

## **ABSTRACT**

Chris Meadows, POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS AT A NC PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL: A PROGRAM EVALUATION (Under the direction of Dr. Marjorie Ringler). Department of Educational Leadership, December 2020.

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a multi-tiered framework utilized in over 26,000 schools across the United States, to create a school culture consisting of a positive learning environment and successful student (Sugai & Horner, 2020). This study sought to determine the effectiveness of PBIS at a North Carolina public charter school in regards to three major indicators: student attendance; student academic achievement; and student discipline. The rise of charter schools in both the US and NC is discussed along with charter school advocate and critic perceptions. To gain a greater understanding of the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of PBIS at this charter, many topics were detailed to mirror the charter's student population. At the time of the study, the study site was predominately African American and high poverty. Because of the predominate student population of the study's site, African American and high poverty student issues and concerns are discussed based on numerous educational theorist's ideas and their respective research. Determining the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of PBIS at the charter occur through data collection procured through various PBIS documents from the three years at the charter, equating to the first year (2017-18) of PBIS implementation, the second year (2018-2019) of PBIS implementation, and the third year (2019-2020) of PBIS implementation. The three years of data included student proficiency on NC End of Grade (EOG) assessments, student suspension data, and student attendance rates. Qualitative data was obtained from charter school staff responses of semi-structured interview questions. The evaluation of this this program was completed with the CIPP (Context; Input; Process; and Product) method. The program evaluation was favorable overall in the fidelity of PBIS

implementation and generated the following findings: academic growth in each of the three years of PBIS implementation; a decrease in student short-term suspensions in each of the three years of PBIS implementation; and a steady and remarkable increase in student attendance rate in each of the three years of PBIS implementation.



POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS  
AT A NC PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL: A PROGRAM EVALUATION

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership  
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by

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AT A NC PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL: A PROGRAM EVALUATION

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my children Christopher and Isabella and wife Beth. You three are my driving force, my motivation, my everything. Beth, you are the smartest person I have ever known and without you, none of this would have been possible. Christopher and Isabella, you are both my “why” for everything I do important in life. I pray that the long nights, the early mornings, and the times I have given up only to pick myself up and start again all serve as a positive example for you in your lives and shows you that with every challenge in life, through God and hard work, great things will eventually occur. I Love you all.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **Problem Statement**

Educators in the United States face a plethora of challenges that include meeting the needs of a growing population of diverse students and increasingly rigorous performance standards (Fitzgerald et al., 2014). With students only spending a mere 20% of their time in a classroom setting, the external influences of one's home environment, including family/parent instability, drug abuse, domestic violence, poverty, food insecurity, child abuse, community disorganization, etc. can negatively impact student performance (Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004; National Education Association, 2016). All of these factors as well as disparities in discipline and student achievement gaps, both of which will be addressed in Chapter 2, demand the need for policies and procedures to effectively serve the social, emotional, and academic growth of our students (Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004).

As students continue to experience an increase in stressors and difficulties away from school, educators are left to address complex emotional and behavioral deficits within the school setting (Benner et al., 2010). Unfortunately, all too often, schools adopt a zero-tolerance approach to discipline as a means to deter negative student behavior (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). Research has proven time and time again that not only does the use of punitive consequences and the adoption of zero tolerance discipline policies actually increase problem behaviors, but also contribute to low academic achievement due to student absenteeism resulting from out of school suspensions (Oliver et al., 2019).

Many students who are exposed to these challenges are diagnosed as having emotional and behavioral disabilities (Fitzgerald et al., 2014). Since as early as 1972, the United States Congress has worked towards defending students with emotional and behavioral disabilities by



ensuring schools across our nation are offering the same opportunity for an equal education as their peers (Fitzgerald et al., 2014). In 1975, President Gerald Ford signed into law the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which ensures the opportunity for any child with a disability an opportunity to a free appropriate public education (Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Many students with emotional and behavioral disabilities have been denied this right due to a large number of schools maintaining a zero-tolerance discipline policy when these students displayed behaviors aligned with their diagnosis (Killu et al., 2006). To combat this concern and continue to make certain students with disabilities were not excluded to a free and appropriate education, an amendment to the IDEA was enacted in 1997 requiring all schools with students enrolled who display severe and/or consistent behavioral problems, undergo a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA), which includes a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) so the student's learning is not obstructed (Killu et al., 2006). These advancements in education and Congress' support in allowing states to use professional development funds for programs that promote positive and inclusive learning environments, were instrumental in the development of proactive approaches to addressing negative student behaviors (Fitzgerald et al., 2014). One of the most trusted and widely used examples of a proactive approach is the evidence-based framework of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) (Kittelman et al., 2019).

### **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support**

The term "*positive behavioral interventions and supports*" was first used by the U.S. Department of Education in 1997 under the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA] (1997). A strategy that utilizes the asset model and has been proven to

reduce suspensions among both African American students and students of poverty is, Positive Behavioral Interventions & Support (Baule, 2020). PBIS should not be considered or used as a curriculum, but instead should be viewed as a multi-tiered framework designed for “organizing and achieving capacity to implement effective academic and behavioral practices” (Sugai & Horner, 2020, p. 121). It has been implemented in over 26,000 schools in almost 40% of states in the United States, and in its 25-year history, has proven to be an often-used framework to assist schools and school districts in addressing behavioral needs (Sugai & Horner, 2020).

The ultimate goal of PBIS is to establish the “social culture and behavioral supports needed for all children in a school to achieve both social and academic success” (Kincaid & Horner, 2017, p. 99). To achieve this, PBIS utilizes a framework composed of three tiers of behavioral supports that become increasingly intensive (Noltemeyer et al., 2019). Tier 1 supports are designed to be preventative and should be applied when working with every student within the school setting (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019). These supports should include specific behavioral expectations that are visibly posted throughout the campus and in each classroom with a conscious effort from teachers and staff to model appropriate behaviors; praise students when appropriate behaviors are observed; offer consistent feedback for student behaviors; and develop specific consequences for violations of the behavioral expectations that are consistently implemented (Gage et al., 2019). Tier 2 consists of targeted interventions for students that continuously engage in negative student behaviors despite the efforts from teachers and other staff in delivering Tier 1 strategies (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019). The final component of PBIS is Tier 3, which consists of the most intensive interventions and are individualized based on the repeated negative

behaviors of students and often times requires a behavioral assessment and the subsequent behavioral intervention plan (Gage et al., 2019).

Both early and recent studies have shown success in PBIS implementation using key disciplinary indicators, such as reductions in out of school suspensions and disciplinary referrals (Luiselli et al., 2005; Netzel & Eber, 2003; Noltemeyer et al., 2019). Success has been noted in both urban districts (Baule, 2020) and rural school settings (Fitzgerald et al., 2014).

Enhancement in student academic performance among schools utilizing PBIS has not been consistently documented. Luiselli et al. (2005) and Pas and Bradshaw (2012) noted significant positive associations in this area, while others, such as Bradshaw et al. (2010) revealed non-significant associations. As PBIS continues to garner positive testimonies and data supporting its implementation related to student discipline, research on academic achievement credited from the effective use of PIBS, is not as prevalent (James et al., 2019).

When PBIS is used as the evidence-based, preventative approach to discipline and is implemented with fidelity, a reduction in out of school suspensions and office discipline referrals as well as improvements in academic achievement, school climate, and safety are more likely to occur (Couvillon et al., 2010). Fidelity of PBIS implementation as Mercer et al. (2017) defines as “the extent to which an intervention is delivered as intended” is critical in order to obtain the desired student behavioral changes (p. 195). A study of 153 schools in Ohio revealed a significantly lower out of school suspension rate per 100 students in schools with higher PBIS implementation fidelity (Noltemeyer et al., 2019). Similarly, Flannery et al. (2014) discovered in a school-wide PBIS trial in a high school setting, suspension discipline decreased significantly as fidelity of implementation increased. Baule (2020) noted specifically “building level

administrative buy-in and effective communications” as key components to ensuring PBIS implementation with fidelity.

### **ZECA School of the Arts and Technology**

ZECA School of the Arts and Technology is a free kindergarten through eighth grade public charter school located in Jacksonville, NC. Currently in its seventh year, ZECA opened in 2013 and is the sole public charter in Onslow County. The school currently has a student enrollment of 156 with a maximum capacity of 200. ZECA employs eleven teachers with an average classroom size of 15 students. Seventy-seven percent of the student population is considered economically disadvantaged, which is well above North Carolina’s economically disadvantaged population of student percentage of 46.5% (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], 2019b). Title I funds are allocated to ZECA based on its high number of children from low-income families, to ensure that every student has the ability to meet the academic standards in NC (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). ZECA has an ethnic or race population of almost 70% African American, 14.5% White, 14.5% LatinX, and 1% other race.

The mission of ZECA, according to its school website, “is to provide a safe and nurturing environment for children by fostering a stimulating and educational atmosphere which will promote each child’s unique, social, emotional, physical, technological, and cognitive development with a strong emphasis on arts and technology” (ZECA School of the Arts and Technology, n.d., Our Mission section). Stacey Owens-Howard is the executive director of ZECA and a career-long educator with two children, one of which was labeled as oppositional defiant when he was in school. Her son graduated high school but, his years enrolled in traditional public schools were marred with difficulties, both academic and socially. Ms. Owens-

Howard, although angry and discouraged about her son not having received the help he needed to make his time in school a pleasant and beneficial journey, became determined to make a change. She was determined to develop a school curriculum that not only met the needs of the student academically, but also, and possibly more important, met the mental, emotional, and social needs of the student. From this vision arose Zero to Eighteen Concepts Academy with the ultimate goal of working with students from birth with an early childcare program to a K-12 academy in the form of a public charter school. ZECA Inc. was incorporated in 2009 with a board of directors who, along with Ms. Owens-Howard, began the steps necessary to open a public charter. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) granted permission to ZECA Inc. to open a charter. In 2013, ZECA opened its doors to students and is now in its seventh year. Currently, ZECA serves students K-8 but eventually Ms. Owens-Howard wants to extend enrollment to a high school curriculum and ultimately a child care center for children birth to 4 years of age. When ZECA Inc. truly reaches the goal set in place, they will become the zero to eighteen program that Ms. Owens-Howard envisioned in 2009. According to the school's website, ZECA is "a comprehensive, not for profit, community-based program designed to educate children by enhancing their social and emotional needs, academic abilities and family structure" (ZECA School of the Arts and Technology, n.d., Our History section).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of PBIS at ZECA, a public charter school in Eastern North Carolina. This study focused on how PBIS has impacted the following three student indicators: academic achievement, behavior, and attendance. The effectiveness of PBIS was determined through the collection of archival data from End of Grade

assessments; teacher observation instruments; PBIS documents; attendance records; student suspension data; and semi-structured survey questions to gain perceptions of the effectiveness of PBIS.

### **Evaluation Questions**

The executive director, Ms. Owens-Howard, expressed a need to evaluate PBIS as she was concerned that it had not been implemented with fidelity. She wanted like to know what had been effective and what were areas for improvement. This program evaluation provided evidence on PBIS at ZECA utilizing data from student suspensions, student attendance, and overall student academic performance.

The following evaluation questions served as the basis of data collection. The data was then analyzed and presented to the ZECA Executive Director:

- Evaluation Question 1: How has PBIS impacted student academic achievement?
- Evaluation Question 2: How has PBIS impacted student behaviors?
- Evaluation Question 3: How has PBIS impacted student absenteeism?

### **Definition of Key Terms**

For this study, an assortment of key terms were utilized to describe the various processes of the program being evaluated. The following definitions will assist in giving the reader a deeper understanding of these terms.

*Academic Achievement* – Whether or not a student has demonstrated mastery of their grade level’s content by earning a level 3, 4, or 5 on the NC End of Grade or NC End of Year assessment (NCDPI, 2018).

*Academic Growth* – Refers to the progress made by students from the previous year using common standardized tests and reported for each school as *Exceeded Growth, Met Growth, or Did Not Meet Growth* (NCDPI, 2018).

*CIPP Evaluation* – An evaluation model created by Daniel Stufflebeam that recognizes the complexities of relationships in a particular setting or program and seeks to focus on program improvement through the use of four components, Context, Inputs, Process, and Products (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007).

*Context Evaluation* – The first element of the CIPP model that “identifies and defines program goals and priorities” through the assessment of a program’s needs and a program’s available resources and opportunities (Frye & Hemmer, 2012, p. 296).

*Chronic Absenteeism* – This term is used to describe a student who has not physically attended school (excused or unexcused) for 10% of the total number of days the student has been enrolled (NCDPI, 2019a).

*Input Evaluation* – The second element of the CIPP model that assesses the resources (staff members, budget allocated, time available, etc.) available and how the resources are allocated in a particular educational program (Frye & Hemmer, 2012).

*Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)*- An evidence-based three tiered framework where students, especially those with disabilities, are supported and given a positive environment to learn and be successful through improving teacher and whole school practices that include but are not limited to, avoiding out of school suspensions as consequences for student misbehavior (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019).

*Process Evaluation* – The third component of the CIPP model that is used to assess the fidelity or lack thereof, the implementation of a program (Frye & Hemmer, 2012).

*Product Evaluation* – The fourth and final element of the CIPP model that is focused on the outcomes of a program expanding on the findings, both negative and positive, and serves as the overall summary of a program (Frye & Hemmer, 2012).

*Short-Term Suspensions* – A short-term suspension refers to an out-of-school suspension of less than 10 days, according to the charter school’s parent and student handbook.

### **Assumptions**

The researcher followed the assumption that the executive director of ZECA understands and is knowledgeable of PBIS and how implementation with fidelity should occur. ZECA is only in its third year of PBIS and is in its early stages of school-wide implementation.

### **Study Limitations**

Several potential limitations can be noted within the process evaluation section of the study design. These limitations are described below:

1. *Staff Turnover.* It is important to note that ZECA lies in Jacksonville, NC, which houses the Marine Corps base, Camp Lejeune. The area has a large active military family population that is consistently transient as enlisted men and women are subject to numerous deployments and base transfers. This factor has caused difficulties in maintaining stability among teaching staff of ZECA, as many teachers who have been employed also have spouses who are active military. Only three teachers from the initial PBIS implementation at ZECA remain employed at the time of the study. Because of this, some of the data collected will be limited to the executive director as she serves as the only sample subject who can offer true insight into the climate of ZECA before PBIS implementation, ZECA during the initial implementation of PBIS, and the state of PBIS at ZECA at the time of the study. The entire teaching



staff will be included in this study, however, to ensure validity of the study, focus on ZECA before and during initial implementation will be limited to a small sample in comparison to the sample used for responses based on PBIS at ZECA at the time of the study.

2. *COVID-19*. The World Health Organization (2020) declared a global pandemic of a novel coronavirus (named COVID-19) on March 11, 2020. The growing public health threat necessitated unprecedented actions to reduce disease transmission of the virus, which significantly impacted educational delivery systems across the nation. On March 14, 2020, North Carolina's Governor, Roy Cooper, issued executive order 117, which directed the closure of all K-12 schools in North Carolina effective March 16<sup>th</sup> through March 30<sup>th</sup>. On March 23<sup>rd</sup>, school closures were extended through May 15<sup>th</sup> via executive order 120 (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Although ZECA's physical location closed to students, learning has continued virtually. With the change in setting (from school to home), implementation of PBIS has been limited. Without students physically being on site, discipline referrals and collection of daily student attendance have ceased. On March 23, 2020, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2020a) announced all state end of year assessments will be waived for the 2019-2020 school year. During the process evaluation, discipline referrals and student attendance data for the 2019-2020 school year will reflect information collected up until the school's closure on March 16<sup>th</sup>. Academic achievement for the 2019-2020 school year will not be included in this evaluation. The absence of this particular indicator will be noted in the findings.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, the need for conducting a program evaluation on PBIS was established. Challenges faced today by students and teachers in terms of behavioral health and its effects on academic success were explored. A brief review of legislative actions related to emotional and behavioral disabilities was provided. Chapter 1 offered a discussion of the PBIS framework for enhancing student behavioral and academic success, including its origins, the three-tiered strategies, implementation research, and the importance of fidelity. The evaluation site, ZECA, was described in relation to its history and student demographics for the 2019-2020 school year. In addition, the purpose of the evaluation, the evaluation questions, definitions of key terms, assumptions, limitations, and potential biases were provided. Chapter 2 will be a deeper look into the literature surrounding varied topics of importance to this evaluation.

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of PBIS at ZECA, a public charter school in Eastern North Carolina. This study focused on how PBIS has affected the following three student indicators: academic achievement, behavior, and attendance. The effectiveness of PBIS was determined through the collection of archival data from End of Grade (EOG) assessments; teacher observation instruments; PBIS documents; attendance records; student suspension data; and semi-structured survey questions to gain perceptions of the effectiveness of PBIS.

To gain a better understanding of the purpose of the study, this chapter will contain a review of literature, which will describe key concepts used that will shape the outline of this program evaluation. This chapter will describe in detail essential information on the ascension of charter schools in the US and NC; teaching students of poverty; student discipline; PBIS; and academic achievement of African American students. To effectively conduct this program evaluation, consideration must be given to publications and research submitted by experts in their respective fields. Because a charter school is the setting of this study, the next section contains a review of literature on charter schools.

### **The Ascension of Charter Schools**

#### **National Perspective**

The rise of charter schools and school choice began under President Reagan and his introduction to the concept of “vouchers” as a method for parents who wish to enroll their children in private schools but are not financially able to pay the tuition (Cavanagh, 2004). After President Reagan, the next four U.S. presidents, George H.W. Bush, William J. Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack H. Obama all played a vital role in fostering the growth of the charter

school movement. George H.W. Bush utilized the U.S. Department of Education to disseminate grants and resources followed by William J. Clinton's 1994 Federal Charter School Program amendment, which provided funding for the expansion of charter schools throughout the United States (Chapman, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2000). This expansion continued under George W. Bush as specific language around charter schools was included under the No Child Left Behind legislation (No Child Left Behind Act, Public Law 107-110, 2002). The growth of charter schools continued to increase at the encouragement of Barack Obama as he called upon states to remove obstacles, such as caps limiting the number of charter schools allowed, in unison with his "Race to the Top" initiative (White, 2009).

Public charter schools provide parents with an option that those without the financial means for private school education are unable to make. Garcia et al. (2008), in a study of 6,339 students in Arizona who transferred into a charter school discovered that 69% of students came from a district school. Of the students who transferred, 60% choose an optional transfer, meaning their current school offered the next grade level up, but the choice was made to transfer into a charter school environment (Garcia et al., 2008). Of further importance, students within the district to charter school sample had the lowest mean achievement score of any group within the study (Garcia et al., 2008). Findings from this study help to solidify the notion that parents are seeking a different environment for their children when conventional public schools have not provided the academic gains they desire.

In 1991 Minnesota became the first state to pass legislation allowing the establishment of charter schools (Teresa & Good, 2018). Including Minnesota, there are 43 states in the United States that have legislative approval for charter schools totaling more than 7,000 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). As of the 2018-19 school year, there were approximately

7,200 charter schools in the US enrolling almost 3.2 million students (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2019). Between the years 2000 and 2018 the percentage of public school students attending charter schools in the US increased from 1 to 6% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). This growth is evidence of the parental demand and desire for school choice in the United States.

This study takes place at ZECA School of the Arts and Technology, a public charter school in Eastern NC. The following section of this literature review will discuss the rise of charter schools in NC.

### **North Carolina Perspective**

Charter schools in NC were established in 1996 after the North Carolina General Assembly passed House Bill 955, better known as “The Charter School Act of 1996” with the purpose of offering teachers, parents, students and community members the opportunity to establish schools that operate independently from a Local Education Agency (LEA) but still follow the requirements, guidelines, and accountability measures for student performance determined by the NC Department of Public Instruction (Charter School Act of 1996, 1995).

Initially, state law capped the number of charter schools allowed at 100, which was achieved by 2001 (Osborne, 2019). This cap remained until 2011 at which time republicans gained control of NC legislature and enacted removal of the charter school cap (N.C. Senate Bill 8, 2011). Since 2011, there has been a consistent increase in the number of charter school openings each year leading up to 184 operational charter schools, serving 110,000 students (or 7.6% of the total public-school enrollment) in NC at the time of this study (NCDPI, 2020b).

The Public-School Forum of North Carolina is comprised of a collection of individuals who work to “study education issues, develop ideas, seek consensus, and ultimately inform

and shape education policy” (Public School Forum of NC, n.d., Our Story section). For over 30 years, they have been a trusted source in delivering information to advance public education in NC. One method used to do this is the annual “Top Ten Education Issues” list. Since 2015, charter schools or themes related to charter schools in NC have appeared in the top ten list five times: 2015 number 4. Emphasize quality and equity in school choice; 2016, number 3. Emphasize quality, not quantity, in charter school growth; 2017, number 4. Improve access, equity, and accountability in school choice; 2018, number 3. Insist on transparency & accountability for school choice programs; and 2019, number 6. Strengthen charter school and private school voucher transparency and accountability (Public School Forum of NC, n.d.). While these issues do not target a specific school or region, they should be viewed as a list to forecast the top ten issues that will impact public schools in NC and serve as a resource for NC educators.

School choice and specifically, public charter schools, are a polarizing topic of discussion in North Carolina and the United States of America as a whole. The upcoming sections will explore how advocates and critics remain divided on the necessity of charter schools.

### **Student Achievement**

The ability for charter schools to improve student achievement is difficult to determine. A 2015 study of charter schools found mixed evidence regarding student achievement (Berends, 2015). Charter schools nationally, have been found to be no better or no worse overall academically, compared to traditional public schools (Cremata et al., 2013).

Student academic achievement in charter schools vary from state to state, city to city, and urban to rural settings. One author credits the growth of charter schools in Florida as the primary reason graduation rates in Florida Public Schools grew from 50% during the 1990s to 76% at the

article's published date in 2016 (Castillo, 2016). Ultimately, the success or failure of charter schools are determined by several variables including "soft and hard factors such as school leadership, teacher expertise, and community engagement" (Wong, 2020, p. 39).

## **Segregation**

In most states across America, African American students are over-represented in charter schools (most notably in urban communities), whereas White students are under-represented (Chapman & Donnor, 2015). While examining nation-wide racial trends in charter schools, Frankenberg and Siegel-Hawley (2011) found that 70% of African American students attending charter schools did so in predominately minority environments. According to Frankenberg and Siegel-Hawley (2011), "while segregation for African Americans among all public schools has been increasing for nearly two decades, African American students in charters are far more likely than traditional public school counterparts to be educated in intensely segregated settings" (p. 45). In some areas of the United States, however, an opposite trend can be seen where white students make up the majority of charter school enrollees, suggesting that "White parents may be using charter schools to provide racially homogenous learning environments for their children" (Chapman & Donnor, 2015, p. 141).

In North Carolina, White students do make up the majority of charter school enrollees. During the 2018-2019 school year, North Carolina charter school enrollment was comprised of 54% White, 26% African American, and 10.7% LatinX as compared to traditional schools during the same period with 47.3% White, 25% African American, and 18.5% LatinX (NCDPI, 2020b).

According to North Carolina General Statute 115C-218.45(e) (2007), charter schools are not permitted to limit student admissions based on certain factors, including race and national origin. Per NC General Statute 115C-218.45(e):

Within one year after the charter school begins operation, the charter school shall make efforts for the population of the school to reasonably reflect the racial and ethnic composition of the general population residing within the local school administrative unit in which the school is located or the racial and ethnic composition of the special population that the school seeks to serve residing within the local school administrative unit in which the school is located.

It should also be noted that along with race, income is a heavily contributing factor in charter school segregation. Nationally, research has found that students in charter schools are divided by either very high income or very low income (Brooke, 2015; Miron et al., 2010). Conversely, along with the high-income parents, middle-class parents are also more likely to attend charter schools as they typically have the means to transport their children to school and have the financial ability to pack lunches for their children. As most charter schools are subject to receiving far less funding than that of traditional public schools, those factors play an integral role in charter school enrollment and the segregation of social classes (Posey-Maddox et al., 2014).

### **Accountability**

Nationally, there is a lack of a clear understanding of how and at what point charter schools will be held accountable as charter school accountability metrics vary (Manno et al., 2000). Because the definition of accountability varies from state to state, it is difficult to find common ground on a set measure (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Darling-Hammond, 1989; Garn, 2001). One form of accountability that remains consistent and the most understood method of measuring charter school success is academic performance (Levin, 1974). Test scores are the most commonly utilized measure of determining the success of a charter school (Paino et al.,



2014). NC is no exception to this form of accountability and if a charter school underperforms in state End of Grade tests as compared to traditional public schools within the state, closure can be expected if test scores are not improved. Paino et al. (2014) sums up charter school accountability in writing:

As educational researchers continue to analyze charter school accountability and closures from multiple perspectives, we move toward a more complete understanding of how charter schools are keeping the promises of accountability in the school choice movement and may begin to see how the role of charter school leaders encourage specific types of accountability.

In North Carolina, of the total charter school enrollment, as of November 2019, economically disadvantaged students represented 18.8% (NCDPI, 2020b). However, because charter schools are not required by NC General Statute to participate in the National School Lunch Program, a lack of a standardized approach to capture economically disadvantaged students among charter school enrollees exists. The actual number of economically disadvantaged students in NC could be largely underreported. The next section provides a review of literature of teaching students of poverty; the asset vs. deficit mindsets; Critical Race Theory (CRT); student absenteeism; and finally, student absenteeism and student academic achievement.

## **Teaching Students of Poverty**

### **Asset vs. Deficit Models**

In education today, we work with students from a variety of backgrounds, cultures, and social classes, demonstrating an even greater need to ensure our teachers are equipped with the most effective teaching strategies and pedagogy possible (de Brey et al., 2019). With more than 12.8 million (or 1 in 5) children living in poverty in the United States, income has emerged as a

major predictor of a student's academic success (Children's Defense Fund, 2019). According to the National Education Association (2016), "For the first time in history, the achievement gap based on income has surpassed the achievement gap based on race/ethnicity" (p. 1). Reardon (2011) notes the income gap as being approximately twice as large as the African American/White race gap (a reversal from decades ago, when the race gap was over 1.5 times higher than the income gap). Administrators, teachers, and school districts recognize the need to serve children of poverty and the prevailing two models of thought often used to determine the optimal approach to serve them are, the deficit model and the asset model (Gerstein, 2016). The deficit model attempts to instill skills in children who come from families with little formal education, little family support, and a lack of knowledge on how to properly speak, behave, and ultimately acquire knowledge (Payne, 2008). The asset model, or abundance model, directly rivals the deficit model by instead of focusing on the child's perceived deficits, we advocate to recognize their capabilities and see them as children from families with deep history and culture who have goals and aspirations of achieving success (Renkly & Bertolini, 2018).

Ruby Payne is one of the most prominent voices in the argument to embrace (or rather counter the effects of) the "culture of poverty" and has been dedicated to assisting educators in understanding the "values and mindsets poor students carry into the classroom" in addition to strategies on how to help such students "develop middle-class values and culture" (Gorski, 2008a, p. 130). Payne has had a long career in education and through her experience and research; she has amassed a multimillion-dollar empire by providing workshops on poverty for school administration and teachers and by authoring numerous books focusing on poverty, including *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, which serves as the basis for most of her lectures (Redeaux, 2011). Payne (2008), utilizing a deficit model mindset, asserts that students

who live in poverty often come to school with a lack of background knowledge on education and very little family support. With this assertion, Payne (2008) has a set of interventions she claims to be beneficial in raising academic achievement for children of poverty. Among these interventions are: building relationships with students and parents; making teaching relatable to children of poverty; teaching students how to ask questions properly; and monitoring progress with planned interventions (Payne, 2008). While Payne's *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* and the strategies listed within remain persuasive in schools and school districts across the country, many researchers criticize her use of the deficit model and the assumed inferiority of people in poverty (Boucher & Helfenbein, 2015).

Given the need for more effective teaching strategies when working with children from various backgrounds, cultures, and socioeconomic statuses, there is a strong push to utilize the asset model, specifically when working with children of poverty, that encourages teachers to focus on their "competence as cultural and intellectual people," rather than dwell on their assumed deficits (Sato & Lensmire, 2009, p. 143). The Search Institute (2020), as part of the Developmental Assets Framework, compiled a list of 40 internal and external assets needed for children to succeed. According to Scales (1999), a typical sixth grader possesses only 22 of the 40 listed assets, which will continually decrease until the eleventh grade (with the sharpest losses in the seventh and eighth grades). For classroom teachers to maximize the potential for their student's academic success, they should highlight and continue to strengthen, rather than ignore, student assets, which can consist of but are not limited to, their lineage, life experiences, values, and family practices (Renkly & Bertolini, 2018; Rose, 2006; Weiner, 2006).

To fully capitalize on the potential to achieve student success, teachers must develop the willingness to listen to their students while respecting their ideas, truly get to know them and

their families, and embrace social class differences among their students (Sato & Lensmire, 2009). Gorski (2018b) notes the far-reaching consequences of deficit models when working with students of poverty, stating “if we believe, however wrongly, that poor people don’t value education, then we dodge any responsibility to redress the gross education inequities with which they contend” (p. 34).

### **Critical Race Theory**

Gloria Ladson-Billings has led pedagogical change and has served as a voice for African-American students since 1990 when she authored, *Like Lightning in a bottle: Attempting to capture the pedagogical excellence of successful teachers of Black students* (Ladson-Billings, 1990). Since then, she has become a guiding force in teaching and learning as her work on culturally relevant pedagogy has been widely cited (Ladson-Billings, 2014). From this work, the term Critical Race Theory (CRT) was coined describing a legacy of white supremacy within education and its influences on our education system (Mills & Unsworth, 2018). Ladson-Billings and other CRT theorists have “uncovered the endemic nature of racism in society” which has found its way into the schools and classrooms across the United States (Mills & Unsworth, 2018, p. 314).

When teachers do not exhibit cultural awareness when working with their students, the rich histories and composition of incredibly significant contributions to our country and beyond are masked (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) is a strategy that has been used as a method of combating this deficit in the classroom and has had great success when implemented with fidelity.

## **CRT and Asset vs. Deficit Theories**

While some of the core ideas of Critical Race Theory continue to have relevance in 21<sup>st</sup> century education, an argument can be made for the need for CRT to evolve as racial inequities in 2020 may be different than the inequities noted when CRT emerged. Some critics of CRT argue that rather than improving the narrative of students of color, CRT serves to further perpetuate racial divide. Zorn (2018) described CRT as depicting minority students as “perpetual victims, their learning problems of interest only as markers of white supremacist conspiracy. To these children CRT offers little more than a noble-sounding excuse not to try, in school and beyond” (Zorn, 2018, p. 204). Zorn (2018) further draws contrast between the goals of the civil rights movement to lessen the significance of race (in order for all races to be viewed equal) to CRT’s notion of “race eclipsing everything” (p. 204).

Regardless of its critics, Critical Race Theory does not appear to be lessening anytime soon. Ladson-Billings (2011) continues to argue that “CRT is more viable and more visible than I [Ladson-Billings] could have ever imagined” citing school inequities as being even “more apparent and accepted as a fact of U.S. life” (p. 1,455). While school inequities cannot be denied, some may find it is an offensive stereotype for many CRT theorists to assume that White teachers cannot teach without “not only ensuring white privilege, but nearly effortlessly perpetuating it” (Rector-Aranda, 2016, p. 2).

## **Student Absenteeism**

A 2016 national survey reported that 16% of students, which equals to approximately 7 million students, in grades Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> were chronically absent from school (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). This number of chronically absent students is particularly alarming as a student who is frequently absent from school are subject to a plethora of negative

outcomes. Chronically absent students are at an increased risk of low academic achievement, destructive health decisions, social disorder, dropping out of school, and related adult negative outcomes such as low income, chronic employment absences, and poor health (Allen et al., 2018). To further complicate the opportunity for student academic achievement, many of our students who suffer from chronic absenteeism live in homes lacking parental guidance and supervision, adequate access to food, and unhygienic practices and conditions (Allen et al., 2018). All of these potential attributes of student households contribute significantly to poor academic achievement as students without food come to school hungry and unprepared to learn, poor hygienic appearance, which can lead to bullying and low self-esteem, and increased negative student classroom behavior. Simply put, “for students to learn, instruction to be effective, and progress to occur, students need to be in school regularly (Balfanz, 2016).

Disparities between race and ethnicity can be seen in student absenteeism rates. Data from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (using the metric of 15 or more missed school days per school year) for the 2015-2016 school year noted nationally, 14.2% of White students, 19.7% of African American students, 22.1% of LatinX students, and 25.2% of American Indian students were chronically absent (Osborne, 2018). North Carolina specific rates follow a similar path, however, chronic absenteeism among the reported racial and ethnic groups is slightly below the national averages (with the exception of a higher rate for American Indian students at 27.1%): 14.1% for White students, 16.3% for African American students, 18.2% for LatinX students (Osborne, 2018).

Educational opportunities are vital in a child’s life and can serve as a detriment or benefit regarded to a child’s future. According to the Children’s Defense Fund (2017):

Children denied educational opportunities and/or pushed into the school-to-prison pipeline are less likely to graduate from high school, move on to college or other post-secondary opportunities, obtain a well-paying job, or provide their children with the high-quality early childhood experiences needed to build a strong foundation for their future. They are also more likely to have children at young ages and be incarcerated as adults, trapping them into an intergenerational cycle of poverty (p. 29).

Poverty also presents challenges for student attendance. In a state by state analysis of school attendance data, Attendance Works (2017) revealed: “Schools with greater percentages of students from low-income backgrounds are more likely to experience high and extreme chronic absence levels, whereas those with the least percentage of students from low-income backgrounds typically experience modest or low levels” (p. 2).

### **Absenteeism and Student Achievement**

Attendance has been noted as a key indicator of student academic success (Balfanz et al., 2007; Chang & Romero, 2008). Studies of chronic absenteeism in elementary grades have been linked to poorer achievement in later grades, particularly among students from low-income families (Applied Survey Research, 2011; Barge, 2011; Chang & Romero, 2008; Ready, 2010). Chronic absenteeism at the middle and high school levels have also revealed lower achievement levels and an increased chance of dropping out (Allensworth et al., 2014; Barge, 2011; Kieffer et al., 2011). Garcia and Weiss (2018) note: “the more days of school a student misses, the poorer his or her performance will be, irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity, disability, or poverty status” (p. 13).

One factor that directly relates to student absenteeism is student discipline. The next section will contain a review of literature on student discipline and will include literature reviews on disparities in discipline and the school-to-prison pipeline.

### **Student Discipline**

Suspensions and expulsions from school are commonplace throughout schools across the United States as an acceptable method to deliver consequences to negative student behavior. Many times, this method is not effective and can, in fact, lead to increased detrimental results. When students are suspended or expelled from school and especially without an educational alternative during suspension, “student alienation, distrust of teachers, delinquency, crime, and substance abuse may result” (Christle et al., 2005; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). While these are dire student reactions to suspension, they are also subject to an increased likelihood of becoming a school dropout and entering the juvenile justice system (Christle et al., 2005; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). An aspect of this type of disciplinary practice that lead to some of the previously stated consequences are the frequent inconsistent use. As stated by Vincent et al. (2012), “being excluded from school has less to do with the behavioral violation a student engaged in and more with which school the student attends and the student’s racial/ethnic background” (p. 586).

### **The School-to-Prison Pipeline**

According to Smith (2009), the school-to-prison pipeline “conceptually categorizes an ambiguous, yet seemingly systematic, process through which a wide range of education and criminal justice policies and practices collectively result in students of color being disparately pushed out of school and into prison” (p. 1,012). This pipeline isn’t a clear-cut route caused by one distinct issue, but rather a variety of contributing factors. Smith emphasizes tracking as a major influence within the pipeline. Miller (2018) describes educational tracking as “the practice



of segregating students based on perceived ability” (p. 905). Tracking historically was based on a student’s cumulative abilities. For example, higher performing students were placed into advanced tracks with the goal of college entry at the conclusion of high school. Lower performing students were placed in vocational or remedial tracks. With this system, students would only be given classes within their corresponding tracks. Today, tracking is typically per subject, recognizing the individual student may have higher academic performance in some subjects, but not in others. Regardless of previous or current tracking methods, Miller (2018) notes this antiquated system as one that “prohibits many students from accessing high-level courses, especially when they are tracked from a young age” (p. 906). Tracking has been noted as being particularly damaging among minority students who are placed in lower tracks at a disproportionate rate (Losen, 2004). According to Smith (2009), “disparately placing minority students in lower tracks is harmful not only because it results in inequitable curricula, but also because low tracked students are subjected to instructional methods that stimulate disruptive behavior” (p. 1,014).

Student discipline acts as another strong school-to-prison pipeline predictor. Rocque and Snellings (2018) state that the disparities surrounding the use of school disciplinary outcomes are “perhaps the most important issue in the school-to-prison pipeline literature” (p. 7). Student discipline will be explored further in the next sections of this paper.

Bottiani et al. (2017) identified poverty as one of the key factors in student discipline and found that black students are disciplined at a higher rate when they feel discipline isn’t equitable. According to many educators, PBIS is a framework that is excellent in addressing the need “for a more fair and equitable discipline program in schools” (Baule, 2020).

## **Race and Student Discipline**

An important area of concern in student discipline is racial inequities. According to the North Carolina Institute of Medicine (NCIOM) (2020):

In the education system, children of color are disproportionately punished through mechanisms like short-term suspension from school. These punishments inhibit academic achievement and open a gateway that can, in time, lead to subsequent involvement with the justice system. Limitations in academic achievement can have lifelong effects on health and well-being (p. 42).

In North Carolina, an average of “3 short-term suspensions for every 10 African American students compared to less than 1 short-term suspension for every 10 White and LatinX students” was found during the 2017-2018 school year (see Figure 1) (NCIOM, 2020, p. 42). North Carolina has selected short-term suspension rates with a target of 0.80 per 10 students by year 2030 as a health indicator for dismantling structural racism under the Healthy North Carolina 2030 initiative (NCIOM, 2020).

Disparities in student discipline is not something recently discovered as an issue in education. Ladson-Billings notes, “educational inequalities such as racial disparities in discipline are essentially the combined effect of the discriminatory policies and practices implemented throughout the history of the United States” (Ladson-Billings, 2006). African American, LatinX, and other students of color are subject to disproportionate rates of suspension and expulsion, with African American students experiencing the highest rate of disproportion (Okonofua et al., 2016; Skiba et al., 2011). According to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil

Short-term suspension rates across populations in North Carolina and distance to 2030 target

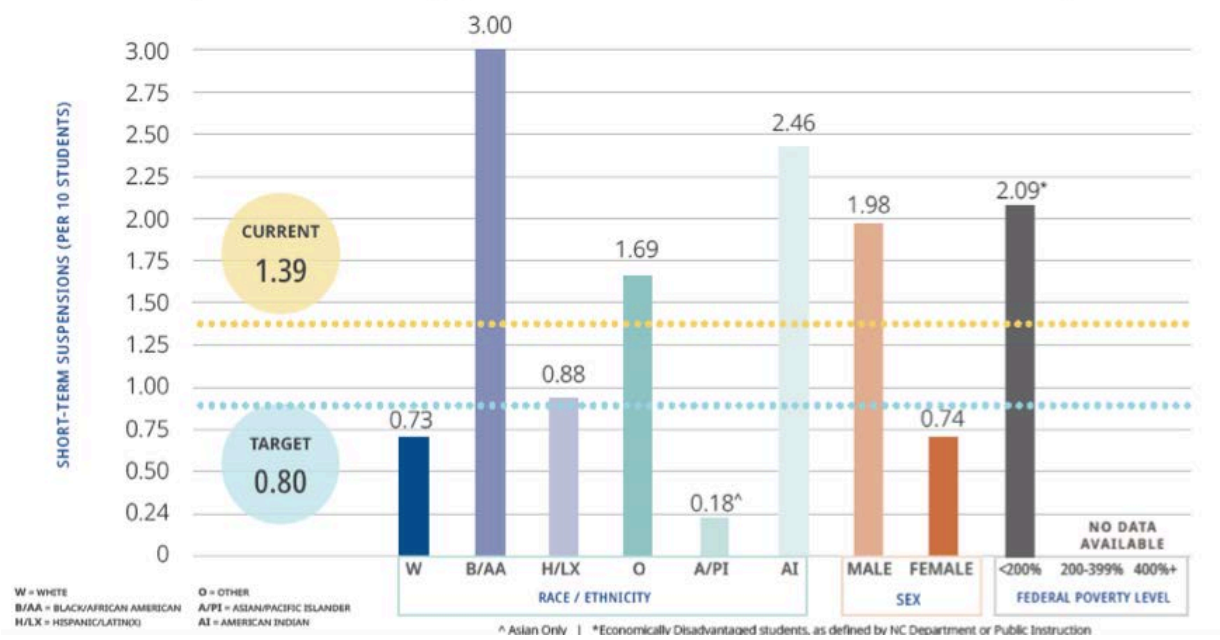


Figure 1. Short-term suspension rates across population in North Carolina and distance to 2030 target (NCIOM, 2020).

Rights, African American students facing disciplinary action has seen a steady increase since the 1970s and now are three times more likely to be suspended than White students (Skiba et al., 2011).

There is a tremendous amount of research dedicated to exposing this inequity in student discipline citing various factors. Cultural stereotypes such as differing communication styles remain and contribute to a disparity in student discipline among African American students (Wegmann & Smith, 2019). White and LatinX teachers are more likely to interpret African American's communications as disruptive, argumentative, and combative in comparison to their White peers (Finn & Servoss, 2014; Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 2014). Minority student behaviors such as "disrespect" and "perceived threat" from an African American student frequently receives the same consequence as more serious student behaviors such as "smoking" and "vandalism of school property" (Wallace et al., 2008). Because African American students are often assumed to be older than their age and "adultized", many times they face harsher punishment for being held to standards of decision making of an adult (Wegmann & Smith, 2019). Furthermore, actions of African American students are often deemed as threatening and more dangerous than White students, resulting in harsher consequences (Goff et al., 2014). In the next section, a review of literature will be provided on the gender disparities in student discipline.

### **Gender Disparities in Student Discipline**

While racial disparities in discipline for schools in the United States is a well-documented dilemma with African American students experiencing a higher rate of suspensions and office referrals than any other race (Smolkowski et al., 2016), gender disparities in discipline has not elicited an equal amount of attention. Male students have historically experienced a

higher rate of suspensions than female students (Hemphill et al., 2014). Research on the precursors of suspensions for the documented national discipline gap among genders remains limited (Yang et al., 2018).

Although the literature for gender disparities in discipline is not as vast, there is research in identifying precursors for student suspensions and methods of intervention before students face suspensions as consequences for behaviors. Some studies have suggested higher discipline rates for African American females, when compared to their White peers, with some rates similar to those of African American males (Blake et al., 2011; Crenshaw et al., 2015). A 2016 study on disproportionality in school discipline concluded that within the 1,666 schools that participated, students faced disciplinary consequences and the severity of the consequences depending on the gender and race of the referring teacher (Smolkowski et al., 2016). The researchers noted that 76% of our nation's teachers are female and 82% of all teachers in the United States are White. These statistics are vital in the researcher's observations during the study as they stated:

Due to their group membership or paternalistic attitudes towards certain groups in certain contexts, teachers may be less inclined to categorize the behavior of White female students in particular as meriting a disciplinary response than they would African American female students or male students in general (Smolkowski et al., 2016, p. 192).

### **Academic Achievement of African American Students**

Disparities in academic achievement between African American students and White students have been well-documented and proven as a persistent reality in schools throughout the United States (Gopalan, 2019). It should come as no surprise that the youth of today face tremendous risks that come in a variety of forms. Social media has become a huge factor in the lives of our youth and can be credited as a risk due to the high volume of harassment and

bullying occurring on such sites as Facebook and Instagram. Many students face an immense amount of pressure to attend college or universities, no matter their cognitive ability. Peer pressure has long been considered a factor in the lives of our students and can be seen as a positive when students surround themselves with high achieving and morally sound peers but more often than not, peer pressure is used in a negative cogitation. While approximately half of our American adolescents are exposed to negative risks, African American adolescents are especially vulnerable (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995).

Initially entering school, African American students are academically comparable to White students, however, upon entering Kindergarten, an achievement gap begins to emerge (Gopalan, 2019). Research has proven time and time again that this academic decline in African American students are not due to a single factor as typically a number of factors cluster together to negatively impact students (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). According to Reardon et al. (2019), “local racial/ethnic differences in parental income and educational attainment, local average parental education levels, and patterns of racial/ethnic segregation” are all strong correlates of achievement gaps of African American Students and White students (p. 1,164). With so many risk factors it is extremely difficult to attribute the achievement gap to a single barrier. Because of the near impossibility of combating these risk factors all at once, it is imperative we determine which factors are the most detrimental.

Socioeconomic status, single parent homes, lack of parental involvement at home and school, disparities in school discipline such as suspensions, and the absence of support in schools are some of the most dominate factors contributing to lower academic achievement in African American students (Gutman et al., 2002). Suspensions and expulsions result in a loss of instructional time, which should come as no surprise that students who have experienced a large

number of suspensions and expulsions, typically are much lower in academic achievement (Arcia, 2006; Hwang, 2018). Due to the disparity of punitive disciplinary actions of African American students versus White students, African American students are facing another obstacle to high academic achievement.

All is not lost, however, for African American students. Many African American students, even those with many of the listed risk factors, have proven to overcome these difficulties and experience high academic achievement and lead successful adult lives (Gutman et al., 2002). One investigator, Garmezy (1993), refers to those African American students as “resilient” children who find success despite these negative risk factors through the presence of positive factors that serve as compensation to their negative effects.

Parental involvement at home and especially at school is one of the most critical factors in a child’s academic achievement with positive outcomes in all grade levels (Gutman et al., 2002). Parental involvement coupled with strong social support, has been proven through countless studies and research as another critical factor in African American student academic achievement (Cauce et al., 1992; Dubow et al., 1991; Gutman & Midgley, 2000). Strong social support appears in the form of positive relationships with parents and siblings and with teachers, peers, school administration, and other school staff in the school setting (Clark, 1983; Comer, 1980).

As one can see, there are many factors that can negatively impact African American student academic achievement (Deficit Theory), however, there are just as many factors that can positively impact African American student academic achievement (Asset Theory). The next section will explore one of the strategies many schools have put in place as a deterrent to suspensions and a way to build relationships, trust, and understanding among African American

students, as well as any student, leading to high or at the very least, improved student academic achievement.

### **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support**

The term “*positive behavioral interventions and supports*” was first used by the U.S. Department of Education in 1997 under the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997). A strategy that utilizes the asset model and has been proven to reduce suspensions among both African American students and students of poverty is, Positive Behavioral Interventions & Support (PBIS) (Baule, 2020). PBIS should not be considered or used as a curriculum, but instead should be viewed as a multi-tiered framework designed for “organizing and achieving capacity to implement effective academic and behavioral practices” (Sugai & Horner, 2020, p. 121). It has been implemented in over 26,000 schools in almost 40% of states in the United States, and in its 25-year history, has proven to be an often-used framework to assist schools and school districts in addressing behavioral needs (Sugai & Horner, 2020).

The ultimate goal of PBIS is to establish the “social culture and behavioral supports needed for all children in a school to achieve both social and academic success” (Kincaid & Horner, 2017, p. 99). To achieve this, PBIS utilizes a framework composed of three tiers of behavioral supports that become increasingly intensive (Noltemeyer et al., 2019). Tier 1 supports are designed to be preventative and should be applied when working with every student within the school setting (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019). These supports should include specific behavioral expectations that are visibly posted throughout the campus and in each classroom with a conscious effort from teachers and staff to model appropriate behaviors; praise students when appropriate behaviors are observed; offer consistent



feedback for student behaviors; and develop specific consequences for violations of the behavioral expectations that are consistently implemented (Gage et al., 2019). Tier 2 consists of targeted interventions for students that continuously engage in negative student behaviors despite the efforts from teachers and other staff in delivering Tier 1 strategies (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2019). The final component of PBIS is Tier 3, which consists of the most intensive interventions and are individualized based on the repeated negative behaviors of students and often times requires a behavioral assessment and the subsequent behavioral intervention plan (Gage et al., 2019).

Both early and recent studies have shown success in PBIS implementation using key disciplinary indicators, such as reductions in out of school suspensions and disciplinary referrals (Luiselli et al., 2005; Netzel & Eber, 2003; Noltemeyer et al., 2019). Success has been noted in both urban districts (Baule, 2020) and rural school settings (Fitzgerald et al., 2014).

Enhancement in student academic performance among schools utilizing PBIS has not been consistently documented. Luiselli et al. (2005) and Pas and Bradshaw (2012) noted significant positive associations in this area, while others, such as Bradshaw et al. (2010) revealed non-significant associations. As PBIS continues to garner positive testimonies and data supporting its implementation with regard to student discipline, research on academic achievement credited from the effective use of PIBS, is not as prevalent (James et al., 2019).

When PBIS is used as the evidence-based, preventative approach to discipline and is implemented with fidelity, a reduction in out of school suspensions and office discipline referrals as well as improvements in academic achievement, school climate, and safety are more likely to occur (Couvillon et al., 2010). Fidelity of PBIS implementation as Mercer et al. (2017) defines as “the extent to which an intervention is delivered as intended” is critical in order to obtain the

desired student behavioral changes (p. 195). A study of 153 schools in Ohio revealed a significantly lower out of school suspension rate per 100 students in schools with higher PBIS implementation fidelity (Noltemeyer et al., 2019). Similarly, Flannery et al. (2014) discovered in a schoolwide PBIS trial in a high school setting, suspension discipline decreased significantly as fidelity of implementation increased. Baule (2020) noted specifically “building level administrative buy-in and effective communications” as key components to ensuring PBIS implementation with fidelity.

To achieve fidelity in PBIS implementation, there are several actions that must occur. In most cases where PBIS implementation have been deemed successful, a PBIS leadership team was established consisting of teachers, counselors, administration, and other school staff with consistent meetings, communication, and thorough planning (Gagnon et al., 2020). It is vital for the PBIS leadership team to not only meet consistently, but with purpose, which should include agenda items consisting of analyzing student behavioral concerns, suspension data, student management plans, providing continuous staff trainings and support, and continuing to monitor the integrity of PBIS implementation (Coffey & Horner, 2012; McIntosh, Kim, et al., 2014).

### **PBIS in Charter Schools**

Many charter schools offer a setting for students that combine academics with a heightened focus on mental and behavioral health, which is not typically the case within traditional public schools (Carver & Lewis, 2010). This setting is enticing to parents desperately seeking a solution and optimal setting for children who have demonstrated difficulties in a traditional public-school setting because of the need for more precise and concentrated special education services. An example of a student who can thrive in a charter school with these specialized services is one diagnosed with behavioral deficits. Research has shown children with

behavioral deficits often are at an increased risk for negative outcomes such as academic failure, placement in an alternative school setting, and school dropout (McDaniel et al., 2014). There are many traditional public schools with zero tolerance policies where these students are subject to suspension, expulsion, and prime candidates for entry into the “school-to-prison pipeline” (McDaniel et al., 2014). When these students are enrolled in charter schools who have adopted PBIS, students are more likely to improve exponentially.

Many educational researchers recommend the implementation of PBIS to assist in increasing student academic achievement and positive student behaviors. PBIS is a strategy designed to prevent negative student behaviors by having clear expectations for students that are taught, modeled, and reinforced with a foundation based on positive relationships with students using positive language (Scott et al., 2008). When charter schools implement PBIS with fidelity, students feel empowered and research has shown 80% of its students to be successful (Jolivette & Nelson, 2010). Research has shown when charter schools adopt PBIS as a proactive rather than reactive approach to student discipline, success is achieved (Jolivette et al., 2014). Furthermore, research found for this chapter have shown that numerous negative outcomes accompany student suspension, expulsion, and absenteeism, which solidifies the importance of PBIS implementation in both traditional public schools and public charter schools.

### **PBIS and Teaching Children of Poverty**

There are a vast number of researchers in education who emphasize the need for a positive school climate as a means of reducing the achievement gap between students of poverty and schools where poverty is not prevalent (Berkowitz et al., 2017). Conversely, it is widely accepted among researchers that if a positive climate is not present, students of poverty are more

likely to experience behavioral problems in the classroom and low academic achievement (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

A 2017 study of Florida schools with PBIS implementation concluded that schools with a high enrollment of students of poverty are more likely to suspend students as a consequence than that of affluent schools (Gagnon et al., 2017). Research has indicated that schools with a high volume of Office Discipline Referrals (ODR) equate to lacking classroom instruction thus yielding low academic achievement (Scott & Barrett, 2004).

To effectively establish the positive environment necessary for students to achieve success in schools using PBIS, school level capacity in the form of staff trainings, ongoing support for teachers, consistency in discipline, clear delivery of expectations, targeted support, and consistent modeling from teachers and other school staff is vital (Lewis et al., 2010). Unfortunately, many high poverty schools are at a disadvantage due to commonly having less qualified teachers and limited resources (staff professional development, money, time, etc.) that are needed to sustain PBIS and ensure its fidelity (Mason-Williams, 2015). While high poverty schools do face difficult challenges in effectively implementing PBIS, it should be noted that if the framework is followed devotedly, thorough planning exists, and the knowledge that PBIS typically takes more than one year to begin seeing positive results, the socioeconomic status of the school may not directly impact the success or sustainability of PBIS (Frank et al., 2009; McIntosh, Predy, et al., 2014). PBIS is one of the most popular and prolific initiatives schools have used, however, there are other initiatives that are designed to offer alternatives to punitive discipline. One such approach is that of Restorative Practices (RP's).

## **Restorative Practices**

RP's consist of an assortment of school and classroom practices centered around school stakeholders, including teachers, students, and administration, working together and using effective communication to find a positive solution when faced with negative student behaviors (Mansfield et al., 2018). Not only does the RP approach assist educators and students work with one another for conflict resolution, but also help to develop student leadership, improved communication skills, and the practice of goal setting (Morris, 2016). While there are similarities between RP and PBIS, a significant distinction of RP is the utilization of educators and students working collaboratively for mutual resolution (Mansfield et al., 2018). While PBIS gathers input from stakeholders in most cases interventions and consequences are determined and delivered by administration, schools utilizing RP's see administration *work* with students to develop mutual resolutions.

RP's are unique in many ways and challenge the most commonly used approach of choosing a reactive course of action for negative student behaviors, by implementing a proactive, holistic approach to discipline with strong emphasis on using language that dissuades placing blame on others or not taking responsibility for their actions (Blood & Thorsborne, 2005). This also enhances the resilience of the student committing the negative student behavior and when applicable, the victim or victims of the student's actions (Kehoe et al., 2018). The holistic elements of RP's can be especially beneficial in increasing the emotional and social skills of students while assisting in building strong, positive relationships between educators and students (McCluskey et al., 2008; Morrison et al., 2005; Porter, 2007). Schools and school districts who have adopted the RP approach have experienced positive impacts on negative student behaviors with reductions in bullying and fighting and an increase in staff collaboration and overall

improved learning environment for both students and educators (McCluskey et al., 2008; Wong et al., 2011). Ultimately, both PBIS and RP can be positive and effective alternatives to student suspension and which is the best for a school or school district will vary.

### **Summary**

This chapter explored literature related to PBIS, charter schools in NC and throughout the nation, student achievement, student discipline, and working with students in populations where challenges can present themselves. This chapter also explained the purpose of the study as well as the location of the study and who comprises the study sample and why. The history of charter schools, its advocates and critics, and other data pertaining to the current status of charter schools in both NC and nationally were explored. To help in explaining the importance of this study, this chapter detailed some of the notable issues plaguing public schools and specifically, public charter schools. Before data on these issues appeared in this chapter, some of the key theorists on educational disparities and their analysis and research on these disparities were detailed. These issues included, disparities in discipline between African American and White students; student absenteeism and its relationship with student academic achievement; the school-to-prison pipeline; and the achievement gap of African American students versus White students. Finally, this chapter reviewed a strategy many schools and school districts across the nation have utilized to address the issues and disparities discussed in the form of the program PBIS. In the next chapter, the researcher will describe the evaluation methodology for the study and give the reader a greater understanding of the importance of conducting a program evaluation of PBIS at ZECA.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **The Decision-Oriented Evaluation Approach**

A methodology commonly utilized in education evaluations is the Decision-Oriented Evaluation Approach. The distinctive feature of this particular approach is its findings are aimed at serving decision makers. The rationale behind using this approach is that those making important decisions such as administrators, managers, board members, and others cannot be effective in running their organization without essential data surmised from quality evaluation (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). The executive director of ZECA is interested in obtaining data to analyze the effectiveness of PBIS with regard to improving student academic performance; increasing positive student behaviors; and growing student absenteeism. For the purpose of this study and to collect the data requested by the ZECA executive director, the decision-oriented evaluation approach will be utilized. The information gained from this study will be primarily used to aid the executive director of ZECA in making decisions to enhance the effectiveness of her school. In this chapter, the types of decision-oriented evaluation approaches will be explored with greater detail.

Fitzpatrick et al. (2011) state that there are three major decision-oriented approaches used in most research: utilization-focused evaluation (UFE), which works mainly with the primary stakeholders to determine their needs or perceived needs; performance monitoring, which is not a traditional evaluation, but more so a collection of data that is submitted to those who are responsible for decision making; and the CIPP model (C- Context, I-Input, P-Process, and P-Product), which focuses on the various stages that occur during implemented programs and the data that can be collected in each of these stages. Each of these approaches shares similarities and differences, but all have the common goal of improving an organization's efficiency by

refining decision-making. There are three people who have been credited as instrumental in the development of the decision-oriented approach, Daniel Stufflebeam (1973) (CIPP), Michael Patton (1978) (UFE), and Joseph Wholey (2004) (Performance Monitoring). Their work in each of the respective decision-oriented approaches has assisted countless organizations in improvement and are credited with revolutionizing research and evaluation in education (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011).

The utilization-focused evaluation is a well-known approach and has been used widely in schools and social welfare settings where its attention lies primarily with an individual or individuals (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). Patton developed this model and published the first book on UFE in 1978. In his model, Patton argues that the key to meaningful evaluation lies within the decision makers and the personal relationship built between them and the evaluator. Patton (1978) refers to this theory as “the personal factor.” When using the UFE approach, the evaluator collects information and data on the interests of stakeholders and what needs they determine should be addressed for an organization or program to achieve success.

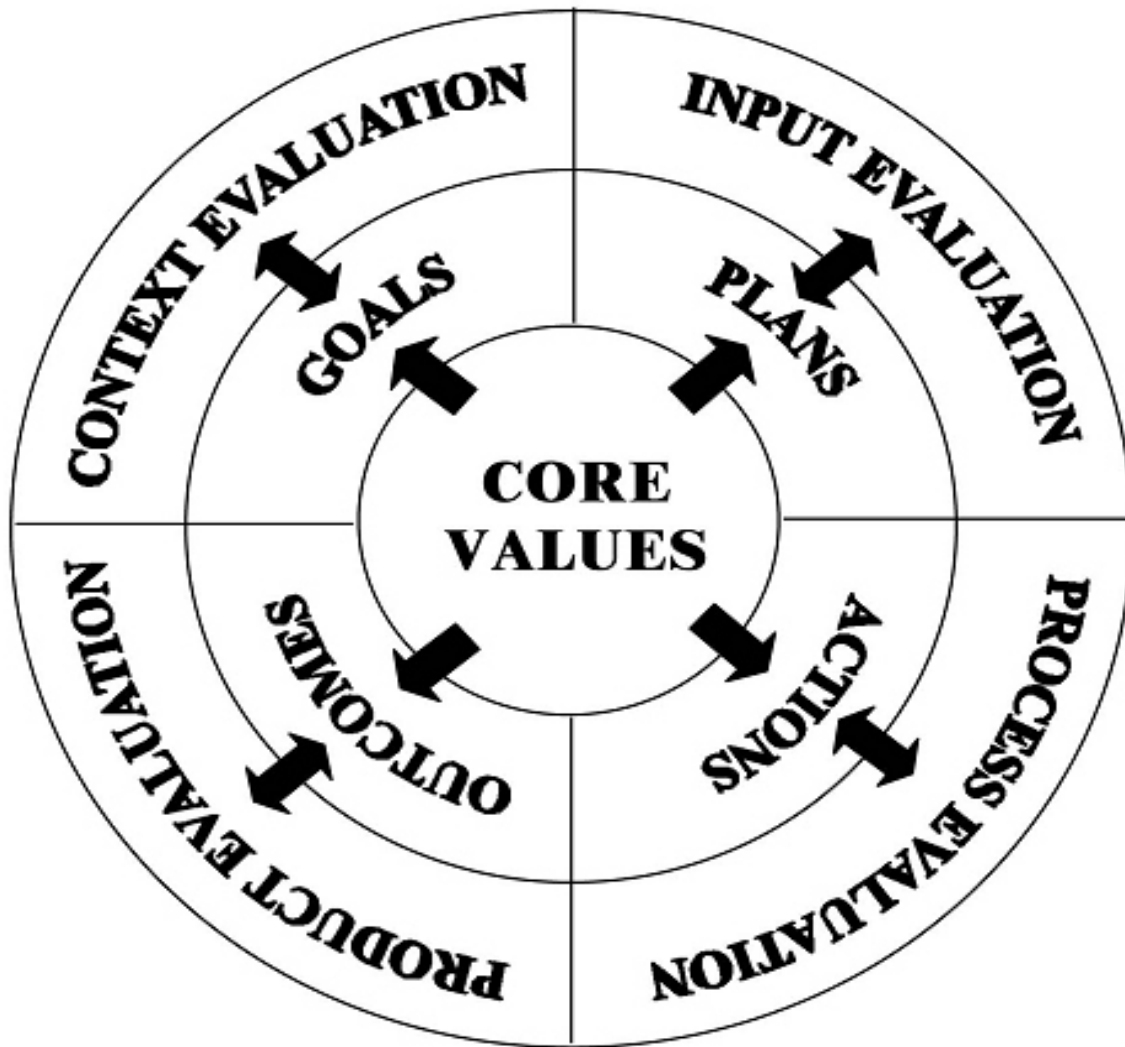
Performance monitoring is an evaluation method designed by Joseph Wholey (2004) with emphasis on program outcomes. Wholey, like Patton and Stufflebeam, developed this approach as a method of achieving organizational success through improved decisions through evaluation. While Patton and Stufflebeam developed evaluation approaches that were primarily school-based, Wholey gained prominence with his approach through working with the federal government (Alkin & Christie, 2004). Since then, however, performance monitoring has found its place among the more commonly used methods of evaluation due to an effective system of collecting, maintaining, and analyzing data. In fact, many schools today rely on performance



monitoring as it measures learning as an ongoing process, unlike other evaluation methods that are used at the completion of a program or initiative (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011).

The final approach, and the approach chosen for this research project is the CIPP model developed by Daniel Stufflebeam. Stufflebeam is widely regarded as a key contributor in the advancement of decision-oriented approach evaluations. Stufflebeam (2005) defines evaluation as, “the process of delineating, obtaining, reporting, and applying descriptive and judgmental information about some object’s merit, worth, probity, and significance to guide decision making, support accountability, disseminate effective practices, and increase understanding of the involved phenomena (p. 61).” In 1973, he developed the CIPP model with a similar basis in mind, stating evaluation as, “the process of delineating, obtaining, and providing useful information for judging decision alternatives” (Stufflebeam, 1973, p. 129). Both, his current definition and his 1973 definition operate with the main ideas remaining and is considered an effective method of evaluation throughout the United States and beyond (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). The letters CIPP serve as an acronym for the four types of evaluation, Context; Input; Process; and Product (Stufflebeam, 1973). In Figure 2, the CIPP process is shown in a visual to help better understand the steps involved and examples of when each letter in “CIPP” should be utilized. Figure 3 details the CIPP process and how it will be used in the program evaluation of PBIS at ZECA.

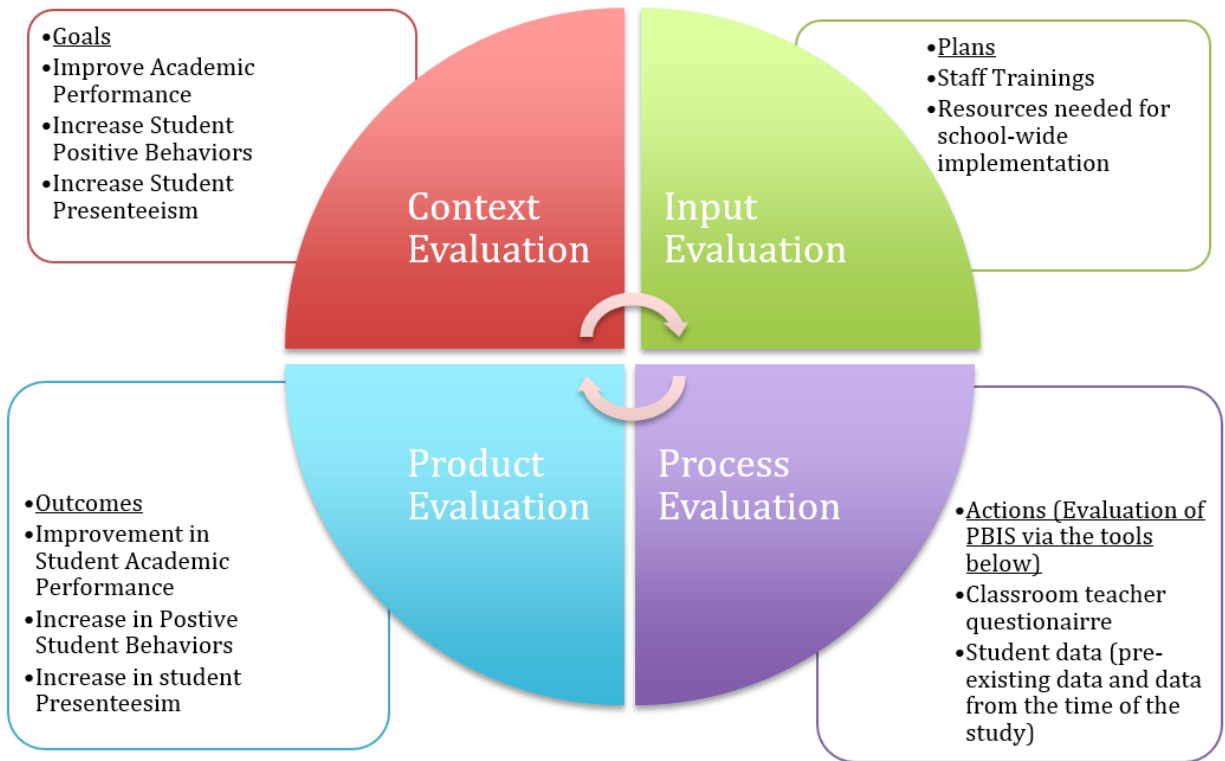
Educators (and administrators alike) understand the importance of evaluation; however, the process (and subsequent findings) can be cause for anxiety among staff. Primary and secondary education is a dynamic field, constantly evolving as a result of evaluation. Frustrations among classroom educators can be felt as a result when changes are frequent or complex (even more so when a perceived disconnect between the “boots on the ground” classroom teachers and



*Figure 2.* Key components of the CIPP Evaluation Model and associated relationships

(Stufflebeam, 2004).

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*Figure 3. Key components of the program evaluation of PBIS at ZECA detailed in CIPP format.*

the program/curriculum developers exist). Fortunately, CIPP's ultimate goal is not to necessarily prove something is not working with the intention of tossing the program out and starting anew, but rather to enhance the program, building on strengths, while mitigating weaknesses. According to Stufflebeam (1973), CIPP is "a move against the view that evaluations should be 'witch hunts' or only instruments of accountability. Instead, it sees evaluation as a tool by which to make programs work better for the people they are intended to serve" (Stufflebeam, 1973, p. 118).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) at Zero to Eighteen Concepts Academy (ZECA), a public charter school in Eastern North Carolina. This study focused on how PBIS has affected the following three student indicators: academic achievement, behavior, and attendance. To address this purpose, qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviews and document analysis accompanied with quantitative data from student EOG assessments, attendance data, and student suspensions were utilized. The data collected was analyzed followed by a presentation of the findings from the program evaluation to the executive director of the charter school. Along with the study findings, this program evaluation resulted in recommendations for improvement in student attendance, student academic achievement, and student discipline.

### **Evaluation Questions**

The executive director, Ms. Owens-Howard, expressed a need to evaluate PBIS as she is concerned that it has not been used with fidelity. She would like to know with regard to PBIS, what has been effective and what are areas for improvement. This program evaluation will

provide evidence on PBIS at ZECA utilizing data from student suspensions, student attendance, and overall student academic performance.

The following evaluation questions will serve as the basis of data collection and will be later utilized and presented to the ZECA Executive Director:

- Evaluation Questions 1: How has PBIS impacted student academic achievement?
- Evaluation Questions 2: How has PBIS impacted student behaviors?
- Evaluation Questions 3: How has PBIS impacted student absenteeism?

### **The CIPP Model**

This study will be guided through utilization of the CIPP Model. As the name of the model suggests, the study will be conducted in the following order: **C**ontext evaluation questions; **I**ntermediate evaluation questions; **P**rocess evaluation questions; and **P**roduct evaluation. The following sections will detail why each phase of the CIPP model is important and the data collection associated with each of the phases.

### **Context Evaluation Questions**

While often associated with the beginning planning stages of a new program, context evaluation can be beneficial during other stages of a program's life-cycle, including when planned program changes are forthcoming or when adaptation is needed due to changed circumstances (Frye & Hemmer, 2012). Under context evaluation, the evaluator seeks to "identify and define program goals and priorities by assessing needs, problems, assets, and opportunities relevant to the program" (Frye & Hemmer, 2012, p. 296). Key findings from the context evaluation questions will be used (to describe the attendance, discipline, and learning before PBIS implementation, during initial implementation of PBIS and the state of PBIS at the time of the study) as the baseline information for the product evaluation phase later on in the

CIPP model. The executive director is responsible for the implementation of any and all programs at ZECA, which includes the implementation of PBIS. The executive director solicits input consistently from the teachers of ZECA and uses this as a determining factor for program implementation. The executive director was the study sample for the context phase of CIPP. The following questions will be asked.

1. When you were first introduced to PBIS, what was your understanding on how its implementation could improve academic achievement at ZECA?
2. When you were first introduced to PBIS, what was your understanding on how its implementation could improve student behaviors at ZECA?
3. When you were first introduced to PBIS, what was your understanding on how its implementation could decrease student absenteeism?

Table 1 is an example of the coding process for the **Context** section of this evaluation:

The responses from the executive director and teachers that were a part of the initial PBIS implementation at ZECA (n=3) was collected using a voice recorder and coded. According to Huberman and Miles (2002), coding occurs when key terms, words, or phrases are given as responses from a participant in a study sample then are used by the researcher in organizing a larger narrative. During the analysis of the responses, attention was placed on the following: ZECA before PBIS implementation; ZECA during the initial implementation of PBIS; PBIS at ZECA at the time of the study; and any trends or patterns observed in the two years PBIS has been utilized at ZECA and the year before PBIS was introduced.

Archival data on student academic achievement, student behaviors, and student absenteeism from the 2017-18 school year (the school year preceding the PBIS implementation at ZECA), the 2018-19 school year, and the 2019-2020 year was collected. Student academic

Table 1

*Context Phase Coding Example*

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Stakeholder Type	Qualitative Data	Code	Question
Executive Director	“My hope was to ensure students are given a positive learning environment”.	Environment	1

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achievement data was collected from NC EOG (End of Grade) assessments. NC EOG assessments are given to students in grades 3-8 as a measure of student academic proficiency. Student behavior data was collected from student out of school suspensions (OSS). Student absenteeism data was collected from student attendance records housed at ZECA.

### **Input Evaluation Questions**

Input evaluation is the second component under the CIPP model. This stage of evaluation serves to “assess the feasibility or cost-effectiveness of alternative or competing approaches to the educational need, including various staffing plans and ways to allocate other relevant resources” (Frye & Hemmer, 2012, p. 297). As PBIS implementation has been ongoing at ZECA, the focus for input evaluation for this phase was to determine current resources (or lack-there-of) needed for continuation. The executive director is responsible for the implementation of any and all programs at ZECA, which includes the implementation of PBIS. She also has the responsibility of formulating the school budget and determining which programs will be implemented and how much of the budget will be dedicated to its implementation. Because of these factors, the executive director was the study sample for the input phase of CIPP. The following questions will be asked.

1. How much funding (if any) is allocated for PBIS training in years 2017-18, 2018-19, and 2019-20?
2. How did you plan and execute the professional development training sessions for staff on PBIS before (2017-18), during (2018-19), and at the time of the study (2019-20)?
3. Describe any other resources not asked about that were needed during the initial implementation of PBIS?



Table 2 is an example of the coding process for the **Input** section of this evaluation:

These three questions were presented to the executive director of ZECA and her responses collected using a voice recorder and coded. Along with the executive director's responses, documents were collected and used to determine the fidelity of PBIS implementation at ZECA. Documents used for this study and were collected are: PBIS meeting dates; PBIS meeting staff participation; PBIS meeting agendas; and PBIS meeting minutes. The executive director will also provide any other documents pertaining to PBIS that will assist in presenting the study's final evaluation report. These documents consisted of the school budget, particularly in regards to PBIS; teacher (past teachers and teachers employed at ZECA at the time of the study) observations with a focus on classroom environment and classroom management; classroom walkthrough instruments; and the visual climate of the classroom (PBIS posters, classroom rules, classroom reward system for positive student behaviors, etc.).

### **Process Evaluation Questions**

Process evaluations explore program implementation, seeking to discover if the program is being executed as desired. The results of process evaluations provided critical insight for the evaluator in his/her analysis of the program's outcomes. If the expected program goals are not achieved, how the program was implemented could be the leading contributing factor. Process evaluations, according to Frye and Hemmer (2012), are also "invaluable for supporting accountability to program stakeholders" (p. 297). Teachers at ZECA employed at the time of this study made up the study sample for the process phase of CIPP. The following questions were asked.

Table 2

*Input Phase Coding Example*

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Stakeholder Type	Qualitative Data	Code	Question
Executive Director	“Planning was based on the desire to improve academic performance for students”.	Academic	2

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2. When you were first introduced to PBIS, what was your understanding on how its implementation in your classroom could improve academic achievement? How does the implementation PBIS look currently in your classroom?
3. When you were first introduced to PBIS, what was your understanding on how its implementation in your class could improve student behaviors? How does the implementation PBIS look currently in your classroom?
4. When you were first introduced to PBIS, what was your understanding on how its implementation in your class could improve student absenteeism?

Table 3 represents an example of the coding process for the **Process** section of this evaluation:

The teacher responses were collected using a voice recorder and coded and used for the final evaluation of the program and conclusion of the study. PBIS at ZECA before, during initial implementation, and at the time of the study were examined closely as well as any trends or patterns observed with regard to the school climate and the three main evaluation questions.

### **Product Evaluation Questions**

Product evaluations focus on outcomes. While the other components of the CIPP model (context, input, process) are formative in nature, product evaluations are summative, exploring program results. According to Frye and Hemmer (2012):

This type of evaluation study aims to identify and assess the program outcomes, including both positive and negative outcomes, intended and unintended outcomes, short-term and long-term outcomes. It also assesses, where relevant, the impact, the effectiveness, the sustainability of the program and/or its outcomes, and the transportability of the program (p. 297).

Table 3

*Process Phase Coding Example*

Stakeholder Type/ID	Question 1a Initial PBIS Understanding/Academics Qualitative Data	Code/ Theme	Question 1b Current PBIS Implementation/Academics Qualitative Data	Code/ Theme
Teacher	“I felt as if it might improve student academic performance”.	Improve	“My students have shown enormous growth with PBIS”.	Growth

This is the final phase of the program evaluation and along with the other three phases, were utilized for the completion of the study detailing the findings and the recommended areas for improvement.

### **Study Sample**

As described in the opening chapter, ZECA has had difficulties in maintaining stability among teaching staff as many have spouses who are active military. Only three teachers from the initial PBIS implementation at ZECA remain employed at the time of the study. Because of this, some of the data collected were limited to the executive director as she serves as the only sample subject who can offer true insight into the climate of ZECA before PBIS implementation, ZECA during the initial implementation of PBIS, and the state of PBIS at ZECA at the time of the study. The entire teaching staff will be included in this study, however, to ensure validity of the study, focus on ZECA before and during initial implementation were limited to a small sample in comparison to the sample used for responses based on PBIS at ZECA at the time of the study.

For this evaluation, a convenience sample was utilized. According to Issel (2004), “A convenience sample is constructed by inviting whoever is accessible or available to participate” (p. 347). As the name implies, this type of sample selection is convenient for the evaluator, offering a quick and inexpensive method to obtain the desired number of participants needed for the evaluation. As the dean/principal of ZECA, I have a consistent presence and rapport with the executive director and teachers. Those who are accessible (based on time and willingness) were interviewed. Because a major part of my job is to evaluate educational programs offered at ZECA, the executive director and staff members are familiar with such inquiries.

Data were gathered from two sample groups, the ZECA executive director, and the teachers (n=11) of ZECA who were employed during the time of the study. The CIPP Model was

utilized in formulating the questions to be asked to each sample group. Each sample group will be asked the questions detailed earlier and their responses collected, coded, and analyzed. PBIS documents accompanied the sample responses and will form the conclusion of the program evaluation.

The PBIS program was introduced to all stakeholders of ZECA and implemented in the 2017-18 school year. The executive director of ZECA and the eleven teachers employed at ZECA at the time of the study were asked the questions as outlined in this chapter. Only three teachers who were employed at ZECA during the initial PBIS implementation remain employed at ZECA at the time of the study. Because of this, some of the data collected will be limited to the executive director as she serves as the only sample subject who can offer true insight into the climate of ZECA before PBIS implementation, ZECA during the initial implementation of PBIS, and the state of PBIS at ZECA at the time of the study. The entire teaching staff will be included in this study, however, to ensure validity of the study, focus on ZECA before and during initial implementation will be limited to a small sample in comparison to the sample used for responses based on PBIS at ZECA at the time of the study.

### **Evaluation Plan**

For this program evaluation to be successful, it is essential a plan is put in place detailing the activities involved, a timeframe of when the activities will take place, the personnel involved, and the cost of the evaluation study (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). Table 4 details the steps which will be taken to complete the program evaluation of PBIS at ZECA with fidelity and includes each phase of the CIPP method.

Table 4

*Evaluation Plan Worksheet for a Program Evaluation of PBIS at ZECA*

CIPP Phase of Evaluation	Study Sample	Tasks	Documents	Timeline
Context: 1. Identified the main concern of the client; the program identified as the focus of the evaluation.	1a. Executive director of ZECA	1b. Met with executive director of ZECA to decide on the focus of the program evaluation. 1c. Determined from executive director the desired outcomes from the program evaluation. Collect and review archival data	1d. School data on student academic performance, student behaviors, and student absenteeism.	August 2020
Input: 2. Identify data to be collected. Complete dissertation proposal. Secure ECU IRB approval.	2a. ZECA Executive Director	2b. Collect and review PBIS documents. 2c. Review school budget. 2d. Review teacher observations. 2e. Review classroom walkthroughs. 2f. Take note of specific visually present artifacts in regards to classroom climate.	2g. PBIS meeting dates, agendas, minutes, and list of teacher participants. 2h. School data on student academic achievement, student behaviors, and student absenteeism. 2i. School budget. 2j. Teacher observations. 2k. Classroom walkthrough summaries.	September 2020

Table 1 (continued)

CIPP Phase of Evaluation	Study Sample	Tasks	Documents	Timeline
<p>Process:</p> <p>3. Determine the consistency of PBIS used in the classroom; the benefits of using PBIS in the classroom; the perception of PBIS from a teacher’s perspective; and the teacher’s perspective on how PBIS could be improved.</p>	3a. ZECA Teachers	3b. Collect and document teacher responses from the semi-structured interviews.	3c. Teacher responses.	October 2020
<p>Product:</p> <p>4. Analyze findings of the program evaluation and present to ZECA executive director.</p>	4a. ZECA Executive Director	<p>4b. Summarize sample group responses from the semi-structured interviews.</p> <p>4c. Summarize student academic performance data; student behavior data; and student absenteeism data.</p> <p>4d. Develop and share the conclusion and recommendations of the program evaluation with the executive director.</p>	<p>4e. Sample group responses.</p> <p>4f. School data from the 3 years of PBIS implementation at ZECA.</p> <p>4g. Summary of study</p>	November 2020



## **Data Analysis**

Upon IRB approval from ECU, data analysis occurred in five stages: (1) documents, (2) data collection, (3) coding and organization, (4) data analysis, and (5) reporting (Altheide & Schneider, 2017). There were two types of data collected and analyzed. The qualitative data consisted of the semi-structured interview responses and the documents that have been highlighted in this chapter. Quantitative data will be gathered from NC EOG results, student attendance records, and student suspensions. Qualitative data will be used as it can give great insight on how and where PBIS was successful and where it could be improved from the teachers who would be seeing how effective PBIS can be in the classroom setting. Quantitative data will show if rates have increased or decreased in the three years PBIS has been implemented. This qualitative data from the study sample will be “contextualized in the settings in which they provide experiences and the meanings of their experiences” (Creswell & Garrett, 2008, p. 322). The interviewer met with each study sample participant individually to collect their responses from the semi-structured interview. The responses were recorded (with participant permission) via a digital voice recorder then transcribed and coded for analysis. Coding will occur with attention to academic performance, student behavior, and student absenteeism. This information will be documented and used in the final report of the study and the recommendations for improvement.

Documents used for this study that were collected are: PBIS meeting dates; PBIS meeting staff participation; PBIS meeting agendas; and PBIS meeting minutes. The executive director will also provide any other documents pertaining to PBIS that will assist in presenting the study’s final evaluation report. These documents will consist of the school budget, particularly in regards to PBIS; teacher (past teachers and teachers employed at ZECA at the time of the study)

observations with a focus on classroom environment and classroom management; classroom walkthrough instruments; and the visual climate of the classroom (PBIS posters, classroom rules, classroom reward system for positive student behaviors, etc.).

Archival data of patterns and trends on student academic achievement for students, student behaviors, and student absenteeism from the 2017-18 school year (the school year preceding the PBIS implementation at ZECA), the 2018-19 school year, and the 2019-2020 year will be collected. Student academic achievement data will be collected from NC EOG (End Of Grade) assessments. NC EOG assessments are given to students in grades 3-8 as a measure of student academic proficiency. Student behavior data will be collected from student Out of School Suspensions (OSS). Student absenteeism data will be collected from student attendance records housed at ZECA.

Once all of the afore-mentioned data has been collected, coded and analyzed, the findings will then be presented to the executive director of ZECA. Recommendations for improvement will also be included in the final report to be presented. These findings will be used to determine the effectiveness of PBIS at ZECA for the purpose of assisting the executive director to make an informed decision on the continuation of PBIS at ZECA, the alleviation of PBIS at ZECA, or strategies to improve PBIS at ZECA based on the recommendations for improvement of PBIS at ZECA.

### **Overall Evaluation Data Analysis**

Data will be triangulated to make an assessment using multiple quantitative and qualitative sources. The assessment of the program will be determined by collecting quantitative data from the last three years, which will equate to the first year of PBIS implementation, the second year of PBIS implementation, and the third year of PBIS implementation. The student

academic achievement data will be obtained from student NC EOG assessment proficiency. Attention to trends and patterns will be analyzed for student academic achievement, student attendance, and student behaviors then summarized for the findings of the study to be presented to the executive director.

Student academic achievement will be assessed through comparing student proficiency on NC EOG tests from the 2016-17 (Baseline) school year, 2017-18 school year; and 2018-19 school year. The percentage of students proficient on NC EOG's will be compared from each of the three years to determine if there has been an increase or decrease in student academic achievement. The baseline to measure student academic achievement will be obtained from the 2016-17 NC EOG data as this was the last full year before the first year of PBIS implementation. In reviewing this data, a bar graph was used to help the reader in having a visual of the percentage of students within the school who earned NC EOG proficiency for each the three years of PBIS implementation.

Next, the findings on student behaviors were presented comparing the number of students out-of-school suspensions from the 2017-18 school year; the 2018-19 school year; and the 2019-20 school year. When comparing discipline data, a focus on determining if trends such as an increase or decrease in out-of-school student suspensions, have occurred during the three years PBIS has been used as a framework for addressing student needs. A line graph was used to show student discipline patterns for each grade during the last three years with PBIS present.

Lastly, attendance records from the 2017-18 school year; the 2018-19 school year; and the 2019-20 school year were compared to determine if daily student absenteeism has increased or decreased. In reviewing daily student attendance data, a column graph will be the tool used to show trends in absenteeism in each of the three years.

Qualitative data was collected from the executive director and teacher semi-structured survey responses. The executive director makes budget decisions that include staffing, resources, trainings, and the overall implementation of programs and school initiatives. Because of this, responses from the executive director were collected and coded for the Context and Input sections of the CIPP model. Teachers are the individuals most responsible for direct implementation and consistency of PBIS and its strategies. Knowing this, teachers responded to survey questions in the Process section of the CIPP model. The executive director and teachers work together to accomplish the common goal of student success. Teacher feedback given to the executive director is encouraged, valued, and considered with each decision to implement new programs such as PBIS. The executive director and teacher are both responsible for implementing PBIS using consistency, modeling, and clear communication of expectations for students. It is the executive director's responsibility to ensure that teachers are given the trainings and resources necessary for successful implementation of PBIS. It is the teachers, then, who must utilize the efforts of the executive director efficiently in the classroom.

### **Final Report Outline**

To ensure the results of this study have the desired impact and influence when reporting to the executive director, Fitzpatrick suggests a clear and comprehensive outline be used (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). The following outline will be utilized for the final report of the study:

- I. Executive Summary
- II. Purpose of the Evaluation
- III. Focus of the Evaluation
- IV. Comparisons with Literature Review
- V. Evaluation Findings

- a. Quantitative
  - b. Qualitative
- VI. Strengths and Opportunities for Improvement
  - VII. Recommendations for Improvement

### **Summary**

This chapter explored the program evaluation process and outlined the CIPP method. Also included in this chapter were the types of data that is to be collected. This data refers to comparisons of student attendance, student behaviors, and student academic achievement in the three years PBIS has been in place at the charter. Data in the form of PBIS documents such as PBIS trainings, staff meetings on PBIS, agendas, staff participations, teacher observations, and the funding dedicated to PBIS. The NC student information system, PowerSchool, will be utilized for data collection of student attendance and for student Out of School Suspensions. The final data collection method will be based on the semi-structured interview questions and will attempt to gain a greater understanding of the perception of PBIS from the perspective of teachers and the executive director of the charter. The next chapter will describe the data analysis and findings.

## **CHAPTER 4: STUDY RESULTS**

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) at Zero to Eighteen Concepts Academy (ZECA), a public charter school in Eastern North Carolina. This study focused on how PBIS has affected the following three student indicators: academic achievement, behavior, and attendance. To address this purpose, qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviews and document analysis accompanied with quantitative data from student NC EOG assessments, attendance data, and student suspensions were utilized. The data collected was analyzed followed by a presentation of the findings from the program evaluation to the executive director of the charter school. Along with the study findings, this program evaluation makes recommendations for improvement in student attendance, student academic achievement, and student discipline.

### **Evaluation Questions**

The executive director, Ms. Owens-Howard, expressed a need to evaluate PBIS as she was concerned that it had not been implemented with fidelity. She wanted to know with regard to PBIS, what had been effective and what are areas for improvement. This program evaluation provided evidence on PBIS at ZECA utilizing data from student suspensions, student attendance, and overall student academic performance.

The following evaluation questions served as the basis of data collection. The data was then analyzed and presented to the ZECA Executive Director:

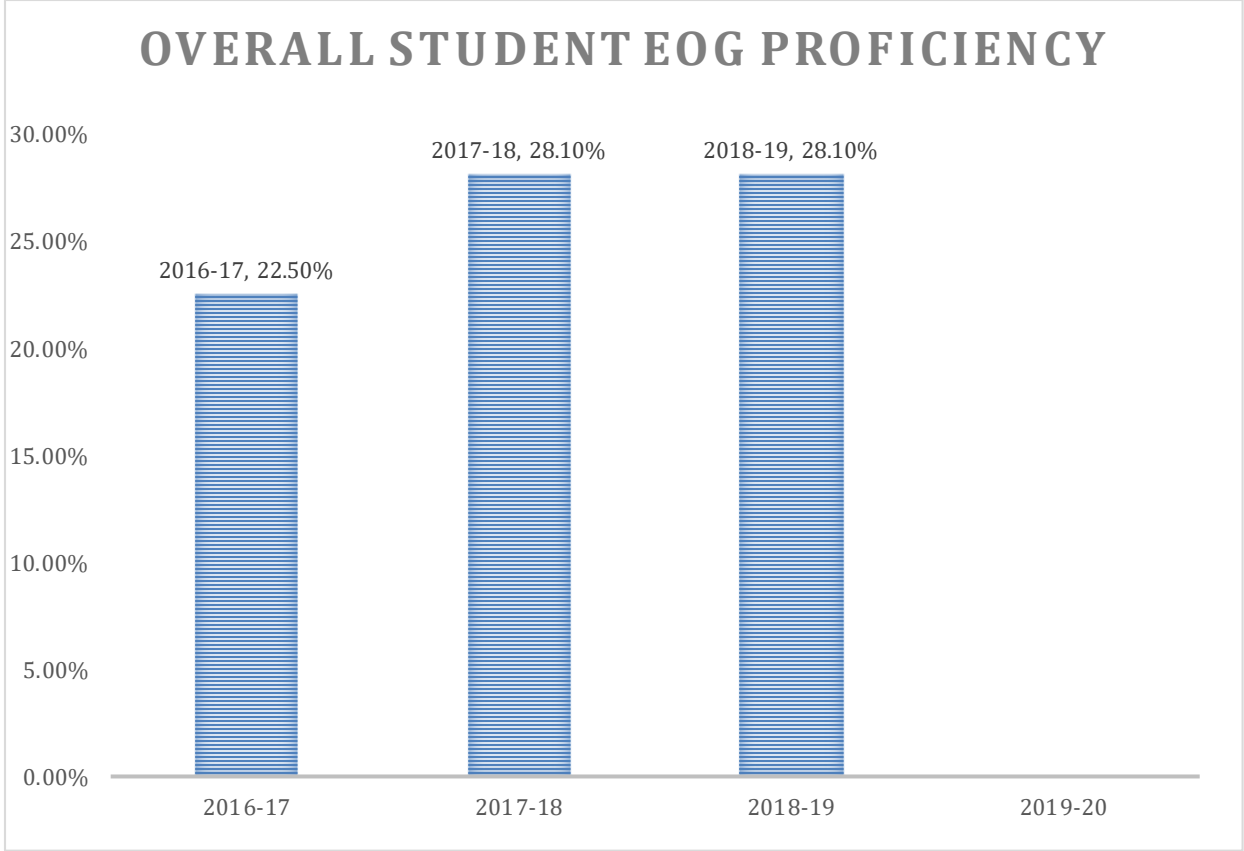
- Evaluation Question 1: How has PBIS impacted student academic achievement?
- Evaluation Question 2: How has PBIS impacted student behaviors?
- Evaluation Question 3: How has PBIS impacted student absenteeism?

The first section of this chapter will answer each of the evaluation questions utilizing quantitative data. The second section of this chapter will answer each of the evaluation questions utilizing qualitative data following the order of the CIPP evaluation model.

## **Quantitative Findings**

### **Evaluation Question 1: How has PBIS Impacted Student Academic Achievement?**

Academic growth has occurred in each year since the implementation of PBIS (see Figure 4). Since the last school year where PBIS was not used at the charter was 2016-17, this NC EOG data was used as the baseline for comparing the first full year with PBIS implementation versus the last full year without PBIS. The overall student NC EOG proficiency in the 2017-18 school year was 28.1% and earned the “Met Growth” distinction. This is much improved compared to the 22.5% overall student NC EOG proficiency earned in the 2016-17 school year. The overall student NC EOG proficiency in the 2018-19 school year saw stabilization in overall student NC EOG proficiency at 28.1% but did achieve the “Met Growth” distinction once again. Due to the emergence of COVID-19, the 2019-20 school year forced students of the charter to remotely finish the year from March 2020 to June 2020. As a result, NC EOG data could not be collected, analyzed, and compared to the previous two years of PBIS implementation. Knowing this, we are left with only two years of NC EOG data to determine the impact of PBIS on student academic achievement. In these two years, however, an increase in overall student proficiency and student growth points to PBIS as contributing to a positive impact on student academic achievement. Although there continues to be student growth, overall NC EOG scores are well below the state average.



*Figure 4.* Three-year comparison of student NC EOG proficiency.

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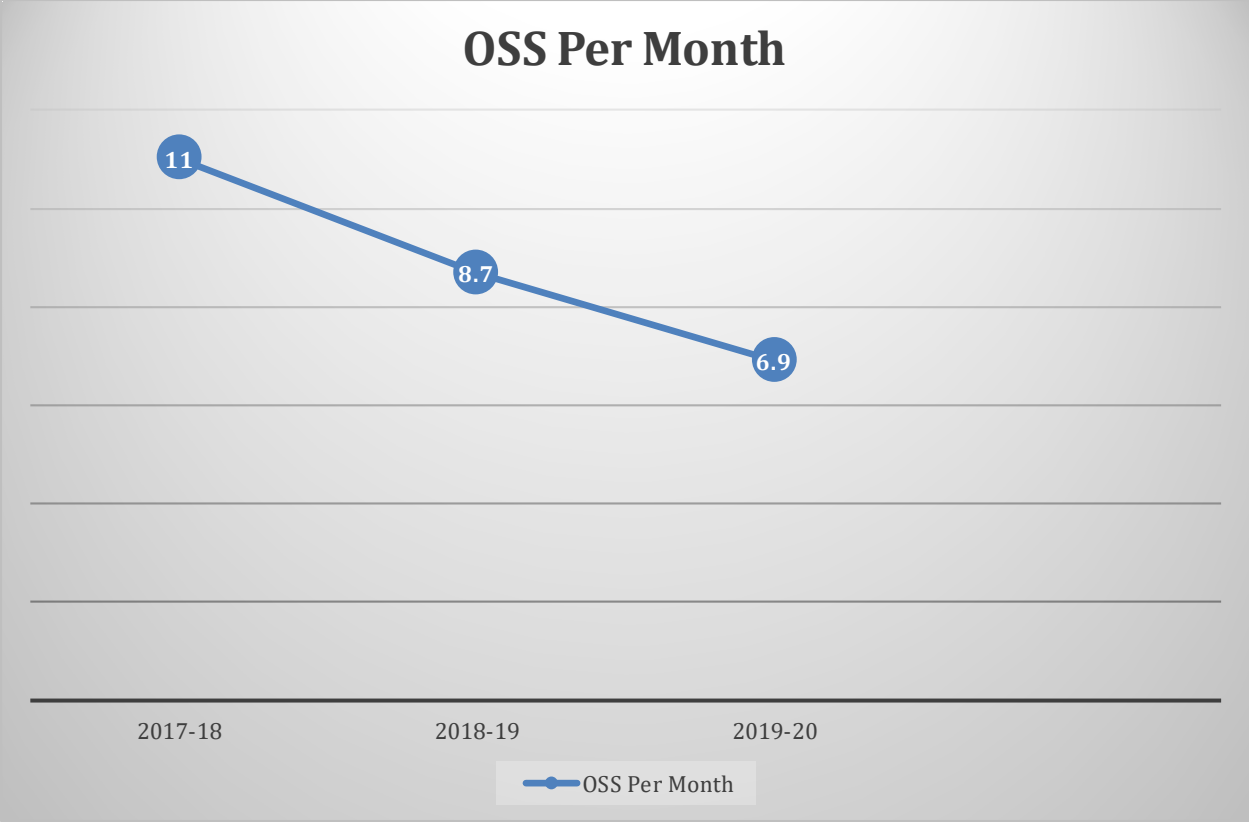
### **Evaluation Question 2: How has PBIS Impacted Student Behaviors?**

A decrease in student short-term suspensions has occurred in each of the three years of PBIS implementation at ZECA (see Figure 5). In 2017-18, a total of 99 out-of-school suspensions were given to students as a consequence of negative student behaviors. In 2018-19, the number of out-of-school suspensions as a result of negative student behavior, decreased to 78. The 2019-20 school year totaled 48 out-of-school suspensions before the COVID-19 outbreak. A decrease of out-of-school suspensions occurred in each of the three years of PBIS implementation but due to the traditional learning environment being modified to a remote learning setting in 2019-20, we will analyze suspensions using a monthly average.

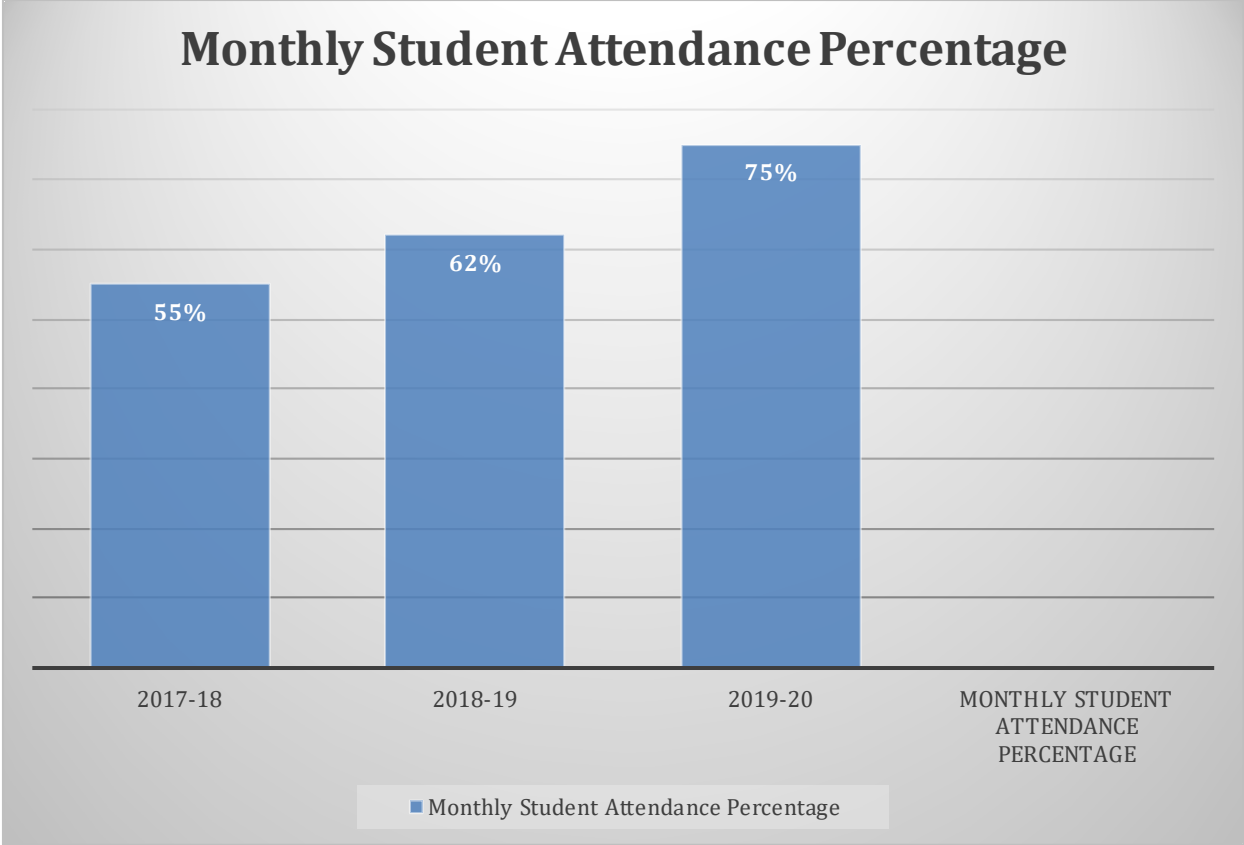
In 2017-18, students were given out-of-school suspension at a rate of 11 per month. In 2018-19, there was a slight decrease in out-of-school suspensions per month at 8.7 per month. The 2019-20 school year experienced its lowest monthly average of student out-of-school suspensions at 6.9 per month. Figure 5 demonstrates the sharp decline in the average number of out-of-school suspensions students were given per month in the three years of PBIS implementation. The three-year rate of student out-of-school suspensions improved with each new year, solidifying PBIS as a key component in reducing the number of out-of-school suspensions as a consequence for negative student behaviors.

### **Evaluation Question 3: How has PBIS Impacted Student Absenteeism?**

Data for average daily student attendance was obtained through PowerSchool, the official student information system (SIS) of public and charter schools in NC (see Figure 6). In the three years of PBIS implementation at ZECA, a steady and remarkable increase in student absenteeism has been achieved. At the end of the 2017-18 school year, the average daily student attendance rate was 55%. The following year, the 2018-19 school year, there was an



*Figure 5.* The monthly average number of out-of-school suspensions since implementing PBIS.



*Figure 6. Monthly student attendance percentage since the implementation of PBIS.*

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improvement in average daily student attendance with an average daily student attendance rate of 62%. In the third year of PBIS implementation, the charter experienced its highest average daily student attendance rate in the school's history, concluding at 75%. It should be noted that only the months students were in school full time and before the COVID-19 pandemic, were used in calculating the attendance averages to maintain validity. The three years of PBIS implementation saw an astounding 20% increase in daily student attendance (see Figure 7). This stark increase in average daily student attendance can safely assert PBIS as a key factor in improving student absenteeism.

## **Qualitative Findings**

### **The CIPP Model**

This section of the chapter details the qualitative findings of the study. These findings were obtained through the use of the CIPP Model. As the name of the model suggests, the study was conducted in the following order: **C**ontext evaluation questions; **I**ntput evaluation questions; **P**rocess evaluation questions; and **P**roduct evaluation. Under the context (**C**) evaluation phase of the CIPP Model, the evaluator seeks to “identify and define program goals and priorities by assessing needs, problems, assets, and opportunities relevant to the program” (Frye & Hemmer, 2012, p. 296). The input (**I**) stage of evaluation serves to “assess the feasibility or cost-effectiveness of alternative or competing approaches to the educational need, including various staffing plans and ways to allocate other relevant resources” (Frye & Hemmer, 2012, p. 297). The next phase, process (**P**) evaluations explore program implementation, seeking to discover if the program is being executed as desired. The final stage of the CIPP Model, are product (**P**) evaluations and are summative and focus on outcomes and exploring program results. The Product section of this chapter will summarize the findings and expand in detail in Chapter 5.

# The ZECA 10

#1	When responding to any adult, you must answer by saying yes/no or yes/no ma'am/sir. Please be sure to say please, thank you, your welcome.	Respect
#2	Transitions will be swift, quiet, and orderly.	Self-Control
#3	Obey the same rules with a substitute teacher.	Integrity
#4	We will follow certain classroom protocols. •Do not get out of your seat without permission. •Do not speak unless you raise your hand and are called on. •Keep your hands, feet, and objects to yourself. •During discussions, respect others comments and ideas.	Self-Control
#5	Follow manners when dealing with food.	Respect
#6	During an assembly, do not speak or try to look around to get the attention of your friends.	Self-Control
#7	When in line, walk single file, face forward, and absolutely no talking.	Self-Control
#8	Never cut in line.	Respect
#9	Learn from your mistakes and move on. Accept you are going to make mistakes.	Persistence
#10	Be honest regardless the circumstances.	Honesty

Figure 7. The ZECA 10 Poster.

## **C = Context (Executive Director Responses)**

After extensively talking with the executive director, it is very clear how she communicates her vision. She calls it “The ZECA Way” and it is one of the initiatives following PBIS the charter uses (see Figure 8). The ZECA Way is a mantra the students are required to learn and ultimately, practice with fidelity. It maintains that each student will, “Follow directions,” “Be in control of my emotions,” and “Improve my reading ability.” The executive director put The ZECA Way as the cornerstone of its student expectations as if each of these are mastered, they will have a greater chance at success in life. The ZECA executive director is very intentional about how The ZECA Way is communicated to students and parents. At Open House, which also acts as Student/Parent Orientation, The ZECA Way is clearly stated as her vision and as her expectation. Speaking with the executive director, it was clear she realized ZECA had a unique population that would require a unique approach to PBIS. Because of this she utilized the core foundation and principles of PBIS with modifications specifically designed for their student population. To accompany The ZECA Way, the executive director also compiled a set of 10 expectations for students and called it The ZECA 10 (see Figure 7).

The ZECA Way and The ZECA 10 are taught to students before they arrive on campus at the Parent Orientation, which occurs before the first day of school for students, and continue as students arrive on campus and throughout the school year. These procedures and expectations are printed onto posters and are required to be visible in each classroom. These posters as well as other motivational posters, quotes, and other positive displays are visible throughout the school in several locations and specifically posted in high traffic areas such as restrooms, the cafeteria, above water fountains, and near the entrance of the school. The posters serve as reminders to students and staff, but should be used more as a reiteration of the common language among used

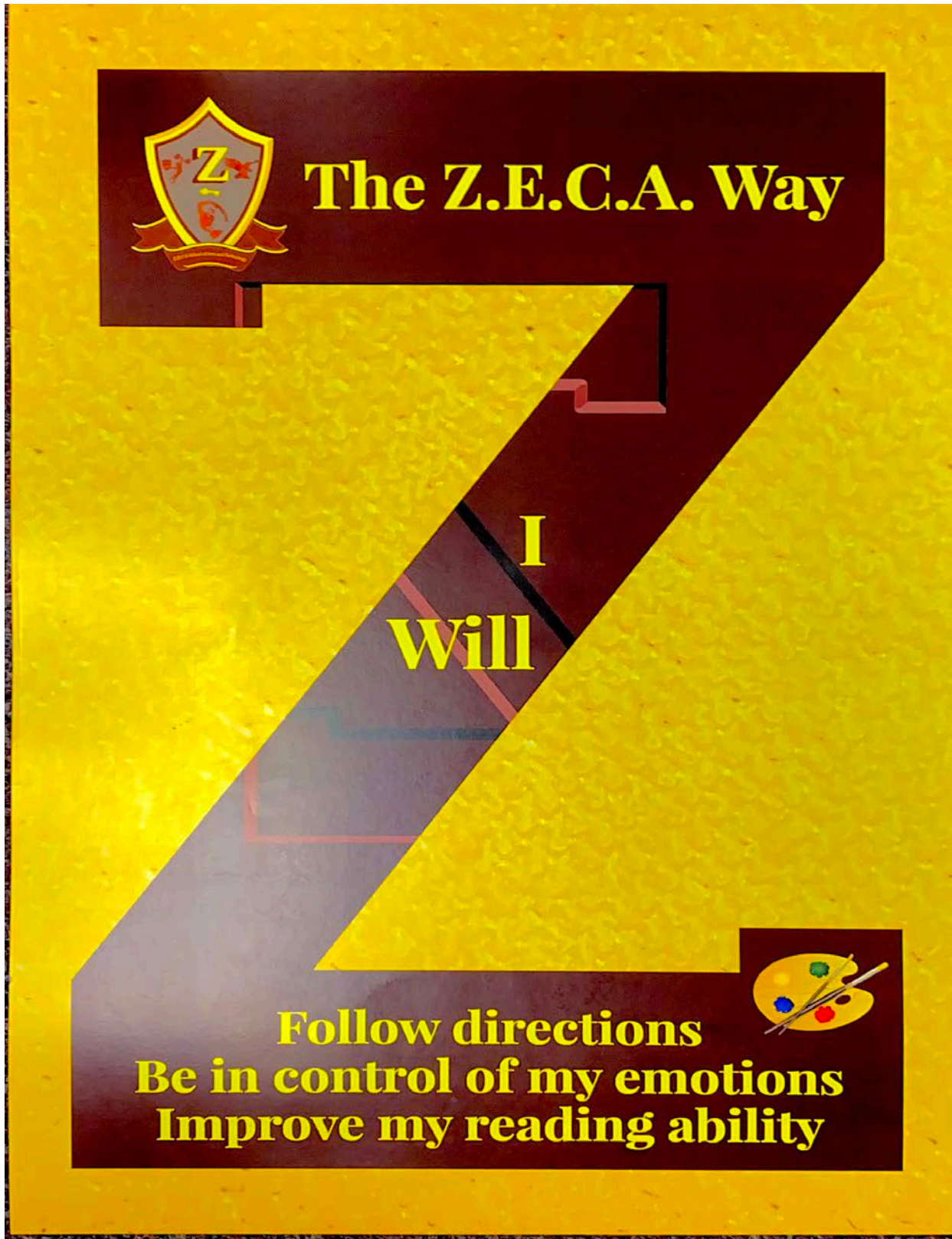


Figure 8. The ZECA Way Poster.

throughout the school. She felt that the more visible the expectations, the more likely students were to make good choices.

According to documents shared by the executive director and derived from past teacher observations, these two posters were required to be displayed in a visible location within their classroom. The executive director also provided me with feedback from teacher observations that specifically listed consistently using the language printed on each poster as an observable artifact. While classroom rules and school-wide rules and procedures are nothing new, there was special attention given to the language used when compiling the components of The ZECA Way and The ZECA 10. The ZECA Way, for example, states “Be in control of my emotions.” This statement is one of the most impactful of all of the language used at ZECA based on the foundations of PBIS. Working with students to have control of their emotions is an intervention that is utilized consistently to avoid behaviors that can lead to negative consequences such as office referrals, in-school suspensions, or out-of-school suspensions. The executive director also shared teacher observation and walkthrough feedback based on classroom management. Only when PBIS common language was used and the required posters were observable, were teachers marked proficient or higher on the standards related to learning environment and classroom management. In comparison, teachers with ratings below proficient on classroom management, did not consistently use the school-wide PBIS common language, did not have the required posters clearly displayed, did not reference the posters when addressing student behaviors, and/or did not demonstrate buy-in with using PBIS strategies.



## **I = Input (Executive Director Responses)**

### ***Budget***

The first year of PBIS implementation at this charter was the 2017-18 school year. There was no budget allocated as NCDPI provided training and consultants at no cost to the school. In each year since the first year of implementation of PBIS, there has not been any funds allocated to PBIS trainings. In the 2018-19 and 2019-20 school years, however, the school budget has allocated funds for incentives based on PBIS initiatives. The executive director states that she is grateful for relationships her school has formed with many community organizations and businesses and it is from these resources the vast majority of rewards, incentives, and other costs accrued during celebrations are obtained.

### ***Professional Development***

ZECA has a very unique weekly schedule. Students attend school Tuesday through Friday from 8:00am to 5:00pm. Every Monday is dedicated to Professional Development for staff. Because of this unique schedule, teachers are given dedicated time each week to participate in valuable trainings. After the initial PBIS training from NCDPI, there continued to be PBIS-based topics at staff meetings on a consistent basis for the three years of implementation.

Although PBIS is not always specifically used as a topic or an agenda line item, it seems that there is confusion among staff about PBIS Professional Development. According to meeting minutes and agendas, PBIS was a focal point of Professional Development days on a consistent basis. To ensure that staff and administration share a common language in using PBIS, this is an area that can be improved by specifically listing PBIS as a topic rather than “Effectively Following The ZECA Way.”

## **P = Process (Teacher Responses)**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the 11 staff members. The average time spent during the interviews was approximately 29 minutes with the shortest interview taking approximately 20 minutes and the longest taking approximately 45 minutes to complete. The teacher responses were collected through one on one interviews. All interviews were conducted in-person, with only the principle investigator and the study sample present as another precaution in maintaining anonymity to encourage honest responses. The questions were not provided ahead of the interview. Using an electronic voice recorder, the interviews were recorded then transcribed. The researcher read through the transcript and coded the statement with a topic description. Next the researcher reviewed the topics and categorized them into themes (see Table 5).

## **Theme Coding**

Staff responses were audio recorded, transcribed, then examined closely to discover if common themes are present (see Table 6 and Table 7). These tables show the most the most common themes from staff responses through the process of coding.

## **Significant Themes**

Conducting staff interviews was illuminating as several themes began to emerge. All of the teachers exhibited a firm grasp on the PBIS guiding theories and principles. It was also obvious from the staff responses that the staff understood the goal of PBIS, which as stated in Chapter 2, is to establish the “social culture and behavioral supports needed for all children in a school to achieve both social and academic success” (Kincaid & Horner, 2017, p. 99). The following sections illustrate the themes that have been identified as significant. The majority of responses represent a positive perception of PBIS, both its guiding principles and how it

Table 5

*Process Phase Coding Example*

Stakeholder Type/ID	Question 1a Initial PBIS Understanding/Academics Qualitative Data	Code/ Theme	Question 1b Current PBIS Implementation/Academics Qualitative Data	Code/ Theme
Teacher	“I felt as if it might improve student academic performance”.	Improve	“My students have shown enormous growth with PBIS”.	Growth

Table 6

*Themes Identified as Effective*

Theme	Occurrences in Responses
ZECA has seen an improvement in student behaviors with the implementation of PBIS.	16
Students at ZECA are given a safe and nurturing environment to learn.	12
The staff at ZECA are consistent in the use of PBIS as a means to deter negative behaviors and promote positive choices.	11
Since the implementation of PBIS at ZECA, student academic improvement has been observed from staff.	8
PBIS has been helpful in building positive relationships with students and staff at ZECA.	7

Table 7

*Themes Identified as Needing Improvement*

Theme	Occurrences in Responses
An increase in PBIS training and increased PBIS presence during professional development sessions is needed at ZECA.	7
PBIS at ZECA needs to be more effective with better strategies in place to support students with special needs.	5
There is an absence of the use of common language when referencing PBIS at ZECA.	4

currently looks at ZECA. There are some responses, however, that signify a need for improvement in using PBIS at ZECA.

### ***Student Behaviors***

All of the staff members agreed that PBIS can be beneficial and make a positive impact on student academic achievement and student attendance when it is implemented with fidelity to improve student behaviors. As one teacher responded, “you have to improve the behaviors first before the academics and attendance can improve.” The most common observable outcome from PBIS implementation according to staff was the improvement in student behaviors. All 11 (100%) teachers mentioned this as a benefit. One teacher stated: “There were definitely improvements in student behaviors because they learned that when they participated in positive actions, they were treated with positive feedback and rewards rather than negative consequences such as OSS.” Another teacher stated she: “has seen a major difference in student behaviors since the beginning of PBIS at ZECA where kids and the environment could sometimes be chaotic but now when anyone walks into a classroom, students follow directions, follow procedures, and are well-behaved.” This improvement in student behaviors also had a positive impact on other areas, including the other two focus areas of the study, academic achievement and attendance. As one teacher noted, “students who did not have as many behavior issues were more successful academically in her classroom.” Another teacher concluded, “student attendance got much better because with PBIS we were dealing with student behaviors more appropriately and more positively.”

### ***Learning Environment***

After interviewing staff and collecting their responses, 7 (64%) teachers responded that ZECA was a safe place to learn with an emphasis on meeting the mental, social, and emotional

needs of children to accompany their respective academic needs. “When students feel safe and don’t have to worry about their outer being, then they can focus on their inner being, which is what I want most in my classroom,” says one teacher. According to staff, this theme was immensely valuable as a measure of implementing PBIS with fidelity as all three of the focus areas of the study can be impacted. One teacher’s response summed up the importance of a positive learning environment by stating, “without the implementation of PBIS, kids wouldn’t feel safe in my classroom and then their attendance would decline, which would eventually have an effect on their academic achievement.”

### ***Consistency***

Another common theme shared by the majority of the staff at 64%, was that the successful implementation of PBIS at ZECA was due in large part to the overall consistency by the school staff. “I think we did a great job of being consistent at ZECA with PBIS from the top down,” responded one teacher. This consistency refers to several specific items named by staff members, including: rules and procedures; consequences; rewards; recognitions; language; structure; routine; expectations; and positivity. “You have to be consistent and make sure that students know that there are processes and procedures that are expected to be followed,” stated one teacher. The teacher continued with, “when we are consistent with our students and expectations, there will be fewer classroom disruptions, which helps students focus on classroom instruction and ultimately, help students to do better academically.”

### ***Student Growth***

“Academics have improved and will continue to improve as long as we remain consistent with our expectations and PBIS implementation,” according to one teacher’s response. This is the perception among 64% of the staff interviewed, that there has been clear student academic

growth and improvement. One teacher responded: “We saw academic improvement mainly because student behaviors improved.” The teacher continued, “when the student is in my class rather than the principal’s office or given OSS, they have a greater chance to improve academically.” Another teacher responded that, “students at ZECA are happy and much of their happiness is from the implementation of PBIS.” She continued to state, “when students are happy in the classroom, they are more likely to have an increase in academic success.”

As EOG data presented in this chapter illustrated, students have indeed met growth in each year of PBIS implementation. Something that should not be ignored, however, is the low overall EOG student proficiency. Despite the low objective data in this category from standardized testing scores, staff perceptions, conversely, note marked academic improvement overall. One teacher echoed the sentiments of some of the other teachers in stating, “I saw great academic improvement with students in my class and one of the biggest reasons for this improvement, I think, was the student relationships that I worked on building.”

### ***Relationships***

Six (55%) staff members reported an increase in positive student relationships due to PBIS implementation. As noted in Chapter 2 and in comparison, to the teacher’s responses, PBIS is a strategy designed to prevent negative student behaviors by having clear expectations for students that are taught, modeled, and reinforced with a foundation based on positive relationships with students using positive language (Scott et al., 2008).

Relationships, based on the teacher interviews and one teacher’s response, “is taking the time to get to know the student, the root cause of their behaviors, and genuinely showing students love.” The improved relationship building with students yielded other student improvements. Another teacher sums it up best by stating, “with our student population,



sometimes we may be the only ones who truly know how to effectively express love.” As one teacher stated, “most of the improvements in my classroom was because of the relationships that I worked so hard to build.” Another teacher not only sites student improvement but also points out the benefit and improvement for her. She states, “honestly, it helped me to improve when I focused on building student relationships.” She continued, “instead of immediately sending a student out of my class, I wanted to find out the root of the problem and work together figure out a solution.”

### ***Training***

Seven (64%) teachers responded that PBIS training is an area that could be improved. Five staff members were responded that they were trained at another school or were not teaching three years ago when PBIS was first introduced at ZECA. Two staff members were employed at ZECA, but did not participate in the initial PBIS training three years ago. The remaining four teachers were present and participated in the initial PBIS training, but felt they were not taught how to effectively use PBIS in the classroom. According to one teacher, “because we were not taught how to use PBIS effectively, we still have a lot of behavioral issues in the classroom.” Another teacher responds similarly, “the problem with PBIS here at ZECA is we were not really trained effectively because we were just told to go to a website and look it up.” This sentiment is shared and expanded in other responses that express a lack of quality in PBIS training. A reoccurring theme regarding PBIS training among staff responses was it should have been more in depth, more frequent, and included more resources for implementation. As one teacher puts it, “we were told to go visit the PBIS website for solutions to bad student behaviors and that was the extent of our training.” According to another teacher, “PBIS is a great initiative and it is one that

could be extremely valuable to ZECA, but because there hasn't been consistent training on PBIS and how to correctly use PBIS and its tiers, we still have several areas that could be improved."

### ***Exceptional Children (EC)***

A concern among six (55%) staff members was that students with special needs, specifically those with behavioral disorders, did not benefit from the implementation of PBIS. As one teacher states, "recently we began a school-wide weekly celebration for students who met a specific academic goal." The teacher continued, "this worked for a lot of the students and was a great motivation for them, unfortunately, there were some with IEP's and were special needs that did not meet their goal and were not invited to the celebration, which was more detrimental than beneficial to them." While PBIS is being used and it certainly appears to be helping in some aspects at ZECA, one staff member responds PBIS is not helpful for EC students. The teacher says, "for most students PBIS is a good thing for ZECA and has been an overall positive initiative but there are other students where PBIS does not seem to be the right answer for them because their disability causes them to act out."

### ***Common Language***

While consistency is considered a strength by many of the staff, the consistent use of common language, however, was voiced as a concern. Three (27%) teachers, specifically, felt using a common PBIS language was lacking. According to a staff member, "PBIS has not been as effective as it could be because we have not been speaking the same language and we need all staff to be on board." As explained in Chapter 2, there are several factors that contribute to the successful implementation of PBIS, including specifically, "building level administrative buy-in and effective communications" (Baule, 2020).

## **P = Product**

This chapter detailed the findings of the study using both quantitative and qualitative methods of research. Quantitative data demonstrated stability in student academic achievement with growth being met in each of the three years measured; a decrease in average number of students with OSS as a consequence from 11 to 6.9 within the three years of PBIS implementation; and an increase in monthly student attendance of 20% with a 75% monthly attendance rate in 2019-20 compared to a 55% monthly attendance rate in 2017-18. Qualitative data was extremely insightful as the staff perceptions of PBIS implementation at ZECA was mixed. While the majority of the responses were positive, the areas that were identified as needing improvement are tremendously important and can be vital in the success of students.

The final phase of the CIPP Model, Product, focuses on the findings of the study and will be detailed in the next chapter in the program evaluation report.

## **CHAPTER 5: PROGRAM EVALUATION REPORT**

This chapter is written in the format a program evaluator would report to the client. The client for this study is the Executive Director of ZECA.

### **Executive Summary**

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a multi-tiered framework utilized in over 26,000 schools across the United States, to create a school culture consisting of a positive learning environment and successful student (Sugai & Horner, 2020). This study sought to determine the effectiveness of PBIS at a North Carolina public charter school in regards to three major indicators: student attendance; student academic achievement; and student discipline. The rise of charter schools in both the US and NC is discussed along with charter school advocate and critic perceptions. To gain a greater understanding of the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of PBIS at this charter, many topics were detailed to mirror the charter's student population. At the time of the study, the study site was predominately African American and high poverty. Because of the predominate student population of the study's site, African American and high poverty student issues and concerns are discussed based on numerous educational theorist's ideas and their respective research. Determining the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of PBIS at the charter occurred through data collection procured through various PBIS documents from the three years at the charter, equating to the first year (2017-18) of PBIS implementation, the second year (2018-2019) of PBIS implementation, and the third year (2019-2020) of PBIS implementation. The three years of data included student proficiency on NC End of Grade (EOG) assessments, student suspension data, and student attendance rates. Qualitative data were obtained from charter school staff responses of semi-structured interview questions.

The evaluation of this this program was completed with the CIPP (Context; Input; Process; and Product) method. The CIPP method of program evaluation yielded the findings to be presented to the charter school's executive director with recommendations for improvement. The program evaluation was favorable overall in the fidelity of PBIS implementation and generated the following findings: academic growth in each of the three years of PBIS implementation; a decrease in student short-term suspensions in each of the three years of PBIS implementation; and a steady and remarkable increase in student attendance rate in each of the three years of PBIS implementation.

As a response to the executive director of ZECA's request to evaluate the implementation of PBIS at her charter, both quantitative and qualitative data was gathered and analyzed. This report details the findings from the program evaluation, the strengths of PBIS at ZECA, the opportunities for improvement of PBIS at ZECA and the recommendations for improvement.

### **Purpose of the Evaluation**

The purpose of this evaluation was to determine the effectiveness of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) at Zero to Eighteen Concepts Academy (ZECA), a public charter school in Eastern North Carolina. The executive director, Ms. Owens-Howard, expressed a need to evaluate PBIS as she was concerned that it had not been implemented by teachers at ZECA with fidelity. She wanted to know what had been effective and what were areas for improvement. This program evaluation provided evidence on PBIS at ZECA utilizing data from student suspensions, student attendance, and overall student academic performance.

To address this purpose, qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviews and document analysis accompanied with quantitative data from student EOG assessments, attendance data, and student suspensions were utilized. This data assisted in determining the

areas of PBIS at ZECA that have been successful and the areas that can be improved. Both the strengths of PBIS at ZECA and the opportunities for improvement of PBIS at ZECA are included in this program evaluation report.

### **Focus of the Evaluation**

This program evaluation focused on how PBIS has impacted the following three student indicators: academic achievement, behavior, and attendance. The following evaluation questions served as the basis of data collection:

- Evaluation Question 1: How has PBIS impacted student academic achievement?
- Evaluation Question 2: How has PBIS impacted student behaviors?
- Evaluation Question 3: How has PBIS impacted student absenteeism?

### **Comparisons with Literature Review**

Many charter schools offer a setting for students that combine academics with a heightened focus on mental and behavioral health, which is not typically the case within traditional public schools (Carver & Lewis, 2010). This statement certainly rings true of the charter school this study takes place, ZECA School of the Arts and Technology. When the executive director, Stacey Owens-Howard, opened the charter in 2013, her primary goal was to exhaust all of her resources, time, and energy into establishing a school where focus would lie on ensuring the mental, social, emotional, and behavioral well-being of children. To make certain her vision would become a reality, a variety of programs and initiatives would have to be implemented. One such initiative, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), has just completed its third year of implementation at ZECA.

ZECA came equipped with a vision of a school environment where children feel safe, understood, and loved. To accomplish the goal of seeing students flourish beyond academics, it

was imperative that expectations were clear and forthright. This vision aligned nicely with the principles and philosophies of those responsible for the creation of PBIS as it was designed to utilize strategies to prevent negative student behaviors by having clear expectations for students that are taught, modeled, and reinforced with a foundation based on positive relationships with students using positive language (Scott et al., 2008).

During the literature review, research and data were plentiful from schools throughout the country where PBIS was implemented to effectively address student discipline. There was also data and research to support the assertion that PBIS can be ineffective, especially when not implemented with fidelity. The completed evaluation indicated that ZECA implemented PBIS with fidelity. The evaluation findings indicated that effective use of PBIS led to an increase in academic achievement, improvement in student discipline, and an increase in student attendance rate. These findings are corroborated by the use of PBIS as an evidence-based strategy leading to a reduction in out of school suspensions and office discipline referrals as well as improvements in academic achievement, school climate, and safety are more likely to occur (Couvillon et al., 2010). There are areas that can be improved and as a result of these recommendations for improvement, tremendous success for ZECA is obtainable.

While the three focus areas of this evaluation were all found to be improved due to fidelity in PBIS implementation at ZECA, there are still concerns and if addressed effectively, ZECA can achieve tremendous success. In most cases where PBIS implementation has been deemed successful, a PBIS leadership team was established consisting of teachers, counselors, administration, and other school staff with consistent meetings, communication, and thorough planning (Gagnon et al., 2020). ZECA did not implement PBIS with fidelity in establishing a

proper PBIS leadership team, which could have vastly increased the level of success experienced.

ZECA also did not implement PBIS with fidelity in terms of consistent PBIS meetings and PBIS meetings with intentional planning and execution of PBIS strategies for students. It is vital for the PBIS leadership team to not only meet consistently, but with purpose, which should include agenda items consisting of analyzing student behavioral concerns, suspension data, student management plans, providing continuous staff trainings and support, and continuing to monitor the integrity of PBIS implementation (Coffey & Horner, 2012; McIntosh, Kim, et al., 2014). When comparing qualitative data from this study to this statement from Chapter 2, ZECA could undoubtedly improve. During the staff interviews, a lack of consistency in PBIS trainings was commonly mentioned. Each staff member remembered vividly the initial training but any trainings after this were sporadic and unremarkable at best. This means improvement is needed in the area of PBIS Training.

Some would consider students at ZECA meeting overall student academic growth in each of the three years of PBIS implementation as a success, others would argue that the very low overall student EOG proficiency in each of the three years of PBIS implementation would consider PBIS at ZECA as unsuccessful. The evaluation in this study had a specific goal of comparing EOG student proficiency data for the three years of PBIS implementation at ZECA and therefore the assertions are limited to the data collected for these specific purposes. As PBIS continues to garner positive testimonies and data supporting its implementation with regard to student discipline, research on academic achievement credited from the effective use of PIBS, is not as prevalent (James et al., 2019).



As stated in Chapter 2, many high poverty schools are at a disadvantage due to commonly having less qualified teachers and limited resources (staff professional development, money, time, etc.) that are needed to sustain PBIS and ensure its fidelity (Mason-Williams, 2015). ZECA, a high poverty school, falls victim to these challenges as well. A high teacher turnover rate each year and limited in resources have plagued ZECA in each of the three years of PBIS implementation. These should be noted as potential contributing factors when analyzing some of the unflattering data but also should not be used as an excuse.

## **Evaluation Findings**

### **Quantitative**

#### ***Evaluation Question 1: How has PBIS Impacted Student Academic Achievement?***

Academic growth occurred in each year since the implementation of PBIS (see Figure 4). Since the last school year where PBIS was not used at the charter was 2016-17, this NC EOG data will be used as our baseline for comparing the first full year with PBIS implementation versus the last full year without PBIS. The overall student NC EOG proficiency in the 2017-18 school year was 28.1% and earned the “Met Growth” distinction. This is much improved compared to the 22.5% overall student NC EOG proficiency earned in the 2016-17 school year. The overall student EOG proficiency in the 2018-19 school year saw stabilization in overall student NC EOG proficiency at 28.1% but did achieve the “Met Growth” distinction once again. Due to the emergence of COVID-19, the 2019-20 school year forced students of the charter to remotely finish the year from March 2020 to June 2020. As a result, NC EOG data could not be collected, analyzed, and compared to the previous two years of PBIS implementation. Knowing this, we are left with only two years of NC EOG data to determine the impact of PBIS on student academic achievement. In these two years, however, an increase in overall student proficiency

and student growth points to PBIS as contributing to a positive impact on student academic achievement. Although there continues to be student growth, overall NC EOG scores are well below the state average.

***Evaluation Question 2: How has PBIS Impacted Student Behaviors?***

A decrease in student short-term suspensions occurred in each of the three years of PBIS implementation at this charter (see Figure 5). In 2017-18, a total of 99 out-of-school suspensions were given to students as a consequence of negative student behaviors. In 2018-19, the number of out-of-school suspensions as a result of negative student behavior, decreased to 78. The 2019-20 school year totaled 48 out-of-school suspensions before the COVID-19 outbreak. A decrease of out-of-school suspensions occurred in each of the three years of PBIS implementation but due to the traditional learning environment being modified to a remote learning setting in 2019-20, we will analyze suspensions using a monthly average.

In 2017-18, students were given out-of-school suspension at a rate of 11 per month. In 2018-19, there was a slight decrease in out-of-school suspensions per month at 8.7 per month. The 2019-20 school year experienced its lowest monthly average of student out-of-school suspensions at 6.9 per month. Figure 5 demonstrates the sharp decline in the average number of out-of-school suspensions students were given per month in the three years of PBIS implementation. The three-year rate of student out-of-school suspensions improved with each new year, solidifying PBIS as a key component in reducing the number of out-of-school suspensions as a consequence for negative student behaviors.

### ***Evaluation Question 3: How has PBIS Impacted Student Absenteeism?***

Data for average daily student attendance was obtained through PowerSchool, the official student information system (SIS) of public and charter schools in NC (see Figure 6). In the three years of PBIS implementation at the charter, a steady and remarkable increase in student absenteeism has been achieved. At the end of the 2017-18 school year, the average daily student attendance rate was 55%. The following year, the 2018-19 school year, there was an improvement in average daily student attendance with an average daily student attendance rate of 62%. In the third year of PBIS implementation, the charter experienced its highest average daily student attendance rate in the school's history, concluding at 75%. It should be noted that only the months students were in school full time and before the COVID-19 pandemic, were used in calculating the attendance averages to maintain validity. The three years of PBIS implementation saw an astounding 20% increase in daily student attendance as illustrated in Figure 8. This stark increase in average daily student attendance can safely assert PBIS as a key factor in improving student absenteeism.

### **Qualitative**

Staff responses were audio recorded, transcribed, then examined closely to discover if common themes are present (see Table 8 and Table 9). These tables show the most common themes from staff responses through the process of coding.

### **Strengths and Opportunities for Improvement**

ZECA is a truly unique place and offers a nurturing, positive, and safe environment for students to learn. Since PBIS was first introduced at ZECA there have been several initiatives that can be attributed to overall student improvement. There are also areas that can serve as an excellent

Table 8

*Themes Identified as Effective*

Theme	Occurrences in Responses
ZECA has seen an improvement in student behaviors with the implementation of PBIS.	16
Students at ZECA are given a safe and nurturing environment to learn.	12
The staff at ZECA are consistent in the use of PBIS as a means to deter negative behaviors and promote positive choices.	11
Since the implementation of PBIS at ZECA, student academic improvement has been observed from staff.	8
PBIS has been helpful in building positive relationships with students and staff at ZECA.	7

Table 9

*Themes Identified as Needing Improvement*

Theme	Occurrences in Responses
An increase in PBIS training and increased PBIS presence during professional development sessions is needed at ZECA.	7
PBIS at ZECA needs to be more effective with better strategies in place to support students with special needs.	5
There is an absence of the use of common language when referencing PBIS at ZECA.	4

opportunity to continue to improve. We will begin with the areas we determined as certain strengths of ZECA and its implementation of PBIS.

ZECA makes every effort to ensure that the students have the opportunity to learn in a nurturing, positive, and safe environment. The teacher responses echo this as a strength of the school, which is one of the themes to why teachers feel student attendance has increased. This is made possible by setting expectations for students by giving them structure and the procedures necessary to achieve success. The ZECA Way and The ZECA 10 are both seemingly effective as teachers and most importantly, students, are well aware of both.

Students are celebrated consistently for a variety of achievements. Students are recognized as examples, for attendance, good character, teamwork, academic achievement, and academic growth. The student recognition occurs in the classroom, school-wide, and throughout the community effectively through the utilization of social media outlets Facebook and Instagram.

### **Strengths of PBIS at ZECA**

According to the program evaluation, the following have been determined as “Strengths of PBIS at ZECA”:

1. Although the NC School Report grade for ZECA is not ideal and is an area that surely needs attention, earning academic growth in each of the three years PBIS has been implemented at ZECA is an accomplishment and one that deserves recognition as a strength.
2. The monthly average number of students receiving OSS as a consequence for student behaviors has decreased in each of the three years of PBIS implementation at ZECA. From a monthly average of 11 students receiving OSS during the first year of PBIS

- implementation at ZECA to a monthly average of less than 7 students receiving OSS in its third year, PBIS can be considered as a contributing factor in this sharp decline.
3. A staggering 20% increase in monthly student attendance rate has occurred in the three years of PBIS implementation at ZECA from 55% to 75%. There was an increase in the second year of PBIS implementation as well improving from 55% to 62%.
  4. A cornerstone of PBIS is the creation of a positive environment conducive of learning. A key component of the successful PBIS implementation at ZECA according to staff members was offering students a learning environment where they consistently feel safe, loved, and are given every opportunity possible to help them grow. ZECA maintains a very positive and nurturing environment where the overwhelming impression from students is that of happiness and excitement.
  5. Celebrating student success is a strength of ZECA as numerous events, ceremonies, and recognitions are held consistently throughout the school year. These events, according to staff, are exciting, energetic, positive, and encouraging. Staff responses indicate that celebrating student success using these methods contributes greatly to the student improvement and growth observed during the three years of PBIS implementation at ZECA.

### **Opportunities for Improvement of PBIS at ZECA**

According to the program evaluation, the following have been determined as Opportunities for Improvement of PBIS at ZECA”:

1. Although in the three years of PBIS implementation at ZECA students have earned “met growth” status, the school performance grade remains very low. In each of the

three years, ZECA has yet to achieve a grade higher than “F” on the annual NC DPI School Report Card.

2. PBIS trainings and other PBIS professional development opportunities have been inconsistent and based on staff responses, have not been frequent enough or in depth enough to implement PBIS with fidelity.
3. While ZECA celebrates its students and staff consistently, it is a common perception among staff that exceptional needs students are often excluded during recognitions or PBIS-based activities. To ensure that every ZECA student is given an equal opportunity to improve and see benefit from PBIS at ZECA, it is recommended that students can be recognized, rewarded, and celebrated based on a wide-array of achievements and not solely academic-based.
4. ZECA incorporates PBIS through a number of initiatives, programs, procedures, and expectations. One of the most prominent of these can be found throughout campus in the form of posters describing “The ZECA Way.” The ZECA Way and the message it provides students is not the one of the opportunities for improvement but there is a clear disconnect with common language as several staff members in speaking about The ZECA Way did not associate this with PBIS. Sharing a common language and making certain that staff, students, parents, and all other school stakeholders understand the connections between PBIS and the various initiatives PBIS has spawned throughout campus.
5. Teacher/staff turnover is a chief area for concern at ZECA. Of the 11 staff interviewed to obtain the qualitative data, only 6 were employed at ZECA during the



initial, first year of PBIS implementation at ZECA. Consistency and stability among staff are two key factors when measuring a school's fidelity of PBIS implementation.

### **Recommendations for Improvement**

According to the program evaluation, the following have been determined as

“Recommendations for Improvement”:

1. *Implement a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) to accompany the PBIS implementation.* MTSS is a framework that utilizes various data sets, systems, and practices to enhance student's academic and behavioral growth and achievement (NCDPI, 2020).
2. *Develop a PBIS Leadership Team consisting of, at the least, administration, teachers, and EC specialists.* In most cases where PBIS implementation have been deemed successful, a PBIS leadership team was established consisting of teachers, counselors, administration, and other school staff with consistent meetings, communication, and thorough planning (Gagnon et al., 2020).
3. *Emphasize the importance of the ZECA PBIS Leadership Team by ensuring the ZECA PBIS Leadership Team meets at least once per month with a purposeful agenda in place and with a common goal of determining strategies as a group to help students succeed.* It is vital for the PBIS leadership team to not only meet consistently, but with purpose, which should include agenda items consisting of analyzing student behavioral concerns, suspension data, student management plans, providing continuous staff trainings and support, and continuing to monitor the integrity of PBIS implementation (Coffey & Horner, 2012; McIntosh, Kim, et al., 2014).

4. *Achieve PBIS staff buy-in and staff capacity to implement PBIS with fidelity by ensuring PBIS information, resources, support, trainings, and ZECA PBIS Leadership Team updates are delivered to staff at least once per month during the weekly Professional Development day. To effectively establish the positive environment necessary for students to achieve success in schools using PBIS, school level capacity in the form of staff trainings, ongoing support for teachers, consistency in discipline, clear delivery of expectations, targeted support, and consistent modeling from teachers and other school staff is vital (Lewis et al., 2010).*

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## APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY  
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board  
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building- Mail Stop 682  
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834  
Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284 ·  
[rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/](http://rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/)

### Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB  
To: [Christopher Meadows](#)  
CC: [Marjorie Ringler](#)  
Date: 8/19/2020  
Re: [UMCIRB 20-001546](#)  
PBIS AT A NC CHARTER SCHOOL

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 8/19/2020. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 2b & 4b.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

Document	Description
Chris Meadows Dissertation Proposal (Revision)(0.02)	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Christopher Meadows Participant Consent (Revised)(0.03)	Consent Forms
Christopher Meadows PBIS at ZECA Interview Questions (0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Interview Consent Letter (Revised)(0.03)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
PBIS at ZECA Interview Questions (0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.



**APPENDIX B: CONTEXT EVALUATION QUESTIONS (EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR)**

1. When you were first introduced to PBIS, what was your understanding on how its implementation could improve academic achievement at ZECA?
2. When you were first introduced to PBIS, what was your understanding on how its implementation could improve student behaviors at ZECA?
3. When you were first introduced to PBIS, what was your understanding on how its implementation could increase student absenteeism?

**APPENDIX C: INPUT EVALUATION QUESTIONS (EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR)**

1. How much funding (if any) is allocated for PBIS training in years 2017-18, 2018-19, and 2019-20?
2. How did you plan and execute the professional development training sessions for staff on PBIS before (2017-18), during (2018-19), and at the time of the study (2019-20)?
3. Describe any other resources not asked about that were needed during the initial implementation of PBIS?

#### **APPENDIX D: PROCESS EVALUATION QUESTIONS (TEACHERS)**

1. When you were first introduced to PBIS, what was your understanding on how its implementation in your classroom could improve academic achievement? How does the implementation PBIS look currently in your classroom?
2. When you were first introduced to PBIS, what was your understanding on how its implementation in your class could improve student behaviors? How does the implementation PBIS look currently in your classroom?
3. When you were first introduced to PBIS, what was your understanding on how its implementation in your class could improve student absenteeism? How does the implementation PBIS look currently in your classroom?

