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## Teacher-Student Relationships and Their Effects on School Culture

Craig Curtis

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DISSERTATION TITLE: TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS  
AND THEIR EFFECTS ON SCHOOL CULTURE

Craig Curtis

National Louis University Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements of  
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

National College of Education

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TITLE: TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS  
AND THEIR EFFECTS ON SCHOOL CULTURE

Dissertation Hearing

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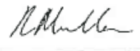
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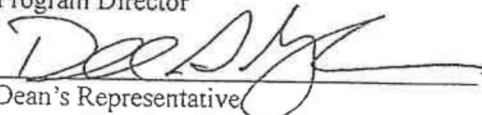
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**Abstract**

Teacher-student relationships are an important part of every school's culture. This study used surveys and interviews to find to what extent teacher-student relationships impact school culture. In the end, research found that teacher-student relationships have a significant impact on school culture and an action plan and recommendations were suggested for the school's continued growth and improvement in the area of school culture with a focus on teacher-student relationships.

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I would also like to show my gratitude to the staff, students, parents, and community members in my school district for their support during my graduate work. Your willingness to participate throughout the process of my research, support me through my work, and be open to new things makes me proud to be a part of our learning community. Thank you for your continued support!

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## Design

### Introduction

Teachers and students are together for approximately six hours per day for five days per week during the school year. Because of this, there is no doubt the amount of time teachers and students spend together creates a powerful bond. “Positive and supportive relationships with teachers and peers promote an adolescent’s sense of school belonging, which engender the will to participate cooperatively in classroom and school activities” (Uslu & Gizir, 2017, p. 64). This study seeks to understand the relationships between staff members and students through a school-wide system of positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS). A more in-depth look into the program will help determine its effectiveness by analyzing students’ motivation. The study will determine whether a school-wide PBIS system supports the overall school culture. The researcher will use data to show whether children feel they are active members of the school’s process. The study will also determine to what degree staff members think the PBIS program supports the overall school culture.

School District X is located in a small, suburban community outside of Chicago, Illinois. The district is comprised of portions of four villages and enrolls early childhood through eighth-grade students. The community has two high schools within its boundaries, Washington High School and Lincoln High School. Both are members of High School District X. School District X’s mission is “Achieving excellence in learning through an equitable education for all.” There were 1,587 students enrolled in School District X during the 2015-2016 school year. As of the 2015-16 school year, the district’s population had continued to trend upward, as it had for the previous five years. Approximately sixty-six percent of the student population was white,

twenty-one percent Hispanic, nine percent Asian, two percent black, and two percent represented other ethnicities. Twenty-four percent of students came from low-income homes, twelve percent had individualized education plans (IEP's), and twenty-four percent of students in the district were English learners (Illinois State Board of Education, 2015).

In the 2011-2012 school year, School District X shifted its school format to a grade-level centers (GRC's) approach. In prior years, all buildings, except the middle school, housed students from early childhood through fifth grade. The new plan included redefining the grade levels of all buildings except the middle school. One building would house students from pre-kindergarten through first grade. Abraham Lincoln Elementary School would now accommodate second and third-grade students exclusively, and another building would only house fourth and fifth-grade students. As a part of these changes, the district also brought forth a similar school-wide behavioral management system, whose beliefs and expectations were shared district-wide. These systems were the start of School District X's positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) initiative. All four schools within the district established their own distinct PBIS program around common expectations. However, they each used their unique reward system and motivators appropriate for their specific-aged students. The changes took some time for the educators within the district to grasp but eventually brought some long-needed culture between schools within the district.

This study's focus is Abraham Lincoln Elementary School, which houses 380 second and third-grade students. Students come from four of the surrounding suburbs. Abraham Lincoln Elementary School offers a unique educational experience designed to meet students' academic, social, and emotional needs. Lincoln School's mission is "Empowering children to achieve excellence." Approximately sixty-nine percent of the student population at Lincoln School was

white, twenty-one percent Hispanic, seven percent Asian, two percent black, and one percent represented other ethnicities. Twenty-two percent of students at the school came from low-income homes. Ten percent of students had individualized education plans, and thirty-six percent of students at Abraham Lincoln School were English learners (Illinois State Board of Education, 2015).

### **Purpose**

A successful management system, such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), is advantageous for a school to introduce, model, and reinforce positive social behavior to children. It is an integral part of a student's educational experience. Teaching behavioral expectations and rewarding students for following them is a much more positive approach than waiting for misbehavior to occur before responding. The purpose of school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports is to establish a culture in which appropriate behavior is the norm.

More broadly, PBIS was first developed in the 1980's when a need arose for improved implementation and effectiveness working with students diagnosed with behavior disorders. In direct response, researchers at the University of Oregon began studies on the topic and theorized that increased focus should be placed on prevention, research-based practices, data-based decision-making, school-wide systems, explicit social skills instruction, team-based implementation and professional development, and student outcomes. Then, through the 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a grant was established to create a national center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. Due to the work done during the 1980's, other universities also competed to establish the original center, including the Universities of Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, Oregon, and South Florida (National Technical

Assistance Center, 2013). More specifically, there are two specific researchers from the University of Oregon who are credited with being the founders of PBIS. During the late 1990s, George Sugai and Rob Horner, created the Effective Behavior Supports (EBS) program, which has now come to be termed Positive Behavioral Interventions and Strategies (PBIS) (Safe and Civil Schools, 2019).

A Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports system was initiated at Abraham Lincoln School for the 2011-2012 school year and has consistently been in place with some minor adjustments to the program all the way until the start of the program evaluation for the purpose of research in 2017-18. Before the 2011-2012 school year, behavior reports had been on the rise and there was inconsistency in discipline expectations between school leaders and teachers. Therefore, Abraham Lincoln School established the PBIS Program based upon the belief that students respond better to expectations outlined clearly and positively. Children who thrive typically cultivate positive relationships with parents, peers, and teachers (Wentzel, 1998). “PBIS is a framework that helps schools decide how to work as a community, both by means of learning environment and student behavior” (Baker and Ryan, 2014, p. 9). Additionally, PBIS enhances schools, families, and communities’ capacity to design effective environments that improve the link between research-validated practices and the environments in which teaching and learning occur (Baker and Ryan, 2014).

The following describes the PBIS Program at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School between the years of implementation in the 2011-12 school year and the time of the start of the program evaluation for the purpose of research in 2017-18. The PBIS Program at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School is a school-wide support system that includes proactive strategies for defining, teaching, and supporting appropriate student behaviors to create positive school



environments. The PBIS Program emphasizes positive behavioral support for all students by setting forth expectations in all classroom and non-classroom settings. Specifically, these settings include classrooms, cafeteria, bathrooms, tech areas, hallways, the playground, and buses.

Perhaps, the most crucial piece of a successful behavioral system is the communication of clear school-wide expectations. At Abraham Lincoln School, this communication for students occurs at least twice per school year. On the first few days of school and near the halfway point in the year, Lincoln staff members host grade level “station rotations” at designated areas around the building. Areas around the building include bathrooms, buses, cafeteria, classrooms, hallways, playgrounds, and tech areas (School District X, 2014). At each station, a staff member is responsible for leading students through the expectations in each setting. For example, bus expectations include staying seated, keeping hands and feet to yourself, taking care of belongings, and following the bus driver's directions. The station rotations include role play, student question and answer sessions, and much more to ensure student involvement and engagement. During station rotations, students often receive their first PBIS tickets of the school year. Both students and staff must buy into the expectations set forth at “station rotations” for Abraham Lincoln School to have a successful year.

Staff members at Abraham Lincoln School reward students regularly for exhibiting positive expectations throughout the building. These tickets, referred to as PBIS tickets, can be disbursed if a child is tiptoeing down the hall, demonstrating strong reading class effort, or supporting a friend in need. A student can never be quite sure when a PBIS ticket is headed in his direction! When a PBIS ticket is handed out, staff members also use this opportunity to talk about the specific behavior that resulted in receiving the reward. It is important for students to receive immediate feedback for the positive expectations they are exhibiting.

All students have a chance to earn additional rewards weekly. Each Thursday beginning in early October, students have the opportunity to trade ten PBIS tickets for a collectible trading card from their favorite staff member. The trading cards allow students to catch a unique glimpse of staff members' lives and interests outside of school and provide an additional relationship link between students and staff members school-wide. Every adult within the building has a trading card that represents them. Trading card representatives include teachers, classroom assistants, administrative assistants, nurses, custodians, the principal, and even the school mascot. In addition to the bonding experience made through the trading card itself, another significant informal opportunity arises. Through this activity, all staff members and students have a chance to meet one another and establish a link they otherwise would not have created. Plus, students have an additional reinforcement to pump them up. Therefore, trading cards at Lincoln Elementary provide an extrinsic and intrinsic reward to students. The extrinsic reward is in the trading card itself. In contrast, the intrinsic reward is through the confidence boost and positive relationship formed with staff members in the building.

Abraham Lincoln School also offers an additional extrinsic, weekly prize in the form of a raffle. Each Friday, approximately 30 students are chosen randomly to be PBIS raffle winners. The office announces student names over the intercom, and the students are called down to the office to select a prize from the Lincoln PBIS store. During announcements, there is a great deal more occurring around the school to reinforce teacher-student relationships and build the school culture. Throughout announcements, classmates are cheering for their friends, both in their classroom and across the school. Available teachers are lining the hallways, congratulating students as they enter the halls, excited to be one of this week's winners. The principal and office staff are awaiting students in the office for a group photo, Twitter opportunity, congratulating

students on a job well done, and reinforcing school-wide expectations. At this time general feedback and praise are also provided. Because there is more time between the reward itself and the behavior that was exhibited, feedback is usually more about the key values of being respectful, responsible, and safe instead of the specific behaviors that were exhibited when the tickets were originally rewarded. The PBIS program is designed as a way to build school culture through teacher-student relationships.

The final sources of rewards for students during the school year at Abraham Lincoln School are the monthly celebrations. These events reward students for positive behaviors and decisions they have exhibited throughout the prior month. Some examples of past celebrations are the Kick-Off Pep Rally, Tug of Strength Competition, and March Madness Basketball Celebration. Both students and staff members participate in these activities to create a regular monthly reward for students and establish relationships between students and staff. The celebrations allow individuals involved to see that learning can be fun for all, while also rewarding everyone for their hard work in following our expectations. During celebrations, students meet staff members they may not otherwise have known. It is also a time to review expectations with students for the next month's celebrations and reinforce positive choices. These celebrations are something the entire school looks forward to from month to month.

Between implementation in 2011-12 and 2017, Lincoln Elementary has made several alterations to update its station rotations format. This includes locations of the stations and moving them from hallways to classrooms and at times even creating video formats. The school has also made changes each year to the celebrations chosen to ensure students and staff are not continuously seeing all of the same celebrations annually. Additionally, when it comes to the behavior management side of PBIS, the school has also transferred from a paper sheet that we

made copies of to a 3-carbon copy form to a Google Form that is linked to an email notification to parents. These small changes to our PBIS system have helped to make it more effective over the years.

“School-wide positive behavior interventions and supports is a systems approach to establishing the social culture and behavioral supports needed for all children in a school to achieve both social and academic success” (Horner, Sugai, & Lewis, 2015, p. 1). The focus is on making and sustaining Tier 1 (universal) supports, Tier 2 (targeted) supports, and Tier 3 (individual) supports systems that improve lifestyle results (personal, health, social, family, work, recreation) for all children by making targeted behaviors less relevant, and desired behavior more functional. The purpose of school-wide PBIS is to establish a climate in which appropriate behavior is the norm (Horner, Sugai, & Lewis, 2015). For example, by targeting and emphasizing specific behaviors, PBIS works to alleviate other targeted behaviors.

The PBIS Program at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School needs evaluation because it has been several years since the program has been formally reviewed and the staff or leadership team has been surveyed regarding the program’s effectiveness. Additionally, based upon the 5Essentials survey data results, it has become apparent that the school climate at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School has diminished in recent years. Schools need to have a positive and safe culture in order for student learning to thrive. A positive and safe culture is developed through positive relationships. Teacher-student relationships are impacted by teacher-principal relationships, teacher-teacher relationships, and teacher-district administrator relationships. The 5Essentials School Reports for the State of Illinois incorporate 20 years of research on improving schools. These reports’ raw data include a comprehensive core of more than 80 student questions and 150 teacher questions compiled into 22 school climate measures and practice formed into

five essentials. As measured by the Illinois 5Essentials Survey, those five essentials are leading indicators of school improvement. The power of 5Essentials comes from their prediction of school success, the intuitiveness of the overall framework components (Instruction, Environment, Leaders, Teachers, and Families), and the survey measures’ reliability (The University of Chicago, 2017). Based on 2017 5Essentials data, Lincoln School scored low in two key areas asked of teachers. Abraham Lincoln School scored a 45 out of 100 in “teacher-principal trust” compared with similar schools that scored a 54 out of 100 (University of Chicago, 2017). The questions in this survey are asked only of certified teachers within the staff. The survey is not administered to non-certified staff members or administrators.

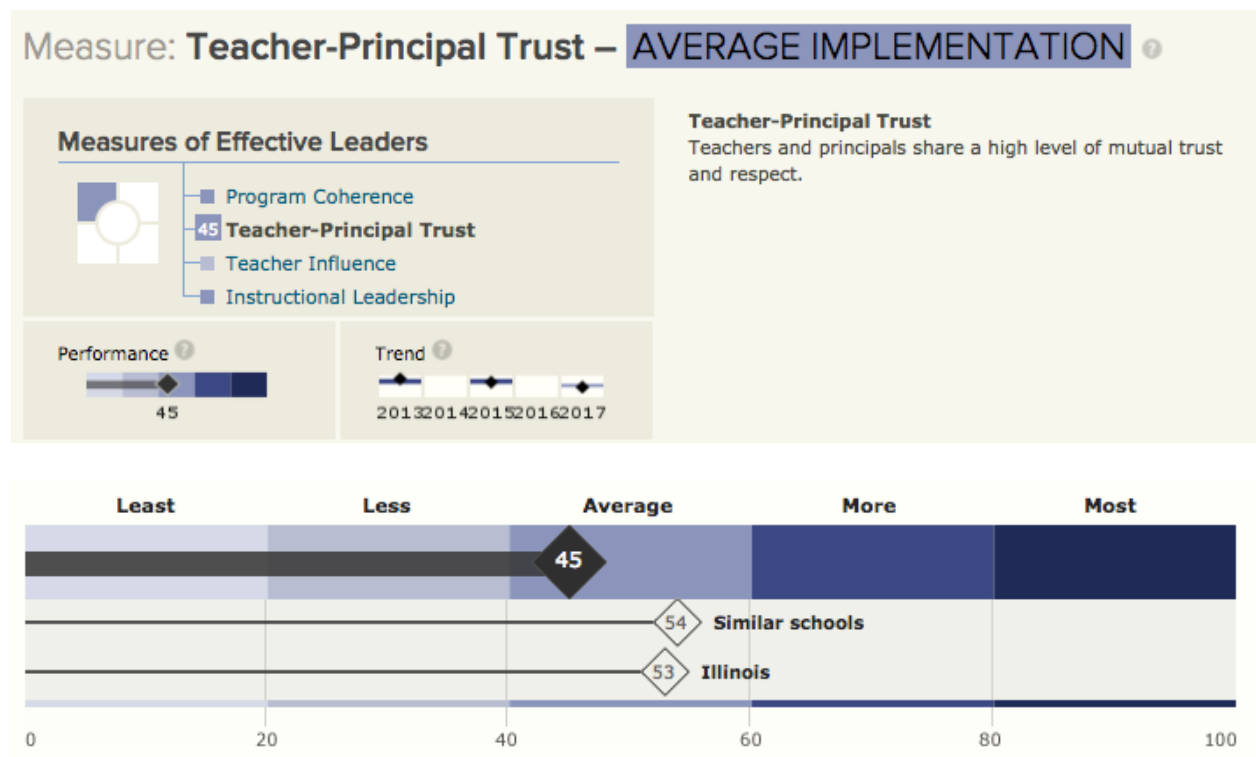


Figure 1. *Teacher-Principal Trust Measure*. This figure demonstrates the relationship between Abraham Lincoln School, similar schools, and other schools within the state of Illinois based upon results from the 2017 5Essentials survey.

On another question asked of teachers, Abraham Lincoln School scored a 42 out of 100 in “teacher-teacher trust” compared with similar schools that scored a 57 out of 100 (University of Chicago, 2017). Once again, this data does not include the perception of administration or non-certified staff members.

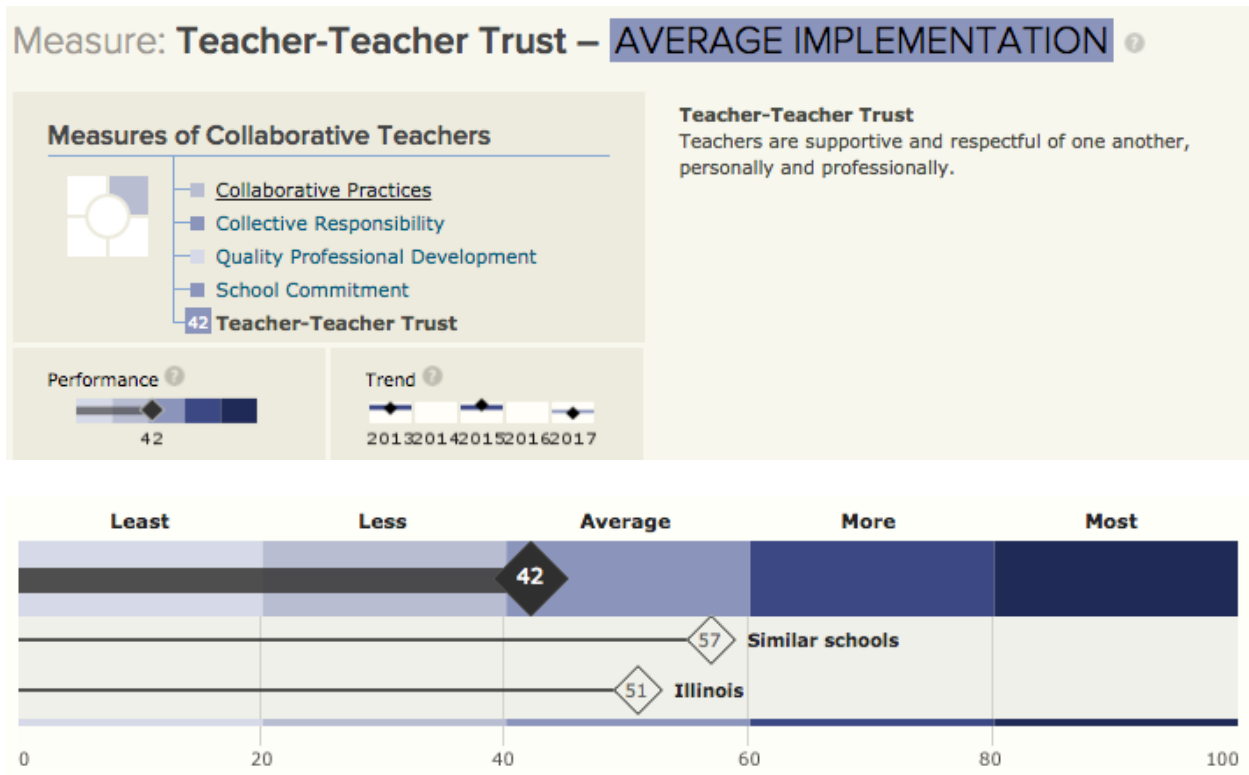


Figure 2. *Teacher-Teacher Trust Measure*. This figure demonstrates the relationship between Abraham Lincoln School, similar schools, and other schools within the state of Illinois based upon results from the 2017 5Essentials survey.

The two areas of the 5Essentials Survey highlighted above are pertinent to setting a baseline for the study because they are the closest dataset available to show the current standing of relationships within the building prior to research. Due to the ages of children within Lincoln Elementary School, the 5essentials Survey is not administered to students and data is, therefore, not available for Student-Teacher Trust. I believe the data made available above is a reflection of

the school's overall culture and should be treated as such. As a result of the evaluation, I plan to determine the program's effectiveness based on its original goals.

### **Rationale**

School should be viewed as an engaging, supportive, and safe place by all stakeholders for learning to occur. At Abraham Lincoln Elementary School, the PBIS program is the glue that holds the school together. It is the one piece of Lincoln School that is identified as school-wide, used in every classroom, and known by all stakeholders. Thus, when one part of the program is not meeting its goal or objective, the rest of the school feels the effects. For example, the results of the previously shared 5Essentials Survey in Figures 1 and 2 show a need for improvement in staff relationships. This is an area that could very well have an impact on the rest of the school. Unhappy staff members could very easily have a negative impact on student success. Being a Lincoln Lion means being safe, respectful, and responsible - the keys to the PBIS program. Because it is one of the essential components to the school's overall success, it is necessary to analyze the PBIS program's effectiveness to truly gauge the school's overall climate.

By evaluating the PBIS program at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School and sharing the analysis, the entire educational community will learn the value of a successful PBIS system. During my time at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School, I have seen firsthand the PBIS program assist in bridging relationships between students and teachers school-wide. For many years, I have believed it to be the driving force in making the school an exciting place for learning. Because of my belief that relationships are the foundation for learning, I want to ensure the PBIS program's longevity as long as it meets the learners' needs and successfully impacts teacher-student relationships. However, if the PBIS program no longer meets the school's needs or requires adjustments, I would like to make the appropriate accommodations and improve

teacher-student relationships and school culture as a whole. In the end, the results of this study will benefit others in education who are looking to improve upon making teacher-student connections as well.

### **Goals**

This program evaluation aims to determine the Abraham Lincoln PBIS program's overall effectiveness by analyzing whether students and teachers are motivated by the program. During the assessment, I will also investigate whether staff members feel data supports the overall decision-making process and whether individuals feel the program strengthens teacher-student relationships. Through these goals, I will be sharing information about the effectiveness of the PBIS program so that the school can work to improve instruction. By guaranteeing the PBIS system at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School is being implemented to the best of the staff's ability, the school will free up some of the time currently spent on discipline concerns and replace it with quality instruction. Additionally, the school's overall culture can only stand to improve from increased buy-in from all stakeholders. At the end of this study, I will target specific areas needing improvement in the PBIS program at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School. I will create a plan to improve the program, implement the project, and strengthen overall relationships between staff members and students to enhance the environment for student learning.

### **Research Questions**

During this evaluation, the primary question driving the research was: To what extent do teacher-student relationships impact school climate at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School?

Some secondary questions investigated in the study were:

- What impact does a school's PBIS program play in school culture?



- To what extent do teacher-student relationships impact student motivation?
- To what extent do teacher-student relationships impact teacher motivation?

Investigating these questions is meant to improve the school's PBIS program and provide meaningful information regarding teacher-student relationships within the overall school.

### **Conclusion**

Over the years, Abraham Lincoln Elementary School's PBIS program has become a key factor in establishing its school culture. During my research, I plan to focus on significant elements needing improvement in the PBIS process by listening to previous research in PBIS, teacher-student relationships, and school culture. Through others' work, I will learn where I need to focus questions directed at my stakeholders. In the end, I will decipher to what extent teacher-student relationships impact the school climate at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School and propose some changes for improvement.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Introduction**

School climate is a term widely used with varying definitions. At this point, the only thing agreed upon is that it has overwhelming importance, and it is affected by many variables. "School climate can either be seen as a construct representing the involvement of everyone in a school or as something that is primarily a function of the teachers or of the students" (Johnson & Stevens, 2008, p. 112). A positive school climate is recognized as one of the main contributors to successful and effective schools and has been for many years. Emmons et al. (1996) and Kuperminc et al. (1997) defined school climate as "shared beliefs, values, and attitudes that shape interactions between students, teachers, and administrators and set the parameters of acceptable behavior and norms for the school" (as cited in Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2008, p. 96).

For clarification, the differences between the terms of *climate* and *culture* must be reviewed. Culture refers to the way people feel about an organization and the beliefs, values, and assumptions that provide the identity and set the standards for its behavior. At the same time, climate describes the shared perceptions of the individuals inside the organization. Therefore, I would like to point out that, for the sake of this study, I am interested in the overall culture of Abraham Lincoln School as viewed by a group of its community of stakeholders. However, the climate will also play a role in the research as the building's teachers were a part of the study. Nonetheless, in general, the educational community and the world have confused these two terms for decades, so, at times, the words are used interchangeably during research.

In this section, I examine research related to improving teacher-student relationships and school culture. First, I look into the research behind maintaining healthy relationships in schools. Then, I investigate the importance of engagement in the overall school setting. Finally, I analyze the impact of safety on school culture, focusing on positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) and educational strategies that can be utilized directly in the classroom. As a result of this review, I engineer a plan to understand effective educational practices and processes that improve all students' overall school culture.

### **Importance of Caring and Trust in Classrooms**

Because teachers and students spend such a significant portion of the day together during the school year, it seems evident that the relationship between these individuals would be a powerful influence on each other's success and their classroom and school's success. After all, the time teachers spend with students during a day equates to nearly 50% of students' active days. Assuming a child spends the remainder of the day with their parents/guardians, the significance of this bond cannot be overstated. When there is a positive teacher-student bond,

there is no doubt school life will be at an emotional high. However, the opposite may also be true. “Most students attributed positive or negative belonging beliefs to the quality of their relationships with their teachers or other students” (Nichols, 2008, p. 164). “A good student-teacher relationship is associated with positive outcomes such as better school adjustment, positive social functioning, and high levels of academic achievement” (as cited in Skipper & Douglas, 2015, p. 276). There have been a plethora of studies associating positive teacher-student relationships with increased student success. Like with any positive relationship, the two parties involved in a positive relationship are more in tune with each other’s overall being, and the classroom mirrors this idea. Recently, a study measured the impacts of negative and positive relationships as they pertain to academic factors such as classroom engagement and overall academic success (Martin and Collie, 2018, p. 28). The findings abundantly concluded that positive teacher-student relationships directly impacted intellectual engagement through participation, enjoyment, and aspirations. Teachers who have gained their students’ trust and built a strong relationship are likely to see positive classroom results.

The benefit of positive teacher-student relationships is also supported when examined from a negative relationship lens. Studies have shown the detrimental effects a negative teacher-student relationship can have on academic success. Birch and Ladd (1997 and 1998) associated poor student-teacher relationships with adverse outcomes such as school avoidance, low levels of self-directed learning, and low classroom performance levels. Therefore, “interpersonal relationships between and among students and teachers may play a pivotal role in promoting adolescents’ sense of belonging in school” (Ellerbrock, Kiefer, & Alley, 2014, p. 2). It’s safe to say that if an environment of mutual respect does not exist between the teacher and students, less learning will occur, and student misbehavior may result. The relationship between teacher and

student acts as more than just a feeling within the classroom. It also acts as a sense of trust and belonging for the student.

As Montague and Rinaldi (2001) stated, classroom dynamics are complex and similar to school climate in that they involve the relationships and interactions between teachers and students, among students, and the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of students and teachers within the classroom. A study found “that student- and classroom-level factors tend to have a greater influence on students’ perceptions of the school environment than do school-level factors.” (Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf, p. 102). By providing supports to assist those with the most negative attitudes into forming more positive attitudes, the whole building’s climate is most likely affected as their attitudes may sometimes spread like wildfire through the school. Research also suggests supporting learning is the most critical factor in determining a good teacher. Students need teachers who dedicate time to students’ acquisition of skills. Data indicated that personal attention to students and willingness to help them, fairness, and respect to others take priority in solidifying the teacher-student relationship (Ida, 2017). Students want teachers who they trust, and they feel care for them. By differentiating for individual students, teachers can gain trust and a sense of caring between themselves and students.

DePaulo and Bell (1996) assert that teacher feedback is an essential factor affecting the student-teacher relationship. Both academic feedback and behavioral feedback has an intense impact on learning and achievement and provides students an authentic chance to find out what the instructor truly thinks of their work (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Feedback likely has such a significant impact because it takes care of two factors at once. First of all, students are working to improve their academic processes. Simultaneously, teachers are also showing students they

have taken the time to provide individual time and thoughtful feedback to their work. There is no doubt giving time for feedback is a key to success in every classroom.

### **Student and Teacher Input on School Relationships with Teachers**

Perhaps, the most important source of input related to school relationships is from the actual students. In the past, decisions were often left to adults to decipher which strategies correlated to student success or positively impact relationships. “Students’ beliefs are very important because they get along with their teachers every day and they can express their own opinions on good and bad teaching as well. These opinions can make teachers understand their students’ realities and change their everyday practice” (Ida, 2017, p. 143). However, “students desire teachers who give them individualized attention, encourage them, and demonstrate patience while teaching. Students also want teachers who can relate to them in a lighthearted way, a situation that creates a safe learning environment” (Wilkins, 2014, p. 167). It is paramount to allow students the opportunity to provide a mindful expression of their thoughts and feelings into the running of the classroom. Students are more likely to buy into processes and routines and trust their teachers if they know their voices are heard.

Teachers could also benefit from incorporating proactive strategies to prevent problem behaviors and promote academic engagement as students transition into the classroom learning environment. One such strategy research proved successful and teachers reported to be feasible, reasonable, and acceptable is positive greetings at the door. Observational studies and research “revealed that the Positive Greetings at the Door strategy produced significant improvements in academic engaged time and reductions in disruptive behavior” (Cook et al., 2018, p. 149). Students feel cared for when greeted at the door on the way in and out of the classroom. This process creates a sense of caring and a sense of safety while in the teacher’s presence.

A recent study concluded schools had better average student achievement if staff perceived a positive school climate, a large degree of affiliation among teachers, a culture of innovation, supportive staff members, and high teacher involvement in planning. It was also beneficial if sufficient materials and facilities were available (Johnson and Stevens, 2006). Just as students need to feel a sense of belonging within a school, this environment needs to exist for staff members. After all, it is the American dream to have a job that you are excited to attend daily. This excitement is mainly created by enjoying what you are doing, who you are doing it with, and the satisfaction you receive from doing it.

While analyzing research involving teacher-student relationships and their impact on school culture, there are many examples of the importance of teachers' and students' connectedness. This relationship must exist positively to promote learning and the best possible outcomes for students. If students and teachers coexist in an atmosphere that is collaborative and supportive of one another, successful results are more likely to occur.

### **Engagement in the Educational Setting**

One of the most important feats of any educator or leader to accomplish is to engage their participants. Educators must engage students in what they are learning. Otherwise, how can they be expected to learn if their attention is elsewhere? Engaging students is the job of every classroom teacher, according to Robert Marzano in *The Art and Science of Teaching*. And Charlotte Danielson says that student engagement may be the most important component of the framework for teaching (ASCD, 2019).

Just as it is vital for teachers to engage their students, it is equally crucial for school leaders to engage their staff members. The engagement of staff members helps in developing a healthy school climate. If teachers and staff members are not involved in their work, how can

they ever be expected to perform to their potential? Many early theorists, including Roethlisberger (1959), Likert (1961), Mayo (1933), and McGregor (1960), believed that satisfied workers are productive workers. Ostroff (1992) conducted a study to find the correlation between job satisfaction and performance. Overall, the study found support for attitudes affecting performance outcomes. In the end, the study found that characteristics such as job satisfaction, attitude, and well-being affect job performance both positively and negatively (Ostroff, 1992). Previously, I discussed that the American dream is to have a job that you are passionate about. This excitement is mainly created by enjoying what you are doing, who you are doing it with, and the satisfaction you receive from doing it. Ultimately, if you are satisfied with your job, you will perform better. This holds true for educators and other school leaders as well.

### **Teacher Strategies for Engaging Students**

Many specific strategies have proven successful in helping teachers build teacher-student relationships in the classroom. For example, “if a teacher manages to transmit his/her interest in his/her own profession, as well as in students’ development, then possibly he/she may lay the foundation for a successful teacher-student relationship” (Sánchez, 2013, p. 123). All teachers need to connect with students on a personal level. The teacher must find at least one topic that will motivate a single student. There is always at least one topic that will encourage a student and, when you identify that topic, it is likely that the teacher will connect with that student.

“When people perceive themselves as similar to others, greater liking and closer relationships typically result” (Gehlbach et al., 2016, p. 342). Wentzel (1998) stated that “children who thrive typically cultivate positive relationships with parents, peers, and teachers” (Gehlbach et al., 2016, p. 342). Research suggests that leveraging individuals’ similarities can be advantaged to improve teacher-student relationships. As summarized by Montoya, Horton, &

Kirchner (2008) the thinking behind this approach is that interacting with similar peers supports one's sense of self, values, and core identity (Gehlbach et al., 2016). Unfortunately, not every teacher has similarities with every child. It is possible to find at least one similarity with most students, though. When you locate this similarity, it is always essential to grasp it and hold on tight to leverage it in helping to solidify a relationship with the student.

While it may never be possible to fully engage one hundred percent with all stakeholders in a school environment, this goal must continue to be strived for. If successful, students will become better learners, and teachers will become better educators. Overall, the educational setting will be a much-improved place for learning that everyone will want to attend regularly. This is what a positive school climate is all about.

### **School Safety and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in Schools**

Many factors majorly impact school climate. Perhaps, none play a more pivotal role than school safety. In this day and age, when school shootings and school crises seem to be leading the national news every week, school safety has become a focal point of education. Nonetheless, my argument is that school safety has and always will be at the forefront of school topics. After all, though students may genuinely be at school to learn, security is still the number one priority while students are in the school's care. Lewis et al. (2002) and Todd et al. (1999) state that results from a growing body of research on utilizing school-wide PBIS shows that it continues to be an "effective approach to reducing student problem behavior and improving the overall climate of the school" (as cited in Lassen, Steele, & Sailor, 2006, p. 702). Each state has its laws, each board has its protocols, and each facility has its procedures for keeping the physical property of a school safe and the teachers and learners inside.



Another important factor related to school climate is the need for a curriculum that supports students' abilities to monitor their emotions, feelings, and the world around them in a positive way. As a result, most schools have adopted a social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum. In the 1980's and early 90's, schools were implementing a variety of youth drug prevention, violence prevention, and character education programs. SEL was introduced as a framework to address the needs of young people and align school programs.

“Both CASEL and the term “social and emotional learning” emerged from a meeting in 1994 hosted by the Fetzer Institute. Meeting attendees included researchers, educators, and child advocates involved in various education-based efforts to promote positive development in children. These SEL pioneers came together to address a concern about ineffective school programming and a lack of coordination among programs at the school level” (CASEL, 2021).

In 1994, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning was created. Its goal was to establish high-quality, evidence-based SEL and to make it an integral piece of all students' education.

One way of supporting the behavior side of social-emotional learning in schools is through a school-wide system that helps draw all educational community stakeholders together toward a common cause or goal. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a discipline framework for schools to decide how they would like to run as a close-knit community. “PBIS is grounded in a continuum of evidence-based interventions that are used consistently throughout the school to prevent problematic behavior, to teach prosocial skills, and to reinforce new skills” (Baker & Ryan, p. 9). There are several reasons PBIS and its reward systems are important in schools. For example, students' confidence may be boosted and they

may feel increased motivation and engagement in the learning process when they receive a sign of recognition (Sánchez, 2013, p. 124). I have found that using PBIS in schools also unites students and staff toward common goals and a shared vision. When staff members and students all use common vocabulary to address school-wide expectations there is a certain comradery that is built along the way. If a student hears a random teacher in the hallway using the same verbiage they heard in the classroom the day prior and then again during the morning announcements from the principal, there is a sense of school pride that is formed around this shared goal. When everyone is working toward an objective and plans are put at the forefront for everyone to see, it is easier to work together.

In a 4-year longitudinal study, Luiselli, Putnam, and Sunderland (2002) studied school-wide PBIS efforts in a rural public middle school. The researchers reported a drop in overall disciplinary detentions in all categories from Year 1 to Year 4 (as cited in Lassen, Steele, & Sailor, 2006, p. 702). The previously mentioned study suggests that, when implemented with fidelity, PBIS can work. A declining number of discipline referrals in a school can often lead to staff members' overall perception of negative behaviors improving as well. Thus, buy-in to the comprehensive PBIS program is often viewed as successful and it is seen as creating a safer learning environment for schools.

It is known that both staff and student morale are higher when they feel safe and are free of the distractions of daily behavior concerns. "PBIS helps teacher schools figure out how to teach social-emotional learning skills...we know that students who are aware of their emotions and can regulate when they are feeling frustrated will do better in school" (Baker & Ryan, 2014, p. 9). By identifying students who require further social-emotional support, PBIS helps schools become safer environments for identified students, peers, and staff members.

It is crucial to complete five steps for PBIS implementation to gain buy-in from staff. The following steps can help gain staff buy-in while exploring PBIS; involve staff from the beginning, create and maintain ongoing communication, build trust, regularly acknowledge all staff, provide visible leadership support, and celebrate successes regularly (Baker & Ryan, 2014).

Yet another advantage of using PBIS programs in schools is a focus on the use of common language. PBIS transforms the structure of each school from reactive approaches to proactive systems-change outlooks. This endeavor cohesively unites all staff in using common language, common practices, and consistent application of positive and negative reinforcement. (Positive Interventions and Supports, 2017). Two important benefits of implementing common language are that all stakeholders understand expectations and minimize misunderstandings. Through the research I've shared, it is evident that implementing positive behavioral interventions and supports in schools can have many positive implications. As a portion of my study, I will seek to discover how PBIS affects the teacher-student relationship and its overall role in impacting school climate.

While PBIS and other similar reward systems have their supporters throughout education, opposers also exist. First, we must discuss both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators. As with behavior systems such as PBIS, extrinsic motivators are those that lead to something else (i.e. rewards). An intrinsic motivator comes from within and is completed for one's own sake. Based on Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory, extrinsic rewards undermine intrinsic interest. Imagine that a child who likes playing baseball for his own enjoyment is offered money for winning. Based on this theory, the extrinsic rewards undermine the child's intrinsic motivation for playing baseball. Later in life, he is less likely to play baseball without the use of

extrinsic rewards (Reiss, 2012, p. 152). According to this line of thinking, opposers of extrinsic motivation likely would not buy into reward systems such as PBIS. There are many other theorists that oppose extrinsic motivators. Alfie Kohn (2001) stated that praise is not often effective as a long-term solution. It is better to work alongside a student in diagnosing the problem. He suggests three strategies as alternatives to praise: say nothing, say what you saw, and say less but ask more. (Kohn, 2001, pp. 203-204). According to Ryan and Deci (2000), children can act out extrinsically motivated behaviors in opposite ways (willing or unwilling) that can reflect their approval. For example, they can perform extrinsically motivated behaviors with resistance or with an attitude that reflects acceptance of the value of the task (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, Ryan and Deci also recognize that intrinsic motivation cannot always be relied on in school for a variety of reasons. "Understanding these different types of extrinsic motivation, and what fosters each of them, is an important issue for educators who cannot always rely on intrinsic motivation to foster learning. Frankly speaking, because many of the tasks that educators want their students to perform are not inherently interesting or enjoyable, knowing how to promote more active and volitional forms of extrinsic motivation becomes an essential strategy for successful teaching" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 55). So, while researchers may not always agree with extrinsic motivation, they understand why it is used. From the studies I have noted, researchers that oppose extrinsic reward systems are most concerned with the aftermath of providing the reward. After you provide the reward, how do you take it off the recipient's mind and focus back to the desired outcome? If this can somehow be achieved, you have turned the original extrinsic motivator into an intrinsic motivator as the end result.

## **Conclusion**

As previously reviewed, there is substantial research linking the establishment of a close, positive bond between students and teachers and the establishment of a strong, positive school culture. Nonetheless, teachers continue to struggle to create bonds with students. The struggle to develop relationships can be understood, as all students and teachers have unique personalities and backgrounds. I will continue to look further into these relationships to help improve teacher-student relationships and study their more considerable impact on school culture as a whole. This study aims to determine the Abraham Lincoln PBIS program's overall effectiveness by analyzing whether students and teachers are motivated by the program.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design Overview**

My research aims to improve teacher-student relationships to impact school culture at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School positively. Patton states that allowing users to play a role in an evaluation's decisions or purpose may lead to buy-in and relevance with the user (Patton, 2008). Participatory action research using a mixed methodological design for data collection and analysis will be evident in this study. My research's vision began through collecting and analyzing previously conducted research (literature review) on teacher-student relationships and school culture. From this research, I have developed a hypothesis that lines up with my research questions. I hypothesize that effective PBIS programs, happier teachers, and more motivated students result from positive teacher-student relationships and, in the end, create a more positive school culture. The data collection methods that will be used are surveys of students and staff members and interviews of staff members.

*5Essentials Survey Data*

I utilized 5Essentials data to formulate a baseline of staff members' opinions regarding school climate. The 5Essentials School Reports for the State of Illinois are derived from 20 years of research on improving schools. The data from these reports are based on a comprehensive core of student and teacher questions compiled into 22 school climate measures and practice and formed into five essentials. As measured by the Illinois 5Essentials Survey, those five essentials are leading indicators of school improvement - instruction, environment, leaders, teachers, and families. The power of 5Essentials comes from their prediction of school success, the overall framework components' intuitiveness, and the survey measures' reliability (The University of Chicago, 2017). The 5Essentials Survey is administered to Illinois school teachers annually. Students in grades five and higher are required to take the survey annually as well. At Abraham Lincoln School, students do not participate as they are in grades lower than fifth. In 2017, approximately 100% of all staff members at Lincoln School filled out the survey compared to the 80% state average. Approximately 31% of Lincoln School's parents filled out the survey compared with the 15% state average (The University of Chicago, 2017). While Abraham Lincoln Elementary School's parent response rate is provided, this information did not figure into the research study.


*2017 5Essentials Response Rate*

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Response (Illinois) Rate</b>
Students	0.0% (75.3%)
Teachers	99.9% (80.3%)
Parents	30.6% (15.3%)

Figure 3. *2017 5Essentials Response Rate*. This figure shows the response rate of Abraham Lincoln School's various stakeholders on the 5Essentials Survey.

The three most pertinent indicators within the 5Essentials survey data that relate to my research are the section titled “Teacher-Principal Trust” within the “Effective Leaders” section, the section titled “Teacher-Teacher Trust” within the “Collaborative Teachers” section, and the “Parents’ Assessment of Teacher Trust” section. I chose these three sections because I feel they are the sections with questions that directly impact teacher-student relationships and school culture. Below are samples of the questions included in the three portions of the survey (The University of Chicago, 2017).

### What are these results based on?

Teacher-Principal Trust is comprised of the survey questions shown below. Betsy Ross Elem School's performance on individual survey questions is available below to identify particular strengths and weaknesses on Teacher-Principal Trust. 

Expand **[+]** the Questions to see this school's responses.

Teachers report the following:	[Expand All]
It's OK in this school to discuss feelings, worries, and frustrations with the principal.	[+]
The principal looks out for the personal welfare of the faculty members.	[+]
I trust the principal at his or her word.	[+]
The principal at this school is an effective manager who makes the school run smoothly.	[+]
The principal places the needs of children ahead of personal and political interests.	[+]
The principal has confidence in the expertise of the teachers.	[+]
The principal takes a personal interest in the professional development of teachers.	[+]
Teachers feel respected by the principal	[+]

Figure 4. *Teacher-Principal Trust Composition*. This figure shows the specific questions that were answered by staff members of Abraham Lincoln School during the Teacher-Principal Trust portion of the 5Essentials Survey.

### What are these results based on?

Teacher-Teacher Trust is comprised of the survey questions shown below. Betsy Ross Elem School's performance on individual survey questions is available below to identify particular strengths and weaknesses on Teacher-Teacher Trust. [?](#)

Expand **[+]** the Questions to see this school's responses.

Teachers report the following:	[Expand All]
Teachers in this school trust each other.	[+]
It's OK in this school to discuss feelings, worries, and frustrations with other teachers.	[+]
Teachers respect other teachers who take the lead in school improvement efforts.	[+]
Teachers at this school respect those colleagues who are experts at their craft.	[+]
Teachers feel respected by other teachers	[+]

Figure 5. *Teacher-Teacher Trust Composition*. This figure shows the specific questions that were answered by staff members of Abraham Lincoln School during the Teacher-Teacher Trust portion of the 5Essentials Survey.

### What makes up Parents' Assessment of Teacher Trust?

Parents' Assessment of Teacher Trust is comprised of the survey questions shown below. Betsy Ross Elem School's performance on individual survey questions is available below to identify particular strengths and weaknesses on Parents' Assessment of Teacher Trust. [?](#)

Expand **[+]** the Questions to see this school's responses.

Parents report their feelings about trust.	[Expand All]
The teachers respect me.	[+]
The teachers do their best to help my child learn.	[+]
The teachers have my child's best interest in mind.	[+]
I am comfortable sharing my concerns with teachers at the school.	[+]
It is easy to contact your student's teachers when you need to?	[+]
Like a partner with the teachers at the school in your child's education?	[+]

Figure 6. *Parents' Assessment of Teacher Trust Composition*. This figure shows the specific questions that were answered by parents of Abraham Lincoln School during the teacher trust portion of the 5Essentials Survey.



The 5Essentials data provided a baseline of school culture data from the parent and staff populations. Secondary data from the 5Essentials Survey (2016-17) was utilized for this research. The reason I utilized data from the 2016-17 school year is that I began the evaluation process within my program evaluation in 2018 and, at the time, the most recent data available was from the 2016-17 school year. Therefore, this was the data I was looking at for my baseline measurements. No further data sample was necessary as data the 5Essentials Survey was only used as baseline data.

### *Staff Culture Survey*

The Staff Culture Survey was provided to 29 staff members and contained 33 questions. Questions were answered on a 1-4 likert scale. A score of 1 signified strongly disagreed, 2 signified disagreed, 3 signified agreed, and 4 signified strongly agreed. The survey was administered once during November of 2018. The staff survey was conducted during a staff meeting in order to maximize the number of staff members participating in the survey. The Staff Culture Survey was developed and intended to help the researcher gain initial, baseline information from an extensive sampling of the school population in various pertinent areas of study, including PBIS data, school culture information, and teacher-student relationships. The Staff Culture Survey utilized was created by the researcher by combining the School-Wide PBIS Survey and the State of New Jersey School Climate Survey, which can be viewed in Appendix G. The target sample size for staff member participation in the survey was 20 of the 40 full-time staff members. For convenience, survey completion time was factored into previously allotted professional development time. I asked for volunteers to participate in the surveys. About half of the staff does not attend building meetings due to traveling around the district, so I knew it would be challenging to lock down these staff members for survey completion.

*Interviews of Selected Staff Members*

“The process of being taken through a directed, reflective process can leave interviewees realizing things about themselves that they were not fully aware of before the interview.

Thoughtfully reflecting on a program experience can evoke a lot of thoughts and feelings, even stimulating commitment to change some behavior pattern” (Patton, 2008, p. 169).

Staff interview subjects were recruited based on a separate page attached to their survey asking for volunteer participation. Because follow-up and personalized information were needed to set up an interview, staff members were asked if they were interested in checking “yes” or “no” on this page and were required to turn it in following the survey. See the final part of Appendix G for a glimpse of the follow-up interview questions. The individual interest sheet ensured the anonymity of survey responses, the anonymity of participation in a follow-up interview, and that interviewees did not feel coerced. I then followed up with interview candidates individually regarding their interest. The interviews were intended to help gather follow-up information from subjects regarding student and teacher motivation, the PBIS program, teacher-student relationships, and school culture.

Before the start of all interviews, I reviewed the interview protocol with all candidates. These protocols are available in Appendix E. Reviewing protocol helped interviewees feel comfortable and have a basic understanding of the format for the process. A list of interview questions is available in Appendix H. While interview candidates accepted voluntarily, I planned to have a representative group of at least a couple of classroom teachers, one specialist area teacher, and one support staff member. Then, I enlisted five staff members’ participation in the interviews, based upon the additional question in Appendix G. Five interviewees were enough to provide a representative sample of the school. Overall, 29 staff members had filled out the Staff

Culture Survey and 5 had replied they would be interested in participating in the follow-up interview. There were two other staff members who stated they would be willing to participate if no other volunteers stepped forward as well. Interviews were conducted in the teachers' classroom during the winter and spring of 2019.

*Staff Interview Candidates*

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Job Description</b>	<b>Job Category</b>
Candidate #1 Alias: "Mrs. Anderson"	2nd Grade Classroom Teacher	Tenured Teacher
Candidate #2 Alias: "Mrs. Lee"	Certified Support Staff Member	Tenured Teacher
Candidate #3 Alias: "Mrs. Jones"	3rd Grade Classroom Teacher	Non-Tenured Teacher
Candidate #4 Alias: "Mrs. Johnson"	Non-Certified Educational Support Professional	Tenured Support Staff
Candidate #5 Alias: "Mrs. White"	2nd Grade Classroom Teacher	Tenured Teacher

Table 1. *Staff Interview Candidates*. This table provides information regarding research interview candidates while also focusing on the anonymity of all participants.

*Student Culture Survey*

The school-wide Student Culture Survey for second-grade and third-grade students, conducted during the 2018-19 school year in February, was intended to help the researcher gain information from an extensive sampling of the student population related to PBIS, teacher-student relationships, and school culture perceptions. The Student Culture Survey utilized was created by the researcher by combining the School-Wide PBIS Survey and the State of New Jersey School Climate Survey, which can be viewed in Appendix F. The survey contained 16

questions answered on a 1-3 likert scale. A score of 1 signified a response of no, a score of 2 signified a response of sometimes, and a score of 3 signified a response of yes. Student surveys were completed during class time and took approximately 15 minutes to complete. The surveys were completed school-wide, which meant all 325 students completed the study within the district's second-grade and third-grade building, Abraham Lincoln School. They were done within individual classroom settings as homeroom teachers saw most convenient within a one-month timespan.

Studying 5Essentials data, reviewing research, and conducting surveys and interviews helped me to understand the ways teacher-student relationships impact school culture at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School. "Qualitative data are particularly appropriate because they can help us understand people's reactions, beliefs, and behavior more clearly" (James, Milenkiewicz, & Bucknam, 2008, p. 69). By conducting interviews, I will be able to gain a fuller understanding of staff members' perspectives around teacher-student relationships, school culture, and education as a whole. There is so much more that simple numbers cannot tell you and that is where information from interviews comes into play.

### **Participants**

The key participants for my research were students and staff members. To gain full insight into all aspects of teacher-student relationships and school climate, school leaders must gain perspective from multiple stakeholders. For this research, the term "staff members" will refer to all adults working within Lincoln Elementary School's confines. Staff members include classroom teachers, related services staff members, and program assistants. All of these staff members are respected members within the Lincoln Community, and, as a result, I wanted to give them a chance to impact the school culture of Lincoln Elementary.

To conduct this research, all staff members signed consent and parents signed consent for their students before data collection. James, Milenkiewicz, & Bucknam (2008) define informed consent as “the agreement between concerned parties about the data-gathering process and/or the disclosure, reporting, and/or use of data, information, and/or results from a research experiment in an educational setting, informed consent in education holds fewer restrictions than other fields, such as medicine” (James, Milenkiewicz, & Bucknam, 2008, p. 18). Because all students participating in the study were second-graders and third-graders, and I had parental consent before enrolling children in research, I did not ask for student assent for participation in the study. Subjects signed the waiver that includes the data collection strategies, my research intent, its benefits and risks, and the parties who will access the information. This process involved sending home letters with consent forms to all students. To streamline this process for students and obtain full participation, those not wanting to participate had an option to sign an “opt-out” form before starting the process. However, no parents chose this option prior to or during the study. The collection of these forms was much like collecting field trip permission slips for the classroom teachers.

### **Risk and Conflicts**

Participation in this study did not involve any physical or emotional risk beyond that of everyday life. All participation was voluntary, and participants and their parents had the option to discontinue participation at any time with no adverse effects. Qualifications and details of participation were described through informed consent and verbally at the point of survey and interview administration. All test subjects and anyone with knowledge of the study are subject to anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality. Pseudonyms ensured anonymity during the study. During research duration, the study reserved the utmost care about subjects, the educational

environment, and the futures of all involved above all else. Researchers will be held to the highest standards of honesty and integrity throughout the study, as demonstrated by the inclusion of benefits and shortcomings of research. Participants are likely not to benefit directly from being in this research study. However, taking part in this study may contribute to a better understanding of teacher-student relationships and their impact on school culture at Lincoln School and its changes that need to be made. Participating in this study may also allow children the indirect benefit of sharing their feelings and experiences about schooling.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

This study involved a mixed-methods approach to analyze data, and research techniques of surveys and interviews were used. The research began with an analysis of 5Essentials data for Lincoln Elementary School which provided a baseline of school culture data for the parent and staff populations. Data from the 2016-17 school year's 5Essentials Survey was utilized for research because that was the year prior to the start of the program evaluation and also the most recent data available. The sections that provided the most valuable information are the Teacher-Parent Trust section, the Teacher-Principal Trust section, and the Teacher-Teacher Trust section. The teacher and principal sections provided an overall rating for the areas. All three sections then provided individual percentages for each question, which were valuable in determining each score's growth from year to year and whether the scores were on the rise or the decline (The University of Chicago, 2017). While there is a student portion of the survey, as referenced previously, Lincoln Elementary students do not participate in this portion of the survey due to their age. Unfortunately, the parent portion of the 5Essentials data asks more about the overall school experience such as communication rather than specific information about teacher-student relationships since this is gathered within the student portion of the survey.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the Student Culture Survey and Staff Culture Survey that were designed by the researcher. Because Google Forms were used to administer the staff and student surveys, the statistics were automatically compiled into a spreadsheet format within Google Sheets. I first calculated all of the statistical means of each question. Next, I looked for outliers within the datasets as this was the information I needed to report in my research.

Interviews were recorded using a voice application on a phone. Then, the recordings were personally transcribed by the researcher. Next, the information in the interviews was analyzed to look for common themes that emerged. “This step encourages practitioners to see new overarching themes congregated under the ideas captured in codes and memos” (James, Milenkiewicz, Bucknam, 2008, p. 90). The themes that were identified were school safety, engagement, student-teacher relationships, and teacher-teacher relationships. Once themes were identified, triangulation was used to relate data from various sources. Triangulation is a way of checking the consistency of findings from different data sources. Typically, the more significant data correlations and the greater the triangulation, the more confidence in the lesson learned (Patton, 2008). Through the use of descriptive statistics, identifying themes, and using triangulation, I knew the research would either support or prove the hypothesis null that effective PBIS programs, happier teachers, and more motivated students result from positive teacher-student relationships and, in the end, create a more positive school culture.

At the close of the study, findings will be reported, and recommendations will be provided for readers and Abraham Lincoln Elementary School based upon the research conducted via this research paper. The proposals will provide suggestions and ask for input on adjustments that can be made to the programming to affect school culture positively.

“Recommendations, when they are included in a report, draw readers’ attention like bees to a flower’s nectar. Many report readers will turn to recommendations before anything else and others never read beyond the recommendations” (Patton, 2008, p. 502).

### **Ethical Considerations**

To conduct research, all staff participants and students’ parents signed an informed consent waiver. James, Milenkiewicz, & Bucknam (2008) define informed consent as “the agreement between concerned parties about the data-gathering process and/or the disclosure, reporting, and/or use of data, information, and/or results from a research experiment in an educational setting, informed consent in education holds fewer restrictions than other fields, such as medicine” (p. 18). Subjects signed the waiver when the data collection strategies, the intent of my research, its benefits and risks, and the parties who have access to the information gathered were completely outlined for them. To streamline this process for minors and obtain full participation, those not wanting to participate signed an “opt-out” form before starting the process. Additionally, all test subjects and anyone with knowledge of the study were subject to anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality. Pseudonyms and false identities assured anonymity during the survey. During the research’s duration, the study considered the utmost care of subjects, the educational environment, and the futures of all involved. Honesty and integrity was held to the highest standards throughout the study, as demonstrated by the inclusion of benefits and shortcomings of research.

There may have been some concern during the study by subjects because their principal was the researcher. Interviewees may have been concerned that negative survey and interview results would impact evaluation ratings and their overall status within the building. While this could not be atoned for during the research process, I did my best to make interviewees feel



comfortable, used discretion and reiterated that they had the option to withdraw from the research process at any time.

### **Conclusion**

This study's methodology includes collecting the data from and the analysis of 5Essentials data, survey analysis, and facilitation of interviews. By incorporating various stakeholders in the research, such as students and staff members, the study was intended to help determine how teacher-student relationships impact school climate.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS**

### **As-Is Analysis & Findings**

#### **Introduction**

The upcoming piece of this study will include an analysis of Lincoln Elementary School's current "as-is" status (Appendix A) about teacher-student relationships and school culture. Overall, the school is viewed by stakeholders as a positive place for learning but there is always room for improvement. The basis for success is due to the caring nature and passion for learning by all adults in the building. Teacher-student relationships within the current program are strong but the program itself has limitations because it is based on past successes. Little input is asked for or given by current staff members or students, and only a few adaptations occurred over many years, which has led to a somewhat stale culture. To better understand this problem, I will use the four C's (context, culture, conditions, and competencies) outlined by Wagner et al. (2006). According to Wagner, the four C's offer an organized and systematic way of thinking about the complications and goals of adaptation in schools and districts. The ideal vision of the four C's is always to improve teaching and learning.

**Context**

The first “C” of Wagner’s approach refers to context. These contexts refer to skill demands necessary for all students to meet to succeed as providers, learners, and citizens, and the specific visions and concerns of the families and community that the district serves (Wagner et al., 2006). At Lincoln Elementary School, many elements have a natural impact on the building’s relationships. As stated previously, Abraham Lincoln Elementary School houses 325 second and third-grade students. Students attend the school from four of the surrounding suburbs.

Approximately 69% of the Lincoln School student population was white, 21% Hispanic, 7% Asian, 2% black, and 1% represented other ethnicities. Twenty-two percent of students at the school came from low-income homes, 10% had individualized education plans, and 37% of students at Abraham Lincoln School were English learners (Illinois State Board of Education, 2015).

When it comes to context, the fact that each individual brings a unique background and perspective to the classroom is an outstanding resource. Lincoln Elementary School does a great job of leveraging this resource by highlighting everyone’s differences and focusing on individuality as a strength. For example, during placement of students each year, we highlight the differences and similarities in teacher personalities and classroom organization styles to help match student needs. Teachers become comfortable and accepting of their unique traits and they become strengths rather than challenges. There is always a teaching style that matches each student’s learning style and, in the end, each classroom is filled with students. At the same time, all of our teachers are proud and comfortable with themselves for the unique learning environment they will provide for their classroom and students the following year because it will meet the students’ needs. Especially in our current time frame, acceptance of diversity is the

viewpoint that will make our society thrive. This is the context that stands out with Lincoln Elementary School.

There is a PBIS Program at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School that is based upon a school-wide system of support that includes proactive strategies for defining, teaching, and supporting appropriate student behaviors to create positive school environments. The PBIS Program emphasizes positive behavioral support for all students within the school by setting forth expectations in all classroom and non-classroom settings. This program is currently driven by a committee that consists of the building principal, the social worker, the psychologist, and two teachers that represent each of the grade levels in the building. The group meets monthly to plan events and activities accordingly. Responsibilities of this committee include planning assemblies, student expectation development, and school culture events. In the end, this team is responsible for planning and implementing events to ensure the safety and understanding of all student expectations, rewarding activities that celebrate and acknowledge the success of all students and staff, and plan activities that respond to the climate needs of the school.

Mainly, the staff use an adult-centered approach to formulate decision-making. Lincoln Elementary School is made up of committees, such as our PBIS Team, that create initiatives for the remainder of the staff in our building to participate in and disseminate the information out to the rest of the school. This is an example of educators utilizing a top-down approach to make changes to programming. Decisions are made by a small group of individuals without the input of the rest of the building or any of the student body. Data is rarely taken into consideration to change practice in any professional development model. I affirm that pairing 5Essentials data with student survey data will be substantially useful in the success of Lincoln School's teacher-student relationships and overall culture. For example, our school has since formed a student

ambassador program to gain student feedback. At any given time, we have access to a representative group of the student population that could offer feedback on important decision-making or input around the building.

### **Competencies**

There are several competencies present at Abraham Lincoln School that may be affecting teacher-student relationships and overall school culture. Competencies can be described as the package of skills and knowledge that influences learning (Wagner, et al, 2006, p. 99). To begin, it is evident that all staff members at Lincoln Elementary School are knowledgeable individuals, who have experience in their field. They work hard and are committed to the success of their students and have a definite passion for the educational profession. Staff members are dedicated and follow procedures to the best of their ability based on the direction they are provided on a daily basis. When it comes to PBIS procedures, staff members follow the directives set forth by the PBIS Team as well.

Staff members across Lincoln School are lacking professional development in a few areas that affects the overall climate of the building. They do not have a consistent background in PBIS and its implementation. Veteran staff members were trained in PBIS at its inception in the district in 2011. However, since then, incoming staff members have not received training to the same extent and sometimes only receive a summary of the system and sometimes are even being excluded from training altogether. Teachers also do not receive regular training in behavior management and building respect and rapport with students, which is domain 2a of Charlotte Danielson's Framework used for evaluation in the state of Illinois. "Teachers create an environment of respect and rapport in their classrooms by the ways they interact with students

and by their interactions they encourage and cultivate among students (Danielson, 2013, p. 25). If teachers are not proficient in this area, teacher-student relationships can suffer as a result.

All students and select staff participate in an event toward the beginning of the school year and near the halfway point in the year called “station rotations” as detailed previously. It is extremely important that both students and staff buy into the expectations set forth at “station rotations” for Abraham Lincoln School to have a successful year. This is also when students are exposed to the positive rewards systems in place at Lincoln School. Expectations are posted around the school but are only formally revisited again with students and staff at the halfway point in the school year. The only other exposure to expectations for students and staff comes at opportune moments during the school day as they arise, such as during behavior infractions. Teachers are encouraged to use their professional judgment to review expectations as often as possible but there are no additional set criteria for reviewing behavior expectations with students. This is a concern related to the competencies of the students because, if different teachers have different expectations, students may be expected to behave with varying levels of expectations. Consistency can become a major concern.

Another area of concern in regards to competencies comes from teacher-to-teacher comparisons in behavior referrals. The behavioral referral system is based on a “minor” or “major” referral system with “minor” referrals being written for most behavior incidents and those being classroom-managed. Minor behavior incidents, such as disrespect to peers or classroom disruptions, typically require communication between the teacher and the parent that the incident occurred. There may or may not be an additional consequence. Major referrals are office-managed referrals and are typically the more violent or outrageous type of discipline concerns, such as bullying and destruction of property. These referrals require a call home to the

parent and some type of consequence. While there is a clarification in the two types of referrals, there is not a distinct clarification in which incidents qualify under each classification. This was evident when looking at the staff surveys conducted, which resulted in only 20.7% of staff members responding to the survey agreeing that “distinctions between classroom versus office-managed behaviors are clear.” As a result, only 48.3% of staff members who responded to the same survey agreed that “the referral process for behavioral violations is comprehensive and understood by staff.” Teachers are simply encouraged to use their professional judgment and a lack of consistency results. The lack of consistency often leads to students feeling one educator is less fair than another even though this problem truly comes from the top. From interview data, Mrs. Anderson stated that “I feel like we’re told the information but we don’t always know what to do with it.” This was one of several statements making it evident that clarity of discipline expectations to teachers was an issue. Evidence of this unfairness was also noted in student survey results when 45.7% of students responded that good behavior is not or sometimes not noticed at school. In order to provide the best learning environment for students, we provide a fairer and more consistent education system for students.

The PBIS behavior referral system also lacks both student and staff input on many fronts. As mentioned previously, there is a PBIS committee that meets monthly but this is simply the input of five staff members and often fails to take into account the remainder of the staff or the student population. Additionally, behavior data is tabulated and available but not often shared with the remainder of the staff in a transparent manner. The reason this is important to note is that there is one teacher in particular who has always had her students develop classroom expectations for their classroom. It is no coincidence that she has also always consistently been amongst the lowest number of student referrals written. While evaluating this teacher, I have

noticed her attention to detail when it comes to the ownership she allows her students. When it comes to incorporating a classroom management system, she allows students to take ownership by writing referrals on their own in a third-grade classroom. While this could be conceived as quite risky for third-grade students, it works and is actually taken as a very diligent responsibility by all involved. As a result, the teacher merely manages behavior through conversations along the way and only handles major infractions when necessary. In the end, everyone would be surprised what second and third graders are capable of when given the increased responsibility.

### **Conditions**

Conditions are defined as “the external architecture surrounding student learning, the tangible arrangements of time, space, and resources” (Wagner, et al, 2006, p. 101). The conditions surrounding the school and district also impact teachers’ ability to form relationships with students and may inhibit school climate. When it comes to this area there are some definite positives. For example, staff members across the district have always felt a natural close-knit bond to each other due to the small size of the school district itself. This feeling has created a bond between staff members that is unmistakable. The district has always been supportive of staff members when it comes to supporting staff resources through a supply budget. When asked, administration very rarely turns down a request for reimbursement to ensure teachers do not get caught with out-of-pocket expenses throughout the school year. As a result of this practice, staff members feel supported and appreciated by the administration. However, there are also some negative conditions that affect Lincoln Elementary School.

Perhaps, the biggest overhanging condition is the district strike that occurred 3 years ago as some staff members still feel as though there is a divide between building staff and building administration and again with district administration. Nonetheless, there are many other

conditions impacting school culture for all constituents, which may have an effect on teacher-student relationships. First of all, the PBIS program is mirrored in all four buildings in the district. This may deter updates at the building level. At the state level and federal level, decreased funding continues to impact the district. Additionally, unfunded mandates by the state continue to burden all public schools and teachers. This adds to the workloads of individuals across buildings and impacts the building of successful teacher-student relationships at Lincoln School.

The district transition to grade-level schools several years ago has been said to have made it difficult for many staff members to establish long-lasting relationships with students as they had in past years. In prior years, staff members spent a minimum of five years in a building with students. This duration is now limited to only two years in nearly all cases. Lincoln School also has the shortest school day in the area as students report to school from 8:30 until 2:30 daily, which creates less time to maximize relationships. Within the building, there is a lack of teacher interest in committee participation. It is possible this is due to past practices. In some instances, I have heard staff members claim they don't feel their voice has truly been heard on committees. While they have been able to voice their opinion and thoughts, they felt as if the end decision was already pre-determined by administration before the committee had even been assembled. While I can say firsthand, this is not the case, it is also something that takes time to overcome. The administration within School District X acknowledges this viewpoint exists and is continually working to alleviate the issue. This makes it difficult to support initiatives from within and share leadership responsibilities throughout the district.

From a teacher perspective, there are some additional overlying conditions affecting teacher-student relationships and culture at Abraham Lincoln School. First of all, the amount of



testing after winter break is overwhelming and leaves little time for focusing on continued relationship building. Beginning in January, students participate in ACCESS Testing for a period of 1 month, universal benchmarking for 2 separate periods of about a week each, MAP Testing for a period of about 3 weeks, and Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR) Testing for a period of about 1 month. Because it is a state mandate, there is little buy-in from teachers, student learning time is lost, and there is a negative impact on the school culture as a result. As stated by a staff member who was interviewed, “The springtime brings up a whole other type of business with all of the testing that comes up. It seems like we’re finally in a groove with everything and then, we get derailed a bit by a long battery of tests that aren’t really even directly related to our in-class learning. This is definitely time that could be better spent on other things.” Additionally, there are also far too many expectations placed on teachers without taking anything off their plates. One example of these expectations occurred a few years ago when the district’s social-emotional curriculum was brought to the district. It was expected that teachers would take over implementation in the third year, yet nothing was taken away from their workload. In the end, because of more initiatives in the classroom, there is less focus on relationships and learning at the school.

### **Culture**

Culture indicates the ever occurring and powerful mindsets held individually and collaboratively within a group (Wagner, et al, 2006). At Lincoln Elementary School, like most schools, culture is affected in both positive and negative ways. Staff members at the school collaborate regularly within both small and large groups to plan for instruction. This action shows a culture of teamwork, collaboration, and positivity. Staff members know the expectations of professionalism in the building, on committees, and within district-wide appointments.

Furthermore, all staff members show a genuine sense of caring for one another on a regular basis. If ever someone is struggling with something, whether personal or professional, a colleague will never hesitate to lend a helping hand.

There are a few concerns evident at Lincoln School that directly affect the culture and, therefore, hinder teacher-student relationships. There is lingering distrust and negativity that stems from past negotiations at the district level and led to a teacher strike in the district and lingering issues still exist. This sense of distrust is evident in relationships between teachers and principals, as well as teachers and teachers. Based on data from the 2015-16 5Essentials Survey, Lincoln school scored 45 out of 100 in the area of “teacher-principal trust” compared with similar schools which scored 54 out of 100. Abraham Lincoln School scored 42 out of 100 in the area of “teacher-teacher trust” compared with similar schools which scored 57 out of 100 (University of Chicago, 2017). There are also two factors that seem to undermine attempts at collaboration with the school. As in most professional settings, shared time and shared interests can also lead to the formation of tight knit groups among staff. Lincoln Elementary School is no exception as several tight knit groups are noticeable amongst our staff as well. While the staff is welcoming and positive overall, some staff members have felt isolated as a result of the close-knit groups of staff members.

### **Interpretation**

Overall, the climate and culture at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School have always been viewed as positive and set the stage for a strong learning environment for students. Nonetheless, through the evidence collected in this study, we look to maximize the learning environment at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School as there is always room for improvement in

the field of education. This information is best interpreted within themes based on support by the data presented below.

*School Safety:*

**Culture Survey Data Related to School Safety**

<b>Student Culture Survey Data</b>							
<b>Question</b>	<b>No (1)</b>	<b>Sometimes (2)</b>	<b>Yes (3)</b>	<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>Average Rating</b>		
I know the school rules.	0.0%	8.9%	90.7%	257	2.91		
I feel safe at school.	1.6%	24.8%	73.6%	258	2.72		
<b>Staff Culture Survey Data</b>							
<b>Question</b>	<b>I don't know (N/A)</b>	<b>Strongly disagree (1)</b>	<b>Disagree (2)</b>	<b>Agree (3)</b>	<b>Strongly agree (4)</b>	<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>Average Rating</b>
Staff in the school feel safe.	0.0%	0.0%	3.4%	51.7%	44.8%	29	3.41
The PBIS expectations are posted and visible around the building.	3.4%	0.0%	0.0%	65.5%	31.0%	29	3.32
Students know what behaviors are expected of them.	3.4%	0.0%	6.9%	82.8%	6.9%	29	3.00
Positive reinforcements are used to support established expectations/ rules.	3.4%	0.0%	3.4%	69.0%	24.1%	29	3.21
Generally, I feel safe in our school.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	62.1%	37.9%	29	3.38
Data is used to reinforce the PBIS decision-making process.	24.1%	13.8%	27.6%	24.1%	10.3%	29	2.41
Distinctions between classroom versus office-managed behaviors are	27.6%	13.8%	37.9%	20.7%	0.0%	29	2.10

clear.							
The referral process for behavioral violations is comprehensive and understood by staff.	6.9%	10.3%	34.5%	44.8%	3.4%	29	2.44
Staff members are aware of crisis procedures and plans are readily available.	3.4%	0.0%	13.8%	75.9%	6.9%	29	2.93
As a member of the staff, I have taught expectations this year on my own in addition to school-wide lessons.	3.4%	0.0%	6.9%	31.0%	58.6%	29	3.54
Students feel safe and comfortable in non-classroom settings at our school.	10.3%	3.4%	3.4%	69.0%	13.8%	29	3.04

Table 2. *Culture Survey Data Related to School Safety.* This table provides data from student and staff survey questions related to the area of school safety.

One of the themes that resulted from data collected during this study was school safety. It can be concluded that the data shows students portray the school as a safe place. This is demonstrated in Table 2 pictured above. The table shows that 98.4% of students stated “yes” or “sometimes that, “I feel safe at school.” From the staff’s perspective, the school is also a safe place. This is specifically referenced in the question within Table 2 above that shows 100% of staff members agreed or strongly agreed that “Generally, I feel safe in school.”

Also related to school safety, when it comes to using processes such as data and referrals, five out of five staff members interviewed stated there needs to be more clarity and improved processes along the way. This same information was backed by data within the staff survey. Based on the Staff Culture Survey, 48.3% of the staff disagreed or strongly disagreed that data

for school-wide behavior is collected and routinely shared with staff. This may be due to the fact that the school has not had an all-staff meeting based on discipline to kick off the school year in a multitude of years. Additionally, when asked about her awareness regarding behavior data within Abraham Lincoln Elementary School, Mrs. Lee responded, “We always review monthly behavior data from majors (infractions) and minors (infractions) but I don’t think we really know what to do with it from there. If we even had a flowchart of the results of different behaviors, maybe we could just take care of everything ourselves and we wouldn’t have to involve anyone else.”

***Engagement:***

Engagement was another theme that arose during the research in this study. When engagement is referred to in this study, it includes the ability of the school setting and adults within the building to make learning fun and exciting for students and staff members. It was viewed in contrasting perspectives by the staff who completed the Staff Culture Survey (Appendix D) and student groups who completed the Student Culture Survey (Appendix C). For more specific data related to engagement in relation to the student and staff surveys during research, see Table 3 below. Staff members viewed the engagement of students and parents as very strong in almost all instances. The only exception was in the area of the school’s PBIS efforts, as 31% of staff members surveyed disagreed that parents are informed and included in the school’s PBIS efforts.

**Culture Survey Data Related to Engagement**

<b>Student Culture Survey Data</b>							
<b>Question</b>	<b>No (1)</b>	<b>Sometimes (2)</b>	<b>Yes (3)</b>	<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>Average Rating</b>		
I like school.	5.4%	44.6%	50.0%	258	2.45		

My teachers make learning interesting.	5.4%	29.8%	64.7%	258	2.59		
Adults listen to students' ideas about the school.	0.8%	21.3%	77.9%	258	2.77		
<b>Staff Culture Survey Data</b>							
<b>Question</b>	<b>I don't know (N/A)</b>	<b>Strongly disagree (1)</b>	<b>Disagree (2)</b>	<b>Agree (3)</b>	<b>Strongly agree (4)</b>	<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>Average Rating</b>
Our staff is welcoming to visitors and parents.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	65.5%	34.5%	29	3.34
Our staff takes pride and ownership in the appearance of the school.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	27.6%	72.4%	29	3.28
Our staff encourages all families to be part of school activities.	6.9%	0.0%	0.0%	65.5%	27.6%	29	3.30
Parents are informed and included in the school's PBIS efforts.	20.7%	10.3%	20.7%	44.8%	3.4%	29	2.52
The principal communicates well and informs parents of new developments, ideas, and issues.	20.7%	0.0%	20.7%	41.4%	17.2%	29	2.96
School events are well attended by staff.	24.1%	0.0%	31.0%	34.5%	10.3%	29	2.73
School events are well attended by families.	27.6%	0.0%	13.8%	51.7%	6.9%	29	2.90
People work here because they enjoy it and choose to be here.	20.7%	0.0%	10.3%	41.4%	27.6%	29	3.22

Table 3. *Culture Survey Data Related to Engagement.* This table provides data from student and staff survey questions related to the area of engagement.

On the other end of the spectrum related to the theme of engagement, 50% of the students stated they either do not like school or only sometimes like school. Only 64.7% of the students stated their teachers make learning interesting. While this student data seems alarming at first glance, it is important to remember that the survey does not allow for a breakdown of subjects, times of the day, specific teachers, or experiences. For individuals in most settings, we would rate the experiences as “sometimes” positive and “sometimes” negative in most situations. For example, if a student answers they sometimes like school, this could lean to the side of only liking one aspect of school such as physical education class and they are miserable the remainder of the day due to their relationship with the teacher. This could also mean they love school and have phenomenal relationships with all of their teachers except for the physical education teacher. Because of this, a rating of “sometimes” is a very broad spectrum. This is quite possibly the reason why the survey data for this specific question appears to be scored as low as it does. It is also possible that in a time when children are becoming accustomed to quick fixes and short-span attention grabbers in all aspects of their lives, we will need to transform practices to better accommodate students’ ever-changing engagement needs as well. In addition, evidence suggests that students realize this lack of engagement is of little fault to staff as 99.2% of students reported “yes” or “sometimes” to “adults listen to or at least sometimes listen to students’ ideas about the school.” As you can see, overall, engagement was viewed in a positive manner by both students and staff.

***Student-to-Student Relationships:***

The next theme that arose from the data of this study was student-to-student relationships. The theme student-to-student relationships in terms of this research is used to describe any data samples that may assist students in creating relationships with other students. Overall, I would

say the data results are favorable. From the staff member side of the equation based on the data from the Staff Culture Survey (Appendix D), the one area where improvements are needed is in “Lesson plans are available for teaching and reteaching PBIS expectations,” where 48.3% of staff stated improvements were needed. Despite the need for this improvement, staff members are able to maintain a positive outlook due to all of the work they have put into this area with their students. For example, three out of five staff members mentioned specific strategies they use to build student-to-student relationships during their interviews even though this was not a direct question. For example, they mentioned utilizing Monday meetings, ice breakers, and increased student leadership opportunities to promote student interaction and getting to know one another as a group outside of the classroom. As a result, there is no doubt student-to-student relationships are of major importance to staff members. When asked about student motivation at Lincoln School, Mrs. Jones reported, “We do an ongoing Monday morning meeting, which is really just a chance for kids to share what they did over the weekend, for me to comment on it, and for me to get to know them a little bit better. But, it also gives them a chance to get to know each other too. They get to know each other so well and it literally only takes 10 minutes!”

### Culture Survey Data Related to Student-to-Student Relationships

Student Culture Survey Data							
Question	No (1)	Sometimes (2)	Yes (3)	Total Responses	Average Rating		
Good behavior is noticed at my school.	1.9%	43.8%	54.3%	258	2.52		
I get along with other students.	0.8%	39.1%	60.1%	258	2.59		
Students treat each other well.	2.7%	53.5%	43.8%	258	2.41		
Students in my class behave.	2.7%	53.9%	43.4%	258	2.41		



Students at my school help each other when needed.	1.6%	40.7%	57.8%	258	2.56		
<b>Staff Culture Survey Data</b>							
<b>Question</b>	<b>I don't know (N/A)</b>	<b>Strongly disagree (1)</b>	<b>Disagree (2)</b>	<b>Agree (3)</b>	<b>Strongly agree (4)</b>	<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>Average Rating</b>
Our school supports and appreciates the sharing of new ideas by all members of the school.	3.4%	0.0%	13.8%	62.1%	20.7%	29	3.07
Students in this school show respect for each other.	6.9%	0.0%	10.3%	79.3%	3.4%	29	2.93
Lesson plans are available for teaching and reteaching PBIS expectations.	31.0%	13.8%	34.5%	17.2%	3.4%	29	2.15

Table 4. *Culture Survey Data Related to Student-to-Student Relationships*. This table provides data from student and staff survey questions related to the area of student-to-student relationships.

Conversely, only 43.4% of students reported “students in my class behave,” only 43.8% of students reported “students treat each other well,” only 60.1% of students reported “I get along with other students,” and only 57.8% of “students at my school help each other when needed”. This shows evidence that students are either critical of themselves and know they can do better or are critical of others and do not think their peers are meeting school-wide expectations for behavior. While it may not be viewed positively that the data results are not higher scoring, it is nice to see that we have set high expectations for students and they are aware of them. It is also important to note that only 54.3% of students reported that “good behavior is noticed at my school”. This shows a desire for student behavior to be recognized and student

input to be brought into the PBIS Program as a whole. For more specific data related to student-to-student relationships in relation to the student and staff surveys during research, see Table 4 above.

***Teacher-Student Relationships:***

In regards to the area of relationships between students and their teachers, nearly all data was reported favorably. The teacher-to-student relationships theme in terms of this research is used to describe any data samples that may assist teachers in creating relationships with their students. Overall, teacher-student relationships data resulted in favorable outcomes. From the Student Culture Survey data (Appendix C), this includes 95.7% of students reporting their school wants them to do well and 91.1% reporting their teachers are proud when they do well. Students reported that their teachers really care about them at a rate of 88.8% and 10.5% of the remainder of students stated their teachers sometimes really care about them. Students communicated that their teachers treat them with respect at a rate of 86.8% and the remainder of all students reported that their teachers sometimes treat them with respect. It is also apparent there are strong relationships at Abraham Lincoln School based upon data reported in Table 5. This data demonstrates that “yes” 85.7% of students feel “there is an adult at school I can count on,” while 12.4% of all other students “sometimes” feel “there is an adult I can count on.” Students reported that “my teachers notice if I have trouble with something” at a rate of 74.4%, while 21.7% of their peers stated “sometimes” “my teachers notice if I have trouble with something”. There was also one data point that came up on the other end of the spectrum for students. When asked if “good behavior is noticed at my school,” only 54.3% of students said “yes”, while another 43.8% of the student population stated this “sometimes” occurs. Once again, the large sampling of students answering “sometimes” demonstrates a desire to be recognized. Students are

demonstrating the desired and expected behaviors. Staff members cannot possibly be expected to recognize each and every positive behavior throughout the day. Students need to be taught along the way about the right thing to do and how it makes people feel when they are treated nicely. This will bring people positive intrinsic value along with the extrinsic motivation that children crave. A sample of the Student and Staff Culture Surveys that pertains more directly to teacher-student relationships is available below in Table 5.

### Culture Survey Data Related to Teacher-Student Relationships

<b>Student Culture Survey Data</b>							
<b>Question</b>	<b>No (1)</b>	<b>Sometimes (2)</b>	<b>Yes (3)</b>	<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>Average Rating</b>		
My school wants me to do well.	0.0%	4.3%	95.7%	258	2.96		
Teachers treat me with respect.	0.0%	13.2%	86.8%	258	2.87		
Good behavior is noticed at my school.	1.9%	43.8%	54.3%	258	2.52		
There's an adult at school I can count on.	1.9%	12.4%	85.7%	258	2.84		
My teachers notice if I have trouble with something.	3.9%	21.7%	74.4%	258	2.71		
My teachers are proud when I do well.	1.2%	7.8%	91.1%	258	2.90		
My teachers really care about me.	0.8%	10.5%	88.8%	258	2.88		
<b>Staff Culture Survey Data</b>							
<b>Question</b>	<b>I don't know (N/A)</b>	<b>Strongly disagree (1)</b>	<b>Disagree (2)</b>	<b>Agree (3)</b>	<b>Strongly agree (4)</b>	<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>Average Rating</b>
Our school respects and	10.3%	0.0%	3.4%	48.3%	37.9%	29	3.38

celebrates others' differences (i.e. gender, race, culture)							
Students generally treat adults in our school with respect.	3.4%	0.0%	10.3%	86.2%	0.0%	29	2.89
Student feedback is obtained to inform the PBIS decision-making process.	34.5%	6.9%	27.6%	27.6%	3.4%	29	2.42
Adults in our school use effective discipline strategies defined by logical consequences and refrain from punishment and shaming.	10.3%	3.4%	6.9%	62.1%	17.2%	29	3.04
Adults in our school treat students with respect.	3.4%	0.0%	0.0%	65.5%	31.0%	29	3.32

Table 5. *Culture Survey Data Related to Teacher-Student Relationships*. This table provides data from student and staff survey questions related to the area of teacher-student relationships.

Addressing teacher-student relationships from a staff perspective provides an alternative data sample for this research. One method of gaining this evidence was by analyzing the Staff Culture Survey (Appendix D). Strong teacher-student relationships at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School are supported by the fact that 96.5% of staff reported that they agree or strongly agree that adults in the school treat students with respect. Staff members also reported at a rate of 96.5% that they agree or strongly agree that students treat adults with respect. It was also communicated that 86.2% of Abraham Lincoln School's staff members agreed or strongly agreed that the school respects and celebrates others' differences, while 10.3% didn't know and chose to abstain from answering this question. Staff members communicated they agree and strongly agree that adults in the school use effective discipline strategies defined by logical

consequences and refrain from punishment and shaming at a rate of 79.3%, while 10.3% of staff members didn't know and abstained from answering this question.

The area that came up as a need in the area of teacher-student relationships is that only 31% of teachers reported they agree or strongly agree that student feedback is obtained to inform the PBIS decision-making process. It appears that one of the most important methods of informing the educational process is actually free and available right at their fingertips. It is using the students' voices. This is something the administration at Lincoln Elementary School will need to work on incorporating much more heavily in the future. A sample of the Student and Staff Culture Surveys that pertains more directly to teacher-student relationships is available above in Table 5.

When it comes to teacher-student relationships, perhaps the most valuable research collected came in the form of interviews. During interviews, there were a variety of words used to describe teacher-student relationships and spoke to various staff members' philosophies on the subject. Some of these words included respect, sharing, relaxed, voice, discussion, time, bond, and family. During the course of interviews, at least 2 of the 5 interviewees used these words when referencing teacher-student relationships, which is the reason they have been shared. For example, Mrs. Johnson commented, "I typically like to spend time the first week of the school year just going through the routines and getting to know my students. Whenever there is a bit of downtime or a transition, I discuss their likes and dislikes to create a bond and show them I'm here for them. I feel that respect needs to be a mutual thing." Another example is from Mrs. White who stated, "It's important to establish routines at the start of the school year. At the same time, you have to create an environment that shows students the classroom is a safe, family-like place for sharing." While each staff member had their own specific strategies regarding the

establishment of teacher-student relationships, it was also noted the faculty sets high standards for themselves. Four out of five staff members cited specific strategies they would like to try or have seen their colleagues try and would like to implement in the future to improve their practice. Mrs. Anderson stated, “Something I’ve been thinking about doing is more of a morning meeting. More of a structured morning meeting, where the students sit down and maybe answer a question each day depending how much time you can give it could really help building relationships and a family-like bond between students.” Similarly, Mrs. Jones offered ample suggestions when she stated, “One teacher plays music in the morning when her students come in, which I love and keep meaning to do. I just think it sets a nice, relaxing tone for the day. The other thing I would like to do eventually is a morning meeting daily. That’s one of my long-term goals. It lets kids know what’s happening but also builds up that rapport and relationship.”

Additionally, information collected during interviews suggests that teacher-student relationships can be improved school-wide. Three out of five staff members interviewed mentioned specific school-wide strategies for improvement. Some of these improvements include increased student Ambassador inclusion, student poster creation, classroom liaisons, and teacher-student connection events. For example, Mrs. White mentioned, “Any chance kids get to hang out with a teacher in a more relaxed setting - kids love that! That’s why you have kids that are like ‘Can I have lunch with you?’ They would rather sit with a teacher and talk about nothing than sit with their classmates. Anytime kids get that chance it’s kind of a big deal for them.” As you can see, teachers had a great deal of information to offer in the area of teacher-student relationships that provides insight into the overall culture of Abraham Lincoln School.

## Judgments

In an effort to judge the overall results of the research, we must first refer back to the original research questions:

- *What impact does a school's PBIS program play in school culture?*
- *To what extent do teacher-student relationships impact school climate?*
- *To what extent do teacher-student relationships impact student motivation?*
- *To what extent do teacher-student relationships impact teacher motivation?*

The data gathered in this study is specific to the current climate and culture of Abraham Lincoln Elementary School. While the decisive goal is to utilize the information in this study to improve the cultures within all educational settings, this section will focus solely on the data specific to Lincoln Elementary School.

Based on the data collected, it can be concluded that teacher-student relationships have a major impact on school climate. This was evident time and again during teacher interviews. Five out of five staff members interviewed mentioned teacher-student relationships being an integral part of their classrooms. Mrs. Jones stated, "The teacher-student relationship is the foundation for any classroom and if you've got a good teacher-student relationship then your classroom management just falls into place." When asked about teacher-student relationships, Mrs. Anderson stated, "At 7 years old in second grade, they want to have a relationship with people. I think it's more important at the younger ages for them to have that relationship and for them to love school and to love learning. And, if you love learning and you make it exciting and they respect you and like you, then I think you're halfway there with that buy-in and getting them to at least try." As a result, there's no doubt that teachers feel their relationships with students are essential. This is a positive result in terms of both the school and the data collected as it shows

that good relationships are being formed and positive intentions are behind teacher-student interactions.

When it comes to teacher-student relationships impacting student motivation, this is one of the areas which quite possibly shows the greatest need for improvement in the school. The results of data collected show that student motivation is impacted greatly by the level of individual teacher-student relationships. For example, students indicated in the Student Culture Survey results that they really want their behaviors to be noticed by adults within the building. As noted in the data, only 54.3% of students stated that good behavior is noticed at their school. This shows they are craving adult approval and it is a motivating factor for them. As educators, the next step is to use this leverage to our advantage by teaching students that the way to gain our approval is through demonstrating expected behaviors, not due to the perceived reward but because it was the right thing to do. “The more kids come to rely on our evaluations, our decisions about what’s good and bad, rather than learning to form their own judgments it leads them to measure their worth in terms of what will lead us to smile and dole out some more approval” (Kohn, 2001, p. 200). Additionally, Mrs. Anderson stated during an interview that she always tells the kids about her family and silly stories about her that she thinks are funny. Then, sometimes parents will tell them that they heard what she or her husband did. Obviously, the kids are excited about school and care enough about the bond that’s been built to go home and tell their parents about the fun things that happen at school and with their teacher.

While this evidence demonstrates that teacher-student relationships have a strong impact on student motivation, it also showed that there is much work to be done in this area at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School. This is evident not only by the student evidence previously mentioned but also by the fact that 69% of staff members either didn’t know, disagreed, or



strongly disagreed that student feedback is obtained to inform the PBIS decision-making process at the school. When asked about student involvement during staff member interviews, Mrs. Jones stated, “I don’t feel kids are necessarily involved. I feel like they participate in it and they enjoy participating in PBIS. They look forward to participating like getting prizes and hearing announcements but I feel like they’re more participants than active members.” This is direct evidence that staff members feel a student's motivation is important and needs to be a more integral part of the educational process as well.

Teacher motivation is also impacted by teacher-student relationships. The data showed that five out of five staff members interviewed pointed to teacher-student relationships being a key emphasis in their classroom. When describing teacher-student relationships in her classroom, Mrs. Jones stated, “It should be the focus to lay a strong foundation but I also feel it has to be an ongoing commitment from the teacher to continue to build that relationship and the rapport between the students so that you can continue to have growth emotionally with the students, growth academically with the students, and in order for them to feel safe and take risks and for the classroom management piece to hold up too.” Statements such as this one show evidence that the maintenance of teacher-student relationships is definitely a motivating factor for staff members as well as students within the school. While reporting this information, it is also important to note that evidence is clear that there is work to be completed toward improvement in this area as well. As indicated in Appendix D, staff feels that information needs to be shared and articulated more clearly with them. This is demonstrated when 41.4% of staff members disagreed or strongly disagreed that “data is used to reinforce the PBIS decision-making process.” It was also reinforced when 48.3% of staff members disagreed or strongly disagreed

that “lesson plans are available for teaching and reteaching PBIS expectations.” There are definitely some major improvements needed in this area based on the data shared.

There is evidence that suggests a school’s PBIS program plays a major role in its school culture. First and foremost, it is highly likely that respondents to the 5essentials survey, the Staff Culture Survey, the Student Culture Survey, and all the interviews considered Lincoln Elementary School’s PBIS Program while completing their responses. This is mostly true because PBIS has become part of the culture at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School. In addition, this played out during the interviews. For example, when asked about improving teacher-student relationships, three out of five staff members suggested ideas for school-wide incentives for the PBIS program. When the question was brought up, there was no reference to PBIS in the framing of the questions. Nonetheless, the PBIS program is such a constant in the school culture that it seems to come up often when discussing school culture. Additionally, there is other evidence that supports this judgment. When speaking about staff buy-in during her interview, Mrs. Anderson stated, “I think everyone’s bought into it (PBIS). They think of it right off the top of their head to solve a problem or to work with a child who’s been having some behavior issues. It’s the first incentive that comes to mind for everyone. Did we try giving them a Star Value?” Mrs. White also added, “I think it does a good job of stating expectations to kids. The fact that we talk about expectations so much with students at the beginning of the year but also reinforce them midyear as a refresher and there are reminders everywhere is great. There’s common language everywhere amongst all staff too.” Therefore, our school’s PBIS program has a profound impact on school culture. Due to this there are definitely changes needing to be made within the school’s PBIS program for its optimal function and overall school culture.

## **Recommendations**

Collectively, the current frameworks in place at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School will need some major modifications and adjustments in order to best continue to build teacher-student relationships and school culture. Upon reviewing the four C's, the alterations needed are fairly obvious. Through the analysis of data collected, a thorough plan will be presented for the school in the area of increased staff and student voice in the decision-making process. The next section will offer recommendations and analyze some of the modifications necessary to make Lincoln Elementary School a superior learning environment that values teacher-student relationships in maximizing its school culture around PBIS.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: TO-BE FRAMEWORK**

### **Introduction**

After analyzing baseline data from parents and teachers on the 5Essentials survey, conducting the Student Culture Survey and the Staff Culture Survey, and conducting teacher interviews, a clear perspective of Abraham Lincoln School's culture has been formulated. It is evident that improvements must be made in order for the culture to improve within the building. Before cultural progress can be made, a clear and concise vision must first be outlined. To aid in creating the optimal plan for success at Abraham Lincoln School, I will refer to Wagner's 4 C's Diagnostic Tool (2006) and lay a framework utilizing the four components: context, competencies, conditions, and culture (Wagner, et al., 2006, p.109).

### **Envisioning the Success "To-Be"**

#### **Context**

An ideal context at Abraham Lincoln School includes several vital components. The district will benefit from a thorough review of its district SEL curricula, including PBIS. Once

the district reviews to ensure consistency and provide a baseline, individual schools will have guidelines for review and can form committees of their own. In the end, the ideal context includes a successful social-emotional learning program across all four district schools, whether it is related to PBIS or not. It will also include content, passionate teachers, focused on strong teacher-student relationships. The district will develop a solid strategic plan for the future to ensure short-term success, as well as long-term financial stability. It will be evident that trust is well established and at the heart of all relationships in the district!

Specific to the area of staff and student voice, the current PBIS program is run primarily by adults. The team of decision-makers for PBIS is also very limited as it is merely a group that meets when it is explicitly necessary to plan an event. In order to better represent the entire staff in building PBIS decisions, the school will establish a sign-up at the start of the school year that allows voluntary participation and requires specific representation from specific stakeholders. The team will meet at least monthly to plan for school events.

In order to successfully include student voice within Lincoln Elementary, the school would create a student group, the Lion Leaders, to represent the school. There will be a representative from each classroom as well as an alternate representative to represent the school. The students will be chosen by their fellow classmates since those are the students they will be representing. Students may nominate any classmate they choose to be a Lion Leader but nominees must commit to following the character traits of being respectful, responsible, and safe throughout the school year, giving up their recess and lunch time to meet with other Lion Leaders, and leading their classmates in our Lion Leader assigned initiatives. These students will meet with staff to help plan decision-making for the school, plan leadership activities, act as a liaison between the staff and students, and act as role models for all students. This was made

evident by staff interviews when student input and voice were brought up by five out of five staff members who stated this was a lacking element. Mrs. Jones stated, “I think we need to use students more actively in the process. I think they should be visible within the school and to their classmates so that classmates know there are kids who are listening to what we’re saying and taking our ideas back. If they’re more actively involved and making decisions, that will help to positively impact the rest of the building.” Another staff member stated, “I think more kids could be involved in some way. If the kids have a topic, they could talk to the rest of the class about it to get more kids feeling like they have a say.”

Trust is another element that must be evident in a successful school and Lincoln Elementary is no exception. In schools, trust should exist in a variety of capacities including teacher-principal relationships, teacher-teacher relationships, teacher-student relationships, and teacher-district administrator relationships. Trust is evident in teacher-principal relationships partly through the evaluation process. When honest communication can occur and feedback can be given openly and honestly as a part of the process, trust is present between the teacher and principal. Moreover, on an everyday basis, trust can be seen through the collegiality that exists through regular interactions and communications. Are these interactions forced or natural? Teacher-teacher relationships are likely the relationships most easily overlooked in schools. Nonetheless, they are key to every school’s culture. Ideally, trust between teachers can be seen as respect through facing common struggles, problem solving, and common planning practices. In the area of teacher-student relationships, mutual respect and engagement are the key words. Students need to know that teachers are invested in them and care about them. When they feel this level of care and respect, they typically reciprocate the respect and engagement in the form of a mutual relationship with the teacher. In the end, this is how teacher-student relationships are

formed. Then, teacher-district administrator relationships are formed through thoughtful decision-making, district appreciation gifts, and collegial interactions throughout time. In summation, the totality of these relationships forms a school's culture. When acting in unison, the result is that all adults have pride in their school and district and enjoy coming to work on a daily basis. Students are happy to attend school because they feel safe and supported. Students feel as though all adults are there to support them and genuinely care for them as individuals. Ultimately, any individual who walks into the school district will be able to feel as if this is an outstanding environment to work and learn.

### **Competencies**

The optimal competency for building teacher-student relationships and school climate contains additional elements to address concerns from teachers as well. The plan includes regular and consistent training for all staff members, both new and returning. It would also include an initiation plan for training staff members hired during the school year. This way, all staff members enter the building with the same level of knowledge and understanding. Professional development within the building would be articulated through a clear and focused vision that included behavior management training and professional development in pertinent areas of the Danielson Framework, based on staff members' individual needs and goals as well as student discipline and PBIS expectations. These goals would be articulated through staff evaluations, goal meetings, and informal feedback conferences. "Although it has become routine to ask teachers to consider the needs of the whole child in their instructional planning and approaches, considering the needs of 'the whole teacher' remains a challenge for administrators" (Rodman, 2019, p. 110). One way to embed these focal points into regular staff meetings is through cohort assignments or breakout groups during the year. This would allow staff members the opportunity

to share and discuss ways in which to better their practice and incorporate things into their classroom firsthand. It would also increase buy-in to the process. During the interview process, one staff member stated, “There’s a group of people who are more knowledgeable about it because they’re on committees or whatever. It would be good for all of us to talk about it more and come up with ideas together, so everyone buys into it and just thinks about it more.”

Additionally, the updated formation of a more representative PBIS Team would allow for staff members to consult this group regarding effective strategies. “While district goals and needs should always be the driver when planning a professional learning program, it is important to at least give teachers a passenger seat. Otherwise, they will disengage and seek experiences elsewhere, detracting from what could potentially be an exceptionally strong professional learning community” (Rodman, 2019, p. 22). As a part of this group’s plan, they would release timely planned lessons throughout the school year for all teachers to implement within their classrooms. This would ensure that all students in all classrooms were receiving a common foundation and values in their social-emotional learning and would act as an outstanding supplement to the social-emotional learning curriculum. It would also ensure transparency across the building. Staff survey results revealed that only 20.6% of staff members agreed or strongly agreed that lesson plans are available for teaching and reteaching PBIS expectations at the school.

The optimal competency plan would also include the addition of support for principals to assist them in focusing on teacher-student relationships in the classrooms and modeling direct contact time with students over time spent in meetings. The hiring and training of lunch/recess supervisors could be diverted to the human resources department. This way, principals’ time spent on lunchroom/playground discipline, hiring of supervisors, and training of supervisors

could be transferred to time in the classroom creating relationships with other stakeholders. Another adjustment in the prototypical situation is the implementation of a summer curriculum planning committee, a regular building committee to review the PBIS program, and a student ambassador program in the building. Through these committees, teachers will feel as though buy-in has been established through their representatives, we will add some fresh ideas to the program, and students will also have increased buy-in through their representatives. These implementations will, no doubt, increase the competencies of teacher-student relationships at Abraham Lincoln School.

### **Conditions**

The ideal conditions for strong teacher-student relationships that would positively impact school culture would include multiple changes at Abraham Lincoln School. The first change would be the allocation of funds for the specific purpose of relationship building, the improvement of PBIS, and school culture. With the proper funding, the school could make the necessary changes without a worry of budgetary constraints. Grade-level centers (GRC's) are going to continue to be a part of the long-term district plan. As a reminder, GRC's were brought to the district during the 2011-2012 school year. In prior years, all buildings, except the middle school, housed students from early childhood through fifth grade. The new plan included redefining the grade levels of all buildings except the middle school. One building would house students from pre-kindergarten through first grade. Abraham Lincoln Elementary School would now accommodate second and third-grade students exclusively, and another building would only house fourth and fifth-grade students. As a result of the funding, the district could provide welcoming events with future and past staff members present. This would provide families an opportunity for transition and assist in relationship building across the district. As a result of the



increased funding, many other changes could be made as well. A longer school day would allow for increased student contact time and, thus, provide increased learning and increased time for relationship building. The considerate selection of committee members of teacher leaders within the building to assist with curriculum adoptions, schedule creation, and shared leadership would also make conditions ideal at Abraham Lincoln School. Articulation of ideas back to teams would improve, as well as buy-in from the remainder of teachers. The feeling of a burden for teachers and principals would also decrease, leaving more time to focus on relationship building and school culture. Additionally, increased funding would also allow for the inclusion of a variety of incentives within the PBIS program at Lincoln Elementary School.

While increased funding would be ideal, there are a couple of solutions that are less costly and could thus occur more immediately. These examples include goals in the areas of family engagement, schedule alterations, and PBIS engagement. Leveraging the relationship that already exists between the schools and the district's two parent-teacher organizations (PTO's) could be of great value to increasing family engagement. There are also many changes that could be made within the current schedule that are less costly prior to adding time to the school day. The PBIS program is one that is currently going through modifications and we continue to evaluate on a regular basis to meet the needs of students. As a result, it is our fiscal responsibility to exhaust all options prior to increasing the budget.

In regards to family engagement, there is a strong relationship between our current elementary school PTO and our school. Because of this, we should be able to leverage this relationship to collaborate on the creation of some new family engagement events that meet the needs of both organizations' goals. If we can do that, we should be able to engage families as well as create worthwhile relationships in our school community. Some ideas for these new

events include a “Sneak Peek” welcoming event for all families, a special PTO welcome basket for new families, “Meet the Teacher” Nights, and Open Houses. This relationship could go a long way in bridging the gap between families and the school.

While our school schedule works well for the length of time we are provided, lack of time always seems to be a major factor. Increasing the amount of time in the school day would come at a major cost to the school district, so there are some alternatives to try first. One solution would be trying some different types of block schedules. Specific for our purposes, I would like to propose the implementation of a social-emotional learning block to begin each morning. This 30-minute block of time would allow each student to become increasingly part of their classroom community. It would ensure all students feel they are a member of the team and that teachers have the necessary time to implement the relationships for success in the classroom. After all, during our interviews five out of five staff members stated the importance of these relationships being integral to the classroom experience. One stated, “I feel it really is the foundation. It should be the focus of the school year to lay a strong foundation but I also feel it has to be an ongoing commitment from the teacher to continue to build that relationship...”

As discussed within this study, there are many pieces within Abraham Lincoln Elementary School’s PBIS program that need modification. Several of these modifications have been suggested already. Another solution for our optimal scenario that would also act within our current budget is moving to a “menu system” for incentives. Rather than offer a system of a prize store for students, which currently costs the school money, we could switch to a “menu system.” This type of system would offer students a selection of three to five prize options that are based on creating relationships with other students and staff members within the school. For example, the prizes could be “lunch with a favorite staff member” or “drawing party with your friends”.

This would be an outstanding way to honor students for their positive choices, motivate them, and build relationships and school culture.

### **Culture**

The optimal culture for teacher-student relationships to have a positive effect on school culture would include a number of changes and improvements. The first would be the implementation of a strategic plan that bridges the district toward successful negotiations of a new teacher contract and improved relations with staff as a whole. The previous staff negotiations included a strike and resulted in some hurt feelings around the district. Along the way during implementation of the strategic plan, the district would benefit greatly from an increase in staff appreciation events and team building activities throughout the school year. Next, Lincoln School would benefit from professional development activities that focus on the area of team building and relationship building amongst peers. If teachers are unable to successfully establish relationships amongst their peers, how can they expect to sustain them with students? The next step is to target participation on committees within the building where individuals within close-knit groups are separated, yet allowed to positively impact change collaboratively with other staff members. "Just as you select ingredients to throw into a stewpot before you turn up the heat, you need to select carefully the individuals who will take part in a conversation about the conflict you are seeking to orchestrate on the issue you are trying to work through" (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009, p.158). One method of increasing team building within committees is allowing the participation of all volunteers on committees but utilizing building principals to mix-up the volunteers where individuals' skills may be best suited. This process will ensure the participation of all but also provide discrepancy of leadership to strengthen the culture where necessary. The prototypical culture will also include interactivity

between all staff members within Abraham Lincoln School. This would include classrooms, hallways, and the lounge. Each of these locations will need to be addressed by the building principal with individual staff members and the whole group to promote a collaborative school and the modeling of relationships for students. The beginning of each and every school year should begin with a behavior and discipline presentation that creates unified expectations for all staff members as well as delineates classroom-managed versus office-managed behaviors. Then, in the end, follow up and a continuation of efforts should occur through team-building efforts.

### **Conclusion**

Through the identification of context, competencies, conditions, and culture related to Abraham Lincoln School I was able to identify both the current obstacles needing to be overcome as well as a vision for ideal success in the future. In the end, Lincoln School will need clear visioning and planning, the implementation of successful committees and committee members, strong professional development, and improved systems.

### **Strategies and Actions for Change**

#### **Introduction**

In order to successfully implement this change plan, there are three main goals needing to be addressed. These goal areas are establishing consistent PBIS programs across the district, increasing student voice and participation within the school setting, and improving the professional development delivery model related to teacher voice within the building. If these three goals can be completed effectively and successfully, I believe our change plan will be successful.

**Strategies and Action**

Establishing consistent PBIS programs across the district will help us in various areas of the 4 C's. Overall, this consistency will ensure that the alignment of our district's four schools in the area of PBIS is seen in a positive light by the community. The students will then be nurtured in a culture of knowing expectations from Pre-K all the way up through eighth grade. When it comes to creating a district and building PBIS Committee and Team, these actions will play into impacting the culture, conditions, and competencies of the district because the committee will be made up of targeted members such as the principal, psychologist, social worker, two classroom teachers, a specials area teacher, and a program assistant that will have buy-in and know their reason for attending is meaningful to their building. The duration of time expected for this implementation will be approximately two years due to gaining buy-in to the program as well as the program's implementation.

Providing ongoing professional development to staff in the area of PBIS will improve the culture and competencies of our staff as they will again feel their overall professional development plan is meaningful, has a clear focus, and their voice is heard as a part of the process. Staff members will now view their attendance at professional development as meaningful.

This work begins with the review of the social emotional learning curriculum across the district to ensure it is meeting our needs. The SEL curriculum needs to be implemented with fidelity and it needs to be at the forefront of the district's mindset. Then, the PBIS Committee will work on professional development for the district throughout a year's time that brings social-emotional learning to the forefront with the objective of fostering a mindset shift toward the importance of this topic and student voice above all. After the first year's professional

development and focusing on the mindset shift, we will continue implementation in the second year by strengthening overall teaching and learning strategies focused on impacting behavioral outcomes in students. From there, we will continue for years to come by providing ongoing professional development as refresher training as necessary and continuing to review and evaluate the SEL and PBIS programs on an annual basis.

As a branch off of this district-wide committee, each individual school will form its own PBIS Team. These teams will contain a representative group of staff members that will give the staff of each school a feeling their voices are being heard and increase buy-in. This means classroom teachers, specials subject area teachers, interventionists, administration, our Lion Leaders, and program assistants will all be represented within the PBIS Team at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School. This team will continue to meet regularly for several important reasons throughout the year at the school level. They will meet at least monthly with the goal of planning and implementing school PBIS decisions. This includes the planning of student expectation delivery, incentive systems planning, celebration planning, data sharing, lesson planning, and any other needs that may arise along the way. They will also articulate their team agendas and progress with the rest of the personnel at staff meetings.

As a part of the ongoing improvement of our PBIS system, several specific implementations need to be initiated by the PBIS Team. The team will plan a monthly social-emotional lesson to be taught in each classroom in an effort to increase buy-in from our entire school community toward our common goals and to create a common language within the building. With the assistance of the school psychologist, the PBIS Team will organize, discuss, and plan a presentation of behavior data for staff on a monthly basis. This will assist in bringing

transparency to the entire staff as well as inform staff members on the impact their guidance and expectations have on student behavior.

Lastly, the team will be tasked with modifying the incentive program at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School to include incentives based on relationships rather than toys and goodies in order to build on students' intrinsic motivation for following behavior expectations rather than receiving extrinsic rewards. For example, the PBIS Team will now create monthly "menu systems." This type of system would offer students a selection of three to five options that are based on creating relationships with other students and staff members within the school. For example, the options would be "lunch with a favorite staff member" or "drawing party with your friends". This "menu system" rewards students for their positive choices, motivates them, and builds relationships and school culture. In a study conducted by Patall, Cooper, & Wynn (2010), results revealed that when students were provided choice by their teacher, not only did students report higher intrinsic motivation but the study also showed an increase in the students' perception of the teachers' support for autonomy within the classroom (Patall, Cooper, & Wynn, 2010, p. 896). With the help of the preceding implementations by our PBIS Team, the Abraham Lincoln Elementary School PBIS Program would be the key to a successful culture within and around the school.

Abraham Lincoln Elementary School also needs to re-establish a priority in PBIS professional development for staff members. This can be accomplished at the start of each year by dedicating time at an Institute Day to the topic. However, this will need to become an annual practice. It will need to become a priority for the building that is engaging for staff so that it does not become repetitive. One of the goals of these staff PBIS expectations must be to teach and demonstrate consistency in expectations for all staff in all areas of the building. If PBIS truly is

part of the building's culture, its importance should be moved to the front of the line by everyone involved with making the school successful.

As you can see, there is a lot of work to be completed at the building level for the PBIS Team. Because of the amount of work to be done, it will be a multi-year completion process. However, due to the dedication of the staff members and the ability of groups to complete work in small groups, the expected timeline will be two years. One year will be needed for buy-in and initialization of the program. Then, the program will be up and running and ironing out the kinks within year two. The Lincoln Elementary School staff has shown they are adaptable, ready, and willing to change things up in order to engage students when it comes to the PBIS program.

The second goal of increasing student voice and participation within the school setting will increase competency by giving students a sense of belonging. By having students on the PBIS team, all students will feel as if their vote counts, that they have a student team that represents them, and that staff cares enough to ask their thoughts. This goal will be accomplished in several ways including our Lion Leaders Program, our Lion Links Program, an adjusted schedule, and increased parent involvement.

Our first means of increasing student participation at Lincoln Elementary School, and perhaps our most meaningful, is through the Lions Leaders Program. In order to successfully implement student voice within Lincoln Elementary, the school will create a student group, the Lion Leaders, to represent the school. There will be a representative from each classroom as well as an alternate representative to represent the school. These students will meet with staff to plan decision-making for the school, plan leadership activities, act as a liaison between the staff and students, and act as role models for all students. This group will essentially become the group of active leaders and communication leaders for both students and staff across the school. While



this implementation may be the most important, it can be accomplished during the course of one school year. The school will need to acquire staff members to lead the group of students and use the PBIS Team to determine how to best vantage the student leaders.

Several long-term intrinsic impacts result from the previously mentioned strategies as well. The “menu system” offers students the opportunity to become more individually involved with staff members and spend more quality, small group time with staff members and students. This time can be used to build on the positive decisions students have made and allow them to realize the impact their decisions are having on others. These positive impressions should be captured and leveraged whenever possible. The “menu system” will greatly increase the intrinsic opportunities when compared with the raffle offered in past years. Another huge opportunity is the Lion Leaders Program. The program offers select student representatives to act as liaisons to their classmates. They can assist in promoting intrinsic values within their classmates throughout the school year within the school. Of course, these students are likely those that already have strong intrinsic motivation. Nonetheless, who do our students learn best from? It’s obviously their peers!

Another implementation across the school to increase student involvement and voice will be Lion Links. When students are in a classroom of twenty to thirty students, they often do not feel as though their voices are heard. The Lion Links Program will be a mentoring program developed to provide at-risk students a chance to create a positive relationship with an adult in the building. Bill and Melinda Gates recognized the importance that every student be known and have an adult advocate in their school building during an initiative they supported in many high schools (McTighe & Willis, 2019, p. 150). Not only will students create a positive bond and feel their voice is heard by their mentor but the program will be an engaging and safe environment

for them within the school. Once again, this implementation is extremely important but will merely take a couple of thoughtful meetings and emails to initiate. The school's previously established leadership team or PBIS Team will plan out the particulars along with the social worker. Then, volunteer mentors will be gathered through email and paired up. The program could be up and running within months and would likely bring a boost to the morale of both students and faculty throughout the building. One additional exciting piece of news related to the Lion Links Program is that Lincoln Elementary was actually able to begin implementing this program as a pilot during this past school year by following the described plan with great success. A need arose to begin implementation of the program earlier than anticipated and the occasion was seized.

The next valuable resource that will be added to the program at Lincoln Elementary School will require an adaptation of the overall school schedule. The change would focus on the addition of a social-emotional learning block or "morning meeting" to begin each day. This 30-minute block of time would allow each student to become increasingly part of their classroom community. Due to the unique circumstances surrounding Lincoln's arrival schedule, 30 minutes seems to be the most appropriate time allotment appropriate for accommodating any type of morning lesson. There is a 15-minute fluctuating window of time for student arrival, so there is no definite time that students will be present. Officially, a lesson cannot begin with all students present until after this fluctuating window of time. Therefore, the timeframe for a full SEL lesson with all students present will only be 15 minutes in total. This total of 30 minutes would ensure all students feel they are a member of the team and that teachers have the necessary time to implement the relationships for success in the classroom. While there would be monthly lessons needing to be implemented as a part of our PBIS program, this time could be creatively

structured based on team, classroom, teacher, and student needs. The morning meeting would likely be implemented as a 30-minute block of time for the first year before gaining feedback from teachers through a survey at the end of the school year on its successes and challenges. This implementation would merely be a shift from the normal and would simply need buy-in from the staff and transparency to other stakeholders. As a result, the change could definitely be implemented within a calendar year. This would leave time to prepare staff members while also communicating the change as a positive to families and the board of education.

Due to the age of the student population at Lincoln Elementary School, parents also play an important role when considering student voice and participation. It is important that parents feel they are a part of the learning process within the building by being informed about their child's education and social emotional learning. In an effort to increase parent engagement, involvement, and voice, several changes will be implemented as well. There will be a dedicated section in the building newsletter, the Lincoln Letter, that explains the current happenings regarding SEL and PBIS. This will ensure parents know exactly what their child is currently learning in regards to social-emotional curriculum and that it can be carried over at home.

The building administration will also establish a monthly, open forum meeting with parents called "Coffee with the Principal." This will be a 30-minute meeting where the building principal will present information from an established agenda and then take a handful of questions from parents. The questions at the end of the meeting will give parents time to have the floor in a more open-ended session. Then, the topics of those questions will lead into the creation of the agenda for the following "Coffee with the Principal". The purpose of this meeting is to allow parents to feel comfortable approaching the principal as well as feel their voices are heard. This will run directly into the building's relationship with the Elementary Parent Teacher

Organization (PTO). The principal will leverage this relationship to lead change in the addition of more targeted family engagement events that serve the purpose of school and PTO goals. In the end, parents will feel as though their voices are heard and valued within the school.

The goal of parent engagement is rather complex and, therefore, it is expected to take a bit more time than some of our others to implement. The actions themselves will be initiated rather quickly but the overall buy-in and culture around them will be a more gradual process. As a result, the expected timeline of implementation for parent engagement is three years. This will allow for buy-in, adaptations to the plans along the way, and collection of parent feedback. It is always important for parents to feel as though their feedback is heard. Otherwise, what is the point of getting them involved?

The final goal of improving the professional development delivery model for the staff will act to improve the culture and competencies at Lincoln School. Professional development within our building has been a topic that has affected our climate for a while and a well-articulated professional development plan would definitely go a long way in improving the culture around our building.

In an effort to improve the professional development at Lincoln School, the school will initiate a PD Planning Team. The team will be made up of representative volunteers willing to plan out professional development for their peers. The team will consist of the principal, a classroom teacher from each grade level, a tech integration specialist, and one member of the support staff (at a minimum). The team will plan professional development based on the needs of staff, needs of students, mandated trainings in the district, and time within the school year. Included within this plan will be earmarking time for behavior data presentations by the PBIS Team, articulation of committee happenings, discipline training, and PBIS training. The planning

team will be implemented over the course of three years. Recruiting and opportunities will begin early and often. However, past history with this team foreshadows that buy-in will take longer than with most teams and committees. A similar team has existed in the past and has lacked the support of its colleagues when they have felt professional development experiences do not meet the needs of all staff members in all teaching positions. Because of this, additional time will be spent focusing toward buy-in for the team through conducting professional development surveys. Implementation will occur over a three-year period. This will help to gain staff member buy-in as well as full understanding of involvement with the team. The inclusion of these items will ensure transparency within the building as well as consistency among staff members for implementation purposes. The full implementation of a PD Planning Team will ensure staff members have an opportunity to provide a voice and feedback on the professional development they receive during the school year.

Lincoln Elementary School will also initiate peer observation as a form of professional development. As a result of peer observation, staff members will learn from one of the most valuable resources available to them that have also been right under their noses all this time. Rodman suggests that if we want to open classrooms to increased collaboration, we need to take evaluation out of observation and create teacher-to-teacher observation opportunities (Rodman, 2019, p. 114). Peer observation allows staff members to learn from other staff members that are in the same role as them by shadowing them or observing them in their role. Each individual is hired for their own unique talents. Due to each person's creativity and uniqueness in facing a challenge, it's important that we all continue to learn from each other on a daily basis. Peer observations will be initiated within the first year of implementation. However, there is a great deal of staff preparation and planning that needs to occur to ensure the observations are

meaningful and staff members are providing quality feedback to the building. Additionally, we want to also provide time within our process to make adaptations along the way. As a result, the implementation of peer observations will be a three-year process.

Another piece of professional development that will be added at Lincoln Elementary is a formal teacher mentoring program. While there has always been a mentoring program, it was informal with no requirements, checks and balances, or guidelines along the way. The intentions of the past program were always good but it was very easy for new staff members to be thrown to the wolves. The new mentoring program will involve a handbook with guidelines and checkpoints for mentors and mentees. A key piece of this handbook will be a check-in training with the mentor before the start of the school year to review Lincoln Elementary School's SEL curriculum. The plan will also include a check-in prior to the start of the school year with the building administrator to review Lincoln's PBIS Program. It will also include mandatory peer observations of the mentee and mentor. The first observation will be of the mentor and will be conducted by the mentee along with the principal. Then, the mentor will conduct two additional observations of the mentee during the school year and provide feedback. Additionally, there will be formal meetings for both the mentors and mentees. All first and second-year teachers will be required to attend five new teacher meetings during the school year. All mentors will attend two of these meetings during the school year along with their mentees. The aforementioned process will be implemented over a two-year span. The first year will be dedicated to buy-in, planning, and articulation. The second year will be dedicated to seeing the physical plan go into action. This process will not only help prepare educators for their time within the district but also help them build relationships with others in the district and provide strength and confidence in our building's overall culture. These additions to our professional development plan will help ensure

staff members are prepared to grow as educators year after year. Below, you will find a detailed recommendation chart that articulates a clear action plan for Abraham Lincoln School.

### Abraham Lincoln School Action Plan

Goal Area	Strategies	Action Plan	Party Responsible	Desired Outcome
Establish consistent PBIS programs across the district.	Create a district PBIS Committee. (2 years)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Building principals hand pick representative members to form a district committee.</li> <li>2. Committee meets regularly to articulate information and ensure consistency among buildings regarding PBIS.</li> </ol>	Building principals & PBIS Committee	Consistency among district staff members and within buildings regarding PBIS frameworks
	Create a building PBIS Team to work on revamping the school's PBIS program. (2 year & ongoing)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The building principal will carry over members from the district PBIS Team to work as a building committee with the goal of making decisions to freshen up the PBIS program within the building.</li> <li>2. Team meets regularly to plan ideas to freshen up the building PBIS program.</li> </ol>	Building principal & PBIS Team	Create a new, revived PBIS program that engages and motivates students to achieve successful behavior and ultimately create good citizens
	Provide ongoing professional development (PD) to staff in PBIS. (2 years & ongoing)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Send a representative group of staff to a PBIS training.</li> <li>2. Follow up this training with a plan of training the remainder of the staff in PBIS.</li> <li>3. Continue to provide PD in the area of PBIS throughout the year as well as in following years to freshen up staff.</li> </ol>	District admin. & Building principals	Create a knowledgeable staff in the area of PBIS, who explicitly understands the research behind PBIS and why it works for students
Increase student voice and participation within the school setting.	Create a group (Lion Leaders) within the building to represent our student voice. (1 year & ongoing)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Principal finds a representative group of preferably 4 staff members to lead our student group.</li> <li>2. Classroom teachers nominate 1 student per classroom to represent their class on the team.</li> <li>3. Lion Leaders send permission slips home to parents.</li> <li>4. As topics arise throughout the year, this group of students will be our means for student voice.</li> </ol>	Building principal, Lion Leaders Staff, Classroom teachers, Lion Leaders, & Parents	Gain a regular means of student voice through the building, so students feel as though they are a meaningful part of the building and their opinions matter
	Create a group (Lion Links) within the building to link at-risk students with a positive adult relationship	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Principal and social worker collaborate to find adult mentors willing to mentor students.</li> <li>2. Classroom teachers recommend students through the problem-solving team process who may be at-risk and need</li> </ol>	Building principal, Social worker, Classroom teachers, Parents	Create positive relationships between staff and students, while also providing a positive role model and engaging experience for at-risk

	(mentor). (1 year & ongoing)	a positive adult mentor in the building. 3. Social worker sends permission slips home and pairs up mentors/mentees. 4. Mentors/mentees meet at least monthly during lunch to create relationships.		learners
	Adapt school schedule to include a social-emotional learning block (morning meeting). (1 year)	1. Principal updates school schedule. 2. Principal articulates updated schedule changes to staff with changes, goals, and purpose. 3. Principal works with the PBIS Team to incorporate regular lessons into the SEL block and ways we can leverage this change to best benefit students. 4. Principal articulates updated schedule changes to parents with changes, goals, and purpose.	Building principal, PBIS Team, All staff	Create an optimal learning environment that maximizes opportunities for relationship building between all stakeholders while teaching and incorporating social-emotional learning strategies
	Improve parent and family engagement within the school community (gradually over 3 years)	1. Principal creates a new section in the school newsletter dedicated to informing parents about PBIS initiatives. 2. Principal uses a previously established bond with the PTO to connect with families. 3. Principal invites the parent community to connect via “Coffee with the Principal” meetings. 4. Principal and the PTO collaborate to create new community engagement events focused on relationship building.	Building principal, PTO	Engage families within the community and build lasting relationships with all stakeholders in the school community
Improve the professional development delivery model within the building.	Initiate PD Planning Team in the building. (3 years)	1. Staff members volunteer and the principal selects representative members as a part of a planning team for PD. 2. PD Planning Team meets monthly to plan upcoming PD for all staff that aligns to a vision focused on staff engagement.	Principal & PD Planning Team	Engage ALL staff in worthwhile learning opportunities
	Initiate peer observation as a professional development resource. (3 years)	1. Building principals set up routine plans to have various staff members observe other targeted professionals within the building.	Building principals	Share teaching strategies within the building and build collegiality and appreciation for others’ skills around the building
	Improve the mentoring program within the district. (2 years)	1. Building principals select mentors for all new staff. 2. District administration collaborates on a new, focused plan to improve mentoring that incorporates the mentor in the process along the way and also brings peer observation into the fold.	Building principals & District admin.	Increased success of all new staff and improved leadership abilities gained by our more experienced teachers



		3. Administration sets up a meeting to articulate a new plan to our mentors.		
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Table 6. *Abraham Lincoln School Action Plan*. This table provides detailed steps to Abraham Lincoln Elementary School's action plan for improvement due to recommendations based on the research in this study.

## Conclusion

With the help of the above strategies and action plans, Abraham Lincoln School will be well on its way to improving teacher-student relationships and school culture. Through new and improved PBIS programming, a revamped professional development plan, the addition of several committees, improved mentoring, and the use of peer observation, Lincoln School is headed in the right direction. The above strategies will help build trust amongst all stakeholders. “These trust-based relationships are essential if schools and districts are to fundamentally disrupt the extreme isolation of educators and help build a profession of teaching based on standards of practice” (Wagner, et al, 2006, p. 157).

## Implications and Policy Recommendations

### Introduction

There is no doubt social-emotional learning plays an important role in the everyday life of children in all schools across the nation. Many teachers have found that learning more about SEL has helped reduce the challenging behavior in their classes, and it has helped them learn how important it is to concentrate on their own health and well-being. For example, a teacher from another study began sharing what she was learning about her own health and well-being with her students and immediately found she was able to connect more deeply with students, especially those with more challenging behaviors (Causton & MacLeod, 2020, p. 85). With

society changing regularly, students are faced with an increased level of anxiety, familial concerns, and a higher need to be well-versed and adaptable to the unexpected turns life may bring. Societal changes are bringing an increased need for educational institutions to be the rock of the community and a place students can go to feel safe and in addition to learning at home, also learn at school how to deal with the challenges that life may bring their way. Now more than ever, teacher-student relationships and social-emotional learning programs need to be the strength of schools in order to assist in providing the positive culture necessary to provide this safe and secure environment for students.

In this study, I conducted a program evaluation concerning the PBIS program at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School. The program had a history of being successful over the years but needed a refresh to ensure buy-in from all stakeholders around the school and to improve the overall climate and culture of the building. It is my recommendation that school districts adopt a policy to make social-emotional learning the forefront of their schools' educational system. Currently, social-emotional learning is, at best, a subcomponent of schools' curricula. For example, when curricula are listed on school websites, they always seem to begin with ELA, Math, Science, and Social Studies. Then, there may be a social-emotional curriculum component listed at the bottom of the webpage. Because of the importance of social-emotional learning in society today, it makes sense for SEL components to be moved to the forefront and become a core curriculum component in all schools. By making social-emotional learning programs part of the core curriculum, all students will become well-versed in SEL strategies and be better able to deal with an ever-changing world.

**Policy Statement**

Social-emotional learning needs to become a core curricular component in all educational institutions that build on students' intrinsic motivation. These SEL curriculums should include anti-bullying, digital citizenship, a system for daily school-wide behavior, and a curriculum to support the five competencies of SEL (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, management skills, and responsible decision-making). In the end, the implementation needs to be backed by federal and state funding to ensure the social-emotional learning standards can be fully implemented to a point that can make all of our young students successful members of society. In 2003, the Illinois State Board of Education partnered with Illinois Classrooms in Action to create the Social-Emotional Learning Standards in accordance with Section 15(a) of Public Act 93-0495 to show an acceptance of the importance of social-emotional learning. However, without proper funding, there will never be the buy-in necessary to ensure the proper education for our children.

**Analysis of Needs**

In order to gain a full understanding of the urgency for social-emotional learning and for it to be moved to the forefront in education, it is necessary to analyze the issue from a variety of perspectives. I will make the case for this policy change from six distinct discipline areas: educational, economic, social, political, legal, and moral/ethical standpoints.

**Educational Analysis**

When looking at social-emotional learning from an educational standpoint, most educators will agree that it plays an extremely important role in the everyday lives of students.

“A 2011 meta-analysis by Joseph Durlak and colleagues found that students whose schooling incorporated instruction to develop competencies such as self-

awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making experienced significant academic gains--11 points higher than students who did not receive this type of instruction. The researchers attributed improved social outcomes to social and emotional learning that provides a foundation for better adjustment and academic performance as reflected in more positive social behaviors, fewer conduct problems, less emotional distress, and improved test scores and grades” (Wilson & Conyers, 2020, p. 62).

For example, the Illinois State Board of Education has already backed this case with the implementation of the Children’s Mental Health Act of 2003 and the creation of the Social-Emotional Learning Standards in accordance with Section 15(a) of Public Act 93-0495. The Social-Emotional Learning Standards call for ISBE to develop and implement a plan to incorporate social and emotional development standards as part of the Illinois Learning Standards” (ISBE, 2003). Nonetheless, this push has fallen short in Illinois schools due to a lack of funding, a lack of specific deadlines, and the lack of a specific uniform process.

Currently, the board policy for Lincoln Elementary School contains policies for anti-bullying (7:180-AP1, E2-E7), online safety (6:235), and SEL programming through PBIS (6:60-AP). Then, when it comes to curriculum (6:40), the board policy states (Use of Guides; #3) that “In all cases, sufficient latitude shall be permitted to provide the teacher with time to teach the current, topical, and incidental issues that add to motivation and meaningful teaching and learning” (District X, 2021). I believe this policy was created to provide teachers the ability to utilize their own creativity within lessons and when delivering the curriculum. However, it could also be interpreted that teachers have the latitude to teach non-core subjects as they see fit. In the

area of social-emotional learning, this latitude needs to be taken away through the implementation of specific curriculum and policies.

In order to be implemented successfully, social-emotional learning needs to be mandated nationwide in schools. The first barrier that exists is that schools are provided latitude to implement the curriculum at a level they see fit. Some schools interpret this implementation as one lesson monthly, some may interpret it as a daily lesson, and others may simply see this as having the curriculum available to teachers. The more leniency provided in implementation, the less important social-emotional learning becomes. As a result, schools across the state need to be uniform in the amount of time dedicated to this subject. There is no doubt that each school has different needs. The makeup of each school is different. Therefore, no one-size fits all approach will work. However, a mandate is necessary to ensure that the resources and curriculum is there to support our students in need. We owe it to our students to provide them the resources they need. Our world is an ever-changing place and we must have the resources on hand to support the whole learner.

The next recommendation I have is for social-emotional learning to become something that is truly an equal piece of the curriculum. For example, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies are all subject areas agreed upon as important in all schools. We include them in our teaching standards, adopt a curriculum for them, provide professional development to staff, report on them during conferences, and assess students in each area on report cards. It has to be asked why social-emotional learning is not on equal ground. We have included social-emotional learning in our standards, likely adopted some type of curriculum, and provided some professional development. However, if we want to go all-in and create buy-in from our entire community, we need to make them equally stressed. We need to report student growth in these

areas and make the reporting a part of our regular procedures during conferences, assessment, and report cards.

The educational implementations of this policy would be positive as social-emotional learning initiatives have proven to have a correlation to increased test scores and positive climate in communities. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is one way that social-emotional learning can be implemented in schools. PBIS is an organizing framework for schools to determine how they want to operate as a community. We know that students who are aware of their emotions and can regulate when they are feeling frustrated will do better in school. We know that students learn the expected school behaviors if they see them modeled and are given time for practice, feedback, and skill reinforcement (Baker & Ryan, 2014). So, in the end, we could expect that a policy to bring social-emotional learning to the forefront in education would be a welcome implementation from an educational standpoint.

Another educational viewpoint is from that of an administrator. It has become widely known that Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching is the staple for holding teachers accountable for best practices during evaluation. Beginning in 2016, the Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA) required that all Illinois school districts restructure and approve their teacher evaluation system. As part of this rating system, all school districts were required to choose a research-based framework against which teachers would be observed and rated. The Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (PEAC) chose the Charlotte Danielson Framework as the model framework for the state of Illinois (Illinois Association of School Boards, 2013). Danielson states that "A teacher's interactions with students set the tone for the classroom. Through their interactions, teachers convey that they are interested in and care about their students" (Danielson, 2013, p. 33). This being said, it is safe to say that administrators would

also support holding schools more accountable for the implementation of social-emotional learning due to the fact that one entire component of the Danielson Framework holds teachers accountable for creating an environment of respect and rapport. After all, social-emotional learning is defined as “the process for which children develop awareness and management of their emotions, set and achieve important personal and academic goals, use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships, and demonstrate decision making and responsible behaviors to achieve school and life success” (ISBE and Illinois Classrooms in Action, 2003). So, if our goal is to create and maintain positive relationships between teachers and students, social-emotional learning is a necessity.

### **Economic Analysis**

Another consideration for the implementation of a stronger policy regarding social-emotional learning comes from economic analysis. The economic stress of a strong social-emotional learning implementation does not lay a heavy burden on a district because its implementation is something that is likely already occurring to some degree. We simply need to reallocate some of the funds already being spent and be sure the curriculum is being implemented with fidelity.

The largest economic implication will be evident in the form of professional development for staff. To reiterate, this will likely not require additional funds but repurposed ones. If we want to focus more wholly on social-emotional learning, we will need to ensure a majority of professional development money in districts is reserved for SEL related professional development. If we were not repurposing funds already available in districts, I would make recommendations for Lincoln Elementary School based on Odden’s (2012) recommendation that

are available in the chart below. To elaborate, these recommendations include 10 days of student-free time for every teacher on total professional development and training (not all SEL related), which would be provided as a combination of 10 non-attendance days for students during the school year. Typically, these are a combination of dedicated teacher institute days and school improvement days. Additionally, the recommendations would include \$100 per student for trainers and administrative costs of delivering professional development, one instructional coach for every 200 students (approximately \$70,000 per coach) to provide onsite assistance and training needed to transform training into change, and time during the regular school day to work in collaborative teacher groups on instructional issues (Odden, 2012, p. 88).

<b>Potential Economic Implications</b>				
<b>Implementation</b>	10 Student-Free Days	Trainers & Admin.	Instructional Coaches	Time During School Day
<b>Potential Cost</b>	\$1,750 per teacher	\$100 per student	\$70,000 per coach	\$14,000 per teacher
<b>Total Cost</b>	\$14,740 per teacher (\$590 per student)			

(\* Information adapted from Odden, 2012, p. 66-67)

Table 7. *Potential Economic Implications*. This table provides information for the potential implications of Abraham Lincoln Elementary School's implementations based on the recommendations of this study.

“A 2015 study by researchers at Columbia University found that the measurable benefits of SEL exceed the costs, often by considerable amounts. The aggregate result of the analysis showed an average benefit-cost ratio of about 11 to 1 among the six evidence-based SEL interventions studied. This means that, on average, for every \$1 invested in SEL programming, there is a return of \$11” (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015). This demonstrates that no matter the financial implications of social-emotional learning implementation, in the end, SEL programs will pay for themselves.



Currently, School District X is above the state average spending per pupil as it spends approximately \$15,200 per student. The district also offers a comprehensive plan for professional development that now incorporates five school improvement planning (SIP) days in addition to the five institute days the state requires for school districts. This is the maximum number of professional development days allowed within the school calendar by the state and now meets Odden's (2012) recommended ten student-free days of professional development. In addition to these ten student free days, the district also includes twenty-two after school sessions on Mondays that last one hour each. Topics for these sessions are selected randomly based on needs within the building. Due to Lincoln Elementary School's strong focus on relationships and school climate, a great deal of time at these meetings is spent focusing on relationships, climate and culture, and social-emotional learning. I would estimate that fifty percent of all professional development is spent on these topics.

During the current school year, School District X spent a great deal of time researching social-emotional learning with a team of staff members. The goal of this committee was to find a program that would best incorporate the ideals of the school district and prepare its students for long-term society today. As a part of this committee, curriculum vendors were invited into the district to pitch their products. In the end, the district decided to adopt a new curriculum, Second Step, for the following school year that incorporates all facets of social-emotional learning. The district is planning to provide professional development over the summer, at the start of the school year, and throughout the school year in order to begin implementing Second Step at the start of the 2021-2022 school year. The total cost of the new K-8 curriculum is \$32,000 for a five-year subscription.

### **Social Analysis**

“Social and emotional issues are at the heart of the problem behaviors that plague many schools, communities, and families, sapping learning time, educators’ energy, and children’s hope and opportunities. Effectively promoting social and emotional competence is the key to helping young people become more resistant to the lure of drugs, teen pregnancy, violent gangs, truancy, and substance abuse” (Elias, Zinns, & Weissberg, 1997, p. 5). Additionally, we are all aware of current societal changes over the past few years that have come with an increase in the use of social media among youngsters. We have seen an increase in adolescent anxiety, teen suicide, and other factors that implicate a rise in mental illness in society today. By doing a better job of preparing our children socially and emotionally at a much younger age, we will hope to change these trends. Because of these societal changes, the need for social-emotional learning has become even more and should be pushed to the forefront in schools nationwide.

When analyzing the social implications of SEL, it is important to discuss the culture of the school. The students play a major role in the overall culture of the school as they are often the source of liveliness within its limits. If you would like some reference to this liveliness, look no further than the few months of remote learning during the pandemic of 2020. Schools worldwide experienced blank walls, quiet hallways, and empty classrooms. Social-emotional learning curriculum programs allow all students to participate, which makes students feel a part of lessons. It also helps their confidence to build. When students’ confidence builds, they feel a part of the action and are able to relate to the overall culture of the building. “These little things show students that they are an essential part of our community. Their voice is needed to create community, ultimately showing them that they do not have to wait to make a difference; they can be leaders today, in our own classrooms. Empowering them now will lead them to be the world

changers we hope them to be” (Couros, 2016). In the end, they feel like they belong and school becomes a place they want to be.

Due to the many ways children have access to the world in society today, it is more important than ever that we teach them to manage their own emotions and feelings. For example, children have access to friends or virtual friends from across the world through streaming video games or social media accounts. They have quick, easy access to direct messages on phones, social media, and email. Access to such tools can result in unexpected and unprecedented situations students are not quite ready to deal with. This is where schools’ implementation of a social-emotional learning curriculum comes into play. Through a well-rounded curriculum, schools can teach children to cope with their emotions at a young age and better prepare them for unexpected situations that occur later in life. One major example of this occurrence is the recent pandemic that hit the globe. The COVID-19 pandemic has isolated families and children in a way like never before seen. As a result, there are children as well as adults that are facing emotional turmoil that is unforeseen. By preparing children to better cope with their emotions at younger ages and identifying with their feelings, we can teach them to know when they need to talk to someone or how to better help themselves through difficult times. “PBIS helps teacher schools figure out how to teach social-emotional learning skills...we know that students who are aware of their emotions and can regulate when they are feeling frustrated will do better in school” (Baker & Ryan, 2014, p. 9). This is what social-emotional learning is all about.

### **Political Analysis**

When it comes to a political analysis of SEL implementation, I think it’s best to look at data. From the perspective of families, there is no doubt the learning community will take some time to familiarize themselves with new report cards that include SEL and achievement. As a

result, districts will need to implement parent education programs to help familiarize parents with the changes. At the end of the day though, everyone reacts to increased test scores.

“According to a 2011 meta-analysis of 213 studies involving more than 270,000 students, those who participated in evidence-based SEL programs showed an 11 percentile-point gain in academic achievement compared to students who did not participate in SEL programs.

Compared to students who did not participate in SEL programs, students participating in SEL programs also showed improved classroom behavior, an increased ability to manage stress and depression, and better attitudes about themselves, others, and school” (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015). So, this study then demonstrates that, in time, the implementation of an SEL program and moving it to equal ground among district curricula will definitely pay off.

### **Legal Analysis**

From a legal point of view, there are several policies that will need to be aligned in order to move forward with our policy change. There are no wholesale changes in policies but updates that need to be made to current practices. For example, Section 6:60-AP of Illinois Board policy outlines the curriculum to be taught in each school district. Social-emotional curriculum should be specifically mentioned in all school districts to help bring them to the forefront. Then, traditional report cards will also need to change to allow for community buy-in to the Social-Emotional Learning Standards. In order for the community to fully back social-emotional learning, they need the main concepts of SEL programs to be front and center in assessing children.

As for additional implications, we can also take a look at Senate Bill 100 in Illinois. This bill laid out specific changes in past practices that dealt with discipline in a “one size fits all”

manner. For example, the bill eliminated all “zero-tolerance” policies, improved professional development for all staff, and focused schools on meeting student needs to help get to the root of disciplinary concerns. Politically, this bill fully backs the need for social-emotional learning in schools, even if this wasn’t the original meaning. The bill takes a stance at eliminating harsh discipline consequences and forces schools to look at each incident separately, get to the root of all problems, and more fully implement remediation plans for students. “SEL involves fostering social and emotional competencies through explicit instruction and through student-centered learning approaches that help students engage in the learning process and develop analytical, communication, and collaborative skills” (Durlak, 2015, p. 6). So, there is no doubt that, ultimately, Senate Bill 100 indirectly backs social-emotional learning in schools.

### **Moral and Ethical Analysis**

In today’s society, most, if not all, schools include teaching students to become well-rounded citizens or successful citizens as an intentional part of their mission and vision. If this is truly what schools are aiming for, it is our duty to provide a well-rounded curriculum that educates the whole child. There is no doubt that schools would include social-emotional learning as a part of teaching the whole child. However, the real question is whether or not there is full buy-in to SEL implementation in making them a core part of instruction. If the answer is no, we need to improve our policies to make up for this disconnect and ensure we fulfill our vision for education. When implementing change, Wagner, et al., (2006) includes this in his envisioning phase for whole-system change. “As the envisioning phase begins, understanding and urgency for change expand into the greater school or district community. This expansion involves community shareholders accepting greater responsibility clarifying how they must adapt their

roles to support their students effectively. Trust among shareholders deepens and respect increases” (Wagner, et al., 2006, p. 134).

There is no doubt that community members exist who believe that schools should only teach academics and social-emotional learning skills should be taught at home. It is not always that these community members do not feel social-emotional learning is not important. Typically, their focus is on the fact that time in school is extremely important and should be dedicated to academics. They believe that families should be held responsible for teaching their own children social-emotional learning on their own time. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) stated, “Some states have encountered pockets of political resistance to having schools involved in SEL at all. Opponents of SEL often say it is the primary responsibility of families. These communication challenges can be successfully weathered. Critical to success is deep listening to understand concerns of the community, as well as a clear plan for communicating with and engaging stakeholders. The plan should identify key goals and audiences, clarify key messages, and prioritize key strategies for sharing those messages” (as cited by Blad, 2020).

In the end, it is our moral and ethical duty to educate the whole child and better prepare them to be successful, well-rounded citizens. “According to a 2015 report by the American Enterprise Institute and the Brookings Institution, SEL competencies are critically important for the long-term success of all students in today’s economy. This report was developed by a group of bipartisan experts who agreed to set aside their differences and create a detailed plan for reducing poverty and increasing economic mobility” (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015).

### **Implications for Staff and Community Relationships**

This policy will have a varying level of effect on stakeholders. As a result of this policy, staff members may have an additional role in stepping up the implementation of SEL curricula with their students. No matter the added implication for teachers, the policy will be extremely beneficial to them in the long run as there should be a decrease in the number of discipline referrals in classrooms as a result. The final piece of the equation for staff comes in the realm of professional development. Staff will need to be trained on all facets of the new SEL curricula, whether they are part of the implementation or not. It's important that everyone in all buildings is onboard for the process, so they can support the initiative in buildings. "Teachers should come to understand the psychological, social, emotional, and mental health challenges and trauma students experience on a daily basis and, perhaps more important, build the expertise to identify and address traumatic experiences. Induction needs to provide teachers with the tools to support their students as they work through psychological and emotional turmoil, especially until other personnel are available to assist" (Milner, 2015, p. 147).

When it comes to this policy's impact on the community, it will be major. While there will be no evident direct impacts on the community, there are definitely many indirect repercussions of this policy. For example, one of the biggest topics in the world is school-related violence and violence as a whole. The more we teach and implement SEL strategies at a younger age for all students, the better mental health all of our citizens will be in as they grow to be contributing adults. If we can teach our students strategies to deal positively with their emotions as youngsters, they will be in a better place to successfully utilize them as adults.

An additional stakeholder that would be affected by this policy is the medical community. For the same reason that the overall community would benefit from the policy, the

medical community will benefit as well. The more schools are able to teach students about social-emotional learning, the better prepared they will be to handle everyday situations later that come their way later in life. Part of social-emotional learning is adapting to feelings and understanding your own and others' feelings. In time, this will help alleviate some of the burden placed on our medical community. However, they will also need to play an additional role. Schools will also need to identify students using some type of social-emotional screener. As schools do this, it would benefit them to have a stronger and closer relationship with mental health facilities or hospitals. It would also benefit school communities if the medical facilities made themselves available at school events and so forth as a resource to the community.

### **Conclusion**

#### **Introduction**

All throughout my career as a teacher and now as an administrator, I have always been a firm believer that you must build a strong relationship with students in order for any real learning to occur. Of course, all students will learn despite their relationships with the educator. However, in order for true learning and optimal learning to occur, a safe and mutually respectful learning environment must exist. It is based on this idea that my dissertation topic focused around teacher-student relationships and their impact on school culture.

#### **Discussion**

Throughout the process of this dissertation, I set out to examine the extent to which teacher-student relationships impact school culture. Prior to my research, I had intended to come up with a list of strategies staff members could utilize to better build relationships with students. Amidst my research, my mindset changed completely though. My thinking changed from what can we do to help teachers to what can we do to help our school community? This was a huge



change in pathway for me. While I was still studying the same questions of the impact that teacher-student relationships had on student motivation and teacher motivation, as well as what impact a school's PBIS program plays in school culture, I was now impacting our school and the district on a much broader scale. As a result, I believe I have definitely grown as a leader.

A clear action plan was established and laid out for implementation at Lincoln Elementary School. Based upon initial data collection, there were actually a couple of parts of the action plan I began implementing ahead of schedule. The first step was modifying our PBIS Team. We did this by adding some new members and swapping out some members that had been on the team for a while. As a result, all of our members are strong contributors and bring a variety of representative opinions and mindsets to the table while also representing the new and former PBIS systems we have had in place. The group has been extremely collaborative and creative up until this point in time. I believe all members of the team truly look forward to meeting and planning for the school and feel as though their voices are heard as a part of the process.

Another portion of the action plan that I was able to begin in advance was a part of the student voice implementation. The PBIS Team discussed the idea of beginning an ambassador program to instill student voice into our PBIS system for increased ownership and buy-in. In the end, the Lion Leaders were created and all rules, timelines, and guidelines were set for the group. It was established that there would be one representative from each classroom as well as an alternate representative to represent the school. The students were chosen by their fellow classmates since those were the students they were representing. Students were allowed to nominate any classmate they chose to be a Lion Leader but nominees needed to commit to following the character traits of being respectful, responsible, and safe throughout the school

year, giving up their recess and lunch time to meet with other Lion Leaders, and leading their classmates in our Lion Leader assigned initiatives. These students would meet with staff to help plan decision-making for the school, plan leadership activities, act as a liaison between the staff and students, and act as role models for all students. Now, the group has begun meeting and four staff members have stepped up to lead the group, three of which are already on our PBIS Team. Thus far, the Lion Leaders have assisted in brainstorming ideas for spirit days, brainstorming ideas for celebrations, creating videos for PBIS expectations, guiding students through an election process for our new mascot name, participating in raising money for charity, and much more. Not only are students being heard but they are creating relationships with both students and staff and becoming a part of the school culture like never before. The program has been an astounding success.

The successes observed by our implementations thus far have only further validated the recommendations discussed earlier in this study. As a result, the administrative procedure that was outlined previously should be adopted as soon as possible. This will ensure that the Abraham Lincoln Elementary School community continues to base its learning on positive teacher-student relationships focused around the voices of its stakeholders.

### **Leadership Lessons**

During the course of this study, there were many takeaways for me as a leader. However, none of them are bigger than my learning related to student and staff voice. Recently, I came across a blog that stated, “These little things show students that they are an essential part of our community. Their voice is needed to create community, ultimately showing them that they do not have to wait to make a difference; they can be leaders today, in our own classrooms. Empowering them now will lead them to be the world changers we hope them to be” (Couros,

2016). Research during this study showed the lack of both student and staff ownership of some of the processes within our building. As a leader, I have learned that this reflects on me because it is my responsibility to ensure stakeholders buy-in to the initiatives brought forth. During the study, whether we were looking at student data, staff data, PBIS data, climate data, safety data, or engagement data, the common deficiencies that kept rising to the top were student and staff voice. As a result, the staff at Lincoln Elementary School and I have already begun initiating an action plan to make the school a better place for students by valuing these results and learning from them. Students and staff will now have a voice!

Another leadership lesson that I take away from this experience is the value of self-reflection. None of us are perfect and that's okay. I need to be comfortable with the fact that there are many areas I need to improve in as an administrator. Actually, over the past few years, we have been promoting a growth mindset within our district. I have always felt I have had a growth mindset when it comes to ideas from others and trying new things. Nonetheless, I am starting to realize that may not be quite as true when it comes to noticing some of my own weaknesses. Couros (2015) highlighted the commonality of this when talking about growth mindset in leaders when he stated:

The term "risk-taker" has become quite cliché in education. As leaders, it's easy to promote or call for risk-taking, but it's rare to see risk-taking actually modeled. People are less likely to take risks and try new things if they don't *see* those above them in the hierarchical structure doing the same thing. If leaders want people to try new things, they have to openly show that they are willing to do the same. (p. 89)

After reflecting a bit on my takeaways from self-reflection and growth mindset, it would be irresponsible of me to miss out on the opportunity to mention the lessons I have learned about change. As I am sure you theorized from the above paragraph, change is difficult for most individuals including myself. Not only have I learned a great deal about change in myself but also in organizational change as a leader. I have learned that I am capable of instilling change and that it is not as difficult and monumental of a task with the right collaborators and the correct amount of buy-in from stakeholders. There is evidence of this in the action plan that is laid out above. I am confident this plan will succeed due to the amount of time that was put into it and the level of staff and student voice that has been valued along the way. Heifetz (2009) referred to “broadening your bandwidth,” which referred to diagnosing the skills you are best at as a leader and the skills of those around you. Then, once you do, use these strengths and weaknesses to determine when you should intervene and instill the change process. During the process of this study, I have truly taken this process to heart and “broadened my bandwidth” for change.

### **Conclusion**

When reflecting on the entirety of the dissertation process, I cannot help but take pride in the accomplishment of its completion. I entered the process knowing that teacher-student relationships were the basis of my philosophy for all educational processes. This has always been where my passion lies. Along the way, I was able to change and adapt based on the results of my data, keeping the big picture in mind. I have learned a great deal throughout the process, become a better leader, become more confident in my leadership abilities, and improved the culture of Lincoln Elementary School. Thanks to this process, not only will I continue to improve as a leader, but my students and school community will grow as a result. I am extremely grateful for this process and the opportunities it has brought my way.

## **Epilogue**

### **Introduction**

This study was conducted over a unique period of time. The initial research was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the dissertation defense occurred post-pandemic. Because of this unique opportunity, several strategies of the action plan were able to be implemented along the way and implementation can be reported as to its progress.

### **Strategies and Action**

The COVID-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented time in education. Perhaps, the largest obstacle it has brought to the forefront in both education and society as a whole is in the area of social emotional health and wellness. While no one was prepared for the circumstances brought forth by the pandemic, Lincoln Elementary School had their school PBIS team previously established and prepared to work on a plan for success within the school. They adapted their former plans and created new ones that worked between remote and in-person learning models of learning. The plan focused on specific behaviors each month that were needing improvement, ensured data was used to highlight improvement, used morning video announcements to highlight the data, and highlighted student success or shortcomings along the way.

Another key to the success of Lincoln Elementary School during the pandemic was the previously established Lion Leaders program. These student leaders were leveraged within the school and their classrooms to lead their peers in several initiatives to ensure all students understand the importance of following the rules within Lincoln Elementary. They helped to make an intrinsic impact within the student body at Lincoln. In addition, they also included the rest of the student body in voting for the celebrations that occurred, in poster creation to

advertise our monthly goals, and in the creation of videos to support our monthly goals. The Lion Leaders were instrumental in the success of Lincoln Elementary and they are quite possibly the biggest addition that has come from this study.

### **Leadership Lessons**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a lot to be learned. When it comes to relationships and school culture, the lessons I have learned are very similar to everything else. To begin, I have learned that it is important to surround yourself with people that are dedicated to the profession, the students, and common goals. When this is the case, trust is more easily established and there is no limit to the things you can get accomplished. It is my belief that Lincoln Elementary School was able to succeed this year due to the dedication of our distinguished staff members. We trusted and relied on our relationships when we needed them most. That is why relationships are the heart of education!

I have also reconfirmed the fact that it was correct to reinsert staff and student voice back into the building whenever possible. We have established the Lion Leaders and our PBIS Team and they have been extremely successful. Next year, we plan to insert our professional development planning team into the mix. No matter the result, I know that the more stakeholders have a say in the happenings within their environment the more positive the results will be. This is already being felt around the school within the school climate and I can't wait to see further growth.

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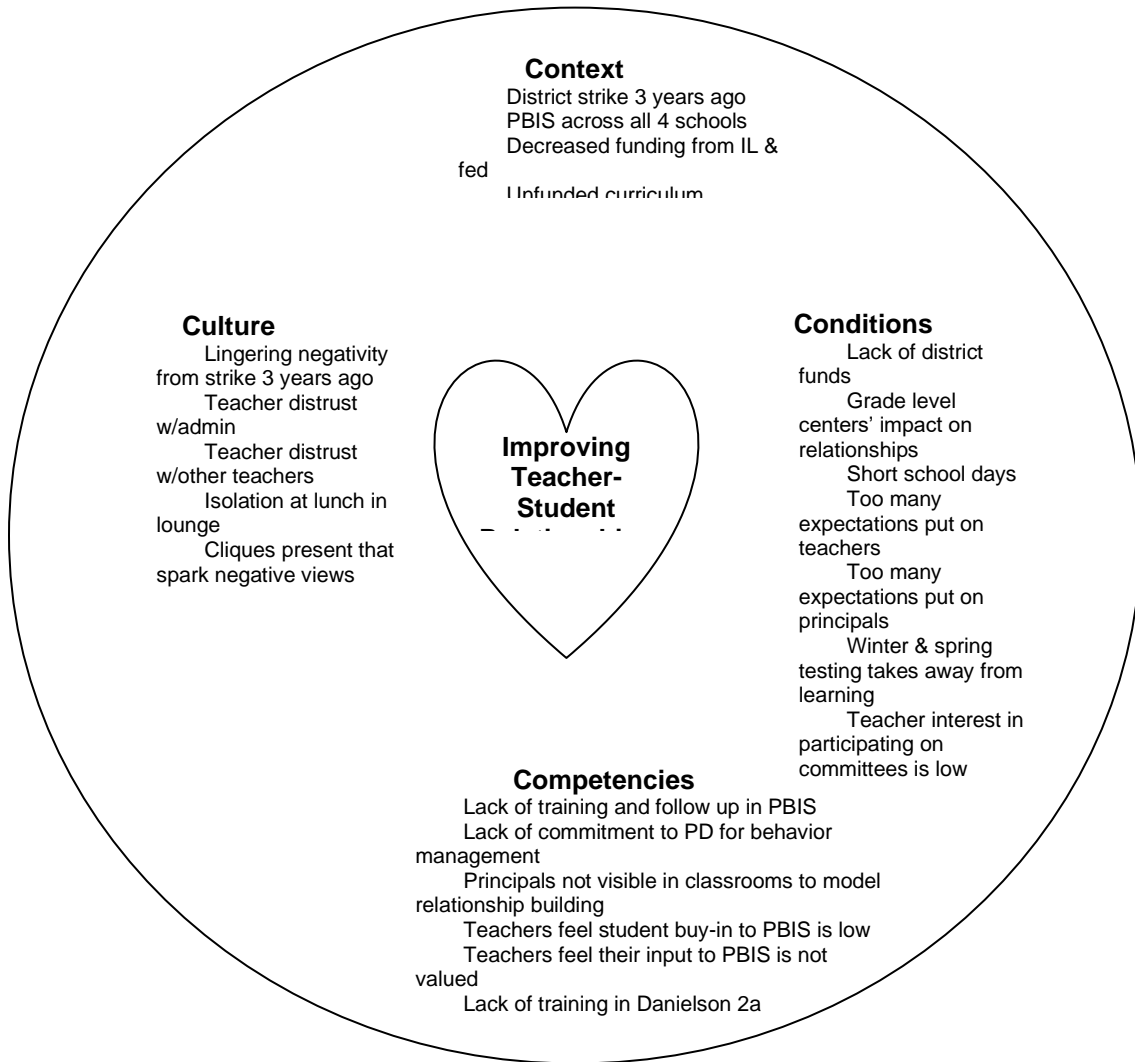
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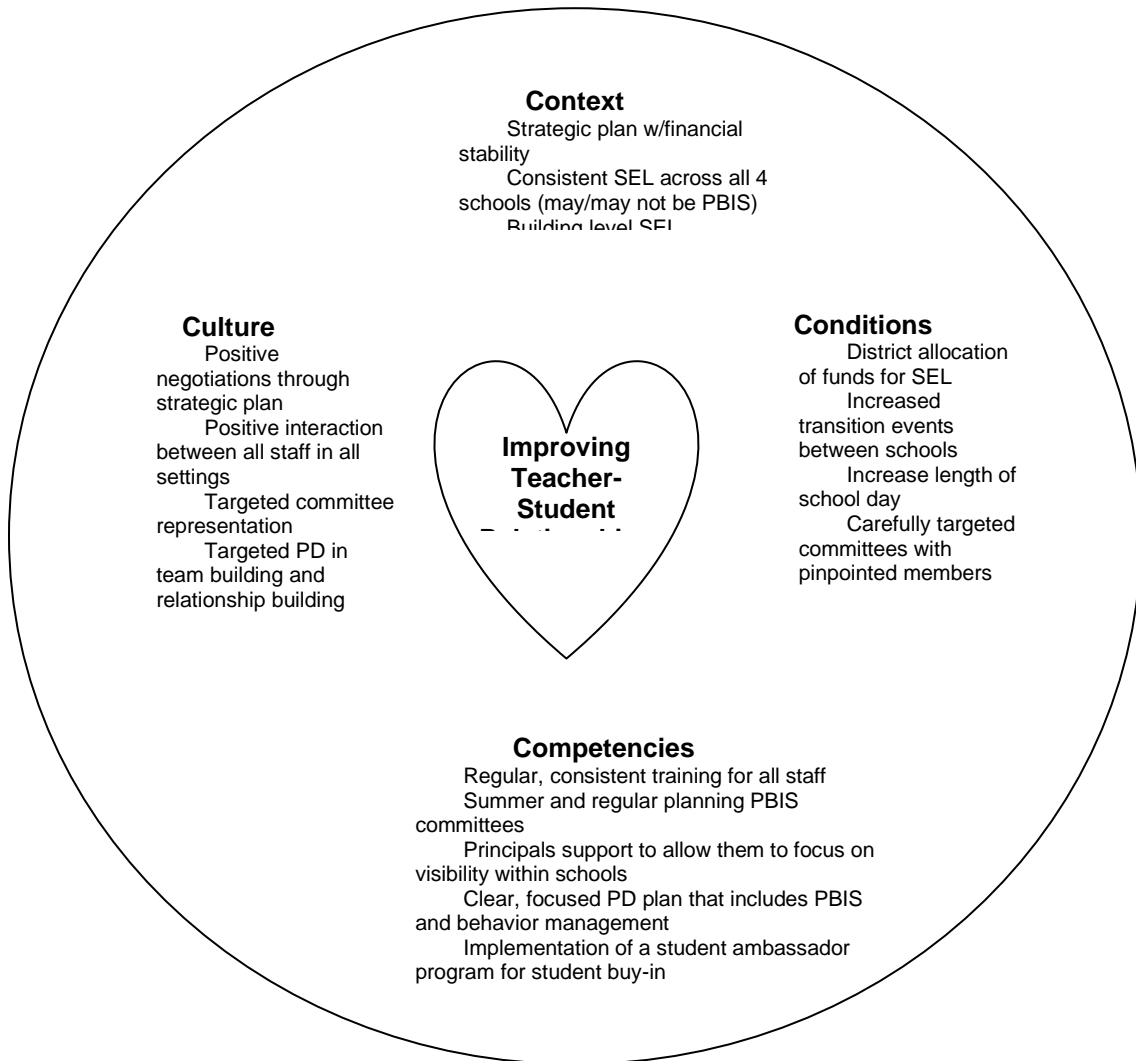
**Appendix A**

**“As-Is” 4 C’s Analysis for Abraham Lincoln School**



**Appendix B**

**“To-Be” 4 C’s Analysis for Abraham Lincoln School**



## Appendix C

## Student Culture Survey Data

Question	No (1)	Sometimes (2)	Yes (3)	Total Responses	Average Rating
I like school.	5.4%	44.6%	50.0%	258	2.45
My school wants me to do well.	0.0%	4.3%	95.7%	258	2.96
I know the school rules.	0.0%	8.9%	90.7%	257	2.91
Teachers treat me with respect.	0.0%	13.2%	86.8%	258	2.87
Good behavior is noticed at my school.	1.9%	43.8%	54.3%	258	2.52
I get along with other students.	0.8%	39.1%	60.1%	258	2.59
I feel safe at school.	1.6%	24.8%	73.6%	258	2.72
Students treat each other well.	2.7%	53.5%	43.8%	258	2.41
There's an adult at school I can count on.	1.9%	12.4%	85.7%	258	2.84
Students in my class behave.	2.7%	53.9%	43.4%	258	2.41
Students at my school help each other when needed.	1.6%	40.7%	57.8%	258	2.56
My teachers notice if I have trouble with something.	3.9%	21.7%	74.4%	258	2.71
My teachers make learning interesting.	5.4%	29.8%	64.7%	258	2.59
Adults listen to students' ideas about the school.	0.8%	21.3%	77.9%	258	2.77
My teachers are proud when I do well.	1.2%	7.8%	91.1%	258	2.90
My teachers really care about me.	0.8%	10.5%	88.8%	258	2.88

## Appendix D

## Staff Culture Survey Data

Question	I don't know (N/A)	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly agree (4)	Total Responses	Average Rating
Staff in the school feel safe.	0.0%	0.0%	3.4%	51.7%	44.8%	29	3.41
Our staff is welcoming to visitors and parents.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	65.5%	34.5%	29	3.34
Our staff takes pride and ownership in the appearance of the school.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	27.6%	72.4%	29	3.28
Our staff encourages all families to be part of school activities.	6.9%	0.0%	0.0%	65.5%	27.6%	29	3.30
Our school supports and appreciates the sharing of new ideas by all members of the school.	3.4%	0.0%	13.8%	62.1%	20.7%	29	3.07
Our school respects and celebrates others' differences (i.e. gender, race, culture)	10.3%	0.0%	3.4%	48.3%	37.9%	29	3.38
Administration supports the PBIS system.	6.9%	3.4%	13.8%	48.3%	27.6%	29	3.07
The PBIS expectations are posted and visible around the building.	3.4%	0.0%	0.0%	65.5%	31.0%	29	3.32
Students know what behaviors are expected of them.	3.4%	0.0%	6.9%	82.8%	6.9%	29	3.00
Lesson plans are available for teaching and reteaching PBIS expectations.	31.0%	13.8%	34.5%	17.2%	3.4%	29	2.15
Positive reinforcements are used to support established expectations/ rules.	3.4%	0.0%	3.4%	69.0%	24.1%	29	3.21
Students generally treat adults in our school with respect.	3.4%	0.0%	10.3%	86.2%	0.0%	29	2.89
Generally, I feel safe in our school.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	62.1%	37.9%	29	3.38

Data is used to reinforce the PBIS decision-making process.	24.1%	13.8%	27.6%	24.1%	10.3%	29	2.41
Student feedback is obtained to inform the PBIS decision-making process.	34.5%	6.9%	27.6%	27.6%	3.4%	29	2.42
Distinctions between classroom versus office-managed behaviors are clear.	27.6%	13.8%	37.9%	20.7%	0.0%	29	2.10
The referral process for behavioral violations is comprehensive and understood by staff.	6.9%	10.3%	34.5%	44.8%	3.4%	29	2.44
Staff members are aware of crisis procedures and plans are readily available.	3.4%	0.0%	13.8%	75.9%	6.9%	29	2.93
Data for school-wide behavior is collected and routinely shared with staff.	13.8%	13.8%	34.5%	31.0%	6.9%	29	2.36
As a member of the staff, I have taught expectations this year on my own in addition to school-wide lessons.	3.4%	0.0%	6.9%	31.0%	58.6%	29	3.54
Students in this school show respect for each other.	6.9%	0.0%	10.3%	79.3%	3.4%	29	2.93
Students feel safe and comfortable in non-classroom settings at our school.	10.3%	3.4%	3.4%	69.0%	13.8%	29	3.04
Adults in our school use effective discipline strategies defined by logical consequences and refrain from punishment and shaming.	10.3%	3.4%	6.9%	62.1%	17.2%	29	3.04
Adults in our school treat students with respect.	3.4%	0.0%	0.0%	65.5%	31.0%	29	3.32
Staff in this school exhibit high levels of respect for one another.	0.0%	0.0%	27.6%	62.1%	10.3%	29	3.15
Parents are informed and included in the school's PBIS efforts.	20.7%	10.3%	20.7%	44.8%	3.4%	29	2.52
The principal is visible and supportive of staff members.	6.9%	0.0%	13.8%	58.6%	20.7%	29	3.07

The principal applies building discipline rules fairly.	13.8%	6.9%	27.6%	37.9%	13.8%	29	2.68
The principal is accessible when needed.	6.9%	0.0%	41.4%	41.4%	10.3%	29	2.67
The principal communicates well and informs parents of new developments, ideas, and issues.	20.7%	0.0%	20.7%	41.4%	17.2%	29	2.96
I feel respected and valued by the principal.	10.3%	0.0%	3.4%	48.3%	37.9%	29	3.38
School events are well attended by staff.	24.1%	0.0%	31.0%	34.5%	10.3%	29	2.73
School events are well attended by families.	27.6%	0.0%	13.8%	51.7%	6.9%	29	2.90
People work here because they enjoy and choose to be here.	20.7%	0.0%	10.3%	41.4%	27.6%	29	3.22

**Appendix E:  
Interview Protocol**

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. The purpose of this interview is to add context and detail to the aggregate results from the survey conducted previously. I hope to gain ideas for improving the planning, implementation, and evaluation of teacher-student relationship building within the building, including our PBIS program. Before we begin, I would like to review a few ground rules for the discussion.

- a. I am going to ask you several questions and we do not have to go in any particular order.
- b. Please treat this as a discussion, where you can share your honest opinions related to the questions based on your own personal experiences. There are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in learning from you.
- c. You are encouraged to refrain from answering a question if you feel uncomfortable.
- d. I will be recording the discussion and also taking notes because I don't want to miss any of your comments. I will treat your answers as confidential. I will not include your name or any other information that could identify you in any reports I write. I will destroy the notes and recordings after I complete my evaluation. In the meantime, the recordings and notes will be kept on my password-protected hard drive.
- e. This discussion is going to take about 60 minutes. If you have any questions before we start, please just let me know.

**Appendix F:**  
**Student Culture Survey Questions**

1. I like school.

**Yes**



**Sometimes**



**No**



2. My school wants me to do well.

**Yes**



**Sometimes**



**No**



3. I know the school rules.

**Yes**



**Sometimes**



**No**





4. Teachers treat me with respect.

Yes



Sometimes



No



5. Good behavior is noticed at my school.

Yes



Sometimes



No



6. I get along with other students.

Yes



Sometimes



No



7. I feel safe at school.

Yes



Sometimes



No



8. Students treat each other well.

Yes



Sometimes



No



9. There's an adult at school I can count on.

Yes



Sometimes



No



10. Students in my class behave.

Yes



Sometimes



No



11. Students at my school help each other when needed.

Yes



Sometimes



No



12. My teachers notice if I have trouble with something.

Yes



Sometimes



No



13. My teachers make learning interesting.

Yes



Sometimes



No



14. Adults listen to students' ideas about the school.

Yes



Sometimes



No



15. My teachers are proud when I do well.

Yes



Sometimes



No



16. My teachers really care about me.

**Yes**



**Sometimes**



**No**



**Appendix G:****Staff Culture Survey Questions**

1. Staff in the school feel safe.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

2. Our staff is welcoming to visitors and parents.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

3. Our staff takes pride and ownership in the appearance of the school.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

4. Our school encourages all families to be part of school activities.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

5. Our school supports and appreciates the sharing of new ideas by all members of the school.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

6. Our school respects and celebrates other's differences (i.e. gender, race, culture, etc.)

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

7. Administration supports the PBIS system.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

8. The PBIS expectations are posted and visible around the building.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

9. Students know what behaviors are expected of them.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

10. Lesson plans are available for teaching and reteaching PBIS expectations.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

11. Positive reinforcements are used to support established expectations/rules.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

12. Students generally treat adults in our school with respect.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

13. Generally, I feel safe in our school.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

14. Data is used to reinforce the PBIS decision-making process.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

15. Student feedback is obtained to inform the PBIS decision-making process.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

16. Distinctions between classroom versus office-managed behaviors are clear.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

17. The referral process for behavioral violations is comprehensive and understood by staff.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

18. Staff members are aware of crisis procedures and plans are readily available.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

19. Data for school-wide behavior is collected and routinely shared with staff.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

20. As a member of the staff, I have taught expectations this year on my own in addition to school-wide lessons.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

21. Students in this school show respect for each other.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

21. Students feel safe and comfortable in non-classroom settings at our school.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

22. Adults in our school use effective discipline strategies defined by logical consequences and refrain from punishment and shaming.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

23. Adults in our school treat students with respect.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

24. Staff in this school exhibit high levels of respect for one another.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

25. Parents are informed and included in the school's PBIS efforts.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

26. The principal is visible and supportive of staff members.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

27. The principal applies building discipline rules fairly.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

28. The principal is accessible when needed.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know



29. The principal communicates well and informs parents of new developments, ideas, and issues.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

30. I feel respected and valued by the principal.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

31. School events are well attended by staff.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

32. School events are well attended by families.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

33. People work here because they enjoy and choose to be here.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree      I Don't Know

## Follow Up Interview

Following this survey, you have the opportunity to participate in an optional and entirely confidential interview that will take approximately 60 minutes. Please check the appropriate information below regarding this follow up interview. (When turning in, please place face down.)

\_\_\_\_\_ I am interested in participating in a follow up interview regarding teacher-student relationships and their effect on school culture. **(If interested, Craig will follow up with you regarding a possible interview session.)**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I am NOT interested in participating in a follow up interview regarding teacher-student relationships and their effect on school culture.

**Appendix H:  
Interview Questions**

1. (Philosophy) – What are your thoughts about teacher-student relationship building?
2. (Personal Strategy) – What are some activities or personal strategies you use in the classroom to help build rapport with students?
3. (Others' Strategies) – What are some strategies or activities you have seen in your colleague's classrooms that you feel may be successful and you may like to try if given the opportunity?
4. (Student Perspective) – What do you think a student would say about your overall classroom environment? Is there a specific word or words that come to mind? Is this the perspective you would want them to have or is there something you would want to change?
5. (Student Involvement) – How successful would you say the school's PBIS program is at involving students in the school's culture? What does the school do well? Where could it improve?
6. (Parent Participation) – Do you think parents are appropriately invited to play a role in their child's learning within our building? To what extent do you feel a parent's level of involvement plays in their comfort level of the school? Explain your answer.
7. (Data) – Our building has some data tools we could use to improve relationship building within the school (5Essentials survey & behavior data). Are you aware of the ways we currently use this data and how could we better use these sources to meet the school's needs?
8. (Improvement) – What ideas do you have to improve student motivation around the school? Do you have any ideas to improve our PBIS program?
9. (Teacher Leadership) – Recently, we began a PBIS Ambassadors Program within the building to increase teacher and student leadership opportunities. How would you like to see this resource better utilized to positively impact our building?
10. (Overall Leadership) What are some ways in which you feel building leadership could improve the school culture related to teacher-student relationships? (student motivation, mentoring opportunities, PBIS program, etc.)