implementation of PBIS, the barriers that hinder the implementation process, and suggestions that might improve the process.

**Factors that facilitate the implementation process.** When addressing the factors that facilitated the implementation of PBIS, teachers and administrators spoke of many issues. However, they most frequently referred to the administrative team, the PBIS Committee, and the refresher trainings.

***Administrative team.*** According to the interviewees, the most important component to the success of the implementation of PBIS was the administrative team. The administrative team is essential in initiating buy-in from the staff, addressing implementation concerns, modeling appropriate strategies, and establishing consistency with consequences for office referred behavior.

T4 said the administrator must always be at the PBIS meetings and be part of every staff meeting where information is presented. There also needs to be open communication, and the administrator should always be a member of that conversation in order to provide consistency and vision. A1 and A3 said the administrator or administrative team needs to be involved in every piece of the pre-implementation and implementation phase. There needs to

be a timeline for implementation and a constant check on what is happening with PBIS in the building.

A3 added that when staff members are struggling with PBIS or classroom management, it is necessary to be proactive by having people observe them. It is necessary to examine their processes and procedures and have conversations with them about changes and additions they could make to be more successful. Once PBIS is implemented, it is no longer about the students changing. Staff members need to look at what they can change to experience success with PBIS.

A3 feels that the administrator needs to be open and honest with the staff. Each year before the transfer period for staff member starts, she stands up in the faculty meeting and announces the expectations for the upcoming year for staff members planning on staying. One of those expectations is the participation in the PBIS approach. She believes there are teachers who are resistant to PBIS in the school, and some of them do not realize they are perceived this way. That is why it is important to constantly address processes and procedures at faculty meetings. PBIS requires that staff members examine their practices and decide whether or not they are effective.

***PBIS committee.*** The second theme the interviewees mentioned was the importance of the PBIS Committee. They work closely with the School Improvement Team and the mission and goals of the PBIS are woven in and out of the school improvement plan. The PBIS Committee is composed of representatives from all grade levels and all specialty groups. They provide support to staff members with the initial training, continued support for struggling staff members, frequent refresher courses, a kick-off assembly, and training for students at the beginning of each school year. Teachers felt it was beneficial to collaborate

with their grade level or specialty group as well as district level coaches to provide continuous support to the staff and school. A1 said PBIS makes them look at everything they do under a magnifying glass to ensure that the implementation of PBIS is doing what they intend for it to do. A2 feels it is important to have open and honest communication with parents. She believes that a copy of the PBIS write-ups needs to be sent home on Friday even if the student has only one.

T4 felt it was helpful that a core group of people (PBIS Committee) was selected by the school to be trained by the district. That team was responsible for bringing the information back to the school and training the staff. This allowed the staff to go back to their grade levels and teams to discuss how the implementation would look and their ideas and feedback to help with implementation. The collaboration was helpful. After the staff was trained, the staff was divided into subgroups which were assigned a common area of the school to write the procedures for that area. This allowed more buy-in for the initial staff because they were instrumental in designing the procedures and norms. A3 believes that having the right people lead the PBIS Committee is imperative. These people would be vested in the success of the implementation, and this would make it easier to share with others and encourage buy-in from all the stakeholders.

A3 said that when an issue comes up, committee members need to take the issue back to their grade levels for discussion. After a solution is reached, there needs to be a timeline for implementation. It is important that information gets to staff members in a timely manner. It is important for decisions to come from the committee.

According to T4, PBIS is about getting everybody on the same page. One of the most valuable resources provided by the PBIS Committee is the PBIS Handbook which contains

everything needed to implement and sustain PBIS. Everything that anyone needs to know about PBIS is in the handbook. According to A2, during the training sessions the PBIS Team can be very comprehensive. Once staff members complete the training sessions, they have a toolbox that can be used to teach without disruptions. The toolbox and the district PBIS coach provide essential support for the school.

T5 stated some people think that PBIS will fix all their discipline problems. However, she contends that it is meant to be a support system. The teacher has to implement PBIS and do what the approach suggests as well as put in the “legwork” for it to be successful. The school started the 2017-2018 year by returning their focus to Tier 1. During the summer of 2017, the PBIS Committee met for four or five days to revisit and update expectations. The team went through every page in the handbook and read the step-by-step expectations. She felt they needed to revamp and change some things to make PBIS work for the school. They put a plan in place to train everybody at the beginning of the school year using the original materials. They also presented a classroom management component because many teachers are not managing their classrooms effectively which is why many of the behaviors are occurring. During the training, the PBIS Committee rotated the staff members through small groups that addressed specific areas. After giving staff members a few more Tier 1 interventions during the first semester, the PBIS Committee planned to revisit Tier 2 during the second semester with the addition of small guidance groups. The team wanted to use the 2017-2018 year to get back on the right track.

***Refresher trainings.*** All the interviewees felt that the follow up trainings or refresher trainings were good because the trainings bring information back to the forefront for everyone. There are times when discipline referrals go up, and everyone will need

renewal/refresher sessions. There is also a PBIS Coach from central office that comes to the school and gives guidance about responding to the “bumps in the road” along the way. A3 said there needs to be at least one refresher session each year before school starts. However, at this school, there is extensive training at the beginning of school and again in October. During these trainings with the staff, T4 said they are updated on practices and procedures about every other staff meeting. The current PBIS Committee is focusing more on training. She explained they want to review everything, especially with the new teachers. When new teachers come, they are expected to know PBIS and how to use it, but that is not what happens.

**Barriers/areas for improvement.** When addressing the common themes about the barriers/areas of improvement, the staff members and administrative staff referred to the administrative team, the PBIS Committee, the use of incentives, and buy-in from the staff.

*Administrative team.* The support from the administrative team was an area that most teachers felt needed to be improved. When addressing the barriers or issues that hindered the implementation process, teachers contended there needs to be more consistency with punishment or consequences. Students need to get the same consequences for the same misbehaviors. They noted that some teachers feel it is not worthwhile to put in the effort for this school-wide approach when the office keeps sending the students back to them with no consequence after they have followed the processes and procedures that are required. PBIS was put in place to help the school be more successful, but teachers need to feel supported. T2 and T3 stated that they needed to feel that someone has their back and they are being supported. That is not always how they view the atmosphere. Consistency with consequences for discipline issues will help accomplish this. Five of the six teachers stated

that PBIS would be more successful with additional support from the office. In the beginning, people were positive about PBIS, but there needs to be consistency with support and consequences from the office when it comes to discipline and morale. Discipline as well as climate/morale problems need to be addressed immediately.

T3 stated there needs to be support from the administrative staff. T4 said that an administrator must always be at the PBIS meeting, and there must be open communication between the administration, the PBIS Team, and the staff. The administrative team should be proactive with staff members who are struggling and get them help immediately so they can change what they are doing.

T5 said there were some instances when teachers have sent a student for office-managed behavior, and the child returns with no explanation or follow-up. The teacher is left wondering what happened and if there was a consequence. Some staff members feel that the follow through is not there for office referrals. This can be frustrating to teachers. She also added that sometime teachers are of the mindset that any student who is sent to the office must be suspended. In their minds, there is no other acceptable consequence. There are many strategies PBIS provides teachers because the goal is to keep students in class. However, some teachers need to change how they look at behavior. A suspension is not always the appropriate consequence. There are alternative strategies or consequences that can be used with students. A2 added that administrators need to stay on top of things and continue to reiterate that PBIS is here to stay and will not be going away. Therefore, teachers need to make a decision to either buy-in to PBIS or transfer to a school without the approach.

***PBIS committee.*** The second area that many felt needed some improvement was the PBIS Committee. T5 contended there was not enough intensive follow-up training about

how to approach behaviors, define response strategies, and fill out forms. Some staff members get confused about what is an office managed behavior and what is a classroom managed behavior. The initial training for the school staff was three to five days. However, new staff members received no training. They heard about PBIS in meetings, but it was not enough information to be successful. She said the school and the PBIS Committee have to own that mistake so the PBIS Handbook was created. She further stated that she had no classroom management training in college and wonders if any colleges offer it.

Unfortunately, new teachers come in with no concept of classroom management. Therefore, the administration and the PBIS Committee need to keep going back and addressing concerns. Struggling staff members need to feel that they are not alone. This is also true for specialists. When PBIS was initially implemented, T4 thinks that specialists were struggling. However, more specialists are starting to put procedures in place and stick to them. Teachers and administrators said that teachers are required to make follow up phone calls after three PBIS write ups. When a specialist is involved with the write ups, there is a question about who is responsible for calling the parents. Is it the classroom teacher or last person documenting an issue on the form? T2 and T3 said it is hard on specialists because they have so many students that they see and need to call. Also, if a specialist gives a student silent lunch, T2 wanted to know who is supposed to monitor the student. In order to help struggling teachers this past year (2017-2018), T5 said they rolled out a mini-boot camp for everyone, not just new employees. It is important that all teachers are provided staff development each year. T1 added it is important to train students as well as teachers. A1 agreed and said students are trained every day for the first two weeks of school and participate in quarterly assemblies for PBIS expectations. T2 stated that the PBIS Committee



trained the staff and students and provided opportunities to get the students on board and parents to buy into the approach. In the summer of 2017, the PBIS committee met for many days and reevaluated everything. At the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year, there were many workshops to reinvigorate people and to make sure that the new people were on board and understood it. The people that organize them are honest, hardworking, and try their best, but the teachers' concerns were never addressed.

T4 further added that the committee has to be visible and vocal. Information cannot always come from the administration. The PBIS Committee needs to have frequent refresher trainings and share the data at every staff meeting. T4 maintained that staff members need to have a growth mindset. There is always room for growth as a classroom manager. Teachers need to make sure expectations are clear and reviewed frequently. T1 mentioned that everyone needs to know what to expect. She believes there must be consistency with everything the committee does and that there needs to be continual refresher courses, support for teachers, detailed consequences for specific misbehavior issues, and PBIS training for all teachers new to the district.

T3 wishes there was someone to take over the PBIS Committee who would be passionate about the implementation in grade 3-5. She feels K-2 is in a good place, but 3-5 needs some work. She wonders if it would not be better if there was a K-2 coach and a 3-5 coach. A3 stated that is important to have people leading the PBIS Committee who are vested in and believe in PBIS.

*Use of incentives.* The third area of concern that causes staff members to question the effectiveness of PBIS is the use of incentives. T4 felt there are some people that do not like PBIS. She said that at least one teacher does not like the fact that students are being paid to

be good, and it took some of the teachers a long time to accept that students are paid for their behavior. However, she concluded it is like an adult having a job. They go to work and get a paycheck based on their performance. She added that general logistics about incentives are really the barrier that she sees. It is hard to fit everything in, to make everything work, and to fully implement it. There needs to be more money for the Wing Store in order to provide incentives for purchase as well as who will stock it and manage it. Both A3 and T5 referenced how much money it takes to replenish the PBIS store. A1 added that supervising and supplying the incentive store with merchandise is the biggest headache associated with PBIS.

T4 explained that PBIS has impacted behavior and consequences more in the lower grades, because it is new for them. They love the PBIS money that is given to them, but in the upper grades, the students act like the money is just a piece of paper that allows them to shop at the PBIS store. She contended that it does not help the behavior of the students in the upper grades. They do not seem to care about incentives. A2 said it is important to remind staff members to pass out Eagle Bucks and to be more positive than negative.

***Buy-in from the staff.*** Buy-in from the staff can be difficult when making changes that will impact an entire school. According to T4, when PBIS was started at this school, everybody was excited. It was something new and fresh to help control behavior. However, as the years have gone by, some staff members feel they have not received the support from the office that they need. She believes PBIS is effective if expectations and procedures are taught. However, expectations cannot be one way in August and change to another way in October. Expectations have to consistently stay the same. Teachers need to send the message to students and parents that they are in control of their classrooms, and students are sent to

the office when there are extenuating circumstances. She noted that PBIS is not completely effective. She said that the K-2 classrooms use it more, and it is a struggle to get substitutes in fourth and fifth grade. A3 said if there is any chance of a complete buy-in from the staff, expectations and consequences must be clear. However, A1 does not feel it is possible for a school to get 100% buy-in from the staff.

T5 believed in the implementation of PBIS and knows it can be a successful. Some staff members experience defeat because not everyone follows the PBIS approach. It is frustrating when they follow the procedures for common areas, and they meet a class that is not following procedures and being disruptive in the hallway. This causes them to want to give up using PBIS. They want to know why they are required to use PBIS if everyone is not following the approach. T5 said PBIS at their school is like a bad relationship. People give up on PBIS, but eventually coming back to it because they know it works. She believes that it is very important that everyone understands what PBIS is, why the school is implementing PBIS, and the benefits of PBIS. The administration has to step in and say, "This is what we're doing, this is why we're doing it, and I'm going to back and support the staff 100%." This helps the naysayers and the people who are just frustrated.

## **Summary**

This chapter presented the findings of the study. These findings are based primarily on analysis of interview transcripts and are supported by reviewed PBIS minutes and data (SWIS, SET Data, Performance/Student Growth, PBIS meeting minutes, and TWCS). Major themes that emerged from the interview data were discussed in the three chronological phases of PBIS implementation. Data in the first section came from the pre-implementation phase and focused on staff members' perceptions of and experiences with the importance of

discipline and classroom management in a school community and the connection between discipline and academic performance, the need for a school-wide discipline approach to help solve discipline issues, and staff morale/school climate.

The second section, the implementation phase, focused on staff members' experiences and perceptions during the initial implementation phase. The themes focused on the procedures and rules for common areas, staff trainings, the PBIS Committee, the administrative staff, the use of incentives, and school climate/staff morale. The third section, sustainability, focused on staff members' experiences and perceptions of the supports and barriers with full implementation and sustainability of PBIS as a school-wide discipline approach. The themes included the factors that facilitate support sustainability (administrative team, PBIS Committee, and refresher trainings) and the barriers to sustainability (administrative team, PBIS Committee, use of incentives, and buy-in from the staff).

## **Chapter 5: Analysis, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

With principals and districts accountable for the academic growth and safe learning environments for all students (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005) and staff members and schools accountable for student growth, discipline issues and time out of class are major concerns. Therefore, schools continue to examine and implement school-wide discipline practices and incorporate strategies that maximize instructional time for all students. In response to this issue, the case study school implemented PBIS, as a school-wide discipline approach, in an effort to control discipline issues and increase student achievement and growth.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this research study was to examine administrators and teachers' perceptions, experiences, and satisfaction with the implementation of PBIS and to contribute to the overall knowledge base about the best practices when implementing PBIS as a school-wide discipline approach. Research was conducted through face-to-face interviews with three administrators and five teachers. There was also a review of data which included SWIS, TWCS, Growth and Proficiency Results, and SET as well as a review of documents which included the PBIS Minutes submitted by the case study school.

### **Analysis of the Findings**

This chapter analyzes the findings of this case study by answering the three fundamental questions, connecting the findings to existing literature; discussing future research recommendations; and providing recommendations for schools or districts implementing PBIS. Three fundamental questions framed this research:

**Question 1: How do the staff members at an urban, Title I, K-5 elementary school with a low-income, diverse population in the southeastern United States perceive and describe the need for, the implementation of, and sustainability of a school-wide discipline approach?**

**Question 2: How does the implementation of PBIS, as a school-wide discipline approach, in this elementary school affect staff satisfaction, teacher retention, student behavior, discipline referrals, and student growth? How does the administration team feel about PBIS? How do the staff members feel about PBIS? What does the data say about PBIS?**

**Question 3: What are the barriers and supports for implementing PBIS in an elementary school as evidenced in this case?**

These research questions were answered using the themes that emerged from the interviews, PBIS Minutes, and Data (SWIS, TWCS, Proficiency and Growth, and SET) reported in Chapter 4.

**Question 1: How do the staff members perceive and describe the need for and the implementation of a sustainable school-wide discipline approach?**

**Need for classroom management.** Before the implementation of PBIS, teachers noted that discipline had gotten worse over the years and had become an issue at their school. When they began their teaching careers, teachers seldom sent students to the office. Teachers dealt with behavior issues in the classroom because it was an expected part of their job. The teachers spoke about classroom management and the importance of managing a classroom efficiently. However, none of them received any training in college or staff development from the district. Their knowledge and experiences came from on the job

training. Teachers and administrators maintain that colleges and teacher support programs do not provide enough classroom management training and support as well as discipline strategies and best practices for teachers new to education. Classroom management skills are necessary to the success of a teacher, and those teachers without strong classroom management will result in loss of strong instruction (Brophy & Evertson, 1976). According to some administrators, teachers come into the profession without adequate training and struggled with discipline management issues. This causes them to become frustrated. T3 said she knew two teachers who left the school or the teaching profession because of a constant struggle with discipline management and a lack of support. This reaffirms Greiner and Smith's research (2009) that indicates many teachers come into the profession without adequate training and struggle with discipline issues throughout their career.

The year before the case study school implemented PBIS (2011-2012), the teacher turnover rate was 10%. By year three (2014-2015) of implementation, it had decreased to 2%. This directly correlates with discipline office referrals which show that discipline issues declined from 555 discipline issues the first year of implementation (2012-2013) to 218 in year two (2013-2014). However, as the newness of the implementation wore off and it was not the main focus for the school, discipline referrals began to go back up and increased to 279 in year five (2016-2017), and teacher turnover rate increased to 14.6% in year five (2016-2017). This confirms part of Evertson and Weinstein's research (2011) which states teachers continue to list classroom management as a major cause of teacher burnout and job dissatisfaction, and over 50% of teachers leave the teaching profession in their first five years of teaching (Greiner & Smith, 2009). Even though the case study school did not see a 50%

turnover rate with teachers, 14.6% is significant when a school is trying to keep a new approach implemented and running smoothly.

**Loss of instructional time.** Before PBIS implementation in the case school, when discipline for the case study school began to spiral out of control, some teachers became frustrated and unable to deal with discipline issues. It became a common trend to send a discipline problem to the office so someone else could address the discipline issue and provide additional assistance/support and consequences. When this became the norm, the interviewed teachers indicated that it upset them to see teachers send students to the office for every small incident. By sending students to the office, they felt teachers gave away their power or authority to discipline students. After students were sent to the office, the students no longer respected and obeyed their classroom teachers, and those teachers had little or no control over their students or their classrooms. As discipline issues increased, the trips to the office took their students out of class more and more often and valuable learning time was lost. Consistent with the research, teachers struggled with loss of teaching time because of their constant focus on discipline matters (Greiner & Smith, 2009). A1 reported that the school's number of out of school suspensions was over 200 the year before PBIS implementation, and this did not include other types of consequences such as after school detention. Both administrators and teachers concurred that discipline is important in the school community and felt that there is a direct correlation between behavior, time out of the classroom, and student achievement. Research studies indicate that implementing a proactive behavior management system will create processes that minimize the time students are out of the classroom (Lassen et al., 2006; Luiselli, et al., 2005).



Knowing that discipline impacts instruction, these staff members worried about students who were out of the classroom missing academic instruction and spoke frequently about the amount of instructional time used to redirect behavior which resulted in lost teaching time with students. This, coupled with the high numbers of office referrals, caused a loss of instruction and affected student scores and growth as indicated by the number of office referrals and the Student Growth Data. The year before PBIS implementation (2011-2012), discipline was out of control and students did not meet growth. However, there was no SWIS data to track office referrals. In 2012-2013 discipline referrals for the year were 555, and students did meet growth. In 2013-2014, discipline referrals for the year were 355, and students exceeded growth. In 2014-2015, discipline referrals for the year were 218, and students met growth. In 2015-2016, discipline referrals for the year were 241, and students met growth. According to the teachers, the amount of time that students were out of the classroom for discipline referrals seemed to be contributing to their low student performance. This confirms the research that states that discipline is a concern because more and more students are spending time outside the classroom which ultimately affects their academic achievement (Martin & Sass, 2010).

**Behavior and achievement.** As teachers struggled with the loss of teaching time because of their constant focus on discipline matters, the teachers as well as the administrators agreed that they noticed a direct correlation between student behavior and achievement. Discipline impacted instruction in the classroom and affected how much learning was taking place. While most teachers focused on and worried about the students who were out of the classroom and missing instruction, T2 noted that learning time is lost for all students, not just the student(s) involved in the discipline issue(s). When she sends a

student to the office, it takes the student out of the learning environment, but it also takes her away from providing instruction for the other students in the classroom. She must complete the office referral paperwork while she and the disruptive student are still in the classroom. Therefore, she is not providing instruction to any of the other students and the disruption in the classroom causes the other students in the classroom to have a hard time focusing on and completing the assignment. When discipline issues occur, valuable learning time is lost for all the students in the classroom, not just the student causing the commotion. This reiterates the research by Luiselli, Putnam, and Sutterland (2002) which states that classroom disruptions not only affect the learning of the disruptive student but hinders the education of all students present. Both the research by Callison (1998) and the research by Harchi, Cortes, Abbott, and Catalano's research (2004) also confirm this. Callison's research (1998) indicates disruptive students interfere with the ability of all students to stay on task and limits the amount of instruction a teacher provides and Fleming, Harchi, Cortes, Abbott, and Catalano's work (2004) indicates that because inappropriate behavior and academic success are directly related, and inappropriate behavior can severely hinder academic achievement.

**Need for change.** All of the teachers and administrators spoke about the amount of time lost dealing with discipline issues indicating the necessity of a school-wide discipline approach to help solve discipline issues. A1 indicated that before the implementation of PBIS, it was hard for administrators to find time to attend grade level and professional learning team meetings, visit classrooms, participate in walkthroughs, and observe teachers because they were continually dealing with discipline issues. Administrators were constantly in classrooms or the office addressing discipline issues, and teachers were persistently interrupted by discipline issues. Teachers were concerned about the amount of time that

students were out of the classroom and the high number of office referrals. Student data indicated discipline was a major concern and was contributing to low student performance. School performance and student growth data indicated that the year before PBIS implementation (2011-2012) the school did not meet expected growth for students.

With all the discipline issues, loss of teaching time, increase in office referrals, and decrease in student growth; the teachers and administrators indicated that the case study school experienced a decrease in positive staff morale/school climate and needed a school-wide discipline approach implemented in all classrooms as well as all common areas of the school. Teachers and administrators felt that establishing a school framework with norms so that everyone understands the rules and what is expected allows for consistency in the school. Even though there were many school-wide discipline approaches to help improve student behavior, the case study school implemented PBIS based on the district's support for the approach and the abundance of research stating it is one of the most effective approaches for positively impacting school climate as well as creating and sustaining effective support for students and academic achievement (Bradshaw, Leaf, & Debnam, 2007; Parr, Kidder, & Barrett, 2007; Putnam, Horner, & Algozzine, 2006; & Luiselli, et al., 2005).

**Question 2: How does the implementation of PBIS, as a school-wide discipline approach, affect staff satisfaction, teacher retention, student behavior, discipline referrals, and student growth?**

**Climate.** Before PBIS implementation, staff morale and school climate were low. Discipline had increased, and some teachers felt there was misbehavior with no consequences. T3 noted that a couple of teachers left the school because they did not feel supported with discipline issues in their classrooms, and teachers at the school were starting

to share their frustration with each other. The sentiments of the teachers negatively impacted the school's atmosphere. This was brought about as a result of the increase of discipline issues at the school (Bear, 2010; Hyman & Perone, 1998). The implementation of PBIS helped to create a more positive school culture in a consistent environment with similar expectations by providing a framework where staff members shared a common language, a common vision, and common experiences. When PBIS is implemented as a school-wide discipline approach, the implementation can result in changes to the environment or climate. This parallels the belief of behaviorists that behaviors can be altered. With PBIS, teachers are trained to teach and model school-wide expectations and positively influence classroom management (Horner et. al., 2005). All the administrators interviewed and a majority of the teachers indicated that PBIS provided a safe and positive school environment where disruptive behavior was addressed, and positive behavior was rewarded by providing students opportunities to participate in spa day, principal for a day, or other positive activities/rewards. By implementing PBIS to target discipline issues, office discipline referrals decreased during the first three years (2012-2013, 2013-2014, and 2014-2015) with a significant decrease the first two years (2012-2013 and 2013-2014). According to the TWCS, teacher satisfaction increased to 91.4% during year two (2013-2014). Academic achievement data showed that the school met or exceeded growth during the first four years (2012-2013, 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016). However, in year five of PBIS (2016-2017), the school did not meet growth. The first three years of PBIS implementation validates the research of Reynolds, Irwin, and Algozzine (2009) which states that PBIS is a school-wide intervention that creates a positive climate and improves behavior and student achievement.

**Staff satisfaction.** Before, during, and after PBIS implementation, discipline issues had an impact on the staff's satisfaction and morale as well as the school's climate. According to the TWCS which is published every two years, teacher satisfaction at the case study school increased during year two (2013-2014) which was the same year that teacher turnover rate was at its lowest (2%). However, when discipline issues increased in years four (2015-2016) and five (2016-2017), teacher satisfaction started to decrease and teacher turnover rate increased to 14.6%. When discipline and classroom management become problems, teachers become dissatisfied and leave. This confirms Evertson and Weinstein's research (2011) that states that teachers continue to list classroom management as a major cause of job dissatisfaction. Even when PBIS was on a downward spiral, it was interesting to note that teachers continued to feel safe at school.

Teachers and administrators felt that effective classroom management and discipline are essential for teaching and learning. Staff members felt behavior and climate improved because PBIS emphasized the integrated use of classroom management and school-wide discipline strategies coupled with effective academic instruction to create a positive and safe school climate for all students. This confirms the research that indicates improvements in student behavior and school climate are related to improvements in academic outcomes (Horner et al., 2008; McIntosh et al., 2006; Nelson, Colvin, & Smith, 1996; Wentzel, 1993).

The effectiveness of the administrative team is another piece that correlates with staff satisfaction. All of the interviewees maintained that the administrative staff is one of the most important pieces for a successful implementation and sustainability of PBIS. However, views differed on how that needed to look. Most administrators viewed it as providing resources and training for expectations to be taught and rewarded. Most teachers viewed it as

being visible at all meetings, modeling appropriate use of PBIS, maintaining consistent and appropriate consequences for office referrals, and communicating to teachers and parents when consequences were given.

According to the data, after the initial training, classroom management became more effective and discipline referrals decreased. This led administrators and some teachers to feel teachers with little or no discipline or classroom management training can be trained with the PBIS approach to teach and model school-wide expectations, to reinforce appropriate behavior, to increase the ratio of positive interactions to negative interactions with students, and to positively influence classroom management. This confirms the research by Horner, et al. (2005).

### **Data**

The Student Growth Data provided the PBIS Committee and the school with a good indication of how PBIS was working. However, according to the administrators and some of the teachers, it is important to continually access the data and make decisions based on the results. In agreement with Sugai's research (2008), the school used the data to take stock of current situations, pinpoint areas for change and/or improvement, and evaluate the effects of current and future interventions. By using data, the school attempted to keep the implementation on track and to provide sustainability for the approach.

**Student growth.** The data showed that the year before PBIS implementation (2011-2012) the school did not meet expected growth for students. In year one (2012-2013) the school met expected growth and exceeded expected growth in year two (2013-2014). PBIS has been shown to be effective for a wide range of behavioral issues and to positively impact academic achievement. This confirms the research that states much of the effect of PBIS is

immediate, and many, but not all, schools typically see positive effects after only one year (Frank, et al., 2009; National Association of School Psychologists, 2008; Safran, & Oswald, 2003). Even though the case study school initially showed growth with the implementation of PBIS, the school peaked at year two (2013-2014). In years three (2014-2015) and four (2015-2016) the school met expected growth. However, A1 added that during year five (2016-2017) discipline issues increased and growth was not met.

**Teacher retention.** Sugai (2013) suggests that PBIS schools with reduced referrals and discipline issues have better teacher retention and higher satisfaction. This was true for the case study school. After implementation, teacher turnover rate was the lowest (2%) in year three (2014-2015), and the TWCS in year two (2013-2014) confirmed that teacher satisfaction got better with the implementation of PBIS. However, teacher satisfaction took a downward turn by year five (2016-2017), and the teacher turnover rate was the highest (14.6%) in year five (2016-2017). The areas of time, managing student behavior, school leadership, and an overall feeling that the school is a good place to work had positive and increasing results through the 2013-2014 school year. However, with the 2015-2016 school year (the fourth year of implementation), a downward spiral began. It was interesting to note that the staff felt that students at the school understood expectations for their conduct and the school environment was a safe place to work. The TWCS directly correlates with Sugai's research (2013) and supports the Behavior Data (SWIS) and Student Growth/Performance Data.

**Student behavior/discipline referrals.** After implementation of PBIS, SWIS data indicated that discipline and office referrals decreased the first three years (2012-2013, 2013-2014, and 2014-2015). In fact, there was a significant decrease the first two years (2012-

2013 and 2013-2014). The fourth year (2015-2016) discipline began to increase and continued to increase in year five (2016-2017). Although it is not a huge jump, there was a continued increase in reading proficiency from the year before implementation (2011-2012) to year four (2015-2016). It increased from 22.6% to 36%. However, in year five (2015-2016) reading proficiency decreased to 31%. After consistently decreasing in year one (2012-2013), year two (2013-2014), and year three (2014-2015); office discipline referrals increased in year four (2015-2016) and year five (2016-2017). This echoed the SWIS data and showed a direct correlation between discipline and academic achievement and confirms the research of Bol et al. (2010) which states the outcome of a successful PBIS implementation can be measured in both behavior data and academic achievement of the students in the school.

**Question 3: What are the supports and barriers for implementing PBIS in this elementary school and did the interviewees perceive it to be successful?**

Ironically, the case study showed continual crossover and intertwining between the themes (buy-in, the administration, and the PBIS Committee) for the supports and barriers of PBIS implementation. At times, it is difficult to see where the support or the barrier of one theme ends and another begins. A theme may start as a support, but evolve into a barrier over time. However, it is the staff's experience with those themes that indicate whether they are perceived as a support or a barrier.

**Supports**

**Buy-in.** All of the interviewees maintained that buy-in from the staff members was a key component during the implementation phase. Because every member of the school community is vital to the implementation process, it is important that all staff members buy



in and support PBIS in order to maintain a positive school climate and to achieve full implementation and future sustainability of the approach. The school community needs to recognize the need for a new approach and embrace the new approach. There must be agreement among the staff on the need for change and the staff must be involved in the planning and implementation of the change (Fagan & Mihalic, 2003). Some people felt the use of incentives was more about buying good behavior and less about changing behavior. Before implementation, two administrators and three teachers worried about teacher buy-in because of the use of incentives. After implementation, seven out of eight staff members thought the incentives worked well and helped teachers and students buy-in to the approach. Only one teacher continued to have reservations and negative experiences with the use of incentives.

T1 said she had not used incentives in the past, but was surprised by the success of using them. She said that it gave the students something positive to work towards. The positive rewards that specifically targeted the interests of the students in the school seemed to work best. In the beginning, A1 was not a fan because of the use of candy treats, and A2 was reluctant about paying a student for something that is expected to be done automatically. However, both changed their minds about using incentives after seeing PBIS work for their school.

**Administration.** Teachers and administrators all agreed that the administration is vital to the implementation and sustainability of PBIS. Administrators need to be the number one advocate for the approach and their support for and modeling of what is expected is important to the implementation process. Their role is crucial in initiating buy-in from staff members, collaborating and responding to implementation concerns, addressing behavior

concerns with consistency, and communicating student consequences to teachers and parents. Their openness and honesty about what they expect and their immediate response to problems indicate to the staff their commitment to the sustainability of the implementation. Administrators are responsible for laying the ground work for a successful buy-in from the staff. The administrative team for the school will support the success of PBIS by establishing strong open communication that continuously expresses a clear vision to all stakeholders. Administrators must be involved in the priorities that the PBIS Committee sets, the allocations of resources, open to making policy changes, scheduling and integration of the approach, and personal involvement. Administrative support and implementation quality are important for success (Durlak & DuPre, 2008).

With the implementation of PBIS, the administrative staff was left with the decision of how to best implement it in order to initiate buy in with staff members. Administrators felt it was important to keep staff members informed every step of the way in order to establish collaboration and build trust. There should be no surprises for staff members. The administrative team and the PBIS Committee were trained one year in advance, and the year before implementation the administrative team let the staff know what to expect during the process. The staff was trained before the 2012-2013 school year began.

The initial core team (the administration and the PBIS Committee) decided how to best implement PBIS at the case study school. This included reading and discussing the approach, collaborating with teachers about how to best implement it, reading and discussing case studies, and hearing from teachers and administrators who had used the approach. It was essential to listen to staff members who had been through the implementation in the past. Their experiences before implementation, during implementation, and after implementation

were valuable pieces of information. The staff members' fears about change and the unknown of what to expect were alleviated by the excellent communication of pertinent information and feedback from the administration team and the PBIS Committee. This open and honest approach of communication encouraged and supported teacher buy in which was crucial because the staff members establish the expectations for behavior and learning.

According to the teachers, it was essential that the administrators were visible during all PBIS meetings, trainings, and staff development sessions to show support and voice concerns. Without administrative support, Kincaid, Childs, Blasé, and Wallace (2007) identified difficulties with team training, barriers with data, team functioning, communication, reward systems, and buy-in from staff members. The staff echoed the research findings of Metzler, Biglan, Rusby, and Sprague (2001) which indicate a lack of support and training for teachers, complex strategies, and a weak administration can jeopardize the effectiveness of the implementation.

**PBIS committee.** Administrators and teachers stated that the PBIS Committee is important because it represents all the different stakeholders in this school community and helps to create a school community that is inclusive and supportive of learning. The PBIS Committee provided an opportunity for the stakeholders/representatives to come together and share in the development of the norms, expectations, consequences, processes, priorities, and procedures. Teachers need to agree on the need for a change, relevance of the implementation, and be involved in the planning (Fagan & Mihalic, 2003). T5 said it is important to come together and collaborate about problem areas. It gave them a chance to collaborate about processes and procedures as well as what worked and what did not work. Buy-in is nurtured by including teachers in the planning process, providing training and

support, and by having regular meetings to discuss problems. It is important to select a program coordinator who supports the approach and guides its operations (Fagan & Mehalic, 2003).

With the data, the committee drilled down, analyzed the troublesome areas, and constructed a plan to address the issue. After having a difficult time with bus discipline this year, the school drilled down and analyzed the data so they could come up with a plan to inspire drivers to become more independent with issues on the bus. With teachers and other staff members being important stakeholders in the PBIS implementation process, it is crucial for them to work together to support the approach and communicate information to the individual teams they represent.

The initial staff trainings for the PBIS Committee empowered the representatives to develop their own model or framework by looking at the issues at their school and using the PBIS approach to create a blueprint for their individual school. Their norms, expectations, and rules for the common areas such as the hallways, bathrooms, assemblies, buses, specials, and cafeteria were based on the needs of their school. The committee also assembled a handbook that detailed expectations for all the common areas, teacher/classroom managed behaviors, office-managed behaviors, dress code violations, disruptive transitions, fire drills, lockdowns, and strategies for all staff members. Along with the refresher trainings and staff development, the handbook explained PBIS implementation procedures and expectations for assemblies, dismissal, cafeteria, hallway, bathrooms, and other common areas in the school. The integration of school-wide discipline and classroom management combined with strong instructional practices and the handbook gave the staff members a toolbox of strategies and helped to create a positive and safe school community for all students. When planning, A1

said they considered every specific area and how it looked, redefined it, and trained everybody on how to implement it in order to positively impact the school.

With PBIS, the teachers altered the environment, taught appropriate skills, and rewarded appropriate behavior, and undesired behavior was replaced with new behavior skills. Because the PBIS Model is easily adapted for each school depending on its needs and culture, the case study school was able to promote success, by using the PBIS model to define expectations, model expectations, teach the expectations, and reinforce the appropriate behaviors associated with their expectations (Sugai, 2008). The PBIS Committee utilized the information to customize their own PBIS implementation approach to best serve their unique population.

During the first three years, PBIS provided a positive school-wide approach which was implemented with the help of the PBIS Committee and the administrative staff to create a common vision, common goals, and norms, expectations, and strategies for the school. This confirmed the research by Stage, Cheney, Lynass, and Mielenz (2012) which indicates that PBIS practices such as curriculum, instruction, interventions, and strategies are implemented within the school in order to create a common and shared understanding of expectations.

## **Barriers**

**Buy-in.** With any new staff development or initiative for a school or district, teacher buy-in is essential to its success. This case study school started out doing well implementing PBIS. For the first three years, the case study school experienced success with PBIS. However, it just did not have the sustainability that it needed to continue. Without support, PBIS may not experience the success that is needed for future sustainability (Horner, et al.,

2005). According to the teachers, the implementation of PBIS was not sustainable over time. For the first three years, things went well. However, some staff members did not buy-in and support the PBIS approach. Administrators and teachers felt there were two causes for this. The first reason was that there was little or no training for new staff members and they never experienced success with the approach. The second reason was that a few staff members never accepted PBIS. They refused to participate in the implementation and there were no consequences for their actions. Teachers felt this was because there were no consequences for staff members who did not follow the guidelines presented by the PBIS Committee and school. They felt it is important to have consequences and/or help sessions for staff members who are not following the PBIS approach. When teachers see other teachers not participating in PBIS, it is not fair to the implementation process. Implementer characteristics such as staff support, motivation, and buy-in are critical to implementation success (Fagan & Mehalic, 2003). T5 said that it is important that everyone understands what PBIS is, knows why the school is doing it, and is aware of the benefits. She further added that people think that PBIS is going to fix all the discipline problems because it is a support system. However, it is there to support teachers, but they have to put in the effort and be willing to implement it as it needs to be implemented. A3 said that every staff member must participate and use PBIS because it is directly related to the teacher evaluation instrument. It needs to be reflected in a teacher's evaluation when he/she does not support PBIS.

One teacher who was on the original PBIS Committee was against implementing PBIS from the beginning and did not buy-in and support PBIS. She felt it was an incomplete program that is running on its own volition, and the school implemented it without real thought about its effect on classroom teachers or classroom issues. Lack of buy-in coupled

with some staff members not using PBIS consistently affected the sustainability of buy-in with PBIS implementation. It did not happen immediately, but one dissatisfied staff member can eventually influence the other staff members and the implementation of the initiative. When staff members do not buy-in to the implementation of PBIS, there is a potential problem with staff morale/school climate which is what happened at this school. This confirms Wasilewski, Gifford, and Bonneau's research (2008). PBIS involves participation and buy-in of all stakeholders, and collaboration is imperative to ensure effective implementation.

**Administration.** Teacher and administrator views differ on the focus of the administrator's role in the implementation of PBIS. Most administrators view their role as providing resources and training for expectations to be taught and rewarded and overseeing the implementation process. However, teachers view it as being present and visible at all meetings/trainings, modeling appropriate use of PBIS, and maintaining consistent and appropriate consequences for office referrals, and communicating to teachers and parents when consequences were given.

According to the teachers, one of the main barriers to implementing PBIS was not getting consistent and immediate feedback from the administration for all discipline referrals. They believe this is essential. Without feedback, teachers have no information and become frustrated. T5 said there were some instances when staff members sent students to the office for office-managed behavior, and the child returned with no explanation or follow-up. Some staff members felt that the follow through is not there because they were unsure about consequences. Active leadership is displayed in setting priorities, resource allocations such as time, policy change to accommodate the program/approach, scheduling and integration the

approach, and personal involvement. Administrative support and implementation quality are important for success (Durlak & DuPre, 2008).

In year three (2014-2015), responding to violations was an area of concern and scored lower during the SET Assessment. This should have been a warning sign for the PBIS Committee and the committee should have addressed this issue. However, the minutes are unclear as to whether or not this was ever addressed.

This was about the time that T5 became concerned about the mindset of some of the teachers. They sent students to the office expecting them to be suspended and that was the only acceptable consequence. No other consequence would work. In order to keep students in class, it is important for teachers to have strategies. She felt some teachers needed to change how they looked at behavior. The consequence for student misbehavior does not always have to be suspension. There are alternative strategies or consequences that work to control discipline issues. However, if a staff member is not implementing PBIS correctly, it is up to the administrator to have that difficult and challenging conversation. If the conversation does not produce change, the administrator is the one who will provide the consequences for an insubordinate staff member.

**PBIS committee.** With members that represent the school, it is important that the PBIS Committee presents a united and collaborative team that supports and advocates for the implementation of PBIS. A3 stated that it is important to have people leading the PBIS committee who are vested in and believe in PBIS. They have to be able to communicate the needs of the school, the vision, the strategies, and continuous training for current employees as well as employees new to the school. T4 believes there must be consistency with everything the committee does. Therefore, T1 mentioned that there needs to be continual



refresher courses, support to teachers, and specific consequences for specific misbehavior issues, and PBIS training for all teachers new to the district. The main problem area for the PBIS Committee was training maintenance for all employees, especially new employees. Without continuous training and refresher courses, there is not always buy-in from all the staff. This is what happened with the case study school. It had some initial members who did not support PBIS and were not supporters for the approach and it lost others along the way. Without support, the implementation may not survive. This confirms Wasilewski, Gifford, and Bonneau's research (2008) which states that support is essential to ensure effective communication.

The relationship between the PBIS Committee members and the administrative team and the staff as well as their ability to work together is essential to a successful implementation. The team is a representative group of all of the staff (Collins & Halverson, 2009). Communication and collaboration between team members as well as staff members are important components of the sustaining phase. PBIS requires a review team of educators with buy-in from across the school and strong administrative support to design and enforce the systems within the PBIS model at each school. The forming of systems is a crucial component of the PBIS model.

### **Success or Failure**

Six out of eight interviewees (three out of five teachers and three out of three administrators) stated that they felt PBIS had been successful even though sustainability was not there. T1 said it was a success in the school and classroom because it gave students incentives to work towards. She had never used incentives in the past and felt they worked. Even though T3 knows staff members who did not feel it was successful, she felt it was

successful for her. T5 felt it was successful because it is smooth and controlled, and there is no longer chaos at dismissal. Because of the routines and procedures, the expectations are the same every single day. A2 said it was a success, but some people are not “sold on” it so the team continues to work to provide support. She was reluctant to use PBIS because she could not see paying a child to do something that he or she is expected to do automatically. However, she has changed his mind after seeing it work. A1 was also not a fan in the beginning because students were given candy treats as incentives for being good. However, after seeing the data for his school, he is now a believer. During the first few years, discipline issues decreased and academics maintained or increased. According to A1, out of school suspensions indicated a drop of 200 suspensions. Central office also noticed the changes, as well as positive comments, from fieldtrip providers. A3 perceived PBIS as a success because discipline referrals decreased and student achievement increased. She feels it has also helped with routines at duty stations each morning and during afternoon dismissal.

T4 feels it is both a failure and a success because people were “gung ho” in the beginning, but have changed their minds. However, she believes it has been very beneficial to her as a teacher. Before PBIS, she thinks she was a negative teacher, but she no longer makes negative statements to the students. She is very positive with her comments and believes PBIS is positive for the classroom, the school, and the community. She added that it is important to get the parents involved by providing sessions for parents to help them understand PBIS.

T2 views it as a failure because it is a lot of work for the PBIS Team, and it is an incomplete program that runs on its own volition. She felt the school implemented PBIS for

the sake of doing it without real thought about its effect on classroom teachers or classroom issues.

A1 noted this past year the school did not meet growth, and proficiency dropped. Even though everyone agreed that discipline referrals have started to increase again over the past couple of years, A3 said they have improved 75% over what they were when they began PBIS. T1 and A1 added that they look at data every other staff meeting. As one of the SWIS trained people at her school, T5 drilled down and analyzed the data. She said the school went through a rough patch with bus behavior this year. They implemented a plan to help drivers become more independent when handling discipline issues.

Participants agreed that the implementation of PBIS resulted in outcomes that improved opportunities for student success. Among the outcomes mentioned are (a) establishment of consistent behavior expectations and rules, (b) use of common language on behavior issues, (c) systematic and continuous collection of data and analysis of behavior data across data sets, (d) development of a behavior matrix, and (e) improved school culture. In other words, the majority of the participants believed that implementation of PBIS as a school-wide behavior approach reduced the barriers to learning that occur when behaviors disrupt the learning community. This confirms the research by Fairbank, Simonsen, and Sugai (2008).

### **Recommendations as a Result of the Study**

Recognizing that schools encounter a multitude of obstacles in their efforts to educate students academically, socially, and emotionally; it is imperative that schools have a school-wide discipline approach in place to ensure that the needs of all students are met. To help

sustain and keep PBIS working efficiently, teachers and/or administrators feel that the following recommendations are essential.

### **Recommendation 1: Administrative Support and Communication**

Because the teachers and administrators each see the main role of the administrator from a different viewpoint and focus, it is important for the administrator to represent both views to the staff. Administrators need to focus on constant visibility, support for the PBIS approach and the staff, overseeing and managing the implementation process, providing resources and training for expectations to be taught and rewarded, providing immediate as well as consistent and appropriate consequences for office referrals, and communicating consequences immediately to teachers and parents. A2 stated that administrators also need to stay on top of all aspects of the implementation and continue to reiterate that PBIS is not going away and needs to be accepted and implemented. All teachers in the school must know that PBIS is to be implemented by everyone in the school.

It is beneficial for school improvement plans to include PBIS; therefore, sending the message to staff members that PBIS is a non-negotiable for that school community. Standard one on the teacher evaluation instrument used in this state addresses whether or not teachers support the school improvement plan and the policies, practices, and procedures outlined in the plan. Including PBIS in to the school improvement plan created for schools by school leaders makes it clear that everyone is expected to support PBIS.

T5 believes in PBIS and has experienced its success. Some staff members experienced frustration because not every staff member was following the PBIS approach. Everyone followed the procedures for common areas. However, when teachers met a class that was not following procedures and being disruptive in the hallway, they wanted to quit.

They wanted to know why they needed to follow PBIS if others were not. T5 said PBIS at the case study school was like a bad relationship. Staff members know that PBIS works, but they kept giving it up and coming back to it. She said that it was very important for everyone to understand what PBIS is, why the school is implementing it, and the benefits of PBIS. Teachers who supported and valued PBIS believed that the administration has to be vocal about their support for the approach. T5 believed the administration has to step in and say, "This is what we're doing, this is why we're doing it, and the administration is going to back and support the staff 100%." This helps the naysayers and the people who are frustrated. Implementation of PBIS can be monitored by connecting its use and support to the teacher evaluation instrument. The administrative team needs to make it clear that the use of PBIS is nonnegotiable. Administrators must be connected to what is happening in the building. If all teachers are not implementing PBIS, administrators need to address the issue immediately in order to prevent some teachers from feelings they are using PBIS and others are not.

### **Recommendation 2: Data Discussions on a Regular Basis**

During the interviews, it became apparent that teachers did not know if data was shared on a regular basis. They knew it was shared, but had no idea when or how often. A notable piece of information was that the case study school did not have the PBIS minutes for all their meetings. Therefore, it made it difficult to determine if data discussions and follow through happened on a regular basis. It is important that all documentation such as minutes of PBIS Meetings be kept so it can be referred to when needed. Data sharing and referencing need to be part of faculty meetings as well as PBIS meetings. A3 and T5 said the PBIS Committee needs to share the data at every staff meeting.

The sharing of data to the staff on a regular basis allows a school community to create long and short term plans that will support the needs of the community. Guidance counselors can use the information to create their lesson plans around the needs of the school. The PBIS Team, as well as other personnel, can use the data to determine locations high in discipline issues. They can make changes in processes and procedures based on the data. The PBIS and administrative team can determine teachers who need extra support based on the discipline data coming to the office. Reviewing the data indicates which response strategies are being used and which are most effective.

### **Recommendation 3: PBIS Committee Support**

The relationship between the PBIS Committee members and the administrative team and the staff as well as their ability to work together is essential to a successful implementation. A3 stated that it is important to have people leading the PBIS committee who are visible and vocal and who are vested in and believe in PBIS. Information cannot always come from administration. Everything must be presented clearly and reviewed frequently. Staff members need to know what to expect at all times. T4 also said that an administrator needs to always be present at the PBIS meetings, and there needs to be open communication. The PBIS Committee must provide frequent refresher trainings for staff members. T1 agreed that there needs to be continual refresher courses, support to teachers, and specific consequences for specific misbehavior issues, and PBIS training for all teachers new to the district. The administrative team and the PBIS Committee needs to be proactive with staff members who are struggling and get them help immediately so they can change their actions. T4 believes there must be consistency with everything the committee does. Staff members need to have a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006). There is always room for

growth as a classroom manager. Each year every staff member needs to be retrained with a PBIS refresher course.

#### **Recommendation 4: Staff Development for New Staff Members**

When new students enter the school during the year, the school already has a plan in place for them to learn about and become acquainted with PBIS. However, it is important that new faculty members have a similar plan in place. With the district support for the use of PBIS as a school-wide discipline approach, it would be beneficial if the district provided PBIS training for new staff members. There needs to be an intensive PBIS training for new staff members to the district during the staff development days at the beginning of the school year. There could also be additional staff development training days each quarter to answer questions and provide support for those new staff members or current staff members who are struggling and need support. With PBIS being an important school-wide discipline approach for the district, it would make sense for the district to offer this new staff training. However, if the district does not offer it, the school definitely needs to make it a priority with their staff development each year.

#### **Recommendation 5: Suggestions for Leaders Implementing PBIS**

The implementation of PBIS by school leaders and stakeholders in the school community is essential to the success of PBIS at that school. The principal and his/her allegiance to PBIS is a major factor in the success or failure of PBIS. The principal must participate in all PBIS staff development and be present at all PBIS meetings. The principal needs to take great care in selecting committee members who are strong classroom managers, have success serving in the coaching role, and who are good at identifying strengths and weaknesses in the data and planning professional development based on the data. The

principal must be committed to identifying meeting places and times for meetings and ensuring that those times and places are sacred. The principal needs to send out regular communications by email and also at staff meetings, grade level meetings, and PBIS meetings where he/she discusses PBIS data, changes in processes or routines, and anything that refers to PBIS. Not only is it important that the principal speaks about PBIS at staff meetings, but he/she needs to ensure that the PBIS Committee shares at staff meetings. The inclusion of the PBIS Committee on the agenda for staff meetings sends the message that the principal values and is in support of PBIS.

### **Implications**

The findings from this study may contribute to the overall knowledge base about the best practices to use in an elementary school when implementing PBIS as a school-wide discipline approach. It suggests every member of the school community is vital to the implementation process. It is important that all staff members buy in and support PBIS implementation to have future sustainability of the approach. If everyone does not fully support or buy in to the program, PBIS may not experience the success that is needed for future sustainability. The research highlights areas teachers and principals experienced and perceived to be the supports and barriers in the implementation of PBIS as a school-wide discipline approach. It suggests ways to embrace or change obstacles that occur during the pre-implementation or planning stage and continue through full implementation.

Additionally, the results can help school districts and schools implement PBIS so they can avoid the pitfalls that arise during implementation and sustainability. The challenges or barriers identified in this study (staff buy-in, administrator's role, and PBIS Committee support) are supported by the literature, even though they did not immediately impact the



implementation. It took about three years for the challenges to surface and to interfere with the sustainability of PBIS. The findings of this study suggest the need for school districts to fill the gaps identified by a lack of continual support from administrators and training for new employees because both can eventually result in lack of buy-in from staff members. Schools can utilize this type of information to customize their own PBIS implementation approaches in order to best serve their own unique populations.

### **Limitations**

The findings of this study are unique to the Title I elementary case study school implementing a school-wide discipline approach because the conceptual framework is grounded in examining the phases of PBIS implementation for this specific school and the effect on student behavior, student growth, school culture, and teacher retention as perceived and experienced by the staff and the school data. Findings indicated that implementation of PBIS may decrease student office discipline referrals which can increase teacher satisfaction and student growth and may contribute to the sustainability of the approach. It is important to note that the findings from a small study of this nature cannot automatically be generalized to other districts. However, the results of this study do have the potential to generate improvements in how schools and school districts implement PBIS in the future, in spite of the study's limitations.

The study specially focused on administrators and teachers with at least seven years of experience at the case study school so they could provide feedback for the entire process. While only three administrators and five teachers were studied, the study also examined the interrelatedness of the experiences and perceptions of the staff members before, during, and after the implementation of PBIS as well as the sustainability of the approach. The

researcher had experience implementing and using PBIS at another school in the district. While efforts were put into place to eliminate preconceived notions of the researcher, there are no guarantees that the researcher's experience with PBIS did not affect some of the follow up questions asked during the interview process.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study presents an opportunity for further research by replicating with a larger pool of participants. A more rural district or a non-Title I school might provide the ability to compare results to determine if themes identified in this study are unique to urban districts or Title I schools or if they are transferrable to other types of areas and schools. Additional considerations for a further study would be to compare two schools that started PBIS at the same time or to compare two schools by principal gender, principal's years of experience, impact on different demographic groups of students, or Title I/non-Title I status.

### **Conclusion**

An opportunity exists for districts and schools to work together to improve the chances of PBIS sustainability after initial training and implementation. This study identified some potential strengths and barriers when implementing PBIS at an elementary school. Based on the perceptions and experiences of a sampling of teachers and administrators, the case study school implemented and sustained PBIS for about three years. Sustainability might have continued if implementation had been monitored and maintained more closely. Continual staff development and refresher training for current employees, intensive training for new employees, and accountability for all staff members are three mandatory pieces that must happen. One way that the district can create sustainability is by listening to and collaborating with staff members at schools which have implemented PBIS. This

recommendation would provide schools and school districts with a greater chance of sustaining PBIS. Schools can utilize this type of information to customize their own PBIS implementation approaches in order to best serve their own unique populations.

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## **Appendix A: Interviewer Profiles**

The participants in this study consisted of three administrators and five teachers from the case study K-5, Title I elementary school with a diverse population of students, located in a low-income urban area of the southeastern United States. All of the participants except the assistant principals were employed by the case study school before the implementation, through the implementation process, and after the implementation of PBIS. Three assistant principals served the case study school during the pre-implementation, implementation, and sustainability phases.

### **Administrator 1 (A1)**

Administrator 1, the only male in the group began his administrative career at the case study school as the assistant principal and moved into the principal's position. Currently, he has 23 years in education, 12 years in administration, and 17 years in the case study school. A1 was one of the reasons the case study school implemented PBIS. Due to the increase in discipline referrals and the decrease in academic achievement, he approached the district office and asked that his school be allowed to participate in PBIS. Even though he had never been in a school with PBIS, he was supportive of and an advocate for PBIS as a school-wide discipline approach.

### **Administrator 2 (A2)**

Administrator 2 participated in an administrative internship at the school during the implementation year and the following year began serving the school in the capacity of the assistant principal and at one point was the PBIS Coach. She brought 17 years of experience in education with EC experience and six years as an assistant principal, all in Title I Schools, to the position. A2 is an advocate for and wanted PBIS to succeed.

### **Administrator 3 (A3)**

Administrator 3 was the assistant principal who served at the case study school for three years before training and implementation. She left to become a principal at another Title 1 school that was implementing PBIS at the same time as the case study school so the schools went through the process together. She has 16 years of experience in education with seven years as a principal. A3 had experience with training, implementation, and sustainability of PBIS at another Title I School and was a strong advocate for implementing PBIS at the case study school.

### **Teacher One (T1)**

T13 is a Grade 3-5 teacher who was a member of the original PBIS Committee and a strong proponent of the approach. She has served in education for 21 years at Title I Schools and has worked at the case study school for 11 years.

### **Teacher 2 (T2)**

T2 is a Grade K-2 teacher who retired at the end of the case study. She also had experience in third grade and English as a Second Language (ESL). T2 spoke multiple languages and communicated well with all cultures. Even though she served on the original PBIS Committee, T2 seemed most skeptical of PBIS and was outspoken about the use of incentives.

### **Teacher 3 (T3)**

T3 is a Grade K-5 specialist teacher who spoke more than one language. She worked well with English as a Second Language (ESL) students and parents. T3 has 17 years of experience in education with 15 years at the Title I case study school. She believes in PBIS at the K-2 level, but has not had positive experiences with it in grades 3-5.



**Teacher 4 (T4)**

T4 has 16 years of experience in education and at the case study school. She is a K-2 teacher with prekindergarten experience, a member of the original PBIS Committee, and the PBIS chair during the first three year of PBIS implementation. The PBIS Committee asked her to come back during the 2017 – 2018 school year and be a part of the committee. She does not represent a grade level, but is merely a voice on the team.

**Teacher 5 (T5)**

T5 is an EC teacher with K-5 experience. She has been in education about 12 years at the case study school. T5 was the PBIS Coach during the fifth year of implementation. She believes in positive reinforcement and is a strong advocate for PBIS who worked tirelessly to ensure its success.

Some participants spoke at length about one theme while others spoke more about other themes. During extensive interviews, participants described their perceptions and experiences with PBIS, how they used data collection and analysis to make decisions, and the sustainability of PBIS at their school.

**Appendix B: Crosswalk for Research Questions and Data Collection**

Research Questions/Rationale	Data Methods
<p><b>1. How do the staff members at an urban, Title I, K-5 elementary school with a low-income, diverse population in the southeastern United States perceive and describe the need for, the implementation of, and sustainability of a school-wide discipline approach?</b></p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> This question provided a broad overview about a school-wide discipline approach and how it affected the school community not only with discipline, but indirectly with student growth, teacher satisfaction, teacher retention, and school climate.</p>	<p>Interview question 1 - <b>Thinking back over your career as a teacher, describe your thoughts about discipline in a school community. Is it important? How does it impact the school community?</b></p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> This opening question oriented the interviewee to the topic of discipline. It also encouraged the interviewee to think back over his/her entire career before answering the question. This question gave the interviewer insight into how the interviewee felt that discipline related to or impacted a school community. (The goal was for the interviewee to include something about teacher retention and school climate in his/her answer without additional questioning/prompting).</p> <p>Interview question 2 - <b>How has discipline impacted this school community in the past? Has discipline been a problem in the past? If so, how? Is discipline a problem in your school today? If so, how?</b></p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> This question gave the interviewer an idea of how the interviewee viewed discipline in this school community prior to and after the implementation of PBIS. The Interviewer compared these answers to other questions to get information about the impact that discipline and PBIS had on this school (Again, the goal was for the interviewee to include information about teacher retention and school climate in his/her answer without additional questioning/prompting).</p>

	<p>Interview question 6 - <b>How do you perceive the make-up, role of, and characteristics of the PBIS Team? Role of and characteristics of the administrative Staff? The success or failure of PBIS?</b></p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> This question was another way to gather information from staff members about things that helped or hindered the implementation of PBIS. Was it the approach, the people, or a combination of factors that helped to sustain PBIS at this school? The answer from this question was compared to the answers from questions 5 and 6.</p> <p>Interview question 7 - <b>How has PBIS implementation impacted the day-to-day operations of this school? Your job/classroom? Student behavior (expectations/consequences)? School climate? Your use of incentives? Your number of discipline office referrals? The number of school discipline office referrals? The way you and/or your school track data? The communication between the PBIS team and the teachers and students?</b></p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> This question allowed the researcher to gather the opinions of a wide range of stakeholders in this school about the day-to-day impact of PBIS. The researcher looked at the different roles of the staff members and noted the commonalities or lack of them in the day-to-day operation of the school.</p> <p>Education Value Added Assessment System (EVAAS) – indicated student growth</p> <p>Teacher Working Conditions Survey (TWCS) – indicated teacher satisfaction and school culture</p>
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	<p>Teacher Retention Rate – indicated teacher satisfaction</p> <p>PBIS Fidelity Checks – indicated the fidelity with which PBIS was implemented</p>
<p><b>2. How does the implementation of PBIS, as a school-wide discipline approach, in this elementary school affect staff satisfaction, teacher retention, student behavior, discipline referrals, and student growth? How does the administration team feel about PBIS? How do the staff members feel about PBIS? What does the data say about PBIS?</b></p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> The aim of this question was to have respondents share their opinions and beliefs about PBIS through their own stories and experiences since its implementation.</p>	<p>Interview question 2 - <b>How has discipline impacted this school community in the past? Has discipline been a problem in the past? If so, how? Is discipline a problem in your school today? If so, how?</b></p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> This question gave the interviewer an idea of how the interviewee viewed discipline in this school community prior to and after the implementation of PBIS. The Interviewer compared these answers to other questions to get more information about the impact that discipline and PBIS had on this school. (The goal was for the interviewee to include information about teacher retention and school climate in his/her answer without additional questioning/prompting).</p> <p>Interview question 6 - <b>How do you perceive the make-up, role of, and characteristics of the PBIS Team? Role of and characteristics of the administrative Staff? The success or failure of PBIS?</b></p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> This question was another way of gathering information about things that helped or hindered the implementation of PBIS. Was it the approach, the people, or a combination of things that helped to sustain PBIS at this school? The answer from this question was compared to the answers from questions 5 and 6.</p> <p>Interview question 7 - <b>How has PBIS implementation impacted the day-to-day operations of this school? Your job/classroom? Student behavior (expectations/consequences)? School</b></p>

	<p><b>climate? Your use of incentives? Your number of discipline office referrals? The number of school discipline office referrals? The way you and/or your school track data? The communication between the PBIS team and the teachers and students?</b></p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> This question allowed the researcher to gather the opinions of a wide range of stakeholders in this school about the day-to-day impact of PBIS. The researcher looked at all the different roles of the staff members and noted commonalities or lack of them in the day-to-day operation of the school.</p> <p>TWCS – indicated teacher satisfaction and school culture</p> <p>Teacher Retention Rate – indicated teacher satisfaction</p> <p>SWIS Data – indicated student discipline data</p> <p>EVAAS – indicated student growth</p> <p>PBIS Meeting Minutes – indicated the concerns about the implementation practices and strategies</p> <p>PBIS Fidelity Checks – indicated the fidelity with which PBIS was implemented</p>
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*Figure 2. Crosswalk for Research Questions and Data Collection*

## Appendix C: SWIS Data

**Table 1**

*SWIS Data*

	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
Referrals for the Year	555	355	218	245	279
Out of School Suspensions	237	140	64	Data Not Available	Data Not Available

## Appendix D: SET Data

**Table 2**

*SET Data*

	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
<b>Expectations Defined</b>	75%	75%	75%	100%	100%
<b>Expectations Taught</b>	90%	90%	100%	100%	100%
<b>Rewarding Expectations</b>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
<b>Responding to Violations</b>	100%	100%	88%	100%	100%
<b>Monitoring and Decision Making</b>	75%	100%	100%	100%	100%
<b>Management</b>	81%	100%	100%	100%	100%
<b>District Level Support</b>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
<b>Total Score</b>	89%	95%	95%	100%	100%

## Appendix E: Student Performance and Growth Data

**Table 3**

*Student Performance and Growth Data*

School Performance	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
Reading			55 (D)	43 (D)	44 (D)	39 (F)
Math			52 (D)	55 (D)	50 (D)	44 (D)
Science			41	43	43	37
Growth			88.6	83.7	80.4	66.8
Overall School Performance and Letter Grade			50 (D)	51 (D)	51 (D)	43 (D)
AMOs	17/21	15/19	20/25	16/22	15/15	15/15
Growth Status/Grade	Not Met	Met	Exceeded	Met	Met	Not Met
EOG Proficiency						
Reading	22.60%	22.60%	33.00%	34%	36%	31%
Math	75.70%	24.90%	43.00%	48.00%	42%	37%
Science	63.20%	17.80%	54%	58%	71%	58%



**Appendix F: Teacher Turnover Rate, Teacher Experience, and Discipline**

**Table 4**

*Teacher Turnover Rate, Teacher Experience, and Discipline*

<b>School Data</b>	<b>2011-2012</b>	<b>2012-2013</b>	<b>2013-2014</b>	<b>2014-2015</b>	<b>2015-2016</b>	<b>2016-2017</b>
<b>Teacher Turnover Rate</b>						
Turnover Rate	10%	9%	11.10%	2%	7.50%	14.60%
<b>Teacher Experience</b>						
0 - 3 years	7%	16%	14%	10%	12.20%	11.90%
4-10 years	36%	27%	18.60%	20%	14.60%	16.70%
10+ years	58%	58%	67.40%	70%	73.20%	71.40%
<b>Discipline</b>						
Short Term Out of School Suspensions per 100 Students				14.08	11.89	17.03
Criminal Acts			0	0.95	0.64	0

## Appendix G: TWCS Data

**Table 5**

*TWCS Data*

Area	Question or Statement	2012	2014	2016
<b>Time</b>				
Q2.1c	Teachers are allowed to focus on teaching students with minimal interruptions.	72.50%	82.40%	64.1%
Q2.1f	Teachers have sufficient instructional time to meet the needs of all students.	63.50%	65.70%	53.80%
<b>Managing Student Behavior</b>				
Q5.1a	Students at this school understand expectations for their conduct.	80.40%	82.90%	86.80%
Q5.1b	Students at this school follow rules of conduct.	51.00%	77.10%	71.10%
Q5.1c	Policies and procedures about student conduct are clearly understood by the faculty.	82.40%	94.30%	84.20%
Q5.1d	School administrators constantly enforce rules for student conduct.	64.70%	88.60%	65.80%
Q5.1e	School administrators support teachers' efforts to maintain discipline in the classroom.	76.50%	94.10%	73.70%
Q5.1f	Teachers consistently enforce rules for student conduct.	84.30%	94.30%	91.90%
Q5.1g	The faculty works in a school environment that is safe.	98.00%	97.10%	97.40%

## School Leadership

Q7.1a	The faculty and staff have a shared vision.	95.90%	97.10%	Not on survey
Q7.1b	There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in this school.	86.50%	88.60%	87.20%
Q7.1c	Teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them.	90.00%	93.90%	86.80%
Q7.1d	The school leadership consistently supports teachers.	92.20%	94.30%	87.20%
Q7.3g	The school leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about managing student conduct.	82.70%	94.30%	78.90%
Q10.6	Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn.	88.20%	91.40%	89.70%
Q10.7	At this school, we utilize the results from the NCTWCS as a tool for school improvement	90.70%	93.70%	77.80%

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## **Appendix H: Informed Consent**

### **Teachers and Administrators' Perceptions of PBIS as a School-Wide Discipline Approach**

Principal Investigator: Cheryl Bowling

Department: ASU Doctoral Student

Contact Information: (336) 703-6788

Faculty Advisor: Tracy Goodson-Espy  
(828) 262-7620

### **Consent to Participate in Research**

I agree to participate as an interviewee in this research project which will help to identify the factors that describe the implementation of Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) from pre-implementation through full implementation. The research will explore the staff's perceptions of PBIS as a school-wide discipline model and its impact on student growth. This study will focus on the factors that support the implementation of PBIS as well as those factors that hinder it. This case study will examine the pre-implementation phase, post implementation, the implementation phase through three tiers, and post implementation with fidelity checks and sustainability. The study will concentrate on one school's processes and procedures for the implementation of PBIS in order to aid other schools that may want to follow the proven steps for implementation to help improve student behavior and growth. I will be one of six participants. The interview will be held at a place of my choice and will take approximately 60-90 minutes. I understand the interview questions will be about PBIS and its implementation at my school.

I understand that there are no foreseeable risks associated with my participation. I also know that this study may benefit other schools implementing PBIS.

I understand that the interview will be audio recorded and that the audio recording of my interview will be stored in a secure location with no evidence of my name connected to it. After the dissertation is completed, my audio recording will be destroyed.

I give Cheryl bowling ownership of the transcripts and recordings from the interview she conducts with me and understand that the recordings will be kept in a secure and locked location. I understand that information or quotations from my interview may become a part of her written dissertation. I also understand I will not receive compensation for the interview.

I request that my name not be used in connection with the audio recordings resulting from this interview. I understand that the interview is voluntary and there are no consequences if I choose not to participate. I also understand that I do not have to answer any questions that cause me discomfort and can end the interview at any time with no consequences.

If I have questions about this research project, I can call Cheryl Bowling at (336) 703-6788; Tracy Goodson-Espy at (828) 262-7620; or the Appalachian Institutional Review Board

Administrator at (828) 262-2692(days) , at irb@appstate.edu, or at Appalachian State University, Office of Research Protections, IRB Administrator, Boone, NC 28608.

This research project was approved on October 6, 2017, by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Appalachian State University. This approval will expire on October 6, 2018 unless the IRB renews the approval of this research (Note - It was renewed until October 4, 2019).

By signing this form, I acknowledge that I have read this form, had the opportunity to ask questions about the research, received satisfactory answers, and want to participate. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research and can keep a copy for my records.

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Participant's Name (PRINT)

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Signature

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Date

## **Vita**

Cheryl Guynn Bowling was born in Mount Airy, North Carolina. She grew up on a small tobacco farm at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Ararat, Virginia. With an emphasis on family, support, and encouragement, her parents gave her a strong foundation on which to build her life. As a family, they worked together, ate together, celebrated together, relaxed together, and worshipped together. Growing up, Cheryl attended Blue Ridge Elementary School in Ararat and Patrick County High School in Stuart.

Cheryl received a B.S. Degree in Elementary Education (K-7) with a concentration in Math (K-12) from Averett College in Danville, Virginia. After graduation, she taught fourth grade at Spencer-Penn Elementary School in Spencer, Virginia, for two years. Afterwards, Cheryl decided to return to college and to pursue her Master in Education Degree. While she attended the University of Virginia, she cared for her three small children and worked as a teacher at their preschool. When her youngest child entered elementary school, she took a part-time job as a primary reading teacher at Old Town Elementary School in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. A couple of years later, Cheryl accepted a position as a full-time first grade teacher. While at Old Town, Cheryl returned to college at the University of North Carolina in Greensboro and added Curriculum and Supervision and Administration to her license. After receiving her certification, she left Old Town Elementary to take a position as the Curriculum Coordinator at Ibrahim Elementary. While at Ibrahim Elementary, Cheryl once again returned to college and earned her Education Specialist Certification and Doctor

of Education Degree from Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. She currently serves as an Assistant Principal at Mineral Springs Elementary School.

Cheryl resides in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, with her husband, Brent. They have three children: Corey, Jamey, and Christy and six grandchildren: Mary, James, Caitlyn, Bella, Jillian, and Blair.