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Managing school behavior: a qualitative case study

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Managing school behavior: a qualitative case study

by

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A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this dissertation research were to understand the methods by which building-level school administrators collect office discipline referral data, and to understand the ways they make decisions based on that data. In order to achieve this overall objective, the following research questions framed this study:

1. To what extent do administrators have access to behavior data that inform their decisions on how to improve student success in school and society?

2. To what extent do administrators use behavior data to improve student success in school and in society?

3. What do administrators perceive it would take to enhance the effectiveness of their current efforts to improve students' success in school and society?

One mid-sized suburban school district from the Midwest was selected for this case study research. Eleven school building administrators were interviewed to provide insight into the research questions. Participants in the study self-selected pseudonyms to preserve anonymity. Interviews were conducted face to face, and then transcribed.

The themes that emerged from the interviews include: (1) participants' perceptions of and experiences with collecting and analyzing student behavior data, (2) participants' perceptions of and experiences with using behavior data to improve student success in school and in society, and (3) participants' perceptions of necessary steps to take to enhance the effectiveness of their current efforts to improve students' success in school and society. The findings from this study describe practices used for collecting student attendance data, office referral data, and suspension and expulsion data. Building-level school leaders recognize that data collection and analysis of building- and school district-level conduct and/or behavior

data would help them establish patterns of behavior for individual students, as well as students throughout the building. The aim for school administrators should be to use research-based strategies, practices, and programs that have proven successful when they plan interventions and programmatic changes for students.

Based on its findings, this study recommends that further investigation into data collection processes that lead to improved behavioral outcomes for students be conducted. Consistent data collection, supported by a systemic procedure to analyze that data, is paramount to increase the effectiveness of any behavior support program. As schools continue to face challenges associated with providing adequate behavioral supports for students, building capacity with teaching and administrative staff is recommended, so that a continuum of behavioral supports could be provided to meet the diverse behavioral needs of buildings, schools, and districts.

behavior was disruptive or challenging, students were simply given consequences, including suspension, and even expulsion. While such consequences still exist today in school systems, there are many research-based strategies that demonstrate that a proactive and positive approach to teaching behavior expectations can have a great impact on schools. There is a plethora of research now available to schools and school administrators to guide the work of school districts in the area of student conduct. Chapter 2: Literature Review explores much of that research. Indeed, there is increasing sentiment among educators that student conduct is just as important to teach as traditional content areas, for example, reading, and math.

In the interest of reforming education and assisting every student to be successful, many districts employ strategies that attempt to serve students proactively. These strategies typically pinpoint antecedents, instead of focusing on the consequences of socially unacceptable behavior. However, the extent to which administrators manage, lead, and work with students' anti-social school behaviors—and the extent to which they collect and analyze building-level student conduct and office referral data—remains unknown.

It is important to understand the strategies school administrators use to make data-based decisions, both for individual students and for overall *building-level behavioral programs* when they consider anti-social or unacceptable school behavior in their schools. I am curious about the ways administrators perceive and define the barriers to serving all children. To gain a comprehensive understanding of this process, it is necessary to gather data about administrators' perceptions about practices that do and do not work in their schools, as they seek to facilitate positive outcomes that lead to behavior success.

There is a concern in education that behavior incidents are still prevalent in schools. Biglan (1995) narrates this concern clearly:

despite the progress that has been made in identifying and modifying variables that affect antisocial behavior, few would argue that our society has made progress in reducing the incidence of such behavior or the proportion of young people in our society who engage in such behavior (p. 479).

Recently, the antisocial, and even violent, behavior of some children in schools has become a most pressing concern (Sprague et al., 2002; Walker & Shinn, 2002). Compounding the issue is the fact that school staff are held responsible for ensuring safe environments where all children can learn appropriate academic and social skills (Irvin et al, 2004). While national data is very compelling in this area, and despite efforts within educational systems throughout the various states to establish School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) systems, incident data show steadily increasing numbers of students being removed from classrooms and/or suspended from schools. As more youth are diagnosed with varying degrees of emotional and behavioral disorders, school systems must prepare to deal with a diversity of mental and behavior needs to ensure that they not only have systems and teachers ready to respond, but also scaffold supports for students. This study examines one important problem facing schools: how best to design programming in K-12 schools to meet the needs of students with behavioral disorders. One aspect of the problem is that schools look for placements outside of a student's traditional classroom setting or home school location when students become unruly and aggressive. Instead, schools should identify the student or system-specific problem, and then develop systems and program options in a continuum format to meet the diverse behavioral needs of its population.

This study explores the ways administrators collect building-level behavioral data and the ways they make decisions based on those collected data—activities that are central to

improving behavioral programming.

Purpose

Students in U.S. school systems have diverse emotional and behavioral disorders. These disorders, coupled with the various developmental levels and ranges of abilities present in students in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade, make this a complex problem to solve, especially when thinking about appropriate behavioral programming that must be implemented for students to succeed in public education. In the school setting, teachers and administrators must have empathy for, and knowledge of, the types of structures and supports that have the greatest likelihood to deal with EBD effectively. This research uses a qualitative case study to answer the research questions that frame this study. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand administrators' management of various student behaviors, collection of building-level data around student conduct, and use of such data to make student-level and building-level decisions for improvement.

Research Questions

In order to find out how schools currently manage student behavior, and how they collect, synthesize and use data, this study posits and answers the following research questions:

1. To what extent do administrators have access to behavior data that informs their decisions on how to improve student success in school and society?

2. To what extent do administrators use behavior data to improve student success in school and in society?

3. What do administrators perceive it would take to enhance the effectiveness of their current efforts to improve students' success in school and society?

Significance of the Study

The intent of this study is to contribute to the overall knowledge base about best practices in the K-12 public school setting regarding students with serious emotional and behavioral conditions. Specifically, this study focuses on administrators' collection and usage of current behavioral incident and conduct data, and how they manage and respond to students with EBD in their respective schools. As a result of state and federal guidelines that govern support systems for special needs students, the number of special needs students receiving instruction in general education classrooms has increased rapidly over the past two decades (Helfin & Bullock, 1999). General education teachers increasingly find themselves responsible for serving students with special needs, but many of them have neither the training nor the support necessary to ensure success for all students (Helfin & Bullock; Lopes, Monteiro, & Sil, 2004). Understanding school-level data serves as an appropriate starting point for determining the complexities and nuances in improving supportive and responsive environments that ensure all students find academic and behavioral success.

Theoretical Perspective

Prasad (2005) asserted that the "interpretative tradition" emerged from a scholarly position that takes "*human interpretation* as the starting point for developing knowledge about the social world" (p. 13). Another common feature Prasad assigned to the interpretive tradition is the emphasis placed on the *social* dimensions of reality construction.

The qualitative research case study for this dissertation is grounded in the interpretive theoretical perspective, which guides and anchors the data collection and analysis. Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2006) argued that having a theoretical perspective in qualitative case study research, "adds philosophical richness and depth to a case study[,] and provides

direction for the design of the case study research project" (p. 54). Crotty (1998) clarified, however, that such depth and design work together, rather than simply being discrete components, and called the theoretical perspective "the philosophical stance lying behind a methodology" (p. 66).

While interpretivism seeks to develop an understanding of an action, positivism focuses on explaining the action (Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 2000). Furthermore, as Schwandt noted, "to find meaning in action, or to say one understands what a particular action means, requires that one interpret in a particular way what the actors are doing" (p. 191). Miles and Huberman (1994) reiterated that researchers following the interpretive perspective "have their own understandings, their own convictions, their own conceptual orientations; they, too, are members of a particular culture specific historical moment" (p. 7).

<div align="center">**Conceptual and Operational Definitions**</div>

The following definitions were used during the course of this dissertation research study:

EBD (Emotional and Behavioral Disorders): Refers to students, formally diagnosed or not, with significant emotional and behavioral challenges that contribute to their social and emotional challenges with peer groups, and within the school setting.

ED (Emotional Disturbance): Refers to students with the same behavioral issues and needs as EBD. Some scholars use this term interchangeably with *EBD*.

SWPBS (School-Wide Positive Behavior Supports): Refers to a systems approach to establishing the social cultural and behavioral supports needed for all children in a school to achieve both social and academic success.

PBS (Positive Behavior Supports): Refers to the proactive building-level supports that

educators utilize when attempting to implement the overall building-level process known as SWPBS.

FBA (Functional Behavioral Assessment): Refers to the assessment that school districts and supporting agencies use to determine the function or cause of student behavior, so that appropriate behavioral support plans may be implemented.

Incident Data: Refers to the documentation about the number of times students are removed from classrooms, sent to principals' offices, suspended both in and outside of school and/or permanently expelled. This type of school data is most typically collected and reviewed by building principals and district administrators.

Non-compliance: Refers to a student's refusal or lack of appropriate response to the directive of an adult.

Off Task Behavior: Refers to a student showing no physical orientation or involvement with an activity or peer as designated by the teacher or activity at hand.

Antecedents: Refers to events that occur prior to a student's behavior that escalate into a particular behavioral situation.

Aberrant Behavior: Refers to such behavioral acts as throwing objects, poking peers, sniffing materials or verbally repeating excessively.

Suspension: Refers to temporary student removal from a single classroom or entire school day. Suspension may be carried out "in-school" or "out of school", depending on the situation.

Expulsion: Refers to permanent student removal from a particular school district.

MU Instrument: Refers to the survey instrument used to collect building-level data. The *MU Instrument* was named for Missouri University, which is the origin of the instrument

itself, and was developed to gain insight into the levels of building-level supports based on data collected, and used to make student-specific and systemic-level decisions in the area of student conduct and behavior. Some school districts use this data to evaluate building-level implementation of the Positive Behavior Supports.

Dissertation Overview

This chapter introduced the study for the dissertation as a whole, presented an overview of the background and problem statement, outlined the purpose of the study, stated the research question and study significance, presented a theoretical perspective, and defined conceptual definitions used during the course of this dissertation research. Chapter 2 reviews the literature of EBD, focusing on the ways behaviors manifest in the K-12 public school setting. The review specifically focuses on schools' responses with positive behavioral supports, administrators' collection and use of behavior incident data, and researched programs and strategies that have yielded positive results in supporting students with EBD. Chapter 3 defines the epistemological framework used in this qualitative case study, as well as the philosophical foundations, research design and site, participant information, data collection methods and analysis, researcher positionality, limitations, and delimitations. Chapter 4 discusses the findings for this study. Chapter 5 provides the implications of this study's findings, and recommends directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Emotional Behavioral Disorders (EBD) in school-aged children have been widely studied. However, despite a broad range of research into what scholars commonly refer to as "students with challenging or anti-social behaviors" (Sugai, Horner, & Gresham, 2002; Horner et al., 2004; Walker, 1995, Dunlap et al., 2006; Irvin et al., 2004), these students' lack of success in school remains a problem for administrators, teachers, parents, and the students themselves. By definition, students with EBD display emotional and behavioral problems that affect their educational performance (Hodge, Riccomini, Buford, & Herbst, 2006). This literature review examines the current knowledge about children with EBD and their struggles with academic achievement, as well as tested strategies and interventions that have shown promising results in the K-12 school setting. Specifically, this review covers practices in reviewing behavior incident data, defines school-wide positive behavior supports, and examines various interventions that professionals use with and without success. While much is known about the struggles of this specific student group, there have been few success stories that merit adaptation in the area of how schools generally review specific building-level data as a strategy to improve both the overall functioning of the school system and individual students.

Meeting the complex and multifaceted needs of students with EBD is often an unattainable goal, both for school administrators and teachers. Historically, educational programs for this student population have not been associated with generally positive outcomes (Eber, Nelson, & Miles, 1997). Eber et al. rely on previous studies (Koyangi & Gaines, 1993) to explain that this student population is characterized with many negative attributes, including "excessive dropout rates, high rates of academic failure and poor

achievement test scores, low graduation rates, high use of homebound instruction and institutional placement[, as well as] demonstrate general poor post-school adjustment indicators".

However, these negative impacts are not simply a concern for schools themselves. They are also a concern for the long-term development of the students. Challenging behavior exhibited by young children is now recognized by education scholars as a serious impediment to social-emotional development, and a harbinger of severe maladjustment in school and adult life (Dunlap et al., 2006).

In fact, students with emotional or behavior disorders behave so disruptively that they seriously impair their relationships with parents, peers, and teachers (Farrell, Smith, & Brownell, 1998). To complicate matters further, students with EBD often are the most difficult to teach and are increasingly segregated, factors which contribute to their high rate of failure in school (Kauffman, 1993). Timothy Landrum's (1992) study clarified this phenomenon by showing that such students take a toll on teachers. He found that teachers generally agree that disruptive, irritable, insolent, and disobedient behaviors are unacceptable. In other words, teachers themselves may experience barriers—whether personal or in terms of classroom management—to teaching these students.

On a larger, systemic level, a national study of school programs (Knitzer, Steinberg, & Fleisch, 1990) indicated that lack of appropriate services, little coordination or integration with other provider agencies and limited support for families contributed to these poor outcomes. Knitzer et al. explain that,"[t]he barriers that EBD poses to children's success in education are complex, and defy simple solutions that take, for example, the form of punishment for bad behavior".

Research in the field of education soon adapted to meet this complexity. The enhanced attention to social behavior in schools soon prompted an expanding body of research on the prevention and remediation of violent and disruptive behavior (Elliot, Hamburg, & Williams, 1998; Gresham, Sugai, Horner, Quinn, & McInerney, 1998; Loeber & Farrington, 1998; Walker, Horner, Sugai, Bullis, Sprague, Bricker, & Kaufman, 1996). A focus on preventive strategies continued to encourage schools to review and utilize their data to make informed decisions when planning preventive strategies to respond effectively to challenging student behavior. Indeed, Walker et al. (1996), found that preventive strategies that included early identification allowed for great likelihood for students to turn antisocial school behavior around and improve their chances of being successful in school.

These shifts in emphasis toward prevention and remediation of behavior problems, and the investment in school-wide practices and individualized interventions, proved to be among the more important changes that have occurred over the past 15 years (Horner et al., 2004). Walker et al. (1996) presented these conceptual changes as a three-tiered model of prevention, adapted from previous public health efforts (Larson, 1994; National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 1999 & 2000). Horner (2004) suggested that the key messages from this model are that schools need multiple behavior support systems to create safe and encouraging environments. Investing time and resources to create this sort of school-wide approach to behavior is the most efficient approach for decreasing the possibility of problems. What makes this model so attractive is that it takes a holistic approach. Not only does it seek to improve learning conditions for students with EBD, but it also targets school-wide behavior support components for *all* students.

School-Wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS)

There are proven methods of dealing with challenging behaviors from school age children. The proposed three-tiered model by Walker et al. (1996), "Positive Behavior Support" (PBS), is a systems approach to establishing needed social, cultural, and behavioral supports for all children in a school, so that they achieve both social and academic success. PBS is sometimes referred to in the literature as SWPBS (School-Wide Positive Behavior Supports) when educators use PBS in a school-wide approach. PBS and SWPBS are not packaged curricula, but rather approaches that define core elements that can be achieved through a variety of strategies. Each of the three tiers in the prevention model contains primary, secondary, and tertiary core elements.

School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports is a prevention model (Irvin et al., 2004) that many school administrators and licensed staff have turned to as a way to improve overall behavior supports at a school-wide level (Sugai, Horner, & Greshan, 2002). It is based on the premise that all students can benefit from well-implemented, evidence-based practices for improving behavior. Researchers agree (Sugai et al., 2000): SWPBS provides a comprehensive framework that can be used by any school to design its own system of behavioral supports for all students. It also provides informed decision-making, based upon data analysis that guides the process of assessing student needs and providing additional levels of behavioral support to students in need.

Ultimately, SWPBS provides a positive focus to encourage desirable student behaviors. A set of universal expectations for behavior, positively stated, is established for all students throughout all locations of a school. These expectations generally promote core values, such as respect, responsibility, and safety. Interventions and strategies teach and

reinforce these expectations, and include:

- Periodic direct instruction in specific student behaviors that demonstrate respect, responsibility and safety in various locations in the school.

- Generous quantities of positive adult/teacher attention, and other kinds of reinforcement to students for demonstrating positive behaviors, especially specific behavior expectations identified by the school.

- Predictable consequences for behavior infractions, delivered consistently by all staff in a professional manner throughout the entire school. Consequences are not primarily punitive in nature; they are opportunities for communication between school officials and students for each student to learn from his or her mistakes and to accept responsibility for his or her choices. The consequences are provided on a continuum, matched to the intensity of the misbehavior (Eber et al., 1997).

A SWPBS school incorporates a few simple systems practices crucial to sustaining the program over time. These practices include:

- The establishment of a representative, SWPBS team with a strong administrative presence and support. The SWPBS team uses the "framework" of School-Wide SWPBS to design that school's unique set of practices.

- The SWPBS activities are embedded into existing school activities, such as school improvement and student assistance teams.

- The establishment of a system for using behavioral data (e.g., office discipline referrals or some other method of incident reporting). These data are analyzed and used in a way to guide the design and implementation of additional behavior supports, especially at the targeted and intensive levels.

Horner et al. (2004) initially found that schools implementing school-wide SWPBS have encouraged an array of research efforts focused on improving school-wide social climate, defining links between social behavior and academic accomplishment, and identifying the most efficient procedures for achieving durable reductions in violent and disruptive behaviors (Lane, Gresham, & O'Shaughnessy, 2002; Tolan, Gorman-Smith, & Henry, 2001). That is, academic achievement could impact students with behavior disorders positively if students have the opportunity to learn and improve problem behaviors, and thereby focus on academic learning tasks.

Often, students with behavior issues spend time outside of classrooms or wait in administrative offices to visit with administrators and counselors, which means that students miss core instruction from general education classrooms. School-wide behavior supports have benefited schools precisely because they are proactive. However, to be proactive, schools must first evaluate and understand their own school data profiles. Using school-wide data sets already in use within school systems is a key factor in building and improving upon overall school-wide systems level supports. Such data sets allow school-based teams to collect, review, and analyze data from their own schools to apply that data specifically and appropriately to their own schools. When schools manage student behavior by first reviewing the types of behaviors that take students away from classrooms, they create a springboard in their quest to understand building-level profiles.

Functional Behavioral Assessment

The strength of the PBS approach is that it creates reliability and accountability in the form of a concrete strategy for supporting and guiding student behavior. However, any PBS approach alone cannot account for pronounced behavioral problems. Therefore, it is

important that a given PBS program be augmented with the Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) tool. This section substantiates FBA as a necessary component of PBS, first by examining the merit of PBS as a systematic tool, and then by showing how FBA augments PBS's systematic nature. According to Sugai and Horner (1994; 1999), PBS is of particular importance for schools, given the emphasis on behavioral systems, in addition to its emphasis on individual children. A systems perspective provides support for the adoption and sustained use of effective school practices. Without a systems approach, identification of practices is limited and incomplete, with the result that attention to school initiatives to address discipline remains episodic and short-term.

Because PBS implementation encompasses multiple contexts—classrooms, non-classroom school settings (i.e., playgrounds, hallways, restrooms, and parking lots), schools, districts, families, and communities—PBS initiatives are supported by policy, accountability measures, effective communication and administrative support to ensure that it is implemented accurately and reliably. Indeed, without strong leadership from school administrators, program efforts often become inefficient, incomplete, and ineffective (Colvin & Sprick, 1999).

The PBS approach is founded on the science of human behavior, which maintains that much of human behavior is not only learned, but is also impacted by the environment, and can therefore be changed. The existing science of human behavior finds connections between behavioral, cognitive, biophysical, developmental and physical/environmental factors—all of which influence a person's behavior (Baer, Wolf, & Risley, 1968; Bijou & Baer, 1978; Schwartz, 1989; Wolery, Bailey, & Sugai, 1988). Of particular interest are factors that affect the development and durability of disruptive and dangerous behaviors (Biglan, 1995;

Kauffman, 1997; Mayer, 1995; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992; Walker, Colvin, &

Ramsey, 1995).

The primary purpose of PBS is to change and shape behaviors, and that purpose

provides a continuum of behavioral interventions and supports. Included, and not to be

overlooked, are the changes that need to happen with educators who are involved with, and

who lead, this process, so that PBS implementation in any school setting or district is

successful. Prevention is emphasized: policies, structures, routines, and environments

necessarily change according to the PBS model. As well, a change or shift in thinking occurs

with teachers, counselors, parents, and staff. The change of appreciating appropriate behavior

is not demanded solely from students, but from everyone, and at all levels of the institution.

So, where does the FBA component fit within this schema? Sugai et al. (2000)

illustrated that no significant behavioral problems exist with 80 percent of the student

population, and that universal interventions through the school-wide system are intended

primarily to be preventive. Next, they showed that 5–15 percent of students at risk for

problem behavior fall into the secondary prevention tier, and that 1–7 percent of students at

the tertiary prevention stage presented chronic and intense problem behavior. For students

with the most significant emotional and behavioral issues, the development of positive

behavioral intervention plans should be guided by a Functional Behavioral Analysis (FBA)—

the foundation to the PBS approach. Sugai et al. (2000) explained how FBA innovated

behavior support over previous notions of managing student behavior:

Historically, problem behaviors have been viewed as residing within a child, and the

diagnostic emphasis has been on the type of problem behavior or the link with

disability type within the individual. Although all types of information may be useful

in the design of effective support, the current emphasis is on careful documentation of

the predicting and maintaining events associated with problem behaviors. (p. 136)

A central message from this advancement is that the design of interventions targeting

successful change in behavior requires identification of events that reliably predict and

maintain problem behaviors (Carr, 1994; Horner, 1994; Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, & Hagan,

1998).

Functional assessment is not new, and can be found in a variety of disciplines.

However, functional assessment emerged in the 1960s in applied behavioral analysis in the

field of education, most specifically, in special education (Bijou & Baer, 1961, 1978; Bijou,

Peterson, & Ault, 1968; Bijou, Peterson, Harris, Allen, & Johnson, 1969). It is important to

note (Blakeslee, Sugai, & Gruba, 1994) that initial research in this area was conducted with

individuals who experienced severe developmental and intellectual disabilities. However a

growing body of research and applications subsequently focused on individuals with mild,

high-incident disabilities, for example emotional and behavioral disorders, and learning

disabilities (Dunlap et al., 1993; Lewis & Sugai, 1993, 1996; Umbreit, 1995; Vollmer &

Northup, 1996). Equally important to note is that this body of research considered students

with behavioral disorders to be students with disabilities. However, it is important to note

that practicioners find this approach useful and appropriate for behavioral problems in

general, despite the fact that it originated by focusing exclusively on students with

disabilities.

Researchers and educators alike have defined functional behavior assessment as a

systematic process of identifying problem behaviors and events that (1) reliably predict

occurrence and nonoccurrence of those behaviors and (2) maintain those behaviors over time.

Research by a wide variety of researchers (Carr et al., 1999; Horner, 1994; O'Neill et al., 1997; Sugai, Horner, & Sprague, 1999; Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, & Hagan, 1998; Tilly et al., 1998) therefore have suggested that the purpose of gathering this information is not only to improve effectiveness, relevance and efficiency of behavior support plans, but also to validate FBA as a valuable tool for predicting and planning for behaviors that are disruptive to student learning.

The goals of FBA, as part of an overall PBS system, are to identify specifically the conditions where behaviors occur, and to restructure school environments to reduce and replace challenging behavior by encouraging positive behavior. However, FBA is not a set of forms or static products. Instead, it is a process of understanding behavior in the context in which it is observed, and guiding the development of relevant, effective, and efficient positive behavioral intervention (Sugai et al., 2000). In other words, educators and researchers consider FBA as a "best practice" for all challenging behaviors—not just individual behavioral events (for example, events that often result in suspension or other disciplinary action).

It is important to note that specific procedures have been established by Sugai et al. (2000) to follow when conducting an FBA and developing behavior support plans. They argue that school administrators, teachers, or supporting agencies who evaluate students for an FBA and create plans based on the data collected, must follow the steps as outlined by the developer and authors.

The following outline synthesizes six steps Sugai et al. (2000) recommend for such development:

1. Collect information regarding conditions where problem behavior is and is not observed and where more appropriate behavior is required. Review archival data and analysis of routines, interviews and/or direct observations, using four primary factors: (a) defining events and operations that make the problem behavior worse (e.g., diet, medication, illness, social conflicts, and so on); (b) understanding antecedent events that predictably precede and trigger or occasion problem behavior (e.g., task demands, instruction, peer/adult requests, and so on; (c) classifying problem behavior within response classes or sets, and which are maintained by a common function or outcome (e.g., attention escape/avoidance); (d) identifying consequence events that predictably follow and maintain problem behavior (positive or negative reinforcement).

2. Develop verifiable hypotheses based on the information collected in the first step to describe best the conditions under which the problem behavior is most likely to occur. A complete testable hypothesis includes problem behavior-triggering antecedent events, and maintenance of consequence events and influential setting events establishing operations.

3. Collect direct observation information to verify the summary statements for accuracy or predictability. Multiple observations across multiple settings should be conducted to see if problem behavior patterns occur under hypothesized conditions and contexts. Such observations require careful documentation of the presence or absence of antecedent and consequence variables when problem behaviors are and are not observed.

4. Develop behavior support plans, based on the information from verified hypotheses, to specify possible teaching strategies or manipulations for desired behaviors regarding antecedent events and consequence events. This plan would serve as the basis for defining the actual implementation of the behavioral interventions, and is unlike other single-focused reactive consequence manipulations, such as time-out and behavior contracts. Instead, it is based on FBA, and considers instructionally focused and prevention focused activities.

5. Develop a team-driven implementation script, based on the information and data collected to this point. The script should specify how, when, where, and by whom the behavior support plan is to be implemented.

6. Collect information regularly on the effectiveness and efficiency of the behavior support plan to evaluate and redesign the plan as needed. Frequent support should be provided by staff to ensure that the plan works, and that teachers receive necessary support with implementing the plan.[1]

PBS and FBA are important approaches for identifying and organizing effective school practices, especially for students who present significant and persistent problem behavior. However, educators struggle with developing effective ways to organize and train staff as part of their efforts to improve programming for students with EBD (Sugai et al., 2000). This struggle reminds us that the goal of PBS is to use information from FBAs to guide the design of learning and teaching environments that support and encourage adaptive behavior as a way to decrease problem behavior and its effects.

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[1] Additional guidelines for implementing the process appear in O'Neill et al. (1997), Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, and Hagan (1998), and Tilly et al. (1998).

Sugai et al. (2000) summarized the expectations well in justifying PBS and FBA approaches, and emphasize that schools need "user-friendly" ways to use both approaches. Establishing a proactive school environment where educators "work smarter", and balancing the efforts and attentions between school-wide and individual student systems were found to be paramount to making the process work. Additionally, Sugai et al. (2000) argued that attention needs to be paid to the specialized intervention intensity, which would increase with the intensity of the problem.

Now, the growing expectation is that schools will deliver socially acceptable, effective, and efficient interventions to ensure safe, productive environments where norm-violating behavior is minimized and pro-social behavior is promoted. PBS and FBA represent important efforts toward achieving these goals (Sugai et al., 2000).

Interventions

In addition to systematic in-school EBD interventions for children, schools also must be aware that the problem of dealing with difficult behavior includes dealing with subsequent adult responses, which often tend to exacerbate rather than reduce significant behavior problems (Landrum, 1992). Because students with behavior disorders are often unresponsive to typical management and discipline systems, they often evoke punitive teacher responses and peer rejection, leaving school teachers and administrators asking to place such students in more restrictive environments or settings. Compared with other categories of students with disabilities, students with EBD tend to be placed in even more restrictive and segregated educational settings, and fewer than half prove to be re-integrated for all or part of their education (Dowling et al., 1990).

One behavioral management system that educators frequently use when looking for

interventions that work with EBD student is the Level System (Farrell, Smith, & Brownell, 1998). Educators claim that level systems can change student behavior so that students become academically and social successful in school, and can return to regular classes. According to Farrell et al., however, little research exists to support this claim, making level systems a dubious alternative for any right-thinking administrator concerned for verifiable outcomes of a school-wide support plan.

For example, in a classroom where a teacher uses a leveled system, it is assumed that students learn appropriate behaviors through a series of steps. Each step has defined expectations, and reinforcements in the form of specific rewards and consequences—all of which determine whether a student progresses to the next grade level.

However, opponents to this approach (Scheuermann et al., 1994) have argued that the uniform practice of placing all students at a level-one step (which leveled systems do) raises concerns about individualized education. State and federal legislation guarantees, through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990, that students with disabilities are to be placed in the least restrictive environment. Placing all students equally into a leveled system does not take into account individual placement options. Farrell, Smith, and Brownell (1998) suggested that to comply with such regulations, teachers and IEP (Individualized Education Plan) teams should play a critical role in the design of the level system and the goals of each student.

Farrell, Smith, and Brownell (1998) went so far as to conduct a large scale survey to determine the degree of usage of this level systems management strategy. The results of their study provided more knowledge about the extent of this practice, the perceived effectiveness and teacher satisfaction with level systems. Specifically, they found that educators know very

little about level systems other than descriptions they could find in the literature. Furthermore, research into this concern is currently incomplete. In acknowledging this incompleteness, Farrell Smith, and Brownell themselves suggested that since many educators deployed this strategy, more research on its effectiveness needed to be conducted to determine the exact nature of its viability.

Indeed, it is the task of every support initiative to understand thoroughly its strengths and weaknesses. Any approach must consider realistically the conditions of the students and school it targets. For a variety of reasons, students with EBD are likely to be absent, truant and/or disengaged when in school. The most severe and overt symptom of disengagement from school and learning exhibits itself in the form of dropping out of school (Lehr, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2004). Furthermore, most students' attrition from school (Hess, Lyons, Corsino, & Wells, 1989) is a particular form of expression: an extreme disengagement from school, preceded by indicators of withdrawal (e.g., poor attendance), and unsuccessful school experiences (e.g., academic or behavioral difficulties).

Some studies have shown that this path to complete disengagement and dropping out could be predicted as early as the elementary years in some students (Barrington & Hendricks, 1989). A retrospective study (Hess et al., 1989) examining early patterns of students who dropped out of schools showed that, starting in first grade, school dropouts had more absences than did graduates. That study's analysis of cumulative records from Chicago Public School students showed that absences and academic grades for three consecutive years, ending in the fourth grade, identified nearly 90 percent of the dropouts. Slavin (1999) stated that while success in the early grades did not guarantee success in later schooling, failure in the early years did virtually ensure failure in later schooling. Enabling EBD

students to engage with school, then, seems to be a key consideration—a consideration that the model known as Check and Connect (Lehr, Sinclair, Christenson, 2004) took as its central focus.

Check and Connect is an intervention strategy for students whose behavioral issues prevent them from becoming engaged with school. The Check and Connect intervention was originally developed as part of an initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs to address dropout prevention and intervention for middle school students with learning and emotional/behavioral disabilities (Lehr, Sinclair, Christenson, 2004). Check and Connect was designed to promote student engagement in school and learning. Its key features included the following elements: relationship building; routine monitoring of warning signals that may indicate withdrawal; timely interventions to provide support tailored to individual needs; long-term commitment, by coordinating interventions with families for at least a 2-year period; "Persistence Plus", a form of academic motivation with the message that education is important for future outcomes; problem-solving, which focuses on identifying solutions and acquiring skills to resolve conflicts; and strong affiliations with school and learning.

In their 2004 study, Lehr, Sinclair, and Christenson found that elementary school students targeted for the Check and Connect program were absent or tardy to school 12 percent less than their previous years' enrollment. The results of this study indicated two things. First, since the study found that students' previous years' punctuality and attendance doubled during participation in Check and Connect, it is reasonable to suggest that Check and Connect increased levels of engagement in school—at the very least, in the sense that students were physically present for lessons. Second, teacher perceptions of program

effectiveness affirmed the direct measure of student participation. Findings from this study

suggested this strategy increased levels of engagement in school, as evidenced by substantial

changes in attendance. Teacher's perceptions from the study indicated that a majority of the

staff reported more engagement from the students participating in the Check and Connect.

Lehr et al. concluded that as school districts and communities sought ways to meet high

educational standards for all youth, school completion and student engagement with school

become critical first steps. Thus, the Check and Connect Model proved to be one intervention

that could be utilized at the elementary level.

The strength of Check and Connect's strategy lies in improving the rate by which

students attend classes. However, attendance rate is just one facet of student engagement.

Unfortunately, attendance in and of itself is not a measure of whether, or the degree to which,

students engage with and ultimately learn material.

To understand whether students "tuned in" to learning when they did attend school,

Landrum, Tankersley, and Kauffman (2003) addressed the academic learning problems

associated with behavior choices that students make. They asked three questions to determine

whether practices found to be effective in the research were actually successful when applied

to special education students with EBD:

1. What research-based practices offer the most promise with EBD students?

2. Are the practices being implemented with regularity and fidelity in schools?

3. Are these practices unique to the field of special education or just simply good
   educational practices?

Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman (2003) categorized their findings into three

"broad" intervention categories—inappropriate behaviors, academic learning problems and

interpersonal relationships (p. 149)—which they referred to as "promising interventions" for students with EBD, and identified potential intervention targets along with examples of effective practices. According to Landrum et al., the basic concept underlying behavioral procedures simply assumed that the environment, or antecedent, set the occasion for behavior, and then the behavior occurred, which was then followed by a consequence, either in the form of a new, added or withdrawn stimulus.

Noncompliance in school situations has generally referred to the refusal or lack of appropriate response to the direction of an adult who has made a request of a student (Walker & Walker, 1991). Inappropriate behavior has manifested into excesses that look like aggressive or disruptive behavior, or a deficit area, showing either social withdrawal or noncompliance. Education research has considered reinforcers to be effective practices, both positive and negative, but it remains clear that educators must additionally take into account how a message, or precision request, is directed toward a student. The likelihood of a student complying with a directive may be enhanced by the way the directive is delivered, which would demonstrate antecedent to compliance (Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003). Regarding this concern, they described two types of teacher requests: precision and behavioral momentum—both of which have proven to be successful with EBD students. Precision requests, as delivered by a teacher, are predictable, involves outlined consequences and allows for students to have wait time to comply. Behavioral momentum outlines a strategy in which the teacher delivers a directive that a student is most likely to comply with. Altering consequences is another strategy that has been used either to reinforce the desired behavior or decrease an undesirable behavior (Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003). This strategy is used when teachers deliver positive attention as a way to reinforce the

desired behavior and has a strong research base as pointed out by Landrum, Tankersley and Kauffman, (2003). Indeed, descriptions of praise and its effective use (Alberto & Troutman, 2003) are abundant in the special education literature.

De Pry and Sugai (2002), furthermore, have examined the effect of using two antecedent-based strategies for reducing problem behaviors in school settings, specifically, *pre-correction* and *active supervision*. The objective of pre-correction is to prompt or engage each student in a pro-social, or more appropriate, behavior before the problem is occasioned. Pre-correction could take the form of a verbal rule restatement or a nonverbal gesture or prompt. Active supervision has three general keys. First, teachers move about the room using body proximity; second, teachers visit problem spots frequently; third, they scan the environment as they move about the room. Teachers give pre-corrections and reminders to students as they move around the room. These supervision strategies have been used by teachers for reducing behaviors during transition times, in the cafeteria, and during recess times (Lewis, Colvin, & Sugai, 2000).

Beyond looking at practices directed at inappropriate behavior, a survey of the evidence-based practices dealing specifically with academic learning problems leads to examining the practices directed at improving academic outcomes for students, such as direct instruction, self monitoring skills, class-wide peer tutoring, and continuous monitoring of student performance through curriculum based measures. According to Walker et al. (1998), direct instruction has perhaps the richest empirical history in enhancing the academic achievement of struggling learners. One of the key advantages of direct instruction for low-achieving students is its emphasis on academic engagement (Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003). With the learning targets for academic intervention, the goal to emphasize

is the improvement of achievement through attention to task, self-monitoring, and peer tutoring—all of which are good examples of learning practices that supplement direct instruction.

In addition to the usefulness of intervention that is focused on academic achievement, it is important to understand the ways interpersonal relationships impact students with EBD. Students in this category have both deficits and problems associated with social skills. For this reason, social skills intervention is a standard component of virtually all programming for these students, and with very good reason. Making academic gains would be short-lived if students simultaneously were not to receive appropriate instruction for their social skills deficits (Broughton & Lahey, 1978). However, some research has disproven the reliability of this approach. Specifically, summaries of intervention literature based on meta-analysis (Fornes, Kavale, Blum, & Lloyd, 1997; Lloyd, Forness, & Kavale, 1998) have shown that social skills interventions are not as promising as they originally purported to be.

In addition to choosing empirically supported interventions and implementing them with integrity, Landrum, Tankersley, and Kauffman (2003) argued that all of the interventions listed thus far in this review need also be implemented early in the cycle of behavioral problems. Indeed, compelling evidence has suggested that the development of behavioral disorders could be ameliorated dramatically if interventions were provided early and intensely (Shinn, Walker, & Stoner, 2002). Thus, education researchers have been able to understand much about the conditions under which problems occurred, and have refined their understanding of how best to implement interventions.

Over the years, research has generally led to the conclusion that children and adolescents with EBD functioned a year or more below grade level across subject areas

(Kauffman, 2001), and were at high risk for failure to master the types of basic academic skills essential to later scholastic functioning (Gunter & Denny, 1998). Because academic difficulties begin early in an education career, and often have lasting consequences (Mooney, Epstein, Reid, & Nelson, 2003), direct intervention early and often throughout a child's schooling becomes essential for laying the groundwork for their future success.

Ultimately, the trends in, and status of, academic intervention research with students with EBD need to be understood, so that school administrators, teachers, and parents can make sound objective instruction decisions (Moony et al., 2003). As much as seems to be known and reported about how students with EBD function lower than other students, not as much knowledge seems to be available with regard to the status and trends in academic intervention research. In 1985, for example, Skiba and Casey reviewed the intervention research, and found the research in the field of behavioral disorders to be "fraught with a number of serious problems" (p. 249), including poor research design, reporting methods, and measurement of treatment implementation. Nine years later, Mooney, Epstein, Reid, and Nelson (2003) reviewed both the status of and trends in interventions designed to improve the academic functioning of students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Fifty-five studies were included in their descriptive analysis, which spanned the years from 1975–2002. Their study found that not much about intervention had changed from some "two decades earlier" (Skiba & Casey 1985).

Skiba and Casey (1985) concluded that more research still needed to be conducted to formalize effective methods for teaching children with emotional disorders. They discovered multiple discrepancies throughout the 55 studies they analyzed. In narrating the discrepancies, they concluded that demographic information was hard to find for some

participants; physical settings were generally special education classrooms, as opposed to general education classrooms; researchers used predominantly single-subject designs; treatment fidelity data were often absent; and few of the studies focused on females or minorities. Another study limitation was that the data for students with behavioral issues was combined with the data for those students with other disabilities, with the result that anyone using that data might predict a different outcome than if data from all studies had been included about the types of student disabilities reviewed. Today, with accountability measures in place (such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001), along with other school-based accountability measures, future research is necessary if the field of educating students with behavior and emotional disorders is to improve (Mooney, Epstein, Reid & Nelson, 2003)[2].

Finally, Dunlap et al. (2006) created a concise and current summary of the most prominent features of the impact of prevention and intervention practices for children with challenging behaviors. They pointed to necessary considerations to pursue as a way to ground future evidence-based research, so that more "complex empirical" questions could someday be answered. They accomplished this goal by producing a synthesis that broadly articulated findings with summary statements specific to impact, prevention and intervention. Their recommendation was that future research should require both considerable resources and a well-planned approach to ensure that new research explorations innovate the field of education.

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[2]   Skiba and Casey (1985) outline a framework of talking points to consider when formulating future research plans that investigate intervention treatment for students with EBD. See Mooney, Epstein, Reid, and Nelson (2003) for the complete list of talking points.

In determining the effectiveness of interventions for students with EBD, Landrum, Tankersley, and Kauffman (2003) noted the importance of understanding that professionals are probably not going to cure the emotional or behavioral problems that EBD students present, considering that EBD is a lifelong disorder. They further argue that special education itself for EBD students could be even more "special" if educators would take full advantage of the behavioral and instructional interventions available to them by utilizing the proven strategies with the highest chance of helping students with behavior disorders reach their potential. Of course, it is realistic for a building's administrators and educators to evaluate the tools available to them to improve the education of EBD students. Testifying to my own educational experiences as a former teacher and current school administrator, I can agree there are viable options available that should be leveraged to improve programming for EBD students.

Using School-Wide Data

Without collecting and reviewing the appropriate school-wide office referral data, sometimes referred to in the literature as "office discipline referral" (ODR), schools themselves would have zero foundational information in moving forward and putting appropriate behavior interventions and plans in place for students. Schools flourish, in part, when educators work together to collect, analyze and act on information about student behavior (LeTendre, 2000). Analysis of school-wide and individual student behavior in schools can be of direct and immediate value in the design of effective, individualized interventions (Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 2000).

Many schools today use electronic student databases to collect attendance data, to schedule classes, to document personalized education plans, and to collect behavioral type of

data. Many types of ODR-related information, such as demographic information, referring teacher, time of day, and nature/location of problem behavior are potentially useful data for facilitating decision-making regarding school-wide and/or individual student behavior (Irvin et al., 2006). Furthermore, many schools have at their fingertips the essential data necessary to begin the decision-making process for all the topics of ODR, since state and federal reporting is so vital to school systems' daily operations.

In a recent review of school research and evaluation reports, Irvin, Tobin, Sprague Sugai, and Vincent (2006) interpreted a variety of empirical evidence to document the validity of ODR measures, for use as indices both of school-wide behavioral status and of effectiveness of school-wide behavioral interventions. The purpose of Irvin et al.'s study was further to apply Messick's (1988) tool—the "Unified Approach to Construct Validity to School-Wide Interpretation and Use of ODR Measures: Relevant Validity Questions and Necessary Evidence"—to assess the validity of office discipline data commonly used in schools. Irvin et al. framed their study by utilizing the SWIS (School-Wide Information System) to ensure a standardized electronic form of the data used by the schools studied. They noted that, typically, this type of SWIS data collection assists with internal decision-making about improving school discipline practices and with support planning for individual students. Furthermore, the collection serves as a means to report data to the district, as well as state and federal governments. Finaly, it aggregates and interprets the data across schools—within and across districts and states.

Irvin et al. (2006) clarified that their evaluative study focused on the first two key hypotheses in using a SWIS approach for school data collection. Their pilot study demonstrated empirically that ODR data, summarized in convenient formats, did facilitate

educators' decision-making about student behavior in schools—both on a school-wide basis and with individual students. They also found that school personnel did access and report use of ODR information to make active decisions about implementing interventions aimed at decreasing student problem behaviors.

The limitation of Irvin et al.'s (2006) study, and which the authors acknowledged, was that it did not explore all of Messick's (1988) hypotheses, specifically the latter two. Irvin et al. recommended that future research explore such concerns in-depth. Since the study measured only schools that reported using the tool, they also recommended that future studies should include concurrent observation of educators using the data for decision-making.

Although Irvin et al. (2006) were able to replicate Messick's unified approaches to validity—by focusing on examples of evidence for empirical and ethical foundations of interpretations and social consequences of ODR measures at the school-wide level—the study itself was not designed to look at the outcomes of such data review, nor at such goals as creating outcomes and interventions for students, based on data. This limitation serves as a reminder to educators that they must first address how data is used, and then evaluate the fidelity of the design and implementation of interventions intended to improve student behavior.

Irvin et al.'s (2006) contributions are, however, extremely important, in that they offer a beginning step in designing effective school-wide practices. The current climate even lends validity to Irvin et al.'s findings, in that schools today (Horner et al., 2004) report 20 to 60 percent reductions in office discipline referrals, improved social climate and improved academic performance when they engage in SWPBS practices. Importantly, since using

school-wide office referral data allows for managing and understanding school climates and profiles, the research in this area gives educators tools and standards toward which to work.

School-wide behavior support is a relatively recent practice. It emerged from early work by educational scholar Roy Mayer and his colleagues (Mayer, Butterworth, Nafpaktitis, & Sulzer-Azaroff, 1983; Mayer, 1995). Their emphasis on the teaching of pro-social behaviors to all children entering elementary and middle (junior high) schools was later expanded by other education scholars (Sprick, Sprick, & Garrison, 1992; Nelson, Johnson, & Marchand-Martella, 1996; Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Luiselli et al., 2002). Subsequent efforts to implement school-wide support saw substantial success, as evidenced by the work of Lewis and Sugai (1999) and Hagen-Burke et al. (2002). The following list conflates Lewis and Sugai's and Hagen-Burke et al.'s work. Together, they identified seven key actions of schools that experienced success with PBS. The schools:

1. Defined 3 to 5 school-wide expectations for appropriate behavior.

2. Actively taught specific school-wide behavioral expectations to all students.

3. Monitored and acknowledged students for engaging in behavioral expectations.

4. Corrected problem behavior, using a consistently administered continuum of behavioral consequences.

5. Gathered and used information about student behavior to evaluate and guide decision-making.

6. Refined leadership, based on school-wide practices of administrators who established a "building behavior" team to manage and implement efforts. They ensured that the leader served as a member of the team, and allocated sufficient time to implement behavior support procedures.

7. Obtained district-level support (in the form of training) for school-wide behavior support practices, established expectations that information on problem behavior patterns be gathered and reported, and sought policies that emphasized expectations that schools be both safe and organized for effective learning.

Subsequently, schools complemented their data collection practices with "The School-Wide Evaluation Tool", or SET, developed by Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd, and Horner (2001), which measured implementation of school-wide positive behavior support procedures. In a follow-up study, Horner, Todd, Lewis-Palmer, Irvin, Sugai, and Boland (2004) documented the psychometric properties of the SET. They contended that educators and researchers needed a metric for assessing implementation of school-wide PBS practices—such as Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd, & Horner's (2001) creation of SET three years earlier to provide a measure of primary prevention practices.

Methodologically, Horner et al. (2004) held two key assumptions for determining the viability of investing in school-wide PBS. The first assumption centered on the idea that promoting appropriate behavior could only be accomplished by clearly defining expectations. That is, if teachers actively taught desired behaviors, then they needed to show consistency by acknowledging and rewarding such behavior. Sugai et al. (2000) themselves acknowledged that there was no degree to which these expectations affected more intense types of problematic behavior. However, reducing the negative behaviors overall freed up resources to support more intensive issues. Horner et al.'s second assumption was that student peers had as much, if not more, influence over fellow students' behavior than do adults regarding the creation of a school climate where desired behavior is expected.

A key methodological concern, then, emerged. The establishment of a positive

student social culture involved providing students with a common set of expectations, a common language and a common set of experiences associated with the defined behavioral expectations (Cushing, 2000; Lewis & Sugai, 1999). Horner et al. (2004) found both promising results and limitations in using the SET. First, because this measure exceeded basic psychometric criteria for measuring tools used in research, it could be administered with high inter-observer agreement, which demonstrated excellent test-retest reliability. Additionally, the researchers concluded that local school decision-makers could establish a PBS tool for training and development. From this conclusion, Horner et al. recommended a number of steps to consider when building systems-level supports for improving student behavior: (a) assess the need for training, (b) assess the impact of personnel development efforts in the area of school-wide PBS, (c) assess the sustained use of school-wide PBS procedures, and (d) develop locally effective strategies for building school-wide PBS outcomes.

Horner et al. (2004) do point out, of course, that the study was limited. Although the SET should prove useful in gathering data on the first level for evaluation of the primary prevention strategies of PBS (first tier), the study did not use SET to evaluate the secondary and tertiary preventions of school districts. This is a limitation because the secondary tier (supports designed to reduce the number of problem behaviors) and tertiary tier (supports that reduced the intenesity and complexity of current behaviors) are just as important to a comprehensive plan for overall school improvement as the first level of any overall plan to be assessed by the SET.

Summary

Our current understanding of emotional and behavioral problems in schools leads

towards the understanding that there are strategies that work in the educational system that can improve outcomes for students. Additionally research does support the development of a three-tiered system of prevention, with the third tier focused on developing individual behavior intervention plans for each student, based on functional behavior analysis (Sugai et al., 2002). This approach to behavior problems in schools represents one possible direction in the spirit of what many educators see as "education for all", and especially for students with EBD. While there remains much to learn about students with EBD, education literature reveals one major theme: it is now clear that students with EBD need more focused, systematic attention to increase their chances of success. It is time to begin a systemic process to collect and analyze data currently housed in school buildings across the nation as a first step to understand and develop better plans and programs for students with EBD.

Specifically, administrators could improve services for children with EBD by reviewing and using incident data at their schools to arrive at a systemic understanding of the types of removals teachers dole out to students. This is a complex and daunting task, especially for school administrators who routinely juggle various tasks throughout the course of a single week, day or even hour; however, collecting and reviewing incident data is the first step in creating structures and programming that benefits students. Incident data are vital to focus schools' efforts to maximize the success of students (Holcomb, 1998). Collecting and using incident data are also essential to creating the safe and orderly environments that students need in order to learn. Viewing incident data helps administrators replace assumptions with facts, identify causes and problems of behaviors, determine whether programming meets student needs, and establish a routine in school settings—through prevention and intervention—of behavior conducive to learning.

Administrators must recognize, however, that data collection is only the first step. Schools must move beyond simply collecting the data for state and federal reporting purposes, and begin building processes at the building- and district-level that use these data sets to improve teaching and learning for both general and special education students alike.

Educators are being asked to educate an increasingly heterogeneous population of students. A growing number of students in our schools have English as a second language, limited family support systems, significant learning and/or behavioral problems, families who face financial barriers, and a great need for mental health, social welfare, medical, and vocational assistance (Knitzer, 1993; Knitzer, Steinberg, & Fleisch, 1990; Stevens & Price, 1992). Although attention has popularly focused on students with externalizing problem behavior (e.g., aggressive, antisocial or destructive conduct), students with internalizing problem behavior (e.g., social withdrawal, depression) also represent an important concern of families, schools, and communities (Kauffman, 1997).

Increasingly, efforts to establish school-linked service arrangements for children and families are appearing around the country (Sailor, 1996). As a society, we look to schools to be or become settings where our children learn the skills necessary to ensure a successful adulthood (e.g., ISEA, Goals 2000, and Improving America's Schools Act). This expectation, of course, occurs in that context of an increasingly heterogeneous general student body, some of whom exhibit intense patterns of chronic problem behavior (Sugai et al., 2002).

The literature regarding students with EBD provides a compelling look at the fact that we now know much more about the problems inherent in teaching these children. There seems to be consensus among authors, educators, and researchers about the ways that challenging behaviors manifest in school settings. Educators can predict future failure in

school and in our communities when children with emotional and behavior issues are left untreated. As this review shows, not only is there an abundance of data that promote the importance of prevention and early detection, there are also data that prove that, untreated, EBD behaviors and student failure simply get worse over time.

This literature review provides a complex look at students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD), and specifically focuses on Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) and interventions for working with students—defined as students with various emotional or behavior disorders. What remains clear is that more needs to be done in the area of the research itself—specifically, in evaluating the efficacy of tested intervention strategies and practices to ensure educators have the necessary tools and the "know how" to implement those tools with fidelity, and to ensure every effort is made truly to impact learners with EBD in K-12 school settings. Choosing interventions that are empirically supported in the literature, and then implementing them with integrity, should be the goal of every educator working with EBD students.

Prevention of behavior-related incidents in the school setting should be the first priority in creating an optimal learning environment for all students including those with EDB. To become preventive in practices, administrators must first be able to navigate through building-level incident data to ensure they have an accurate profile not only of their respective buildings, but also of the overall school district. While a comprehensive incident database makes it easier to manage resources and complete state and federal incident reports, the most important reason to collect data is to facilitate activities that promote learning (i.e., improving school safety and focusing discipline reform efforts). Without accurate data, it is difficult to take appropriate steps to create climates conducive to learning (U.S. Department

of Education, 2010).

A motivating factor for this study is that existing literature does not specifically investigate the ways school administrators and staff members have collected and used school-based discipline data to inform decisions to improve school-based protocols to improve services for EBE students. Collecting and reviewing building- and district-level incident data can be the first step toward understanding the specific needs of an individual school building or complete school district when improving the overall behaviors of students in the K-12 setting. This case study examines how one school district collects, manages and uses student incident behavior data to inform school-based and district decisions.

Yin (2009) stated that novices mistakenly think that the purpose of a literature review is to determine the answers about what is known on a topic; experienced investigators, however, review previous research to develop sharper and more insightful questions about the topic. As a fledgling researcher myself, I have paid particular attention to this sage advice, and have leveraged this literature review to help me establish the questions that will guide this research.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

I chose a qualitative approach for this study for several compelling reasons. In general, qualitative research methods are especially useful in discovering the meaning that people give to events they experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The purpose of this study was to discover the meaning that administrators give to the their collection, analysis and use of behavior data to improve student success in school and in society.

Specifically, a qualitative approach is warranted when the nature of research questions requires *exploration* (Stake, 1995). Qualitative research questions often begin with *how* or *what*, so that the researcher can gain an in-depth understanding of what is going on relative to the topic (Patton, 2002; Seidman, 1998). For the current study, I explored participants' experiences with reducing behavior barriers that impede learning by asking the following *what* questions: (a) To what extent do administrators have access to behavior data that inform their decisions on how to improve student success in school and in society?, (b) To what extent do administrators use behavior data to improve success in school and in society?, and (c) What do administrators perceive it would take to enhance the effectiveness of their current efforts to improve student success in school and in society?

Second, a qualitative study allows the researcher to explore phenomena, such as feelings or thought processes, that are difficult to extract or learn about through conventional research methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For the present study, I explored participants' *perceptions* and *lived experiences* (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006) of reducing barriers that interrupted learning.

Third, qualitative research methods are the best approach when studying phenomena

in their natural settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), and when striving to understand social processes in context (Esterberg, 2002). The current study focused on administrators' experiences of addressing behavior problems in the buildings in which they held leadership roles.

Fourth, qualitative methods emphasize the researcher's role as active participant in the study (Creswell, 2005). For the present study, I, the researcher, was the key instrument in data collection, and the interpreter of data findings (Stake, 1995).

Qualitative research methods used in this study included: purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews, and systematic and concurrent data collection and data analysis procedures. Specifically, the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to analyze the data and discover administrators' perceptions and experiences with reducing negative behaviors that affect student learning.

This study, based in the constructivist paradigm, used a case study approach to explain building administrators' perceptions and experiences with understanding and reducing behavior problems that disrupt learning in the school setting. This chapter describes the research paradigm, approach, and design used to achieve the purpose of the study.

There is no single wellspring of qualitative research. Its history is extensive, drawing from the evolving curiosities of humankind over the centuries, formally disciplined by ethnographers, social psychologists, historians, and literary critics (Bogdan & Bilkin, 1982; Eco, 1994; Hamilton, 1981; Stake, 1978). The function of research is not necessarily to map and conquer the world, but to lend the world sophistication. An ongoing interpretive role of the researcher is prominent in any qualitative case study (Stake, 1995).

Since qualitative methodologies are fundamentally anchored in a concern for

developing a depth of understanding both of a particular phenomenon and a construction of meaning that individuals attribute to their experiences, care must be taken to attend to the complex dynamics that emerge (Jones, 2002). Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2006) submitted, for example, that the intent of qualitative research is, through in-depth examination, to illuminate and better understand the rich lives of human beings and the world in which they live.

To this end, Oldfather and West (1994) compared qualitative research to the musical genre of jazz. This metaphor is fitting when considering the many elements of jazz and the ways these same qualities pervade qualitative research. Oldfather and West further iterated that the inclusive, improvisational, collaborative, and interpretative qualities of jazz are adaptive, and shaped by the participants much like qualitative research is shaped by both the researcher and those participating:

> Those who experience jazz firsthand (as players or members of a live audience) are those most deeply affected. Similarly, those who participate directly in qualitative research, who are physically, intellectually, and emotionally present in the research context, and who hear the interplay of voices for themselves are those for whom the understandings are most vivid and meaningful. (Oldfather & West, 1994, p. 23)

The qualitative approach is based on the idea of striving to understand social processes in context, while exploring the meanings of social events for those who are involved in them (Esterberg, 2002). Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world—studying things in their natural settings while attempting to make sense of and interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Qualitative research has grown in popularity over the past quarter of a

century, and continues to emerge as a means to answer questions in the educational field (Prasade, 2005): "The so-called qualitative turn that has overtaken the social sciences in the last twenty-five years has yielded both a rich body of research using non-statistical methods and substantive amount of methodological advice on how to engage in qualitative inquiry" (p. 3).

As well, the components and foundations that guide qualitative research serve as the means to contextualize and understand the research questions in this study. A qualitative approach is most appropriate for this study because it fosters a better understanding of the lived experiences of the participants (school personnel) and their own understandings of how they collect, navigate, and work with student behavioral incident data. This study allows participants the opportunity to articulate (or, in the language of the literature, "express") the ways they collect and analyze building-level data. The use of rich, critical description provides in-depth, detailed accounts of the participants' experiences. The essential elements of a qualitative research process are generally defined as including epistemology, a theoretical perspective, and methodology (Crotty, 1998). This chapter defines and discusses each of these components in relation to this study.

Philosophical Foundation

The epistemology framing this qualitative dissertation research is constructivism. This epistemological approach asserts that different people construct meaning in different ways, even when experiencing the same event (Crotty, 1998). Crotty identified several assumptions of constructivism, three of which are fundamental to this study: (1) Because meaning is constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting, qualitative researchers tend to use open-ended questions, so that the participants can share

their views; (2) humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives; (3) the basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community. The research interpretations and findings in qualitative research, therefore, are context-specific.

Constructivism is useful as the philosophical framework for this research. According to Stake (1995), out of all the roles that researchers play, the role of gatherer and interpreter is central: "Most contemporary qualitative researchers nourish the belief that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered. The world we know is a particularly human construction" (p. 99). Stake (1995) defines constructivism as a belief that knowledge is made up largely of social interpretations rather than awaremenss of an external reality.

This dissertation's research is based on the interpretations of educators working with students who have behaviors that disrupt their and others' learning in the K-12 school setting. Of particular interest are the ways educators made meaning of the behavioral incident data and the ways they decided to collect the data. The study's participants constructed reality based on their individual and shared experiences. How they interacted with and made decisions based on the actions and reactions of students is complex, and reflects the constructivist epistemology.

In terms of analysis, the interpretive theoretical perspective provided a framework for understanding the ways that school administrators and teachers interpreted and made meaning of the school-based data they collected and analyzed. This study was specifically interested in discovering how educators collected and interpreted their data, and how the data guided and informed programmatic decisions for students in the K-12 public school setting. The interpretive tradition asserts that researchers should begin by examining the context to be

studied through actions and inquiry, as opposed to predisposed assumptions. The basic interpretive study exemplifies the assumption that the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon. This meaning is mediated through the researcher-as-instrument. The strategy is inductive, and the outcome is descriptive (Merriam, 2002). Generally, rather than begin with a theory or preconceived notion of the way the world works, researchers should begin by immersing themselves in the world inhabited by those they wish to study (Esterberg, 2002). Specifically, understanding how individuals in the world construct and interpret reality should constitute the primary emphasis (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). Constructivist and interpretive approaches subscribe to the notion that all social reality is constructed, created, or modified by all the social players involved. Thus, it is important to consider Stake's (1995) argument that, "most contemporary qualitative researchers nourish the belief that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered. The world we know is a particularly human construction" (p. 99).

In agreement with this worldview, I used a constructivist paradigm to examine and understand administrators' perceptions and experiences with reducing barriers to learning in their buildings. Constructivist researchers focus on understanding and reconstructing the meanings that individuals hold about the phenomenon being studied (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Jones, 2002) by examining in-depth their *lived experiences* (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006) through use of open-ended questions (Crotty, 1998). Thus, for this study, I conducted interviews with 11 school administrators, reviewed relevant on-site documents, and continually analyzed these data in an attempt to understand and construct meaning of participants' perceptions and experiences with reducing behavior-related barriers to learning.

Research Design

Qualitative case study research served as the main methodology for this study. This section describes the background of case study research, defines case study methodology, examines the relevance of case study methodology, explores the characteristics and misconceptions of case study methods and describes case study research designs as being created from case study research. All components of the research design are connected. However, these connections are not rigid. Maxwell's (2005) rubber band analogy explains the connections and interactions clearly: "This 'rubber band' metaphor portrays a qualitative design as something with considerable flexibility, but in which there are constraints imposed by the different parts on one another, constraints which, if violated, make the design ineffective" (p. 6).

There are many well-known case study researchers, the most prominent of whom include Robert K. Yin, Robert E. Stake, and Sharon B. Merriam, all of whom have written extensively about case study research, and have suggested techniques for organizing and conducting such research successfully. For the purpose of this dissertation research, I relied primarily on definitions offered by modern case study methodologists Merriam (1988), Stake (1995), and Yin (2009).

In terms of the contributions of case studies, Flyvbjerg (2006) believed that greater numbers of good case studies would strengthen social science. However, he warned researchers to be mindful of the five greatest misunderstandings of case study research: (1) theoretical knowledge is more valuable than practical knowledge; (2) one cannot generalize from a single case; therefore, the single-case study cannot contribute to scientific development; (3) the case study is most useful for generating hypotheses, whereas other

methods are more suitable for hypotheses testing and theory building; (4) the case study contains a bias toward verification; and (5) it is often difficult to summarize specific case studies.

Case Study

Stake (1995) described case study methodology as a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in-depth a program, event, activity, process or one or more individuals. Cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time. For this study, the phenomenon under investigation was student behavior that negatively impacted learning. The *case* for the current study were administrators from a PreK-12 school district in a Midwestern state. Case study researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time. For this study, I collected data through in-depth interviews, and additionally reviewed documents provided to me by the school district where the study was conducted. Specifically, interviews were conducted and audio-taped, tapes were transcribed into word documents, district documents were reviewed, and data were coded for emergent themes. Another component of case studies is the unit of analysis, defined as the area of focus of the study (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2009). For this study, this unit of analysis was the individual school buildings participating in the study.

Yin (2009) named five components of effective case study research design: (1) research questions; (2) propositions or purpose of study; (3) unit analysis; (4) logic that links data to propositions; and (5) criteria for interpreting findings. The most appropriate questions for this type of qualitative case study research were "how" and "why" forms of questions. Specifically, I asked about the ways administrators accessed behavior data that

informed their decisions on how to improve student success in school and society. Additionally, I inquired as to the ways administrators used behavior data to improve student success in school and in society.

The second component of case study research design is to define the study purpose clearly. This component is most commonly recognized as the purpose statement. My purpose in this case study was to understand the experiences of the administrators in a school district that oversees eleven schools, the schools' characteristics, and how these schools collected and analyzed building-level data.

The third component of the case study research design is the unit of analysis. Yin (2009) described the unit of analysis as the area of focus that a case study analyzes. Yin wrote that an appropriate unit of analysis occurs when primary research is accurately specified. The unit of analysis is directly tied to the research questions developed by the researcher. This study's units of analysis, per Merriam (1988), are the schools (cases to be studied) in a mid-sized suburban school district in a Midwest state.

The fourth component of case study research design is to connect data to propositions. This connection is made following the data collection phase, as themes emerge. As data is analyzed, the researcher attempts to match patterns that appear in the data to the theoretical propositions of the case study. The themes that emerged in this study thus served as answers to the research questions posed in Chapter 1.

The fifth component of case study design is the criteria for interpreting findings. Commonly, the case study researcher codes the data prior to developing themes (Yin, 2009). Following the theme development stage, I carefully extracted meaning from the findings to determine recommendations for practice and future research.

Research Site

Fortunately, there were no barriers to locating a suitable site to conduct this study. With over three hundred public school districts in the mid-western state where this study took place, gaining access was as simple as inquiring with district leadership and building-level administrators. Because the nature of the study was to determine the ways that individual buildings understood and managed student behaviors by examining the ways selected schools accessed and used student data, the participating schools were very interested in the results from their respective schools. Furthermore, this study resulted in double the amount of benefits for me: as the researcher of the study, I was interested in the overall results for my research; as an educator, it was exciting when the participating schools divulged that this would be an additional piece of school data that they could consider in their quest toward improving school initiatives and goals. Understanding the latter benefit proved that this study's findings could contribute significantly to schools' improvement efforts and impact students positively.

The site for this study was a PreK-12 pubic school district in a Midwestern state. At the time of the study, district enrollment totaled 8,500 students across 11 buildings—eight elementary buildings and three secondary buildings (i.e., two middle school buildings and one high school building). At this writing, the participating district was the eighth largest district in the state.

Participants

Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to select the administrators for personal interviews. The selection criteria were based on each school's potential to add to the understanding of the processes and procedures used to collect building-wide data. The

selection of participating schools for this bounded case was uncomplicated. Since the overall study intended to determine the ways schools collected and managed student data, all eleven schools from this school district were included. The selection of participants for this study was based on a strategy referred to as, "purposeful selection" which, by one definition (Maxwell, 2005), denotes that "a selection strategy in which particular settings, persons or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can't be gotten as well from other choices" (p. 88). Selecting administrators to be interviewed for this study was purposeful, in that they were the leaders of their respective school buildings, and would understand best the process utilized within the buildings with regard to student behavioral data. In order to achieve a thick, rich descriptive for the case (Esterberg, 2002; Merriam, 2002), it was important to include various administrators from within the school district. One administrator from each school was selected, for a total of eleven participants to be interviewed.

<div align="center">**Data Collection Methods**</div>

Green, Camilli, & Elmore (2006), echoing Yin (2009), stated that a carefully conducted case study benefits from having multiple sources of evidence, which ensure that the study is as robust as possible. The concept of methods refers in general to the appropriate use of techniques of data collection and analysis (Prasad, 2005). In a case study, it is important to converge sources of data, also known as triangulation, as a means to ensure comprehensive results that reflect the participants' understandings as accurately as possible. Yin (2009) and Stake (2000) concur that triangulation is crucial to performing a case study reliably. Additional sources of data allow case study researchers to create a story—one that honors participants' meaning-making processes. Seidman (1991) supported this same view,

stating, "I interview because I am interested in other people's stories. Telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process. When people tell stories, they select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness" (Seidman, 1991). Based on the scope of this research, which focused on making meaning, I selected interviewing as the primary data collection vehicle, and then thickened the data with two additional data points: district-level suspension and expulsion data and district survey data.

As a rule, interviews must be conducted carefully to ensure a reliable case study. So, purposeful sampling, including the consideration of an individual versus a group focus, should be considered, as well as sample size and appropriate participants to choose for the interviews. The interview is often viewed as a conversation between the interviewer and interviewee, in which the interviewer asks questions and the interviewee responds accordingly (Esterberg, 2002). The researcher should determine early who the "gatekeeper" of the knowledge is and be able to access the best sources to ensure as rich of a data sample as possible. There were two reasons I identified building administrators as gatekeepers. First, they knew the buildings best. Second, and more importantly, I needed them to support and cooperate with the project in order for me to review their data collection and review processes and procedures.

When conducting interviews, relationships and rapport must be established, and coupled with trust: "The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else's mind. We interview people to find out from them those things we can't observe" (Patton, 1980, p. 196). Active listening and nonjudgmental behavior are two of the common practices that should be prioritized when interviewing for case study research. There are six types of questions (Patton, 1987; Merriam, 2009) to be employed during the interview

process for case study research: (1) experience/behavior, (2) opinion/belief, (3) feeling,

(4) knowledge, (5) sensory, and (6) background/demographic.

Esterberg (2002) described a pattern for general and specific questions, called, "open-ended" questions, and cautioned against dichotomous or leading questions, which could lead to a closed style of questioning. The intent for this study was to make the interviews conversational. As the researcher, I shared information about myself with the participants to establish the trust and rapport necessary for this conversation. Conducting the interviews in this way allowed me to put respondents at ease, and allowed for an optimal interviewing environment.

Qualitative researchers use many methods for gathering information and interviewing is one of those methods with a research base. Seidman's (1998) *Interviewing as Qualitative Research* is grounded in the phenomenological tradition of three distinct, thematic interviews designed to question the meanings of lived experiences. Seidman connected the core of phenomenology to qualitative philosophy: "interviewing provides access to the context of people's behavior and thereby provides way for researchers to understand the meaning of behavior" (p. 128). He furthermore established the idea that:

> a basic assumption in in-depth interviewing research is that the meaning people make
> of their experience affects the way they carry out that experience . . . Interviewing
> allows us to put behavior in context and provides access to understanding their action.
> (p. 128)

One of the primary goals of this study was to understand how the participants (school administrators) made meaning of their experiences collecting and using building-level student data to improve outcomes for students. The in-depth interview approach linked the

making of meaning to the behaviors that participants exhibited as they expressed the ways in which they viewed and reviewed building-level data. Esterberg (2002) refers to in-depth interviews as semi-structured, describing the process as less rigid than structured interviews, and allowing for a freer exchange between the interviewer and interviewee.

Interviews

There were four persuasive reasons for using interviewing as the primary data source for this study. First, qualitative interviewing is appropriately used when "studying people's understanding of the meaning in their *lived world*" (Kvale, 1996, p. 105). Second, the purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else's mind. "We interview people to find out from them those things we can't observe" (Patton, 1987, p. 196). Third, qualitative interviews result in thick descriptions of the subject being studied that enable readers to make decisions about transferability of study results (Merriam, 2002). Finally, interviews allow for triangulation of information obtained from other sources and, thus, increase the credibility of study findings (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Merriam, 2002; Stake, 1995).

Eleven participants were interviewed for this research. Interviewing administrators allowed for identifying and soliciting knowledge from those who Patton (2002) calls, "key informants". Key informants are people who are particularly knowledgeable about the inquiry setting and articulate about their knowledge, and whose insights can be helpful in assisting an observer in understanding events that have happened and reasons why those events happened. This study's participants were interviewed between November 8, 2010, and November 16, 2010. For convenience, nine of the interviews were held in participants' offices. At the discretion of the two remaining participants, their interviews were held at an

alternative district office site. All interviews were conducted face to face and lasted from 35-55 minutes.

With participant approval, I audio recorded the interviews to ensure accurate transcription (Merriam; 1998). I also took handwritten notes during each interview, which enabled me to track key points to return to later in the interview or to highlight ideas of particular interest or importance.

As a first step in the interview process, I reminded participants of the purpose of the study, research procedures, expected benefits, their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and protection of confidentiality. I also asked participants if they had any questions about the research study or research procedures. I also provided information about myself to establish rapport and gain their trust (Patton, 1980).

I used the semi-structured interview approach (Merriam, 2002) and a uniform set of open-ended questions to obtain: (a) demographic information on the participants, and (b) participants' perceptions and experiences with collecting, analyzing, and using data for the purpose of improving student success in school and in society (See Appendix A: Interview Guide). Open-ended questions were used throughout the interviews to encourage participants to respond freely and openly to queries (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Esterberg, 2002; Kvale, 1996). Probing and/or follow-up questions were used, when necessary, to encourage participants to elaborate on or clarify a response (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The transcription process began after the first interview on November 8, 2010, and was completed by November 23, 2010. To ensure transcript accuracy, I reviewed each transcript while listening to the audiotapes. Additionally, the transcripts were presented to each interview participant for their review further to ensure accuracy.

Document Review

Although interviews were the primary method of data collection, I also collected and reviewed documents. Document review was used to clarify or substantiate participants' statements (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and to provide thick description of the case (Esterberg, 2002; Merriam, 2002). The following building-level data documents were reviewed:

1. MU Inventory Survey Document (See Appendix B: MU PBIS Survey Document for a copy of the survey instrument).

2. MU Implementation Inventory Results. This document summarized the results of a self-report inventory questionnaire that asked buildings to assess their current level of implementation of Positive Behavior Support (PBS) by responding specifically to questions about their (a) practices, (b) support system, and (c) data collection and decision-making. (See Appendix C for the survey results).

3. Suspension and Expulsion Reports. These annual reports, required by the Department of Education, provide information, by district, on the number of student suspensions and expulsions each year, as well as the reasons for removal (See Appendix D for District Document).

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Data Analysis

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Qualitative research studies involves a continuous interplay between data collection and data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). For this reason, I began analyzing data following the first interview to begin identifying patterns, and to facilitate subsequent data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Qualitative analysis is a form of intellectual craftsmanship. There is no single way to accomplish qualitative research, since data analysis is a process of making meaning. It is a creative process, not a mechanical one (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Similarly,

a qualitative study capitalizes on ordinary ways of making sense (Stake, 1995). Stake reminds qualitative researchers that, "there is no particular moment when data analysis begins. Analysis," he explains, "essentially means taking something apart" (p. 71), which in this case, not only means understanding the ways administrators use and make sense of building-level data, but also identifying and defining the patterns that emerged from that meaning making process. Qualitative data analysis, then, gives meaning to first impressions and final compilations. It is an analysis that tells the story of administrators' intentions to make (and their results from making) informed decisions that define and guide student success in this Midwest school district.

Methodologically, Esterberg (2002) suggests, "getting intimate with data" (p. 157), and describes the main objective of immersing oneself in interview transcripts to "load up your memory" with the collected data. This dissertation research followed the data analysis and coding procedures suggested by Creswell (2009) and Esterberg (2002). Specifically, Esterberg (2002) suggested that open coding is a process where "you work intensively with your data, line by line, identifying themes and categories that seem of interest" (p. 158). Additionally, Creswell (2009) mandated the traditional approach in the social sciences that allows the codes to emerge during the data analysis (p. 187). Once the data from this research were examined thoroughly through the open coding process, I reviewed the codes for emerging themes in the data.

This research study followed the Creswell's (2009) six steps during the data analysis process and, although these steps are described in linear order, Creswell described "an interactive practice" to analysis. That is, there is a recursive element to following these steps—the process is not simply a static, linear order of analysis.

Step 1: Organize and prepare the data for analysis (p. 185). During this step, I reviewed audio tapes from interviews and transferred into word document transcripts.

Step 2: Read through the data (p. 185). This step also aligns with Esterberg's directive to "get to know your data". I reflected on the overall meaning to gain a general sense of the information and ideas that the participants conveyed.

Step 3: Begin detailed analysis with the coding process (p. 186). I followed Creswell's procedure of organizing the material into segments by taking the text data and segmenting sentences into categories. I then labeled those categories with terms based on the actual language from the participants.

Step 4: Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories for these for analysis. (p. 189). I used this process to generate codes for the descriptions, which then led to generalizing a small number of categories or themes. Then, I analyzed the themes that emerged and gathered the various cases into a general description for this bounded case.

Step 5: Advance how the description of the themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative (p. 189). For this step, I wove the emergent themes into narrative passages, so that the findings emerged logically from the participants' responses.

Step 6: Interpret the meaning of the data (p. 189). Creswell recognizes that a researcher's own background plays just as important a part of the meaning making process as a researcher's fidelity to a theoretical lens. During my own interpretation process, my experience as a school administrator informed my understanding of the participants' stories. As well, to convey the participants' perceptions of their experiences accurately, I focused specifically on what they were saying, the conclusions they drew, and their intentions for

future practice. The themes that emerged from this study came directly from my awareness of the healthy tension between my own biases and the participants' own meaning-making processes.

Research Steps

The research conducted for this study followed a uniform protocol to ensure that the interviews yielded data consistent with the study's goals:

1. Participants were invited to the study by the researcher, and were informed of the risks involved.

2. In-depth (semi-structured) interviews were held with participants in their respective schools.

3. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed within a day of the interviews.

4. Follow up informal contact was initiated, and each participant was given his or her respective transcript for member-checking, and to verify transcript content.

5. District-level data were reviewed by the researcher.

6. District MU survey data was reviewed by the researcher.

7. The researcher coded the data for emergent themes.

The audit trail was documented to ensure verifiable research steps throughout the process (Appendix E).

Goodness and Trustworthiness

Because qualitative research entails the researcher taking an active role in the collection and interpretation of others' meaning making, to be credible, qualitative researchers must be good and trustworthy. Stake (1995) cautioned qualitative researchers against narrow thinking, and instead suggested that researchers learn to understand their research as their participants do, rather than impose their own assumptions. In qualitative research, these protocols come under the name of, "triangulation" (p.109).

To increase the trustworthiness of the study's findings, I employed strategies recommended by renowned qualitative researchers. To decrease threats to credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I (a) *triangulated* data; i.e., I used multiple sources of data to confirm emerging findings (Merriam, 2002; Prasad, 2005; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009); (b) performed *member checks* (Merriam, 2002) by sending participants a copy of their interview transcript and asking them to verify the accuracy of the content; and (c) requested *peer* (or *colleague*) *review* (Merriam, 2002) of my findings as they emerged. To increase dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of study findings, I provided an *audit trail* (Merriam, 2002)—that is, a detailed explanation of the data collection and analysis methods and how decisions were made throughout the study (see Appendix E). Finally, to enable other researchers to make decisions about transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of results, I used *rich, thick description* (Merriam, 2002).

All researchers attempt to design and implement good/ethical and trustworthy studies. Indeed, qualitative researchers believe that if a study is credible, it has to be good in the ethical sense and be trustworthy. A sound case study is significant and complete, utilizes alternative perspectives and sufficient evidence and is reported in an engaging manner (Yin,

2009). However, there are additional strategies, according to Merriam (2002), that
researchers need to follow to be ethical and trustworthy:

Triangulation..............Using multiple investigators, sources of data or data collection

methods to confirm emerging findings.

Member checks..........Taking data and interpretations back to the people from whom

the data were derived, and verifying its plausibility.

Peer review.................Discussing the process of the study and the congruency of

emerging findings with data and the tentative interpretations

with colleagues.

In addition to triangulation, member checks, and peer review, Merriam (2002)
recommends that credible and trustworthy researchers follow these additional guidelines.

Reflexivity..................Engaging critical self-reflection by the researcher regarding

assumptions, biases, and the relationship to the study, which

may affect investigation.

Engagement................Allowing for adequate time to collect data, such that it

becomes saturated.

Maximum variation....Purposefully seeking variation or diversity in sample selection

to allow for greater range of application of the findings by

consumers of the research.

Audit trail...................Providing a detailed account of the methods, procedures, and

decision points in carrying out the study.

Rich description.........Providing enough rich, thick description to contextualize the

study, such that readers will be able to determine the extent to

which their situation matches the research context (p. 31).

Merriam (2002) further described the strategy of ensuring rich description as "providing enough description to contextualize the study such that readers will be able to determine the extent to which their situation matches the research context" (p 31). Thus, the prominence of Merriam's strategies in this study's methodology ensures the goodness/ethical practices and trustworthiness of this research.

One strategy, maximum variation, seeks broad experimentation of the sample size to allow for a greater range of application of the findings, which would naturally happen within this study, since all sites' principals were included in the interview process. For this study, the researcher purposely and intentionally calculated the sample to include representation from administrators across the district. This strategy, as defined by Merriam (2002), uses multiple sources of data collection methods to confirm findings. Therefore, the goodness/ reliability/ethical nature of the research is ensured, and the validity and reliability of this qualitative study is strengthened.

Furthermore, maximum variation demands the purposeful recruitment of diverse participants, "to allow for a greater range of application of the findings by consumers of the research" (Merriam, 2002, p. 31). Thus, recruiting all building-level administrators from the study site's single school district allows for diversity, the most notable of which is the substantial range in the ages of students with whom principals work (i.e., K-12).

An audit trail appears in Appendix E: Audit Trail, which tracks the progress and verifies the steps taken throughout the research process.

Researcher Positionality

One important distinction between qualitative and quantitative research is the role the

researcher plays in the process. It is clear that the primary instrument for data collection and analysis in case study research is the researcher herself. As a researcher progresses through the research process, the researcher must acknowledge he or she is a human instrument and the primary research tool. As such, it is imperative for researchers to consider their own biases, limitations, and views—throughout data collection, analysis, interpretation, and the reporting phases of the process. Qualitative research assumes that the researcher's biases and values impact the outcome of any study (Merriam, 1998). However, Peshkin (1998) submitted that, "one's subjectivities could be seen as virtuous, for bias is the basis from which researchers make a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities, and joined to the data they have collected" (p. 18). To enable any audience of qualitative studies to evaluate the validity of conclusions extrapolated from data, researchers should, as part of the study, neutralize or bracket their biases by stating them explicitly to the full extent possible (Altheide & Johnson, 1994). For this study, in the interest of full disclosure and of guarding against unethical or unintentional influences on my interpretation of how schools collect and review school-level behavioral data, the following discussion outlines my personal experiences germane to this study.

I have currently spent more than twenty years working in K-12 education, including nine years as a school teacher and ten years as a building-level school principal, both of which have given me keen insight into the data available to administrators and schools. Currently, working as a central office administrator in the Curriculum and Instruction Department as the Executive Director of Special Programs has given me an even broader scope. From this position, I can view the district "from the treetops", so to speak. Understanding the challenges that school administrators, teachers, and counselors face

bolsters my understanding of the day-to-day operations and procedures that transpire in the school setting.

In addition to the influence of my professional experience, my personal background and upbringing may bias my methodological approach. I have spent my entire life, personally and professionally, in the Midwest, and within a range of a few hundred miles of the research site. In this geographical context, I have been immersed in a culture that emphasizes the importance of education and life-long learning. Although my professional work compels me to travel extensively to other states for site visits, conferences, and professional development opportunities, my limited, and even second-hand, experience with school districts around the country might constitute a bias.

Limitations and Delimitations

There are limitations and delimitations to this study. Although the study was conducted in all eleven buildings that comprise the entire school district, the study focused on data collected from administrators in each building, as opposed to gaining insight from other categories of school personnel, such as guidance counselors or teachers. The scope of this study is limited to research at only one school district and, therefore, results should not be applied to similar contexts.

The district participating in this dissertation research included principals and assistant principals and, since they focused their answers on students in general in their school building, there was no differentiation between students with disabilities and the general education students. In other words, the results would have been different if the study focused only on students receiving special education services or on students not receiving special education services. Those categories were not specified within the study, and the students

were grouped into one category.

Since the respondent pool and the participants were limited to administrators, a larger sample including teachers, counselors, students, and/or parents could have given additional insight into the overall building profile, or processes, by adding information according to their respective understanding.

An additional limitation to the study proved to be the data collection process. Since information obtained during the interview was largely depended on the interviewee and what he or she was willing to share, the nature of their information was limited to his or her own perspective and lived experiences. Patton (2002) stated that perceptual data are in the eye of the beholder. However, this study's triangulation of data helped to verify results, and help to support the accuracy of the themes mined out of the interview transcripts.

There are delimitations—that is, how the study was narrowed in scope (Creswell, 2003). Having conducted case study research in only one school district could be viewed as a delimitation. Although a complete district perspective could be gained by collecting data from each individual school within a singular district, it is important to remember that one Midwestern school district may vary greatly from another Midwestern school district, whether of the same size, larger, or smaller. For this reason, speculation that this study's results would be similar to another school district should be discouraged. Another possible delimitation is the fact that the study focused solely on how the administrators collected data and how they used the data to make informed decisions. A broader scope of questions may have given more insight into other complex problems when dealing with students with behavioral disorders. Additionally, the sample in this study consisted of 11 building administrators who agreed to participate in the study. Data sources, which included semi-

structured face-to-face interviews, and then relevant document review, added to the narrow scope of the study.

Summary

Chapter 3 outlined the epistemological and theoretical grounding, the methodology and methods for this study, and the ways in which these decisions anchored the research design and process of analysis. The constructivist paradigm was described along with rationale for qualitative research methodologies. This chapter also provided the rationale for the methodological decisions for this study. The theoretical perspectives, methodology, and methods helped to illuminate the various complexities and experiences of the schools included in this case study research: schools' data collection process, analysis, and problem-solving with respect to building-level student conduct and discipline data. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the strategies that were used to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings.

Chapter 4 presents the results of the study. Chapter 5 discusses the findings, draws conclusions based on examination of study results and review of the literature in the field, discusses the implications of the study for practice, and makes recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this research study was to examine building-level administrators'
perceptions and experiences of collecting, analyzing, and using student behavior data to
improve student success in school and in society. The following research questions informed
this study: (a) To what extent do administrators have access to behavior data that informs
their decisions on how to improve student success in school and society?; (b) To what extent
do administrators use behavior data to improve student success in school and in society?; and
(c) What do administrators perceive it would take to enhance the effectiveness of their
current efforts to improve students' success in school and society?

During in-depth interviews, study participants described their perceptions and
experiences with student data collection and analysis to inform decisions. They also
discussed their use of findings to improve student success in school and in society.

The research findings that this chapter reports are based on analysis of the following
data sources: semi-structured interviews, school district documents, and the researcher's
observations within the buildings.

Background

The participants of this study were comprised of eleven administrators from a
suburban PreK-12 district in a Midwestern state. They ranged in age from 33 to 52 years old;
two were female, and nine were male. On average, participants had 12.5 years of
administrative experience. One participant reported fewer than six years of administrative
experience; six administrators had seven to eleven years of experience, and four
administrators claimed 19 to 25 years of administrative experience. All eleven administrators
had previous teaching experience. In addition, two participants reported having worked as

school counselors, and two administrators possessed special education teaching experience. All eleven participants described themselves as having special education experience as part of their current roles as administrators.

Each administrator self-identified as the lead collector of student behavior data for his or her respective building. Each administrator used the same district-wide electronic database to access and document student behavior incidents. For reporting purposes, and to protect participants' identities, each participant was assigned a pseudonym.

At the time of the study, eight elementary buildings, but none of the secondary buildings, were implementing the Character Counts program, a development initiative instituted in the district approximately nine years prior to this research. In 2009, one building in the district took the first steps toward implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), a research-based program designed to identify individual student—as well as school-wide—behavior problems, teach explicitly behavior expectations, and continuously gather, analyze, and use data to improve student behavior. When this study was conducted, three of the targeted elementary buildings were conducting training to implement PBIS (see Chapter 2 for details about PBIS). During their interviews, several study participants referenced one or both of these character development initiatives.

In addition to Character Counts and PBIS, two other initiatives taking place in the participating district at the time of data collection could impact or influence study results. First, one of the secondary buildings in the study recently implemented a new approach to reward students for positive behaviors. Second, the district itself was in its first year of applying district-wide criteria to identify and support students who met the state standards for at-risk programming and supports.

Interviewees contributed differing amounts of information to the three themes that comprise the narrative. Some participants talked at length on one or two themes; some participants made nearly equal contributions across all three themes. Thus, all participants' voices and views are represented in this study.

Study Findings

Three themes emerged from the data:

1. What are participants' perceptions of and experiences with collecting and analyzing student behavior data?

2. What are participants' perceptions of and experiences with using behavior data to improve student success in school and in society?

3. What do administrators perceive it would take to enhance the effectiveness of their current efforts to improve students' success in school and in society?

While the themes are reported as being discrete, there is considerable overlap among them. Further, participants' responses to interview questions often addressed more than one theme. In those cases, the interview data are described where they appear to fit most logically.

Theme 1: What are participants' perceptions of and experiences with collecting and analyzing student behavior data?

This theme is discussed in two parts: (1) collection of data, and (2) analysis of data. Each part is further divided into sections based on participants' perceptions of and experiences with collecting and analyzing behavior data.

Data collection.

This section describes the types of office referral data that administrators collect. Furthermore, it discusses the procedures that administraors use to document and record behavior incidents.

When asked about student behavior data collection in their building, some participants described the types of data collected, some talked about people or positions responsible for collecting the data, and some talked about the frequency or timing by which the data were collected. This section of the narrative reports on those three data collection issues.

In general, participants reported that they regularly collect data in three areas: (1) attendance, (2) office referrals, which included suspensions and expulsions, and (3) at-risk identification data. Eleven participants indicated they collect attendance data (i.e., absences and tardiness) on a daily basis. Jeffrey summed up the consensus among participants that, "We collect data on anything from attendance to disciplinary referrals, and we document those in a district system".

Bruce further explained that his building collected attendance data, but did not review them in isolation. He said, "We collect attendance data, which we review weekly. I think attendance is closely linked to academics. So, we also pull in our academic data. We look at at-risk data and how that plays into attendance." In other words, Bruce, and other administrators, perceived the categories of behavior data to be closely interrelated, and should therefore be examined together to inform decision-making. Six other administrators shared anecdotes about their processes for collecting attendance data; together, their descriptions reveal an interpretation process, whether through comparing and contrasting or

tackling individual students' issues on a case by case basis, of making sense of multiple types of data to inform their decision making.

Netty, for example, reported collecting behavior data in all three areas: "When it comes to the behavior of my students, I look at a lot of data. I myself keep track of behaviors, and then I have an attendance team [who] looks at attendance data weekly. After looking at absentee rates, I generate attendance letters and send them to families. I also keep track of my suspension and expulsion data. I also keep track of office referral data through our district data system". Netty's examination of office referral data was mirrored by her colleagues, as well—that is, all but one: Nick.

At this time of this study, Nick worked in a building with no history of collecting or using behavioral data, other than the behavior data for which special education teachers commonly are responsible. According to Nick, "Right now, we are not formally collecting any data, because this is a fairly new building, and there has never been a formal office referral process." Recognizing this deficiency, however, he implemented a simple data collection system for the current school year. The plan gave teachers the option to handle behavior problems themselves or refer students to the office. Teachers who elected to manage behavior incidents in their classrooms would also collect data on the incidents.

For the most part, however, study participants collect data on a variety of incidents that resulted in office referrals. Of course, law requires that administrators keep records on suspensions and expulsions, and submit an annual report to the Department of Education in their state. However, building administrators and leadership teams have some discretion in terms of other behavior data they collect. Of interest here is the fact that none of the eleven

participants described a process of connecting their building's office referral practices to the practices of other buildings in the district, or according to a district standard.

Jeffrey, for example, described the types of behavior that resulted in office referrals in his building: "We track physical behaviors. Physical student contact is a big red flag for me. Another one is the bullying and harassment type behaviors that often happen." Despite the amount of data collected, Jeffrey expressed concern that such data is not enough to inform sound decision making:

> I don't think that we have much behavior data . . . I don't know if there is [sic] enough data to track and get information from. I don't know whether or not our data could show an effect of our character program.

Jeffrey's comments not only describe the office referral data collected (Theme 1), but also foreshadow the conditions needed (in this case, collection of additional behavior data) to enhance current practices to reduce behavior incidents (Theme 3).

Other administrators also described the kinds of data they collect. Their responses, woven into the discussion throughout this section of the narrative, reveal an array of methods—each unique to the ways each administrator understands the needs of his or her building.

Daniel collected behavior incident data for his building. His personal system of documenting the behavior is two-fold: (1) he enters the data in the electronic district-level database, and (2) keeps a paper file in his office.

Lennie views collection of office referral data more as *writing notes to himself* than as official documentation of behavior events. He explained that, to a great extent, he relies on memory to inform him of emerging patterns of behavior:

I enter the data when the events happen, but I don't necessarily run any building-wide

analysis of data probably, because I'm the only one doing discipline in the building. I

know if I'm seeing a pattern like a bunch of fourth graders [being referred to the

office], or if I have seen one particular kid too many times lately. If we need to do

something different, and I need the data, I can go back and access them, but I pretty

much know [the data] just from being the one who takes care of discipline problems.

To be really honest, we have minimum discipline problems in the school, so it

[keeping track of data] is not an issue generally.

Lennie's descriptions clearly outlined his procedure for entering office referral data,

and for using the data to establish patterns of behavior for the building for which he is the

principal. Bruce outlined a similar pattern of data collection practices, and qualified that

behavior data are collected in his office each time a student is sent there for behavior issues:

Behavior data I collect (for example, off-task behavior, noncompliance to rules,

inappropriate language, and fighting) come to me via the office referral system that

teachers use when they send a student to my office. The [referral] form is given to me

when the child shows up in the office, and then I am to write on the form how I

handled it [the problem], and then the completed form is given to the teacher and to

the parent.

However, like Lennie, Bruce acknowledged that he often relies on his personal

awareness of events, students, and students' situations to make decisions about behavior

issues:

Without a systemic approach to it [data collection], I don't know if there is an

adequate method of analyzing data. Right now, there is just a lot of gut feelings about

incidents and, you know, by the time we are looking at the problem, the response has already been issued, and we are then more or less left looking at how attendance, academics, and behaviors are connected.

The statements by Bruce are relevant to all three themes that emerged from the study. Bruce named the data he collects (Theme 1), indicated that he *responded* to issues rather than took a *proactive approach* (Theme 2), and perceived that a systematic approach to data analysis would enhance the effectiveness of his efforts (Theme 3).

The word, *transition* was a repeated among many participants when they described patterns or problem areas indicated from their office referral data. Public schools today demand many transitions of students. Although transitioning is an inherent part of the educational establishment, many of the administrators interviewed for this study lamented the fact that transitions are problematic for students of various developmental ages and stages. In fact, participants reported that, according to the office referral data they have collected consistently, the majority of behavior incidents in the school happen during transitions. While behavior incidents that occur during transitions were typically reported as office referral data, they are not described here. Instead, they are described in a separate section of this narrative that focuses on the frequency of their occurrences across buildings.

For the purpose of this study, the word *transition* refers to (a) the period of passing from one place to another during unstructured times (e.g., arriving at or departing from school, recess time, and moving to and from the lunchroom, restrooms, and various classrooms), and (b) the passing from one educational stage to another; that is, passing from one grade to another (e.g., from third to fourth grade), and (c) the passing from one level of education to another (e.g., from primary school to middle school).

Study participants named transitions as the primary source of problematic student behavior. For example, Shawn expressed that transition behavior problems, which led to office referrals, occurred predominately between classes:

> Of the 62 referrals that have been made to my office this year, only one of them has been a problem from an instructional setting . . . Every other disciplinary referral has been for behavior at recess or non-structured time like going from classroom to restroom, coming from specials, or walking in the hallway.

Shawn added that she deals with office referrals as quickly as possible, but never during the student's core instructional time, "unless someone is not in a safe situation." Further, she prefers to address behavior problems in the settings in which they occurred. Thus, if the student had problems in the lunchroom, then the student sits with Shawn during the next lunchtime. Her testimony demonstrates that analysis of office referral data can help school personnel identify and address behavior problems in the building, including undesired behaviors that occur during transitions.

Nick reinforced Shawn's observations, recognizing that transitions can be problematic. He used this knowledge as a springboard for action in his building:

> I realized last year that our building had a couple of transition times—the hallways and recess—that needed attention. During these times, kids were going all over the place without any supervision. To reduce the problems, we developed behavior expectations for students when they were in those areas, as well as some curriculum lessons. Another thing we did to improve behaviors in these areas was increase supervision in the hallways during passing time around lunch and recess.

In addition, Nick recognized that such actions anticipated the implementation of PBIS in the building. He noted that once the district "gets on the PBIS train," then it would become common practice to develop a behavior matrix for each building, write lessons for specific problem areas, and monitor the targeted behaviors.

Nick's account of transition problems address all three themes that emerged from the study: collection and analysis of behavior data (in this case transition data); use of the data to reduce behavior problems (that is, to develop expectations and curriculum and increase supervision); and what it would take (i.e., full implementation of PBIS) to enhance current efforts to improve student success in school and in society.

In contrast to Nick, Ted described problems associated with the other type of transition: namely, the passing from one grade level to another. Because teachers have differing behavior expectations and classroom rules, parents as well as children worry about the children's ability to meet the changing expectations. According to Ted:

> I get a lot of feedback from teachers—and even more from parents. They say, 'Okay, in 3rd grade there's this [set of rules], and now my child is in 4th grade, and there are new rules. Please help me learn and understand what the new rules are.' This particular example is troubling since there are not enough developmental differences between grades three and four so that the expectations for behavior should be drastically different. Second, these parental concerns speak to the fact that our staff has not clearly articulated a set of common expectations and rules that would help students transition smoothly up the grade levels.

Based on his experience, Ted realized the need for systematic practice throughout the building: "The inconsistency [of behavior expectations and rules] between grade levels and

even between classrooms, causes me to realize that we need to put in place a system so that everybody is doing the same way across the board." Further, Ted believes full implementation of PBIS would provide the impetus for addressing transition problems. He stated:

> We don't have a school-wide system right now for being consistent as we transition kids . . . but that is one of the reasons why we are doing the PBIS training this year. So, our goal for next year is to have a school-wide behavior plan with everyone using the same language, holding some common expectations, and adhering to common rules.

Ted's description of transition problems in his building indicates that he recognizes that the lack of formal, building-wide behavior expectations creates uncertainty, even anxiety, for parents and transitioning students. Further, he believes the building needs a new strategy for successfully transitioning students from one grade level to another and that the strategy would most likely be PBIS, which requires educators to collect and analyze behavior data, and then use the results to inform decisions and practice. Ted's goals for his building aligns with the PBIS philosophy that using common language and consistent expectations would improve student behavior and may, in fact, reduce transition problems. Ted's report, like Nick's, addresses all three of the themes uncovered for this study.

A third transition problem is the movement from one level of education to the next level—that is, from primary school to upper elementary or middle school. One participant, Daniel, observed that some students in the district transition to five different school buildings before they graduate from high school. He believed that frequent transitions make it more difficult for building staff members to identify and provide appropriate support to students

who may be at risk for failure. Furthermore, he found the current data system inadequate for collecting information, and identifying and monitoring the progress of students who transition from one building to another on a regular basis. Daniel stated:

> One disadvantage I see in our school system is how many times students need to transition from one building to the next. It takes a while to get to know students and their behavior patterns, so it seems like you are just getting to understand them, and then they transition to the next building.

Administrators collect and monitor office referral data, although they also may be called on to help with problems related to attendance and academic grades. Daniel's building illustrates this point. He, as building administrator, collects office referral data. Attendance clerks collect data on absences and tardiness daily, and the counseling department tracks students on the *D* and *F* (academic grades) list.

Jeffrey further explained the need for teachers serving multiple roles concerning the data collection in his building:

> We have a number of teachers who have students in their classrooms on what might be called *behavior plans*. In those cases, teachers monitor social behaviors, using daily, weekly, or monthly charts. And then, of course, special education teachers have kids on behavior goals, and collect data on their progress.

Moreover, Lennie explained the role of the guidance counselor in assisting him with data collection, adding that collected data are not analyzed frequently, but maybe only twice per year:

> I would say I primarily collect behavior data along with the guidance counselor, who keeps a master list of students who are on behavior intervention plans, and we do

have a fair number of students with those. I would say we track that [data] probably every three weeks for each of the students on an intervention plan.

At-risk identification data was another common data set collected by the participants, and all participants described the district at-risk criteria differently. For example, Netty explained, "One thing to keep in mind is what I said earlier about our identification process for at-risk students. We are on the cusp of it and doing it as a system." Marcus, however, when asked about at-risk prediction data, summed up hs process as follows:

I feel like I can answer that better now than ever before. We have district at-risk staff, and have common criteria that have been developed, and when students meet two of the four criteria, we respond by putting resources in place for that student. If it's a connectivity issue to school, then we respond to that and build a relationship. If it's an academic issue, then we respond to their needs with whatever services they need. That's the kind of data that we use and how we respond in the area of at-risk.

This section describes the types of office referral data that administrators collect. Furthermore, it discusses the procedures that administraors use to document and record behavior incidents. This includes the types of data collected, who collects it and the frequency or timing by which the data were collected.

Data analysis.

Participants reported a wide range of data analysis experiences. Their responses can be divided into two parts: (a) how often are data analyzed, and (b) who analyzes the data.

Among buildings, frequency of analysis varied from being informal and loosely assigned to highly formal with structured intervals. At one end of the spectrum was Nick, whose building had no written policy regarding data collection or data analysis. He believed

that once such a policy were to be put in place, data analysis would typically occur at the end of each school year. Other participants supported Nick's observation by recounting that they reviewed and reported on certain behavior data only once per year. For example, Daniel stated:

> Typically, at the end of the year, we [building-level team] look at office referral data and break them down by students and teachers. For example, we look at the number of office referrals from each teacher, and also look at student grades from those teachers. We pass the report on office referrals to the next building [that] the students will attend. Additionally, we receive the previous year's office referral data from the school the students attended before coming here.

Daniel's comments address three data analysis issues; namely, how often data are analyzed (i.e., once a year); who analyzes them (i.e., the building-level team), and how results are used (to inform current and future teachers of students with behavior incidents). The first two issues relate to Theme 1, data collection and analysis, and the third issue relates to Theme 2, uses of data.

At the other end of the spectrum, some administrators reported that they analyze data frequently to make informed decisions about reducing behavior incidents and improving students' success in school. Harold and his team, for example, shared Bruce and his building team's protocol of meeting weekly to analyze office referral data.

The frequency of analysis ranged from looking at attendance data daily to once per year, depending on the purpose and individual needs of the administrators to understand patterns in their building. Additionally, while participants described collecting suspension and expulsion data at the building-level as it occurs, they clarified that they reported that data

to the district office yearly, so that it may be uploaded for state level reporting (see Appendix D).

Additionally, several administrators participating in the study claimed that they, along with their leadership team, reviewed selected behavior data. Others reported reviewing the data alone. Harold, for example, described leading the building data analysis process for his building:

> We meet as a team every Friday for 75 minutes, and we analyze student attendance data student by student. Additionally, I get a simple count of positive office referrals, and we match that against our count for disciplinary office referrals. We look for patterns of students who have been referred to the office.

Harold's description echoes interview data from all participants, which indicate that they share a common understanding of the benefits of collecting and analyzing student behavior data to inform decision-making. Theme 1 of this study, then, in addition to defining administrators' collection and analysis of data, also points to a shared understanding of the high degree of importance they attribute to data collection and analysis.

The key points outlined in this section relate to data collection and data analysis. There were three types of data typically collected by the school administrators studied in this case study: (1) attendance data, (2) office referral data patterns, including suspension and expulsion data, and (3) at-risk identification data. Participants indicated they collected data at differing times, in part because of the nature of the data. Some data, for example, attendance data, were collected daily. Other data, such as office referral, transition, suspension, and expulsion data, were collected at the time of the event. Specific details about the frequency of

data collection and analysis were embedded in participants' responses to queries about data collection, and were reported logically throughout this section of the chapter.

Although administrators report having authority to document office referral data as incidents happen, one district suspenstion and expulsion document (see Appendix D) displays the district's suspension and expulsion data depitcting they are reported once per year to the state's Department of Education. Administrators designate categories in that data, some which use the same categories, such as physical fighting, disruptive behavior, and attendance policy violations. One administrator, Bruce, indicated that as office referrals occur, he looks for themes, such as off-task behavior or behaviors around compliance to teacher-given directions. Often, the administrator collects behavior data, but at other times, the responsibility is delegated to office personnel or other staff members. For example, attendance clerks collected data on absences and tardiness. Counselors kept track of academic performance. Teachers recorded classroom behavior incidents. Again, the nature of the data collected is the key indicator for when administrors decide to analyze it. For example, suspension data are reported at year's end, but attendance and office referral data are analyzed at the time of their occurrence. Data are sometimes analyzed as they are collected, but at other times, analysis waits until a team can be assembled, or for the end of the year, so that it can be reported.

Theme 2: What are participants' perceptions of and experiences with using behavior data to improve student success in school and in society?

In their responses to interview questions, participants identified a number of uses for the behavior data they collect. The identified uses fit under two main categories: (1) to meet state and district reporting requirements, and (2) to improve student success in school and in

society, by reducing behavior problems. This study is primarily concerned with the latter purpose.

Synthesis of participants' perceptions resulted in four fundamental uses of behavior data: (a) to identify occurrence patterns, (b) to identify students at risk for failure in school, (c) to develop appropriate interventions—including new behavior initiatives—aimed at reducing problem behavior, and (d) to become more proactive in approaching behavior problems. These four uses are the focus of the next sections of this narrative. While the four uses are described in separate sections, there is considerable overlap among them. Further, participants' responses often addressed more than one of the four uses. In those cases, the interview data are described where they appear to fit most logically.

Identification of occurrence patterns.

Administrators reported using behavior data to pinpoint the areas of the school and times of the day when behavior problems occurred most frequently. Further, they examined data over time for changes in frequency of behavior problem indicators (e.g., suspensions and expulsions).

Previous sections of this chapter describe five administrators and their use of behavior data to determine the location and frequency of problem behaviors:

- Bruce compared data from various data sets to determine whether correlations exist between/among attendance, academic grades, and behaviors.

- Shawn analyzed office referral data, and found that 61 of 62 referrals resulted from behaviors that took place during transitions.

- Nick developed a behavior matrix for his building, and discovered the hallways and recess where the majority of problem behaviors occurred.

- Ted utilized office referral data to discover the frequency of behavior problems that occured when students transitioned from one grade level to the next.

- Daniel used office referral data to determine behavior problems that occured when students transitioned from one level of education to the next.

In addition to the examples of administrators' use of behavior data to identify occurrence patterns, Patrick examined attendance data to determine whether a correlation existed between increased attendance and increased suspensions in his building. His description of the quandary is included in a later section of this chapter, entitled, "Development of Interventions and/or New Initiatives".

A final example of administrators' use of data to uncover patterns of behavior was described by Harold. By comparing suspension and expulsion data from one year to the next, he and his building-level team noted an increase in suspensions during the year of this study. At the time this study was conducted, the team was utilizing the data to try to understand the reasons for the increased number of suspensions. Although Harold was the only administrator who referred to reviewing suspension data, all administrators shared their building-level totals with the district annually for state reporting (see Appendix D).

Identification of students at risk of failure.

A second purpose for which administrators used behavior data was to look for patterns in student behavior that would lead potentially to failure in school. If patterns existed, the administrators would have been able to *predict* future behavior, so that they might take steps to reduce or prevent further problems. For example, Marcus described his procedures for identifying students at risk for failure:

Office referrals could lead to the prediction of problematic behaviors. When a

child comes to my office, I look him up in our district data system to see if he has

been in the office before. I can't remember all the students who come through the

office because this is a large building, but I can review the database and say, 'Oh,

yes, okay, you had an issue—aggressive behavior, non-compliant behavior,

insubordination, or whatever—three weeks ago, and now you have the same

issue again. Three weeks ago, we had a conversation about the behavior I

expect.' So, I do think looking at building-level data can lead to conclusions such

as, 'This kid is going to be a real problem if we are not careful, and he will keep

having problems if we do not put structures in place to help him.' . . . If we just

keep recording incidents each week, but don't respond in any way, we are not

doing any kind of service to the kids.

Marcus believed identifying these patterns to be a first step toward preventing

students from falling into the at-risk category. He added, "In my opinion, if you have the

right structures in place, [then] you are going to detect the kids who have significant behavior

issues and need more supports".

Like Marcus, another participant, Daniel, used office referral data to identify patterns

of at-risk behavior. He also used the data to communicate with parents:

I keep a file on each and every student who is sent to the office for any reason. I use

the categories listed on the district data collection system, such as harassment,

bullying, classroom removals, theft, anything that's listed there. When a student

comes to my office, the first thing I do is check our data system and my files to see if

I already have data on the student. I then look at the student's grades and attendance.

When I see negative patterns of behavior in any of these categories, I follow building

policy and contact the parents by telephone while the student is still in the office. That

gives all of us a chance to discuss the patterns and look for solutions.

Ted also used data to identify students at risk of failure. He made a practice of

scheduling biweekly meetings with an at-risk team for the purpose of reviewing data,

identifying students with at-risk behaviors, and planning interventions. Ted explained the

process:

> Well, we have a new system this year that we use to track our at-risk kids—their
>
> attendance, their grades, their socioeconomic status, whether or not they are in a
>
> minority group—and look for patterns of behavior. When we identify a student who
>
> appears to be at risk, we set up a plan, communicate to teachers that the kid's a red
>
> flag, and try to make sure we get things together for the student.

Ted's regular meetings with a team of experts on the topic of at-risk behaviors

enabled him to identify at-risk students early, plan for and coordinate interventions for those

students (see "Development of Interventions and/or New Initiatives" for further detail about

interventions), and provide teachers with essential information so that they could provide

support to the students and monitor change in student behaviors. Without the first steps of

collecting and analyzing data, however, this process could not achieve its goal of reducing at-

risk behavior and increasing student's opportunities to succeed in school and in society.

Development of interventions and/or new initiatives.

During their interviews, study participants talked about a third way that they use behavior data to improve students' success in school; namely, to develop appropriate interventions and to create new initiatives designed to reduce barriers to learning.

Lennie talked about the importance of analyzing data and using results to develop appropriate interventions. To assemble a more complete picture of students' behaviors and increase the likelihood that planned interventions would work, Lennie's team (a) began looking at additional data sets, and (b) enlisted the assistance of individuals and agencies with experience and expertise in behavior management:

Our system is starting to look at-risk data, and [we are] making some good strides. [To collect and analyze data,] we now work with a social worker and a district staff member who is in charge of attendance. We have also asked the district's at-risk coordinator to help us put together our building's student data on at-risk factors, such as attendance, poor grades, and problems with social interactions. Once we have identified students who have those kinds of strikes against them, we ask, 'What's the deal?' and 'What can we do to help them?'.

Another administrator, Bruce, described the efforts of his building-level team to provide personalized supports to students who have been identified as at-risk—for example, individualized learning opportunities and access to appropriate experts. The team reviewed data on students' attendance, academic proficiency level, and connectivity (defined as how well students are connected to their school, other students, and staff members). In Bruce's words:

One of the purposes [of the team's data analysis] is to see if there is a support staff member we could offer here at school to help support the student at school, as well as at home. For example, depending on the need, we will pull in our JCO [Juvenile Court Officer], our Outreach Coordinator, our guidance counselor, or our nurse to see what they can do to support the student.

Lennie's and Bruce's testimonies, as well as Ted's (see previous section, "Identification of Students at Risk of Failure"), show that study participants used data to develop appropriate interventions to prevent students from falling into the at-risk category. Apparently, the participating school district's newly implemented at-risk initiative, including common guidelines and checkpoints, is instrumental in these efforts. Another participant, Netty, summed up the steps of the district's at-risk initiative by highlighting its systematic and proactive approach:

Looking at at-risk data and who might be at risk in the future is something we [the district and individual buildings] have been a little more intentional about this year. There are specific populations that we need to target for further improvement, and we have an at-risk team [that meets] weekly to examine data on students who fall into two or more of the at-risk categories we have established. So we look at failure rates, specifically in reading and math, and we look at other data, such as connectivity to peers, connectivity to school, and we look at those students who have free and reduced lunch status. [For identified at-risk students in our building,] we put together a personal plan and work with the school counselor, school social worker, and the juvenile court liaison to support those kids.

Like Bruce, Netty stated that her building employed a variety of resources, within and outside the building, to develop the most appropriate interventions for students exhibiting problem behaviors.

In addition to using behavior data to devise personalized interventions for students, administrators used the data to design new initiatives to reduce behavior problems. For example, Patrick reported using data to create a new initiative to improve student behavior. Dissatisfied with the number of unexcused absences and tardiness, his building initiated a *loss of privileges program* to improve attendance. Patrick described himself as the key developer of the system that expects and rewards positive student behavior until the student proves the school wrong; at that point, privileges are taken away. In his words:

> We start data collection from the point that an incident arises. If a student has had [behavior] problems in the past, then data collection is ongoing for that student as we continue to develop appropriate interventions to support the student. If it is a first-time incident for a student, then we might begin with a schedule change and monitor that to see if further changes need to be made.

In this loss of priviledge system, the system begins with privledges that all students receive and when a student has a rule violation, they are considered on the first level and they lose a priviledge such as lunch with friends or parking priviledges. When a student progresses to the next level which is two, then schedule changes might occur, students might be required to stay after school or parent interaction might be required. When a student's behavior progresses to level three in nature, suspenstion may occur or even a more restrictive placement might be warrented. If the intervention is successful at any of the levels, no further behavior modifications are employed.

Patrick's use of a system that takes away privileges as a corrective measure did have its successes:

> Our administrative team looks at data every two weeks and tries to make sure we are handling things consistently. The number one problem [in our building] right now is our attendance, the increased number of unexcused absences and tardies this year compared to last year. That is why we instituted a loss of privilege program, which has cut the unexcused absences in half. So, we are very proud of that, knowing the privilege program is working. We continue to examine attendance data by determining how many violations fall into level 1, 2, or 3 within that privilege program.

Beyond the success, however, Patrick went on to explain an unexpected finding:

> In looking at our suspension data, we found that we have a higher rate of suspensions this year compared to the number we had last year at this time. We looked at the reasons for the suspensions and discovered they are primarily for classroom removals, inappropriate behavior, and insubordination.

The significance of these unexpected findings are that some administrators are finding patterns in their own data and making changes accordingly to improve outcomes for students. Additionally, interventions are being implemented for the same intended outcome of improving situations for students and their overall school environment.

Proactive vs. reactive approach.

Administrators acknowledged that they often reacted to behavior problems after they occurred, rather than anticipated them to prevent them. For example, Jeffrey, along with other participants, explained that he would find himself waiting for office referrals to happen,

and then deal with and document them. He laments this as a "putting out the fires when they happen" approach to behavior management. Jeffrey's interview underscored the importance of using data to *anticipate* rather than *react* to behavior problems, but also revealed problems that prevented his building from being more proactive than it was.

While he voiced appreciation for the efforts of teachers in monitoring behavior problems in the classroom, Jeffrey also noted that having a variety of people involved in collecting data and monitoring student behavior diminished the building's ability to use data effectively. He wondered if a more systematic approach to data collection would yield richer results and enable the building to realize the goals of behavior initiatives such as PBIS and Character Counts:

> We [building administrators] track all the referrals that are formally made. However, we don't always know about the conversations teachers have on their own [with students]. Our teachers handle a lot of behavior problems in their own classrooms, which could be good or bad. Teachers handle a lot on their own—until they can't take it anymore, and then you [building administrator] need to pick up the pieces, and you don't always have any data leading up to the situation you are in . . . It's hard to gauge whether we should be doing a more systemic comprehensive behavior program like Positive Behavior Supports or Character Counts.

Jeffrey's remarks explain the significance of using data to become more proactive when dealing with problem behaviors. In addition, they suggest that it takes a systematic approach, such as PBIS, to reducing barriers to learning. Indeed, Jeffrey's anticipation of a systematic approach is one type of perceptions that constitutes the focus of the next and final

theme, "Theme 3. What do administrators perceive it would take to enhance the effectiveness of their current efforts to improve students' success in school and society?".

In summary, Theme 2 (uses of behavior data) relies and builds on Theme 1 (collection and analysis of data). Unless essential behavior data are first collected and analyzed, administrators cannot use results to improve students' opportunities to succeed in school. However, with data findings in hand, building administrators can implement a number of strategies that have been found to reduce barrier problems. In this section, administrators described the four primary purposes for which they use data findings: (1) to identify occurrence patterns, (2) to identify students at risk for failure in school, (3) to develop appropriate interventions and new behavior initiatives, and (4) to become more proactive in addressing behavior problems.

Theme 3. What do administrators perceive it would take to enhance the effectiveness of their current efforts to improve students' success in school and society?

Many of the study participants perceived that a systematic approach to behavior management would result in fewer behavior problems and improved student success in school. With implementation of a systematic approach, they believed the five outcomes would occur. The outcomes are listed below, along with examples of participants who claimed the desired outcome would enhance efforts to improve students' success in school.

Establishment of consistent behavior expectations and rules for students.

All eleven administrators who participated in the study stressed the importance of consistent expectations for desired student behavior. They recognized the need to develop and implement behavior expectations as a first step toward reducing behavior incidents in their buildings. Nick, for example, identified two problem areas in his building, and set about

reducing the problems by developing behavior expectations for students in those areas. Ted understood that behavior expectations were not necessarily clear, and recognized that the differing expectations and rules in classrooms in his building caused confusion and anxiety for both students and parents. He planned to work with teachers to develop common expectations and rules across the classrooms in his building.

Another administrator, Bruce, was proud of the behavior expectations and rules in place in his building, which he believed to be effective in reducing behavior incidents:

About five or six years ago, staff members looked at areas in the building [where] they wanted consistent rules, such as the lunch room, bathrooms, classrooms, and hallways, as well as at recess and assemblies . . . They decided to post the rules in classrooms so teachers could refer to them . . . *Incidental teachings* come when behavior incidents happen at recess or when a staff member walks past a noisy bathroom. At those times, staff members chat with the child and remind him or her of appropriate recess rules or bathroom responsibilities, and then, if the problem is serious enough, the staff member might bring the student to the office to visit with me.

The interviewer toured all eleven buildings in the data sample. Many were explored on the day of the interview, and others during other periods of the data collection phase. Behavior posters were displayed in multiple areas of each school, but each building had its own unique set of expectations.

Use of common language.

Ted's building goal for the following school year exemplifies the importance he and other administrators gave to the use of common language for describing, monitoring, and

rewarding expected behaviors. His goal was to implement "a school-wide behavior plan with everyone using the same language." Additionally, two other administrators, Marcus and Nick, discussed the intent to implement building-level expectations for next year as a result of the recent training in which they participated with their leadership teams. Other participants, such as Bruce and Lennie, shared stories of how their buildings had arrived at common expectations (which were about five years old, but were still in effect in their respective buildings).

Systematic and continuous collection and analysis of behavior data.

Administrators participating in the study described the usefulness of the district's electronic data system for documenting and accessing records of student behavior incidents. Further, ten of the eleven administrators reported having systems in place, often informal, that enable them to track student behavior. However, some of the informal systems, such as relying on memory or jotting down handwritten notes about behavior incidents, were found wanting by participants such as Lennie and Bruce.

Based on their experiences with data collection, several administrators indicated the need to implement a more systematic approach to data collection and analysis. For example, Nick, whose building did not have a data system in place, took the first steps to initiate a form data collection system. He planned to have a more sophisticated system in place in subsequent school years. Bruce acknowledged that "without a systematic approach to data collection, I don't know if there is an adequate method of analyzing data". Daniel found his current data system to be inadequate, not only for collecting information and identifying, but also for monitoring the behavior of students transitioning from one building to another. Jeffrey wondered if his system of collecting data impeded the efficacy of addressing behavior

problems. His concern was that with several individuals collecting behavior data,

communication among those who need the data could break down easily, with disastrous

results for the students and the faculty or staff who try to help them. But, a greater concern to

Jeffrey was that not enough data were collected and, thus, schools remained unable to

measure the impact that their efforts had on student behavior.

Development of a behavior matrix for each building.

Only one participant, Nick, explicitly expressed the need for buildings to develop a

behavior matrix for the purpose of identifying the areas of the building and documentng the

the time at which behavior incidents occur. However, it is conceivable that all participants

who described transition behaviors—Nick, Shawn, Ted, Daniel, and Harold—had developed

a behavior matrix informally. Given the high number of behavior incidents that occur during

transitions, it seems that having a formal behavior matrix in place and updating it regularly

would enable buildings to address problem behaviors by moving from a responsive to a

proactive approach.

Impact of school culture.

Several administrators cited the program known as *Character Counts* as the

foundation for their building's character development efforts, including their behavior

curriculum and their system of rewarding good behavior. There was no mention of a district-

level standard. However, each administrator shared scenarios from their buildings,

suggesting either that they had the autonomy to create a building-level culture of

expectations, or that they created such expectations with building leadership teams. Some

building practices, such as Jeffrey's, were rooted in Character Counts:

Kids receive Character Counts slips when they are recognized for demonstrating good

character. Those slips are then placed in containers, and then once a month we draw

out names. That's one way that we recognize 24 students every month for being kids

of good character.

Jeffrey's systematic recognition of students demonstrates that appropriate school

character is an example of how that behavior is systematized in a particular building. All

buildings visited for this study had similar systems that compared student behavior—both to

the standards that were set and to each other. For example, one building's method reinforced

incidental teaching, where one student from each class who exhibited good character was

acknowledged (which equates to selecting the best student from one particular class during

one particular time).

Lennie further described the importance of culture in his building:

I would say that the culture in my school revolves around a couple of foundational

things. One is the six pillars of character [the basis of the Character Counts initiative].

The other is the use of 'I-statements' to resolve conflicts. These two concepts are

depicted on posters placed around the building, and we expect teachers to use them

with their kids. Years ago, our building staff developed and displayed expectations

for student behavior in restrooms, hallways, the lunchroom, and on the playground.

These expectations are part of our culture and are reinforced in classrooms . . . Every

kid in our school has a Character Counts t-shirt that has been donated by our business

partner, and in this school there is pride in having good character and being a good

citizen.

Lennie's perceptions connect to the larger purpose in describing the impact of culture. He explicitly believes that good character is cultivated at the building level and that the building level expectations that were developed have impacted the pride at the building level.

Interestingly, participants identified outcomes from character education programs such as Character Counts, as well as outcomes that were planned objectives of Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS). At the time of this study, while three of the participating elementary schools were training to implement PBIS, all participants—not just the administrators of those buildings—recognized that a systematic approach to behavior management would enhance current efforts. Furthermore, they recognized that such an approach would result in improved success for students. Their beliefs regarding the question "what is needed to enhance their current efforts to reduce behavior incidents that interfere with academic learning and social development?" follow.

While some administrators named components of Character Counts, others named elements associated with PBIS (such as those listed above) without naming the program itself. Two administrators explicitly named PBIS as what it would take to improve conditions. Nick concluded that once the district "gets on the PBIS train," it would become common practice to develop a behavior matrix for each building, write lessons for specific problem areas, monitor targeted behaviors, continuously collect and analyze data to determine problem times, problem areas, and problem behaviors, and then develop and implement a plan to change those things.

Ted believed that if staff followed their recent PBIS training, then they would have the necessary tools to implement a school-wide behavior plan, with everyone using the same language, holding common expectations, and adhering to common rules. In other words,

Nick and Ted (and perhaps other administrators, too) believed that full implementation of PBIS could result in the outcomes that participants want and a reduction in behavior problems that negatively impact learning and student success in school and society.

Patrick stressed the importance of shared expectations of behavior. He indicated that teachers not only discussed appropriate school behaviors in the classroom, but also that they were part of the school culture:

We expect staff to come to work on time and prepared, and we expect students to come to school every day on time and prepared, and those behaviors are modeled by staff, and the building expectations are delivered in each classroom by staff members. Expectations are posted within the classrooms, and teachers talk about them in the first couple of days of school and with the syllabus . . . I would say that appropriate school behaviors are identified in our building as really part of the school culture, and the culture is acting mature like an adult and being responsible. I think younger students see behaviors being role modeled daily by upper class and by staff. It think it's a predetermined expectation that when you walk in our building that you are going to follow the rules and be compliant . . . I feel it is a very positive school culture in a sense of behavior, and we've had very few critical incidents in the building dealing with behavior.

Patrick went on to say that the expectations were established in the school's student handbook, and were very clear and concise about behavior expectations. Furthermore, the students were required to sign off that they had read and understood them. He explained that his school maintains "a very safe and secure environment during the day, and we expect

students to sign off on the student handbook." Students are encouraged to meet with the principal if they have questions about handbook policies.

Daniel added to the reward conversation by discussing holding, for those students who demonstrated the desired behaviors, a celebration breakfast. But for these methods to become part of a building's culture, consistency is key, according to Marcus:

Sometimes, when looking around your building, you see expectations implemented differently among adults, and I really don't have a problem with that in the classroom setting. If teachers have a management system that is working for the way they are running their classroom, that is fine, but what ends up happening is in the common areas, the playground, the gym in the morning before school, the lunch room, the hallways, the bathroom. If we are inconsistent, it's very confusing to kids. You hear things like, 'I don't understand why I'm getting in trouble for sliding down this big pile of snow; yesterday, Mrs. Jones let us do it and now today Mrs. Smith says we can't do it'. And sometimes we see expectations that we have at school that differ greatly from what parents have for expectations at home. An example would be that, when at home, it's not a problem if you are with your mom or dad in the front yard playing football, but at school when 200 students are on the playground, it's a problem. And so, I do think we confuse kids a lot with our expectations . . . We are on the cusp of creating common expectations for our kids in this school, as we are currently in training for PBIS. We recognize that it is our responsibility for creating a culture for common expectations and those we need to teach the behaviors we want to see.

Nick, however, addressed the notion that consistency should not simply be based on a reward system, but that students learn to understand the instrinsic value of behaving properly. He stated, "My hope is that we *acknowledge* appropriate behavior rather than *reward* it. We really want to stay away from the whole carrots and sticks thing".

The establishment of consient behavior expectations and rules for students will lead to a reduction of of behavioral incidents at the building level. Common expectations, along with consistency in the implementation of the expectations along with common language and staff focused on a culture for common behavior expectations will lead to successful outcomes for students. The usage of common language and a building level systems approach to collection and analysis of behavioral data will impact the overall functioning building wide and for students in both general and sepecialized programs.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the findings of the study. These findings are based primarily on analysis of interview transcripts, and are supported by reviewed documents and observations throughout each building during the course of the study. Findings were discussed in three parts that correspond with the major themes that emerged from the data. Data in the first section focused on PreK-12 administrators' perceptions of and experiences with collecting and analyzing data to reduce barriers to learning. In the area of data collection, participants described (a) what data are collected and how they are collected, (b) how often data are collected, and (c) who collects the data. In the area of data analysis, participants described (a) how often data are analyzed, and (b) who analyzes the data.

The second section focused on how administrators used data to reduce barriers to learning and improve success for students in school. Participants described a variety of uses

of data, which were then analyzed and grouped into four categories: (a) identification of occurrence patterns, (b) identification of students at risk of failure in school, (c) development of appropriate interventions and/or new initiatives, and (d) proactive vs. reactive approaches.

The third section focused on what administrators perceived it would take to enhance the effectiveness of their current efforts to improve students' success in school and in society. Administrators agreed that implementation of systematic initiatives for behavior would result in outcomes that would improve opportunities for student success. Among the expected outcomes are (a) establishment of consistent behavior expectations and rules, (b) use of common language on behavior issues, (c) systematic and continuous collection of data and analysis of behavior data across data sets, (d) development of a behavior matrix for each building, and (e) improved school culture. In short, administrators believed that full implementation of a school-wide system of support such would reduce the barriers to learning that occur when behaviors are disrupting the learning community.

School-wide support systems do vary, which makes it difficult for administrators to evaluate the appropriateness of such systems to their respective buildings and behavior expectations. To that end, Chapter 5 discusses the themes that emerged from this study, and recommends future practice and research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine building-level administrators' perceptions and experiences of collecting, analyzing, and using student behavior data to improve student success in school and in society. Research was conducted through semi-structured face-to-face interviews with eleven school administrators, and through the review of documents submitted to the researcher by the study site's school district. This chapter reviews, analyzes, and discusses (in light of the relevant literature) the findings of this study. This chapter also outlines the implications of the findings for schools' building-level administrators, and illustrates the potential impact for students who struggle with behavior in the school setting. This chapter concludes with suggestions for further research.

Discussion

Three fundamental questions framed this research:

1. To what extent do administrators have access to behavior data that informs their decisions on how to improve student success in school and society?

2. To what extent do administrators use behavior data to improve student success in school and in society?

3. What do administrators perceive it would take to enhance the effectiveness of their current efforts to improve students' success in school and society?

The research questions were answered by themes that emerged from interview data, and were reported in Chapter 4.

Theme 1: Administrator Experiences with Collecting and Analyzing Student Behavior Data

Researchers agree that a comprehensive framework designed to improve overall

student behaviors should be based in data collected and analyzed. Sugai et al. (2000) state: "Positive behavior interventions and support systems incorporate decision-making, based upon data analysis that guides the process of assessing student needs and providing additional levels of behavioral support to students in need" (p. 135). Participants in this study had wide ranges of experiences with collecting and analyzing student behavior data, most specifically data about attendance, office discipline referrals (ODR), suspensions and expulsions, and data on students who meet district and state criteria for being at-risk of future failure in the school setting.

Administrators in this study either collected these data sets themselves or delegated collection to office staff, leadership teams, or counselors. Data collected around inappropriate student behavior resulting in referrals to the administrator's office were documented into an electronic data base system at the time of the occurrence. Administrators had autonomy and discretion to determine how they handled each occurrence.

In general, collecting and reviewing appropriate school-wide office referral data can give school personnel foundational information that could be used as a springboard to implement appropriate behavior interventions and plans for students. Schools flourish, in part, when educators work together to collect, analyze, and act on information about student behavior (LeTendre, 2000). On one hand, this study found administrator leadership practices of collecting and analyzing student office referral data to be closely aligned to the literature on this topic. The participants in this study outlined, as reported in Chapter 4, the formal practices by which they collect and analyze student behavior. Indeed, analysis of school-wide and individual student behavior in schools can be of direct and immediate value in the design of effective, individualized interventions (Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 2000). On the other hand,

while study findings demonstrated that administrators do collect and analyze data, one question remains to be discussed: to what degree is this practice systemically occurring?

As Harold stated, "When I reflect about our practices of collecting data, I would conclude that we're much more proficient collecting, monitoring, and making decisions about academic student data than behavior data." Similarly, Jeffrey was concerned about the amount of data being collected with regard to office referrals, and questioned whether he had an accurate building picture, as it relates to office referral data: "I'm not sure if there is enough data to track [whether] our programs are making an impact for students. We do track the referrals that are formally done, but our teachers handle a lot in their own classrooms, which can be a good or bad thing." Jeffrey's perception was that gaining a building-level profile or overall building view of student behavior would be both inconsistent and difficult to quantify if not implemented consistently with clear communication between the office and the teachers. Additionally, participants in this study recognized that using some type of metric or building-level profile could result in an even more systematic approach to collection and analysis practices.

Theme 2: Administrator Experiences with Using Behavior Data to Improve Student Success in School and in Society

School administrators described four main uses for the data they collect and use to improve outcomes for the students in their buildings: 1) to identify occurrence patterns; 2) to identify students at risk for failure in school; 3) to develop appropriate interventions, including new behavior initiatives, aimed at reducing problem behavior; and 4) to become more proactive in approaching behavior problems.

First, ten of the eleven participants reported using practices for documentation of

behavioral referrals to the office and then additionally study participants described their respective practices to identify patterns that occur. Administrators described this data as office discipline referral (ODR) data. These data are used to identify occurrences of patterns of behavior of individual students, and/or patterns of behavior of multiple students in certain areas of the school. As patterns develop, administrators use the data to develop appropriate interventions, including new behavior initiatives aimed at reducing problem behavior.

Second, all eleven participating school leaders consistently described four pieces of at-risk predictor data they use to identify students at risk for failure in school: 1) patterns of low attendance, 2) failing grades, 3) low connectivity to school, and 4) achievement two years below their peer group in either literacy or mathematics. The practice of using these four criteria is aligned to the state standard for at-risk identification, and additionally aligns with district level-systemic practices (as many participants explained). For example, as Ted noted:

> We have a new system in place this school year where we are all tracking patterns to identify students who may be at risk for failure or future failure in school. We look at attendance patterns, the grades they currently have, and we look for red flags. Our team meets every two weeks to discuss these students.

As this administrator reported, the practices around at-risk data collection were not only a new protocol, but also a new district-level requirement that they were implementing for the first time.

These administrative practices align well with the research. Some studies have shown that some students' path to complete disengagement and dropping out can be predicted as early as the elementary years (Barrington & Hendricks, 1989). A retrospective study (Hess et

al., 1989) examining early patterns of students who dropped out of schools showed that, starting in first grade, school dropouts had more absences than did graduates. That study's analysis of cumulative records from Chicago Public School students showed that absences and academic grades for three consecutive years, ending in the fourth grade, identified nearly 90 percent of the dropouts. Furthermore, Slavin (1999) stated that while success in the early grades did not guarantee success in later schooling, failure in the early years did virtually ensure failure in later schooling (p. 105). Ted's description of meeting every two weeks to review data and identify patterns seeks to address the disengagement from school and subsequent drop out rates that Hess et al. discovered.

The development of appropriate interventions is the third area that participants describe as part of the overall experience of improving outcomes for students. The review of office discipline referrals (ODR) and the review of at-risk data have potential to influence directly the development of appropriate interventions for students. Administrative leaders would be wise to ensure that intervention practices align with the literature's emphasis on finding ways to increase success and improve outcomes for students with behavior problems.

For example, Landrum, Tankersley, and Kauffman (2003) categorized their findings on interventions into three "broad" intervention categories—inappropriate behaviors, academic learning problems, and interpersonal relationships (p. 149). Additionally, noncompliance in school situations has generally referred to the refusal or lack of appropriate response to the direction of an adult who has made a request of a student (Walker & Walker, 1991). When students demonstrate noncompliance or compliance for following teacher's directions, "reinforcers" are often times offered. Study participants had a wide range of ways they reinforce positive student behavior ranging from awards breakfasts to tangible character

counts awards. It should also be noted that all participants shared stories of "interventions" for students, but none of the participants referred to using antecedent based strategies.

Educational research has considered the use of "reinforcers" to be effective practice, both positive and negative, but it remains clear that educators must additionally take into account the manner in which the directive or message of reinforcement is delivered. The likelihood of a student complying with a directive may be enhanced by the way the directive is delivered, which would demonstrate what is educationally known as antecedent to compliance.

Antecedent refers to what is happening in the student's environment that triggers a negative or positive response or behavior and there is a research base for antecedent-based strategies. De Pry and Sugai (2002), for example, have examined the effect of using two antecedent-based strategies for reducing problem behaviors in school settings, specifically, pre-correction and active supervision. The objective of pre-correction is to prompt or engage each student in a pro-social, or more appropriate, behavior before the problem is occasioned. Pre-correction could take the form of a verbal rule restatement or a nonverbal gesture or prompt. Active supervision has three general keys: first, teachers move about the room using body proximity; second, teachers visit problem spots frequently; third, they scan the environment as they move about the room. Teachers should give pre-corrections and reminders to students as they move around the room. These supervision strategies have been used by teachers for reducing behaviors during transition times, in the cafeteria, and during recess times (Lewis, Colvin, & Sugai, 2000).

Study participants have common experiences with identifying that transition times are areas they identify as being some of the most problematic for students. A recommendation to

explore and align practices with key research based strategies susch as these may go far to improve behavioral outcomes during school transitional times. Beyond looking at practices directed at inappropriate behavior, a survey of the evidence-based practices dealing specifically with academic learning problems leads to examining the practices directed at improving academic outcomes for students, such as direct instruction, self monitoring skills, class-wide peer tutoring, and continuous monitoring of student performance through curriculum-based measures.

In addition to the usefulness of intervention that focuses on academic achievement, it is important to understand the ways interpersonal relationships impact students with EBD. Students in this category have both deficits and problems associated with social skills. For this reason, social skills intervention is a standard component of virtually all programming for these students, and with very good reason. Making academic gains would be short-lived if students do not simultaneously receive appropriate instruction for their social skills deficits (Broughton & Lahey, 1978). However, some research has disproven the reliability of this approach. Specifically, summaries of intervention literature based on meta-analysis (Fornes, Kavale, Blum, & Lloyd, 1997; Lloyd, Forness, & Kavale, 1998) have shown that social skills interventions are not as promising as they originally purported to be. In light of this literature some study participants use social skills classes as a means to improve social behavior for students. Although this study did not surface any themes specific to social skills interventions, some participants listed this type of intervention as one being used for some students.

In addition to stressing the imperative to choose empirically-supported interventions and implement them with integrity, Landrum, Tankersley, and Kauffman (2003) argued that

all interventions need to be implemented early in the cycle of behavioral problems. Indeed, compelling evidence has suggested that the development of behavioral disorders could be ameliorated dramatically if interventions were provided early and intensely (Shinn, Walker, & Stoner, 2002). Thus, education researchers have been able to understand much about the conditions under which problems occurred, and have refined their understanding of how best to implement interventions. Participants from this research study could deploy any of the above-mentioned interventions as a strategy to improve success for students.

Finally, participants reported using the data they collect and analyze to become more proactive in approaching behavior problems. However, as participants described building-level practices of documenting behaviors as they happened and then analyzing for patterns after the fact, it could be questioned whether this approach is truly proactive. Instead, waiting for behavior to happen and then reacting with intervention strategies could be viewed as being reactionary. Another administrator may perceive that collecting and analyzing data for patterns is not reactionary but rather responsive—that is, looking for patterns could lead feasibly to systems practices for behavior supports. This question was not clearly answered in the research conducted for this study. Additionally, a careful synthesis of participant responses should clearly define how the terms, "proactive," "reactive," and "responsive" are used, to make the message clear.

Regardless of whether administrators' practices could be regarded as proactive or reactionary, data collection does serve the important, long-term purpose of facilitating activities that promote learning (i.e., improving school safety and focusing discipline reform efforts) and aim to improve students' chances at success. Specifically, a comprehensive incident database makes it easier to manage resources and complete state and federal incident

reports. However, without accurate data, it is difficult to take appropriate steps to create climates conducive to learning (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The study participants did paint the picture that data are collected and reviewed to various extents when the district is viewed as a whole. Individually, and at the building specific level, data are collected systemically on suspension and expulsions and reported consistently to the district at the conclusion of each school year to be reported to the state. Other data, such as office referral data, are collected at different intervals and the data collection has different outcomes at different school buildings. A recommendation from the data collected during this dissertation research may suggest the need for more systems level collection and analysis of behavior related data.

Theme 3: Perceptions of What It Would Take to Enhance the Effectiveness of Current Efforts to Improve Students' Behavioral Success in School

Many of the study participants perceived that a building-wide and systematic approach to behavior management would result in fewer behavior problems and improved student success in school. Participants believed that, with implementation of a systematic approach, the concrete outcomes could occur, and would enhance efforts to improve students' success in school. The outcomes are grouped into three categories: 1) building-level behavioral data, 2) common expectations, and 3) a systemic or cultural approach to behavioral learning.

First, leaders should focus on designing a system at the building level to collect and analyze student behavior data continuously to aid administrators in understanding the patterns and areas that require the most resources or administrative attention. Administrators who participated in the study described the usefulness of the district's electronic data system

for documenting and accessing records of student behavior incidents. Further, ten of the eleven administrators reported having systems in place that, while often informal, enable them to track student behavior. However, two reported using informal systems, such as relying on memory or jotting handwritten notes about behavior incidents. Continual collection and analysis of available data could lead to a building matrix or profile, so that all school personnel could understand the magnitude of the building-level nuances that impact overall functioning and student productivity.

Second, establishing consistent behavior expectations and rules for students could improve the overall success at the building level, according to study participants. Recognizing problematic areas of the buildings, such as the transitions to restrooms, which are often unsupervised, and then designing consistent rules for those types of areas of the school could lead to improved overall building-level management of behaviors. Additionally, having common expectations among staff members would ensure common language being used from teacher to teacher, which could result in more consistency for students. These expectations could, and should, be explicitly taught to all students. Plans also should be developed so that systemic practices that ensure systematic teaching and modeling for expected school-wide behaviors for students can emerge and be implemented.

Third, and according to administrator participation for this study, building-level culture plays a large role in overall student conduct. In other words, there is a social culture to support learning. The question is: To what degree? Some administrators described building systems rooted in the language of the nationally known character development program known as *Character Counts*. Others lamented the fact that they intended to improve building-wide behavior through implementing PBIS (Positive Behavioral Intervention

Supports). Still other participants described leading their buildings with neither approach. In contrast to a labeled program, they simply used their own hybrid of building-level accountability and behavior instruction through what they described as, "a culture of good expectations". Finally, other participants described using building-level handbooks to outline student expectations for following the rules for conduct.

Administrators did agree, however, about the value of data collection. They agreed that the overall learning environment, which they referred to as building-level culture, could be improved by analyzing data and making adjustments that influence and direct students toward desired outcomes. In terms of outcomes, having common expectations, teaching common expectations to all, and building a culture of competence through a systematic approach to behavior initiatives would improve opportunities for student success. Furthermore, since the establishment of a positive student social culture involves providing students with a common set of expectations, a common language and a common set of experiences associated with the defined behavioral expectations (Cushing, 2000; Lewis & Sugai, 1999), there are long and short term consequences of the approaches that the participants have in place.

<center>**Recommendations as a Result of This Study**</center>

Recognizing that schools face a variety of issues, including multiple expectations in the areas of academic accomplishment, social competence, accountability, and student safety, school administrators additionally face the challenge of leading schools through a variety of school improvement initiatives that address all of the variables that impact student learning.

Inconsistency among staff members' knowledge and ability to deal with behavior challenges, coupled with the wide variety of student needs in the area of social, emotional,

and behavioral learning, renders school administrators unprepared to meet the increasing challenges facing students and schools. Administrators commonly report that the use of individual student interventions are effective, but that they cannot always meet the demand, and therefore look for ways to reduce the inefficient methods and resources that schools have used traditionally to support the behavioral learning of students.

The findings of this study point to five recommendations for addressing and improving they types of behavioral support that are critical for success of schools: (1) collect and use data, (2) teach expectations explicitly, (3) develop consistent acknowledgment and consequence systems, (4) increase staff capacity, and (5) develop and make available a continuum of social and emotional services for students.

Recommendation 1: Collect and Use Data

Collecting consistent data and having a concurrent systemic procedure to analyze that data are paramount for increasing the effectiveness of any behavior support program. Ten of this study's eleven participants who reported collecting data stated that many different factions collected and examined building-level data. For example, some buildings used leadership teams, others used office personnel, and some administrators collected and analyzed data themselves, or with counselor teams. While one administrator (Nick) proved to be the exception with regard to having a formalized data collection process (since his building was too new at the time of this study to have had a formal office referral process in place), the rest of the administrators understood the importance of consistent collection and examination.

Consistent, formalized processes of data collection enable administrators to understand better the complexities of data, and the types of concerns for which data can and

cannot account. As Jeffrey commented, "We track physical behaviors. Physical student contact is a red flag for me". Furthermore, understanding the strengths and weaknesses of data enables administrators to make sound decisions—even when the data is unclear. For example, Jeffrey clarified that, despite the amount of data he had collected, he still remained concerned about not having enough "behavior data" to "inform good decision making". In spite of his concern about "enough behavior data" he still kept student safety a priority by tracking physical behaviors and making decisions about consequences for those student behaviors.

Key recommendations, such as reviewing data on a regular basis, could be accomplished through the development of a building-level matrix or profile, so that leadership teams, guidance department teams, and administrators could fully organize and understand the data collected about such things as office referrals, the types and patterns of referrals, attendance, and suspensions. Additionally, a district-level overview could be established, using a matrix and/or profile, so that trends may be noted from year to year, or even disaggregated further, such as from month to month.

Although administrators reported having an electronic district-level database to tally and record anecdotally the details of office referral data, little mention throughout this study noted the reporting capabilities of the system. Building leaders might investigate the reporting capabilities inherent in the collection vehicle already in place at the building and district level. New and additional training would be needed to ensure building-level administrators have the necessary tools to improve practices in the arena of collecting and analyzing building- and district-level behavioral data.

Additionally, to refine their collection and analysis process, so that the most accurate

data are found, administrators should make use of the most current and available assessment tools—such as SET, the School-Wide Evaluation Tool (Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd, & Horner, 2001) (which measures implementation of school-wide positive behavior supports). These types of tools would be useful to school buildings that use PBIS strategies, and would further increase the accuracy of data, and the ways administrators use data to increase opportunities, and improve conditions, for student learning.

At the time of this study, as part of overall school improvement movement initiatives, school districts have become rich with data about varying levels of achievement in core content areas, such as math and literacy. Leadership in schools systems today must view data sets about student conduct in the same light. Simply reporting suspension and expulsion data yearly for state and federal reporting accomplishes little. A systematic review of suspension and expulsion data would benefit building leadership. Data collection and analysis comprise the first step of improving overall learning conditions for students in special and general education programs.

Another recommendation for the collection and analysis of data would be to reevaluate the impact of that review process on an administrator's daily schedule. Careful analysis of building-level office referral data consumes large amounts of time, especially the amount of time she or he spends on reacting to office referrals for undesirable school behaviors. Future analysis of the time that referrals take away from other instructional duties and obligations would be informational and helpful for principals.

Recommendation 2: Teach Expectations Explicitly

All eleven participants in the study stressed the importance of consistent expectations for desired student behavior. Recommendation 2 stresses moving beyond simply having

building-level expectations for student conduct posted around each building, and promoting

the explicit teaching of expectations to all students. Horner et al. (2004) established that

when investing into school-wide behavior supports, promoting appropriate school-wide

behavior could only be accomplished through teaching clearly defined expectations.

Supporting this notion is the work of Cushing, Lewis, and Sugai (1999), which found that the

establishment of a positive student social culture involved providing students with a common

set of expectations, a common language, and a common set of experiences associated with

the defined behavioral expectations. The idea of clearly defined expectations relates to the

findings outlined in chapter four. For example, Netty described practices of how explicit

lessons about expected behavior are taught in the building where she resides as principal.

Although participants agree that having common expectations are central to the overall

functioning at the building level, a recommendation that all buildings ensure practices for

explicit teaching and modeling of the expectations would improve system practices.

When children don't know how to read, educators teach them. When students don't

know what is expected and how to behave in socially acceptable ways, educators need to

teach them. Neither administrators nor teachers can assume that students know what is

expected and what is appropriate for the school setting. Therefore, the findings of this study

echo the literature in recommending that building-level expectations—core behavior

expectations—should be taught to all students, and not just to students supported with

behavior programs through special education classrooms. As many researchers have pointed

out, explicitly teaching core desired behavior outcomes can reach 80–85 percent of students,

thus freeing up resources to focus on the most significant and challenging behaviors.

Furthermore, to ensure that students learn the skills necessary to navigate the school

setting, clearly stated school-wide expectations should be taught and modeled, allowing time for students to practice and build fluency in the social, emotional, and behavioral realms. School leaders should therefore explore strategies to transform broad school-wide expectations into specific, observable behaviors for students of all ages.

Specific language reduces the chances of confusing or misaligned behavior expectations. In this way, the frequency of scenarios like that which Marcus narrated, where students become confused when rules are different from teacher to teacher, or even different from home and school, would be reduced. Proactive instruction of common expectations to all students would therefore combat against this confusion. An additional recommendation, as pointed to in PBIS literature, would be to establish universal expectations for behavior, positively stated, for all students throughout all locations of a school. These expectations should generally promote core values, such as respect, responsibility, and safety—values that PBIS espouses, but which additionally can be found in the theory that supports teaching pillars of character.

Ultimately, the wording of expectations should conform to two principles: (1) expectation statements should be short, and (2) expectations should be positively stated. Focus should be placed on the expected behaviors desired by students. For example, state what they should do, instead of what not to do. An example of this recommendation, at the elementary level, would be to state expectations for students that define and support positive action—for example, "walk in the halls" or "use your walking feet", as opposed to expectations that read, "don't run".

Recommendation 3: Develop Consistent Acknowledgment and Consequence Systems

Implementing a system that guarantees consistent acknowledgement of positive

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school behavior, as well as consistent consequences, would build a culture that is both predicable and focused on student successes, as opposed to being punitive in nature.

School principals would thereby influence the school environment by expecting staff to acknowledge students for demonstrating expected behaviors. It is worth noting that, in this study, several principals used the tactic of rewarding students for *good* behavior by doling out *Character Counts* slips, recognition breakfasts, and tokens to recognize when a student has demonstrated one of the tenets of the *Character Counts* program that the building follows. These *good* behaviors are tied to one of six pillars identified with the program.

Bruce and Daniel, for example, described systems that acknowledge desired student conduct through recognition breakfasts. Nick shared that he stays away from "the whole carrots and sticks thing", and works through having high expectations for students versus rewarding behavior. Shawn described her system as having "three layers" of data, collected at the classroom level, and which relates to their building-level consequence system. Students in this system are recognized quarterly and, additionally, both individually and as part of an entire classroom. These systems of acknowledgment illustrate a predictable and consistent framework for students and staff alike, and serve as models to which all buildings and schools should aspire as they establish a clear acknowledgment system.

The virtue of such models is expounded in the literature. Eber et al. (1997), for example, concurred with the notion of having predictable consequences, delivered consistently by staff. To that end, administrators could follow Eber et al.'s advice and conclude that consequences should not be regarded simply as being punitive in nature, but as opportunities to communicate, so that students could learn from their mistakes and accept responsibility for their respective choices.

Another component of consequence and acknowledgement systems is that principals would be wise to allow teachers to retain control of classrooms when possible. But even more importantly, teachers should have a full understanding of criteria that define the types of behavior that result in an office referral to the principal's office, versus behavior that could be handled by a teacher in the classroom. Some researchers submit that schools could benefit from leadership that develops various levels of intensity in their consequence or management systems.. Other researchers, however, refute this claim. Farrell, Smith, and Brownell (1998) discovered that although there is little research on the effectiveness of this strategy, many teachers have a perceived teacher-level satisfaction with level systems. Like any strategy or intervention designed for shaping student behavior, administrators would be wise to consult the research and align specific corrective or disciplinary strategies with the desired outcome for that specific student or situation. For example, Shawn describes classroom procedures utilizing color systems to indicate varying degrees of behavior indicating that teachers in her building have built behavior management plans at the classroom level to indicate both undesirable and desirable behaviors.

Recommendation 4: Increase Staff Capacity

Any effort at initiating overall school improvement should consider improving the capacity of teachers and administrators. Specifically, building capacity refers to improving both teachers, and administrators' skill level to deal appropriately with behavioral issues. School administrators are key instructional leaders. With this role comes an awesome responsibility to design structures that support the learning of staff—not only for standard subjects like reading, writing, and math, but also for the social, emotional, behavior realms.

As Chapter 2 states, teachers often feel unprepared to deal with student behavioral

issues. Schools must become aware that the problem of dealing with difficult behavior includes dealing with subsequent adult responses, which often tend to exacerbate rather than reduce significant behavior problems (Landrum, 1992). Because students with behavior disorders are often unresponsive to typical management and discipline systems, they often evoke punitive teacher responses and peer rejection, leaving teachers and administrators asking to place such students in more restrictive environments or settings. Building capacity with staff can improve this scenario. One way to improve staff capacity is to provide professional development specifically aligned and focused on improvement of student behavior. Marcus, Nick, and Ted shared examples of training they arranged for their building leadership teams in the area of PBIS. Marcus described how he facilitated a study group that met for one school year prior to the formalized training he arranged.

Training that focuses on best approaches to address behavior supports (which are critical for student success) should be provided for administrative leaders and classroom teachers alike. Professional development should also focus on training staff to establish preventive practices, as well as on the active use of data collection and analysis for accurate decision-making, which should be prioritized as a topic of conversation whenever teachers and administrators discuss school improvement issues. Increasing school capacity would improve overall learning conditions for students.

With the exception of Marcus, no participant addressed the general need to build capacity within the staff. The point Marcus did make, however, highlights compellingly the value of increasing staff capacity (in Marcus' case, by leading teachers):

I believe in transformational leadership, and that's really building capacity with folks around you. I try to build capacity and empower others to be able to make decisions.

True empowerment is a shift in the rules and responsibilities of folks and I really

believe in that.

Marcus' words speak to capacity building towards overall school improvement.

Additionally, the facilitation of a study group and leading his staff through PBIS training

demonstrate specifically how he improves teachers' capacity to deal with problematic school

behaviors.

Recommendation 5: Develop and Make Available a Continuum of Social and Emotional Services for Students

Another recommendation for administrator practice would be to have a continuum of

services available for students. Although only three of the eleven participants from this study

referenced the need to have a continuum of behavioral services available for students, it is

worth noting that these three participants have experience and advanced training with PBIS.

This recommendation to establish a continuum of behavioral supports should be considered

by school administrators. But in the words of Netty, who had no experience with PBIS

training at the time of this study, other ideas for delivering social emotional services to

students in a continuum fashion do exist:

Last year, we started working on an initiative where teachers created explicit core

lessons for desired behaviors. We communicated them to all staff, parents, and

students, and we tied them to the work we were doing with our character council.

This effort—driven not just by her leadership, but also by a coordinated leadership—is a

result of the broader support network she referred to as her "critical partners" and "building-

level leadership team". She described this effort as an implementation of services that all

students could experience as a first step to an overall behavior support program for her

building.

These recommendations could establish educational practices for having core teachings for social and emotional learning, similar to those in place for core content academic areas, such as reading, math, and science. Students would thus benefit from a systems approach that teaches pro-social behaviors—specifically, an approach designed to increase positive behaviors and decrease non-positive behaviors.

In addition to promoting what educators refer to as "core" areas in social emotional learning, school leaders should explore ways to establish supplemental and intensive services for students. Research suggests that a three-tier system, such as PBIS, would establish a continuum approach to supporting students with varying needs (Walker et al., 1996). Establishing a continuum of services would take short- and long-range planning to establish timelines and action steps to design, train, and implement a systems approach. Such an approach should teach and reinforce regular and special education students' behavior to achieve improved services and results.

Ultimately, if such a systems approach to building a continuum of support is to be established and sustained over time, then a school's culture must be evaluated by the administrative leaders. Only through formal evaluation would administrators, either individually or in leadership teams, be able to identify areas for improving services, so that at-risk students learn ways to succeed academically and socially.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research study attempted to increase understanding regarding the ways school administrators collect and use office referral data in the PreK-12 school setting to improve outcomes for students. Previously, the general lack within education literature regarding this

topic obscured administrators' practices and the potential, positive effects of such practices in improving education for children. The qualitative case study methodology utilized in this study offered a detailed examination of the experiences of eleven school administrators and they ways they collected and used available data in their respective school buildings.

Although this study represents a start for developing a larger body of research on the relationship between data collection practices of school administrators and improved student behaviors, further research is necessary. First, a future study should focus on gaining administrators' perspectives of the factors that interfere with schools' efforts to implement practices that focus on behavior-related data collection and analysis. As well, there may be additional benefit in investigating how central office administrators could assist with this process of data collection and analysis. This focus could be part of a larger study about collection practices, or explored as a study of only central office administrators' roles in such processes.

Second, it would be prudent to examine school principals' and leaders' efforts to implement a district-wide or systemic approach to managing student behaviors in both general and special education. Topics in both general and/or special education are worthy of research, since they would seek to define administrators' perceptions of the value of managing each—either individually or together.

Third, a study could compare school administrator data usage practices in schools where proactive practices have been implemented with the resulting social emotional learning improvements. Such a comparison would reveal the strengths and weaknesses of such practices in producing intended results. Additionally, electronic databases created and used for such a study should be examined and compared. It might be useful for future

research to gather data using such technology as the EETT (Electronic Evaluation Technology and Tools) to assist with data collection processes. As office referral data are collected in various student information systems, school administrators would find value in leveraging every available technology tool to make collection and analysis processes more efficient.

Fourth, research should be conducted regarding teachers' perceptions about types of successful interventions used in classrooms. For example, one behavioral management system that educators frequently use when looking for interventions that work with EBD students is referred to as a Level System (Farrell, Smith, & Brownell, 1998). Educators claim that level systems can change student behavior, with the result that students become academically and socially successful in school. According to Farrell et al., however, little research exists to support this claim, making level systems a type of approach that, at the time of this writing, still can be found in many classrooms, despite the lack of research base. For this reason, more research is needed in this area.

Fifth, the purpose of data collection in schools should focus on continual school improvement. Researchers have provided school leaders with data and evidence that suggests that students who struggle with maintaining appropriate school behaviors typically struggle with academics, as well. For this reason, school districts and school administrators must engage in data collection practices that can be used to improve outcomes for students. A research study from the quantitative paradigm should be conducted to increase the breadth of knowledge related to data collection practices for school administrators, and the ways these data collection processes yield results for student success.

Sixth, an empirical research study evaluating the effectiveness of such character

education programs as described by participating administrators in this research study should be conducted. An analysis of in-depth or semi-structured interviews with school administrators concerning their beliefs about how to improve school-wide behavior using existing school data sets about character education programs might additionally be conducted.

Finally, districts where close to one-half of the elementary school buildings are implementing practices known as PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention Supports) could be examined. A study including pre and post-level data could demonstrate whether school sites that implement PBIS experience greater reductions of undesirable social behaviors building-wide, compared to school buildings that do not choose such a path. Such a comparision will seek to uncover the effectiveness of the structures implemented in a PBIS environment.

Conclusion

Building-level school administrators who collect and use building-level data to be informed about student behaviors believe this practice is valuable to their overall school improvement initiatives. While school administrators agree upon the need to have consistent expectations for students, few participants in this study have had training opportunities to implement expectation practices that operate systemically, and which connect to the district level. Additionally, not all administrators would agree that connecting such practice to the district level is as important as having consistent expectations at the individual building-level, and which are aligned with the specific needs of that specific building population.

Building-level school leaders recognize that data collection and analysis of building- and school district-level conduct and/or behavior data would help them establish patterns of behavior for individual students, as well as students throughout the building. The aim for

school administrators should be to use research-based strategies, practices, and programs that have proven successful when they plan interventions and programmatic changes for students.

The data collected from the interviews in this case study have generated numerous topics for discussion, including the use of rooting school-wide expectations in character education programs and/or school wide behavior systems—which include protocols to teach, model, and implement consistently core behavior initiatives designed to improve social emotional learning for all students, not just students in specialized programs.

The results of this study suggest that a key message from school administrators to other school administrators is that having consistent data collection and analysis practices will lead to improvements for students. Addressing the behaviors of students can begin when schools understand and emphasize that the overall school environment greatly influences academic and behavior successes.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

A. Introduction and Demographic Info

1. How would you describe yourself?

2. How long have you been a school administrator?

3. What is your teaching background?

4. What is your background with special education?

5. How would you describe yourself as a leader?

B. Research Q # 1: What building-level behavior and incident data are collected in the building where you are a building administrator?

6. What types of behavior data are collected in your building?

    a) Describe categories you look for in data collection

7. Who collects your building's behavior and incident data?

    b) How often are those data collected?

    c) How are those data analyzed?

7. What data do you collect and review about students with behavior goals in your building?

    a) What data are collected for students without special services or programs?

8. What data are specifically collected in the area of at-risk students?

    a) How often?

b) For what purpose?

9. How are appropriate behavior and expectations taught and monitored in school and what data is collected about the teaching of expectations?

C. **Research Q #2: How is the student behavior and incident data being used to inform decisions for individual students and programs in your building and/or in the district?**

10. How is appropriate school behavior identified in your school?

11. How is inappropriate school behavior identified in your school?

12. How are appropriate school behaviors rewarded and what data are they based upon?

    a) What systems or programs are in place that support appropriate and desired student behaviors?

13. What are the consequences for inappropriate school behavior and what data are they based upon?

14. How do you make discipline decisions consistently when there are multiple administrators in a building handling similar behavior situations with multiple teachers?

15. How do you identify students in your building who are at risk for inappropriate behavior?

16. What are the initiatives in your building related to student behavior and what is your involvement with those?

    What incident or student conduct data guide these initiatives?b) How are data used in these initiatives?

        c) How are data used to monitor programs and student behaviors?

17. Do you have any data that predicts students who are at risk of undesirable school behaviors?

    a. If so, how do you use those data?

D. Closing and Thank you

18. Is there anything else that you would like to offer that I did not specifically ask about?

Thank you for your time today. As mentioned earlier, I have procedures in place to keep this information confidential and it only will be used for this research project. You will receive a copy of the written transcript from this interview for your review.

APPENDIX B: MU PBIS SURVEY DOCUMENT

School-wide PBIS
Implementation Inventory

School_____ District _____ Date _____

Month/Year PBIS was first implemented_____Person Completing Form_____

This implementation inventory is an assessment that schools engaged in the process of systems change through the implementation of school wise positive behavioral support can use to evaluate their level of implementation.

The inventory is organized to assess your schools current implementation of a school-wide system of Positive Behavior Support along a continuum (universal, secondary, and tertiary) and across a) practices, b) system support, and c) data collection and decision making. The inventory asks you to indicate to what degree key features are in place (not at all, partial and full).

To complete the inventory:
- a. Evaluate the degree to which each system feature is implemented (i.e. *not at all = 0; partial = 1; full = 2)* in your building (left hand side of survey).
- b. Use the scoring guide on page 10 to list and total the subscale categories.
- c. An average is calculated for each subscale

The team can determine their level of implementation based on the subscale scores. This information can be used to determine strengths and weaknesses in implementation practices, as well as an indication of readiness to increase capacity by focusing on implementation features at the next level.

Scale Score Guidelines
Level Subscale:
Start-Up = School-wide total < 70%

Level 1= School-wide total equal to or greater than 80%
Secondary total less than 80%

Level 2 = School-wide total equal to or greater than 80%
Secondary total equal to or greater than 80%
Tertiary less than 80%

Level 3 = School-wide total equal to or greater than 80%
Secondary total equal to or greater than 80%
Tertiary equal to or greater than 80%

Level 4 = Maintenance, 80% on all Level Subscales and Feature Subscales (i.e., Practices, Systems & Data)

Lewis and Newcomer, 2005

Universal Level

Positive Behavior Support

This section focuses on key practices, systems, and data management at the Universal or Primary prevention/intervention level. The purpose of Universal strategies are to target all students, all staff, and all settings including classrooms and non-classroom settings such as hallway. Universal strategies should serve as the "foundation" of the school-wide system and should be implemented consistently with high integrity. Universal strategies when implemented will typically be sufficient to allow 70-80% of students to be behaviorally successful.

A Feature	Level of Implementation		
School-Wide <u>Practices</u>	Not (0)	Partial (1)	Full (2)
Five or fewer positively stated rules with corresponding clearly defined expected behaviors are developed for <u>all</u> school settings (*school matrix*)			
Formal lesson plans or other strategies developed to teach rules & expectations			
Rules & expected behaviors are taught directly across the school year in <u>all</u> classrooms and school settings			
Students are taught routines & provided opportunities to practice			
Multiple opportunities are provided for student's to practice school-wide rules & expected behaviors			
Students are acknowledged with specific feedback when they display expected behavior			
Student errors are corrected in a positive/instructional manner			
Variations in expected behaviors based on school setting taught directly (e.g., cafeteria, playground, hallway transitions)			
Consistent Routines established to promote student success (e.g., transitions, line-up, entering & exiting cafeteria, attention signals)			
Effective classroom management strategies used in 80% or more of classrooms			
Effective teaching practices are being used in 80% or more of classrooms			
Effective curriculum being used in 80% or more of classrooms			
Academic & social needs of individual students are accommodated in <u>all</u> classrooms			
Students experience high rates of success (> 70% correct) in <u>all</u> classrooms			
Column total			
Total	A =		

Lewis and Newcomer, 2005

B *Feature* **Systems to Support Universal Interventions**	Not (0)	Partial (1)	Full (2)
PBS team has been established with administrative, faculty, staff, and parent representation			
PBS team has an established meeting time and format			
Team has developed a written short term (one year) and long term (three year) action plan based on initial PBS assessment and baseline data (e.g., office referrals)			
PBS team has an established mechanism to communicate with building faculty and staff			
Need for PBS established and commitment gained among 80% or more of school faculty and staff			
PBS school building efforts supported by District administration			
PBS team receives on-going training on essential components of PBS			
School /District professional development opportunities allow team and staff to continually add to or improve PBS system			
New members are included on the team over time			
PBS process & procedures codified in building/district "Discipline Handbook"			
School-wide expectations and policies shared with parents and other community members			
Column total			
Total	**B =**		

Lewis and Newcomer, 2005

C	Level of Implementation		
Feature	Not (0)	Partial (1)	Full (2)
<u>Systems</u> to Support Universal Interventions			
Instructional lessons & student feedback implemented <u>consistently</u> across all faculty & staff			
Supervision in place to promote effective routines (e.g., enter/exit cafeteria)			
Behavior progress shared with students on pre-determined schedule & students progress acknowledged in multiple forums (e.g., assemblies, newsletters, student of the month)			
Staff receive feedback on efficacy of implementation of PBS practices (e.g., monthly office referral data)			
Staff can easily refer concerns to team regarding current or potential problem spots			
Team works with staff to remedy problems or breakdowns in implementation			
Regular opportunities for teacher assistance for behavioral support is available in the classroom or other school setting (e.g., observations, coaching, material development, problem solving)			
Clear definitions & distinctions are made between behavioral offenses that are to be managed by staff versus those managed by building administration			
A continuum of consequences exist to address behavioral offenses in the a) classroom, b) non-classroom, and c) schoolwide settings			
Current "discipline" strategies re-worked to reflect a) school-wide expectations and b) a positive instructional focus (e.g., during in-school suspension students are taught and practice social skills and self-management skills)			
A clear plan exists to respond to emergencies or crisis such as a) fire, b) weather, c) assault/fighting, d) stranger on campus, or e) weapons on campus. Plan should include specific instructions for all adults & students and be practiced periodically throughout the school year			
Column total			
Total	*C =*		

Lewis and Newcomer, 2005

D *Feature* Data-Based Decision Making	*Level of Implementation*		
	Not (0)	Partial (1)	Full (2)
A central school data collection system is in place			
Multiple staff can enter data into single data-base			
PBS Team has developed a set of questions to be answered on a formative basis using central data collection system			
"Discipline Referral" or Infraction form is in line with data entry codes in data collection system			
All behavioral offense data stored in same data-base (e.g., "discipline room" reports, major staff managed infractions)			
Data collection system allows on-going decision making (e.g., monthly reports, when a student is seen for an offense, to identify "problem spots") in response to team questions & other			
Data are shared with staff in a usable format (e.g., graphs)			
Data are used to make summative evaluations (e.g., year by year comparison, pre/post intervention)			
Multiple data sources used to identify students who are not successful with Universal strategies alone (e.g., office referrals, teacher referral)			
Column total			
Total	**D =**		

Lewis and Newcomer, 2005

Secondary Level

Positive Behavior Support

This section focuses on key practices, systems, and data management at the Secondary or small group intervention level. The purpose of secondary strategies is to provide students who are not displaying school-wide behavioral expectations at high consistent rates (i.e., "at-risk") additional support. Secondary strategies should not be viewed as a "separate class" of practices, rather as intensifying universal strategies along a continuum. Secondary strategies follow the basic format of universal strategies but are typically implemented in a) smaller groups, b) tailored more toward the individual, and c) may involve other school staff beyond the classroom teacher. Students may need secondary support for brief or long periods of time and may need multiple approaches to be successful (e.g., reading instruction and social skills group). Secondary strategies are typically implemented with about 10-20% of the school population.

E *Feature*	*Level of Implementation*		
Secondary /Small Group <u>Practices</u>	Not (0)	Partial (1)	Full (2)
Secondary strategies developed based on student need (e.g., academic support, social skill instruction) and possible "function" of problem behavior			
Secondary strategies build on school-wide practices (e.g., use same set of school rules, teach similar expectations, use school reinforcement system)			
Secondary strategies follow basic format of a) teach pro-social skill and b) build maintenance and generalization strategies			
A range of secondary strategies available to assist students such as social skill groups, mentors, self-management, peer tutors			
Secondary strategies designed to be implemented within classrooms and other school settings			
If secondary instructional strategies are implemented outside the classroom (i.e., "pull out" program) generalization strategies are developed and implemented consistently by staff			
Column total			
Total	**E =**		

Lewis and Newcomer, 2005

F	Level of Implementation		
Feature			
Systems to Support Secondary/ Small Group Interventions	Not (0)	Partial (1)	Full (2)
A behavioral support team routinely reviews data to identify students at-risk			
A simple referral process is in place to allow teachers to refer students who are beginning to display chronic patterns of challenging behavior			
Team develops, monitors, and assists with implementation of secondary interventions			
Team assists with training and support for staff who implement secondary interventions			
Team possess and/or can access behavioral expertise to assist in plan development			
Team continues to receive training on secondary practices			
Schedules, teaching expertise, and supervision altered by administrator to allow for implementation of secondary interventions as needed			
Column total			
Total **F =**			

G	Level of Implementation		
Feature			
Data-Based Decision Making	Not (0)	Partial (1)	Full (2)
Parent permission secured prior to start of secondary interventions as per School District policy			
Individual student data routinely extracted from data-base to identify at-risk students			
Individual student data extracted from data-base to monitor progress of secondary interventions			
Teacher and parent perceptions of student progress gathered pre/post secondary intervention (e.g., surveys, rating scales, anecdotal reports)			
Direct observation data collected formatively during past "problem spots or times"			
All data sources used to a) celebrate success and/or b) to alter interventions to insure effectiveness			
Data shared with team, teaching staff, and parents			
Column total			
Total **F =**			

Lewis and Newcomer, 2005

Tertiary Level

Positive Behavior Support

This section focuses on key practices, systems, and data management at the Tertiary or individual student level. The purpose of tertiary strategies is to provide students who are displaying clear chronic patterns of challenging behavior, or severe patterns of challenging behavior, individually developed behavior support plans. Tertiary strategies should not be viewed as a "separate class" of practices, rather as intensifying universal and secondary strategies along a continuum. Tertiary strategies are developed through a 5 step process: a) conduct a functional assessment and gather other data, b) develop plan based on assessment and data review, c) train/consult with all staff who work with the student on the basics of the plan, d) involvement of specialist, external agencies, and family, and e) plan implementation & evaluation. Students may need tertiary support for brief or long periods of time and may need multiple approaches to be successful. Tertiary strategies are typically implemented with about 5-10% of the school population and will include both students with and without IEPs.

H Feature	Level of Implementation		
Tertiary/Individual Practices	Not (0)	Partial (1)	Full (2)
Functional assessments conducted for all students in need of an individual plan			
Other data sources reviewed (e.g., discipline reports, past plans, past assessments)			
Individual/tertiary strategies developed based on individual student need and "function" of problem behavior			
Tertiary strategies build on school-wide practices (e.g., use same set of school rules, teach similar expectations, use school reinforcement system)			
Tertiary strategies follow basic format of a) teach pro-social skill that results in same or similar function as problem behavior, b) multiple opportunities to practice "replacement" behavior provided, and c) school environment does not allow problem behavior to access previous outcomes (i.e., problem behavior not allowed to meet student's need)			
Individualized generalization and maintenance strategies implemented across all school environments			
Column total			
Total	**H =**		

Lewis and Newcomer, 2005

I *Feature*	*Level of Implementation*		
Systems to Support Tertiary/ Individual Interventions	Not (0)	Partial (1)	Full (2)
Data routinely screened to identify students who display chronic behavior (e.g., discipline referrals, absence of progress at secondary support level)			
A simple process exists for teachers to access a behavior support team when concerns arise regarding student behavior			
Structures exist with administrative support to organize resources and personnel to a) assess students and b) develop & implement student support plans (e.g., release from other duties, a designated building or district person such as school psychologist or behavior consultant available)			
Specialists are consulted and participate in assessment and plan development (e.g., special educators, reading specialists, speech/language)			
Multiple team members (or other building-based personnel) are trained to conduct Functional Assessments and develop related behavior support plans			
Team members receive on-going professional development and technical assistance in behavioral assessment, intervention development, and consultation/collaboration skills			
Family members involved in plan development and implementation including skill classes/consultation for parents			
External agencies involved in plan development and implementation where appropriate (e.g., mental health)			
Column total			
Total	***I =***		

J *Feature*	*Level of Implementation*		
Data-Based Decision Making	Not (0)	Partial (1)	Full (2)
Parent permission secured prior to start of secondary interventions as per School District policy			
Multiple data sources used to identify students who display chronic behavior (e.g., discipline referrals, absence of progress at secondary support level)			
Pre/Post measures gathered (e.g., teacher parent rating scales, surveys, anecdotals, discipline reports)			
Multiple measures used to conduct Functional Assessment including "in-direct" (teacher interviews, rating scales, student self-assessment) and "direct" (direct observation)			
Specific measurable behavioral objectives developed			
Direct observation data collected on a formative basis			
Column total			
Total	***J =***		

Lewis and Newcomer, 2005

Scoring the Implementation Inventory: The IP is scored by summing the responses for each subscale. Insert the total score for each subscale in the chart below. To get a percentage score for each, divide each total by the number indicated.

Level Subscales	Subscale Total	Divide Subscale By	Implementation at 80%?
Schoolwide Practices	A = _____	÷ 28 = _____ %	☐ Yes ☐ No
Schoolwide Systems	B + C = _____	÷ 44 = _____ %	☐ Yes ☐ No
Schoolwide Data	D = _____	÷ 18 = _____ %	☐ Yes ☐ No
Schoolwide Total	A+ B+C+D = _____	÷ 90 = _____ %	☐ Yes ☐ No

Level Subscales	Subscale Total	Divide Subscale By	Implementation at 80%?
Secondary Practices	E = _____	÷ 12 = _____ %	☐ Yes ☐ No
Secondary Systems	F = _____	÷ 14= _____ %	☐ Yes ☐ No
Secondary Data	G = _____	÷ 14 = _____ %	☐ Yes ☐ No
Secondary Total	E+F+G= _____	÷ 40 = _____ %	☐ Yes ☐ No

Level Subscales	Subscale Total	Divide Subscale By	Implementation at 80%?
Tertiary Practices	H = _____	÷ 12 = _____ %	☐ Yes ☐ No
Tertiary Systems	I = _____	÷ 16 = _____ %	☐ Yes ☐ No
Tertiary Data	J = _____	÷ 12 = _____ %	☐ Yes ☐ No
Tertiary Total	H+I+J= _____	÷ 40 = _____ %	☐ Yes ☐ No

Feature Subscales	Practices	Systems	Data
Schoolwide	A= _____	B+C= _____	D= _____
Secondary	E= _____	F= _____	G= _____
Tertiary	H= _____	I= _____	J= _____
Total	_____	_____	_____
Divide Column Total By:	÷ 52 = _____ %	÷ 74 = _____ %	÷ 44 = _____ %
Implementation at 80%?	☐ Yes ☐ No	☐ Yes ☐ No	☐ Yes ☐ No

Lewis and Newcomer, 2005

APPENDIX C: MU SURVEY DATA RESULTS BY BUILDING

Sample MU Survey Results by Building
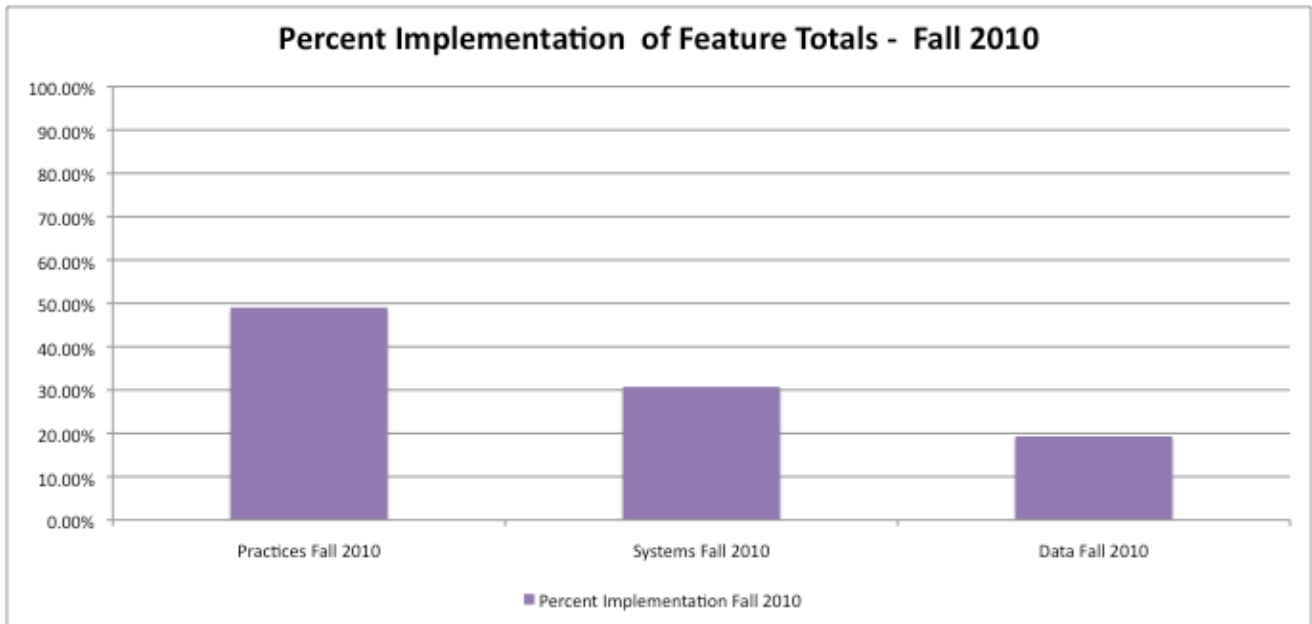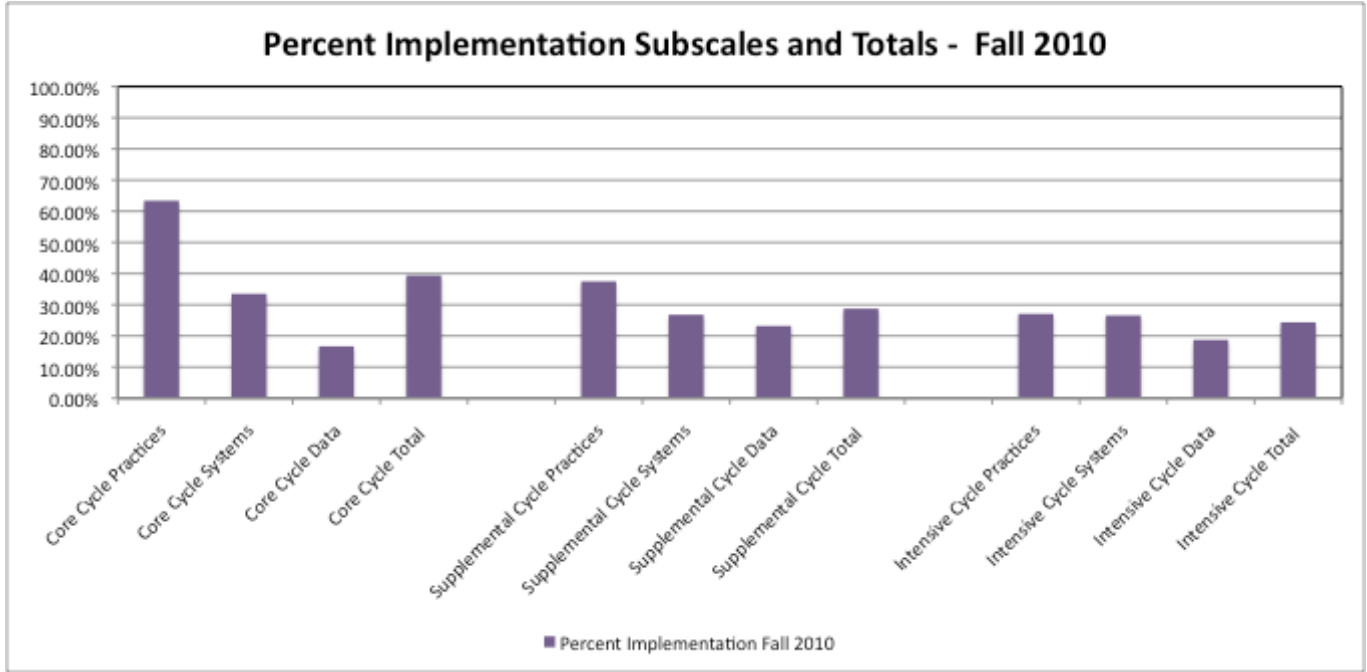
APPENDIX D: SUSPENSION AND EXPULSION DOCUMENT

Suspension/Expulsion Summary

	Spring 2009	Spring 2010
Removal Type		
In-School Suspension	636	618
Out-of-School Suspension	71	106
Expulsion Following a Suspension for the Same Incident	0	1
Removal Reason		
Legal Action	3	0
Drug Related	8	15
Physical Fighting with Injury	1	4
Violent Behaviour with Injury	0	4
Alcohol Related	1	4
Other	368	156
Tobacco Related	19	15
Physical Fighting without Injury	41	41
Disruptive Behavior	64	172
Serious Body Injury	0	4
Attendance Policy Violation	159	214
Violent Behaviour without Injury	14	46
Weapons Related (Requires Weapon Type)	7	7
Property Related	22	43
Weapon Type		
Knife	7	4
Look Alike or Fake Weapon	0	1
Not Applicable	699	717
Rifle or Shotgun	1	1
Serious Body Injury Indicator		
No	707	0
Unsafe School Choice		
No	707	722
Yes	0	3

APPENDIX E: AUDIT TRAIL

May, 2010	Reviewed list of potential school districts to identify a suitable site for case study research.
June–August, 2010	Made methodological determinations through dissertation seminar and began preparations for literature base and IRB documentation.
July, 2010	Worked with peers doing similar qualitative research to share and complete peer review of qualitative procedures.
July, 2010	Established face to face communication with the selected school district to inquire about their interest in study participation.
August 10, 2010	Followed up communication with Assistant Superintendent of Schools to obtain letter granting permission to conduct research in the school district.
August 23, 2010	Received letter from school district with permission to proceed and conduct research.

August 24, 2010	Reviewed list of potential building-level administrators and made plans to contact them once Internal Review Board gave approval for research study.
September, 2010	Peer review with regional experts from Area Education Agency to ensure comprehensive research citations were being considered and reviewed for literature base.
October 20, 2010	Received IRB approval to conduct research.
October 20–30, 2010	Conducted follow-up conversation with eleven participants confirming their willingness to participate in the study.
November 8, 2010	Explained the informed consent form and process to participant one; conducted face-to-face interview.
November 11, 2010	Explained the informed consent form and process to participant two; conducted face-to-face interview.
November 11, 2010	Explained the informed consent form and process to participant three; conducted face-to-face interview.
November 11, 2010	Explained the informed consent form and process to participant

four; conducted face-to-face interview.

November 15, 2010   Explained the informed consent form and process to participant

five; conducted face-to-face interview.

November 15, 2010   Explained the informed consent form and process to participant

six; conducted face-to-face interview.

November 15, 2010   Explained the informed consent form and process to participant

seven; conducted face-to-face interview.

November 16, 2010   Explained the informed consent form and process to participant

eight; conducted face-to-face interview.

November 16, 2010   Explained the informed consent form and process to participant

nine; conducted face-to-face interview.

November 16, 2010   Explained the informed consent form and process to participant

ten; conducted face-to-face interview.

November 16, 2010   Explained the informed consent form and process to participant

eleven; conducted face-to-face interview.

November 8–16, 2010	Toured buildings concurrently with data collection.
November 8–16, 2010	Performed transcription and analysis process of all eleven interviews.
November 16–23, 2010	Conducted follow-up communications with eleven participants providing them the opportunity to review transcripts.
November–January 2011	Data analysis through transcript review.
November–January 2011	Requested peer and colleague review as findings and themes emerged.

APPENDIX F: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: *Managing School Behavior*

Investigator: *Pam Dodge, ISU doctoral candidate (with assistance from Dr. Scott McLeod, ISU Associate Professor)*

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to learn more about how schools are collecting student incident behavior data and, additionally, how they use the data collected to make decisions about individual students and building-level programs. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a building-level administrator and you have insight into how the data are collected and used for the particular school building where you work.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate, Pam Dodge will interview you for no longer than 60 minutes. You will be presented with the interview guide ahead of time (see attached interview guide for complete list of questions). The full interview will be recorded on a digital voice recorder. You will be identified by a pseudonym for the study and your information will be protected before, during, and after this research project.

During the interview process, you may skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

Your participation will last for the amount of time that the interview takes. After the interview, the audio recording will be transcribed and you will be presented with a copy of the transcript for your review. This will be delivered in person or via an e-mail to the address that you provide to me. After that, your participation will be over. At the conclusion of the dissertation research, you will be provided a write-up of the written, anonymized findings from the study.

RISKS

There are no known or foreseeable risks for participation in this study.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study, there are no personal advantages to participation. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit your school district's administrative and instructional practices. It also is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by adding to the body of research about how administrators collect and use student incident behavior data.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs related to participating in this study, other than the time you spend during the interview and reviewing the interview transcript.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may initially refuse to participate or stop participating in the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or detrimentally affect your relationship with the researcher, her major professor, the ███████ School District and/or Iowa State University.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken:

1. Your interview will be recorded and transcribed but you will be identified in the transcripts and on tape with a pseudonym.

2. The data will be stored on a password-protected computer in a locked room at all times.

3. The data only will be kept until the completion and publication of the study. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential. In publications related to this study, your school district will be referred to as 'a mid-sized suburban school district in the Midwest' and participants will be referred to by their pseudonyms.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions or express your concerns at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study, contact primary investigator *Pam Dodge, 515-367-3114*; or *Dr. Scott McLeod, 707-722-7853.*

- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, *IRB@iastate.edu*, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

****

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Your signature below indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given time to read this document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant's Name (printed) _____

_____   _____
(Participant's Signature)   (Date)

APPENDIX G: IRB DOCUMENTS

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board
Office for Responsible Resear
Vice President for Research
1138 Pearson Hall
Ames, Iowa 50011-2207
515 294-4566
FAX 515 294-4267

Date: 10/20/2010

To: Pam Dodge
15197 NE White Oak Dr
Cambridge, IA 50046

CC: Dr. Scott McLeod
N231 Lagomarcino

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: Managing Student Behavior

IRB Num: 10-439

Submission Type: New

Exemption Date: 10/20/2010

The project referenced above has undergone review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and has been declared exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b). The IRB determination of exemption means that:

- **You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.**

- **You must carry out the research as proposed in the IRB application,** including obtaining and documenting informed consent if you have stated in your application that you will do so or if required by the IRB.

- **Any modification of this research should be submitted to the IRB on a Continuing Review and/or Modification form, prior to making any changes,** to determine if the project still meets the federal criteria for exemption. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an IRB proposal will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

Please be sure to **use only the approved study materials** in your research, including the **recruitment materials and informed consent documents** that have the IRB approval stamp.

Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review by the IRB. **Only the IRB may make the determination of exemption,** even if you conduct a study in the future that is exactly like this study.

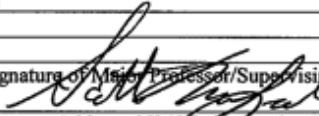| For IRB Use Only	☐ Not Research Per Federal Regulations	☐ No Human Participants	IRB ID: 10-434
	EXEMPT Per 45 CFR 46.101(b): 2	Minimal Risk ☑	Review Date: 10/19/10

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)
Exempt Study Review Form

IRB

SECTION I: GENERAL INFORMATION

SEP 0 9 2010

Principal Investigator (PI): Pam Dodge	Phone: 515-367-3114	Fax: 515-963-4301
Degrees: BS, Masters & Certificate of Advanced Studies @ Iowa State University	Correspondence Address: 15197 NE White Oak Drive, Cambridge, IA 50046	
Department: Ed Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS)	Email Address: pam.dodge@ankenyschools.org	
Center/Institute:	College: Human Sciences	
PI Level: ☐ Faculty ☐ Staff ☐ Postdoctoral ☒ Graduate Student ☐ Undergraduate Student		

Alternate Contact Person: Scott McLeod	Email Address: mcleod@iastate.edu
Correspondence Address: N243 Lagomarcino Hall, Ames, Iowa 50011-3195	Phone: 707-722-7853

Title of Project: Managing Student Behavior

Project Period (Include Start and End Date): [8-30-10 to 7-1-11]

FOR STUDENT PROJECTS	
Name of Major Professor/Supervising Faculty: Scott McLeod	Signature of Major Professor/Supervising Faculty:
Phone: 707-722-7853	Campus Address: N243 Lagomarcino Hall, Ames, Iowa 50011-3195
Department: Educational Leadership and Policy Studies	Email Address: mcleod@iastate.edu
Type of Project: (check all that apply) ☐ Research ☐ Thesis ☒ Dissertation ☐ Class project ☐ Independent Study (490, 590, Honors project) ☐ Other—Please specify: _____	

KEY PERSONNEL

List all members and relevant experience of the project personnel. This information is intended to inform the committee of the training and background related to the specific procedures that each person will perform on the project.

NAME & DEGREE(S)	SPECIFIC DUTIES ON PROJECT	TRAINING & EXPERIENCE RELATED TO PROCEDURES PERFORMED, DATE OF TRAINING
Pam Dodge; BS, Masters & Certificate of Advanced Studies from Iowa State University	Principal investigator: Interviewing, Observing, Document Reviewing, and Data Analyzing; project management	Research experience in qualitative and quantitative research methods: Completion of IRB 5/28/09
Scott McLeod		5/27/08

FUNDING INFORMATION

☐ Internally funded, please provide account number:

Office for Responsible Research/IRB 08/13/10

1

☐	Externally funded, please provide funding source and account number:
☐	Funding is pending, please provide OSPA GoldSheet ID:
☐	Title on GoldSheet if different from above:
☐	Other: (e.g., funding will be applied for later, project not funded, etc.).
☒	Student Project—no funding or funding provided by student

SCIENTIFIC REVIEW

☐ Yes ☒ No   Has or will this project receive peer review?

Although the assurance committees are not intended to conduct peer review of research proposals, the federal regulations include language such as "consistent with sound research design," "rationale for involving animals or humans," and "scientifically valuable research," which requires that the committees consider in their review the general scientific relevance of a research study. Proposals that do not meet these basic tests are not justifiable and cannot be approved. If an assurance review committee(s) has concerns about the scientific merit of a project and the project was not competitively funded by peer review or was funded by corporate sponsors, the project may be referred to a scientific review committee. The scientific review committee will be an ad hoc and will consist of your ISU peers and outside experts as needed. If this situation arises, the PI will be contacted and given the option of agreeing that a consultant may be contacted or withdrawing the proposal from consideration.

If the answer is "yes," please indicate who did or will conduct the review:

If a review was conducted, please indicate the outcome of the review:

COLLECTION OR RECEIPT OF SAMPLES

Will you be: (Please check all that apply.)

☐ Yes ☒ No   Receiving biological samples from outside of ISU? See examples below.
☐ Yes ☒ No   Sending biological samples outside of ISU? See examples below.

Examples include: genetically modified organisms, body fluids, tissue samples, blood samples, pathogens.

If you will be receiving samples from or sending samples outside of ISU, please identify the name of the outside organization(s) and the types of samples you will be sending or receiving outside of ISU:

ASSURANCE
- I certify that the information provided in this application is complete and accurate and consistent with any proposal(s) submitted to external funding agencies.
- I agree to provide proper surveillance of this project to ensure that the rights and welfare of the human subjects or welfare of animal subjects are protected. I will report any problems to the appropriate assurance review committee(s).
- I agree that I will not begin this project until receipt of official approval from all appropriate committee(s).
- I agree that modifications to the originally approved project will not take place without prior review and approval by the appropriate committee(s) and that all activities will be performed in accordance with all applicable federal, state, local, and Iowa State University policies.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

ISU's Conflict of Interest Policy requires that investigators and key personnel disclose any significant financial interests or relationships that may present an actual or potential conflict of interest. A conflict of interest can be defined as a set of conditions in which an investigator's or key personnel's judgment regarding a project (including human or animal subject welfare, integrity of the research) may be influenced by a secondary interest (e.g., the proposed project and/or a relationship with the sponsor). By signing this form below, you are certifying that all members of the research team, including yourself, have read and understand ISU's Conflict of Interest policy as addressed by the ISU Faculty Handbook and have made all required disclosures.

☒ Yes ☐ No   Do you or any member of your research team have an actual or potential conflict of interest?

☒ Yes ☐ No   If yes, have the appropriate disclosure form(s) been completed?

SIGNATURES

Pam Dodge   9-2-10

Signature of Principal Investigator   Date

Linda A Hagedon   9-7-10

Signature of Department Chair   Date

FOR IRB USE ONLY:

☑ Project is exempt.
☐ Project is not exempt.
☐ Project is not research according to the federal definition.
☐ Project does not include human subjects as defined by the federal regulations.

Kerry A Agnitsch   October 20, 2010

IRB Reviewer's Signature   Date

SECTION II: EXEMPTION CATEGORY

The following categories and sub-parts are eligible for exempt status review.
Check all applicable categories and sub-parts below. To select a category box, double-click on the check box.

PLEASE NOTE:

All procedures for all subjects in a project must be exempt in order for the project to be reviewed for exemption (i.e., all of the activities that participants will be asked to participate in must be found in one or more of the following categories).

Exemption does not apply if the targeted populations for the research will involve individuals who are legally incompetent, significantly mentally ill or impaired, or those who are vulnerable to extraordinary institutional coercion, such as prisoners, residents of 24-hour nursing facilities, or anyone who is involuntarily confined.

Investigators whose research projects involve procedures which <u>do not fit</u> within an exempt category will be asked to complete the ISU Application for Approval of Research Involving Humans.

Investigators conducting research that fits into the exempt categories of research are not required to obtain a volunteer's consent to participate using an informed consent document containing all of the elements of consent. However, the IRB requires that the following items be included in an informed consent document or letter of introduction: a statement that the project involves research; a statement that participation is voluntary; a statement that the participant may skip any questions they do not feel comfortable answering in a survey; and the measures that will be used to ensure confidentiality of data collected in the research.

☒ **Education Practices:** Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings involving normal educational practices is exempt when:

    ☒ research is on regular and special education instructional techniques, <u>or</u>
    ☒ research is on the effectiveness of, or the comparison among, instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

☐ **Educational Tests:** Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement) is exempt if:

    ☐ in the researcher's private data (including field notes), as well as in any published material, information taken from these sources is recorded in such a manner that subjects *cannot* be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; <u>or</u>
    ☐ the information, if disclosed outside of the research, could *not* reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subject's financial standing, employability, or reputation.

☒ **Surveying or Interviewing:** Research involving, or interview procedures of, adult-aged subjects is exempt if:

    ☒ in the researcher's private data (including field notes), as well as in any published material, *responses are recorded anonymously* and in such a manner that the human subjects *cannot* be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects: **or**

    ☐ the responses, if disclosed outside of the research, could *not* reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subject's financial standing, employability, or reputation.

This exemption does not apply if the subjects are minor children or other vulnerable participants.

☐ **Public Observations:** Research involving observation of public behavior is exempt if:

    ☐ in the researcher's private data (including field notes), as well as in any published material, information taken from these sources is recorded in such a manner that subjects *cannot* be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; **or**

    ☐ the information, if disclosed outside of the research, could *not* reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subject's financial standing, employability, or reputation.

This exemption applies to research involving minor children only when the investigator does not participate in the activities observed. Workplace meetings and activities, as well as classroom activities, are not "public behavior."

☐ **Public Officials:** All research involving educational tests, survey or interview procedures, or public observations is exempt when the respondents are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office.

Managers and staff in public agencies are not "public officials" in most cases.

☐ **Existing Data:** Research involving the collection of existing data, documents, records, pathological or diagnostic specimens is exempt if:

    ☐ these sources are publicly available, **or**
    ☐ in both the researcher's private data and in any published material, the information is recorded by the researcher in such a manner that subjects *cannot* be identified, directly or through identifiers (e.g., ID codes, email addresses, etc.) linked to the subjects.

☐ **Taste and Food Quality:** Research on taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies is exempt if:

    ☐ wholesome food without additives will be used, **or**
    ☐ the food contains a food ingredient that is at or below the level found to be safe, or agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

SECTION III: PROTOCOL INFORMATION

1. Please describe the purpose of the study and how the data will be used.

> The purpose of the study is to collect data about how adult school administrators collect student incident behavioral data and then, additionally, how they use those data to make decisions for students and programs in their respective school buildings.

2. Please outline the study procedures. Include a complete description of how subjects will be involved and all data collection procedures (i.e., what participants will be asked to do). For studies using existing data, please describe the source of the data and whether or not it is available publicly.

   Additionally, please attach a copy of all data collection instruments, such as surveys, interview or focus group questions, etc.

> The study will consist of interviews as the data collection method. Participants are all adult school administrators in a single school district in Iowa. Participants will be contacted face-to-face to be asked about their study participation. During the course of the face to face meeting, they will be asked to review and sign the informed consent documents. The participants will be asked to select a pseudonym to be used during the interview process. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. The participants will be given a copy of the transcript to review and verify the content. Their participation will be complete at that time.

3. List characteristics of your study population (i.e., ages, student status, gender, ethnicity, etc.) and your rationale for choosing them for the study. (Studies with vulnerable populations such as children, adolescents, prisoners, or other institutionalized individuals are not eligible for exempt review.)

> Eleven school administrators from one school district will be selected to be possibly interviewed for this study. The ages of the administrators range from 32-58, and four of the eleven will be female. The rationale for selection is that one building-level administrator from each of the eleven schools in the district will be selected.

4. Describe any potential risk and assess its level of likelihood and seriousness. *If you believe there are no risks, please explain why.* Describe the procedures to be used for protecting against or minimizing any potential risk, including any confidentiality measures used to minimize the risks related to disclosure of data. Risks could be physical, psychological, social, or legal and can include minor discomfort and/or embarrassment.

> There are no potential or anticipated risks for the participants for this study. Participant information will be kept confidential to the extent possible by law and any sensitive information gained will additionally be protected as pseudonyms will be used and the district name will not be reported in the final reporting section other than to be identified as 'a mid-sized suburban Mid-western school district.'

5. Describe the informed consent process to be used for the study. Attach copies of consent forms, information sheets, and/or letters of introduction that will be used. Also attach any documents that will be used for advertising or recruiting purposes.

> The participants will be contacted face to face about their participation in the study. The attached informed consent documents will be thoroughly reviewed by the participants and they will receive copies of the consent forms that they sign.

6. If the project involves the use of existing data, please describe the extent to which persons could be identified based on information in the data, such as:
   - whether or not any identifiers (names, addresses, email addresses, exact dates of birth, SSN, student IDs, subject ID codes, etc.) will be included with the data you receive;
   - whether or not you have access to any keys or links between ID codes and the identity of the persons (please attach any agreements with the holder of the key/link that it will not be released to you).

> There will be no identifiers on any of the data collected during the interview process of this study. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the data collection, analysis, and reporting process.

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